

## *“Living in the Good Pleasure of God”*

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Romans 8:7-9 are some of the most difficult verses for believers to accept. Somehow we are reluctant to give up on the idea that God's pleasure has to be earned or merited and that *somehow we are up to the task of doing so*. This is regrettable. Such thinking is delusional. In such thinking, self-deception reigns supreme. There is a significant failure to not fully understand our bankrupt status spiritually. There is great delight in understanding our union with Christ and the enabling power of the Holy Spirit to work in us and through us, but instead of seeing this as a life exchanged we see it as a life make-over.

The New Testament speaks of pleasing God and couples with it thoughts of commandment keeping, or in other words obedience. Many, through mechanical performance, believe their actions of obedience bring pleasure to God. Such assumptions are faulty. God has never been pleased with rote external conformity to biblical revelation. This has not nor ever will please Him.

Even under the Old Covenant (i.e. Mosaic Code), God saw heart obedience as the bottom line expression of His relationship to His people (1 Sam. 15:22, 23). The Proverbs give us sweeping generalizations (Prov. 21:2, 3). The issue in both passages is that mere conformity to a set of rules and regulations has never been God's measurement of or means to pleasing Him. When the prophet Isaiah addressed the nation of Israel his words probed the heart of the issue in Isaiah 1:11-17. The prophets Hosea (6:6) and Micah (6:6-8) spoke to the same matter.

This same idea does carry over into the Gospels. Listen to Mark 12:28-34.

<sup>28</sup> One of the scribes came and heard them arguing, and recognizing that He had answered them well, asked Him, "What commandment is the foremost of all?" <sup>29</sup> Jesus answered, "The foremost is, 'HEAR, O ISRAEL! THE LORD OUR GOD IS ONE LORD; <sup>30</sup> AND YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND, AND WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH.' <sup>31</sup> 'The second is this, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.' There is no other commandment greater than these." <sup>32</sup> The scribe said to Him, "Right, Teacher; You have truly stated that HE IS ONE, AND THERE IS NO ONE ELSE BESIDES HIM; <sup>33</sup> **AND TO LOVE HIM WITH ALL THE HEART AND WITH ALL THE UNDERSTANDING AND WITH ALL THE STRENGTH, AND TO LOVE ONE'S NEIGHBOR AS HIMSELF, is much more than all burnt offerings and sacrifices.**" <sup>34</sup> When Jesus saw that he had answered intelligently, He said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." After that, no one would venture to ask Him any more questions.

Although the covenant will shift after the cross, there is a principle that is retained; an obedience that comes from the overflow is a work of the Spirit and an obedience that comes from external conformity to rules and regulations is a work of the flesh. This principle forces the question, "What is it about obedience that pleases Him?" Perhaps even more fundamental is the question, "What pleases God?"

The Westminster Confession states, "Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever." John Piper's slight modification of this confession reads as follows, "God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him." Such statements are large and sweeping, but there is at the core the essence as to why God created.

If my obedience is viewed as a work of the flesh, then all it shows is my self-centered old nature. But if I see my obedience as a fruit of the Spirit and fully sourced in Him and through Him, then in that "fruit" or "obedience" He sees the image of His Son and it is this that pleases Him.

The New Testament calls us to please Him. In such statements, misguided zealots pursue a path of imitation fruit. Instead of resting in His finished work, they determine to show Him how much they "love" Him through their own efforts. Such efforts end up being works of the flesh. Such efforts might look good, but they are self righteous fruit that amount to nothing but filthy rags.

To think that His people do not please Him undermines the very nature of their union with Christ and the imputing of His cross work to their account. They are always acceptable to Him and they are equally pleasing to Him. So what are we to make of those passages that set forth the idea of pleasing God? What follows is a listing of the passages that accent the idea of pleasing God. There are three words considered in what follows. All three words are inside of the same word family (i.e. *aresko, arestos, euarestos*). It originally meant "to set up a positive relation," hence "to make peace." (Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Abridged in One Volume, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, 77). In the New Testament, it carries the idea of "well-pleasing" of "acceptability."

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- Jesus Christ always did those things that pleased His heavenly Father (John 8:21-30, esp. note v. 29).

In John 8, Jesus is in a volatile conversation with the religious leaders of His day. They are making multiple accusations in order to undermine His integrity and ministry. Our Lord's response shows how "nothing He did was of His own initiative" (v. 28). He always did those things that pleased His heavenly Father.

- It is used of pleasing others (Rom. 15:1-3; 1 Cor. 10:23-33, esp. note v. 33). Instead of living selfish lives, seek to serve others. This involves "pleasing" others before "pleasing" oneself.

In other passages, the word is used to speak of selfless service towards others instead of focusing on one's self. What you do and whom you serve depends on whom you desire to please, either yourself or others. God delights in having His body be the body to one another (Phil. 4:10-19, esp. note v.18).

- It is used of pleasing one's spouse or living single and pleasing only the Lord (1 Cor. 7:32-34).

This same principle is used in Galatians 1:10 (See also 1 Thess. 2:4). If I am always seeking to "please" men, then my attention is diverted away from "pleasing" the Lord. This same idea is present in 2 Timothy 2:4 concerning soldiers being single minded. This does not mean married people do not please the Lord, only that their attention is diverted away from a single mindedness.

- Those who fight against God's people and program do not please Him (1 Thess. 2:15). If you're for God, you are pleasing Him. If you're against God, you are not pleasing Him. Those who are "for God" are to be embraced as those who please Him (Luke 9:43-50).
- Those who walk in the Lord please God (1 Thess. 4:1). This is very similar to our passage in Romans 8.

This "walk" is not conditional, other than regeneration. Bearing the fruit of the Spirit/keeping His commandments pleases Him because it is the outworking of our identity in Christ. This is why He answers our prayers (1 John 3:22). God is always working in and through His people those "fruits" that please Him (Heb. 13:21). First Thessalonians 4:1 is of interest because the apostle encourages his audience to please God more and more just as they already are.

- Accepting our union with Christ pleases God (Rom. 12:1, 2).

Accepting who you are in Christ and embracing His work is pleasing to Him. This is why mind renewal pleases God (Eph. 5:10). It is as our mind's are awakened to our union with Christ that we begin to recognize the power of the cross manifesting its impact in us and through us. Thus, God delights in seeing the Spirit of Christ manifested in our earthen vessels (Rom. 14:18). When we have set our minds on Him, He is pleased (2 Cor. 5:9).

There is another word used that is different than the previous three words considered. With few exceptions this word is used of that which pleases God. The redemptive purpose of God in working the image of His Son in and through His people is what pleases Him (Eph. 1:5, 9; Phil. 2:13; 2 Thess. 1:11).

Why is God pleased with obedience?

- Our obedience is nothing less than a fruit of the Holy Spirit.
- Our obedience is nothing less than the imputed righteousness of Christ revealing itself through our "physical body."
- Our obedience is the outworking of our identity, an identity that is sourced completely in the cross work of His Son. This work puts the character of Christ into the life of His people. It is a transfer of nature.

When I obey, it is nothing less than His righteousness being manifested in me and through me. When God sees the life of His Son in me and through me, He is pleased. This expression of spiritual fruit is well-pleasing to Him. Not only is this His desire, but it is the fulfillment of His will, a will that is immutable and unstoppable.

As a child of God, I take great comfort in knowing that He is working His good pleasure in me and through me to those around me. I rest knowing that nothing created can stop Him from fulfilling His eternal purpose.

Does God delight in "my sin?" Of course not, but what He sees sourced in my old nature is never accredited to my account. There is an enormous joy in knowing that my actions can never undo His pleasure in me. My desire is always to do those things that please Him, and I rest in the knowledge that He is doing just that.