

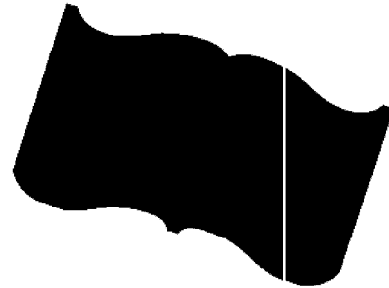
# Pleasing God

## Making it our aim in life

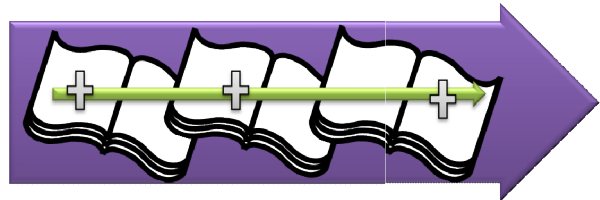
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One of the purposes of this pulpit is to exposit the Word in a way that explains the message of the text, exposes the hearts of the people and exhorts towards God-pleasing obedience. We exposit the Bible several ways:

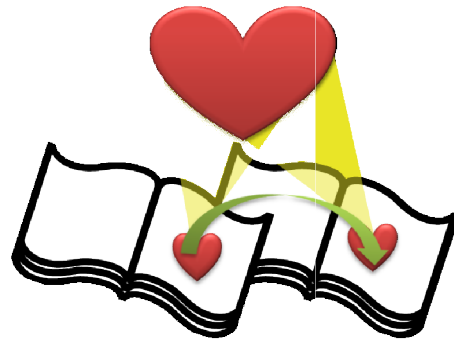
We preach our way through a *book* of the Bible. Thus, we exposit the Bible in the form in which we have it and seek grow and mature in our love for God and people. In doing so, we will meet the themes and issues as they are addressed, book by book.



We preach *themes* or truths in a Canonical way – that is, we exposit a topic following its development through the Bible. We are doing that now in the evening with the cluster of themes commonly called Eschatology.



We take *issues* and *topics*, expositing key texts that address that issue or topic. With careful attention to the Biblical context, the author’s intent, the audience’s situation and the words of the text itself, we explain and apply what the Bible says on an issue.



The *green* line represents the exposition that occurs within each method.

We are always expounding *the text before us*, whether it arises in the flow of a book, a Biblical theme or a text addressing an issue. The difference is in why the text was selected.

We are always expounding *the message of the text*. We are not going to a text to yank it out of its context. However we select that text, we will use it *in the same way as though you had gotten there by expositing through the book it resides in*.

When we are expounding Old Testament texts, we will do so *from the perspective of the New Testament*. In other words, the New Testament tells us what the Old Testament actually meant, even if the original audience could not have understood it. Be sure and be here tonight to hear our message on Matthew 12:46-13:23.

We must constantly be aware of the green line – of staying on the line of Scripture. We must not impose our own agendas or questions on the text. We must not bend a text to suit our preconceived notion. We must not stand over the text but submit to it. We must always communicate the message of the text.

So exposition is always explaining, exposing and exhorting from text(s). With this in mind then, we take up exposition along the trajectory of topics. In I have been impressed with our need to do some serious work on applying the Bible to different issues of life and godliness.

Illustrations of pleasing someone:

Pleasing a boss...

Pleasing a loved one...

A child pleasing us...

We begin then a focus on being pleasing to God.

Why *PLEASEING GOD*? Our theme comes from the following cluster of paragraphs which shape the approach.

## Our Example

### John 8:28–30

<sup>28</sup> So Jesus said to them, “When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he, and that I do nothing on my own authority, but speak just as the Father taught me. <sup>29</sup> And he who sent me is with me. He has not left me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to him.” <sup>30</sup> As he was saying these things, many believed in him.

Jesus always pleased the Father in all He did even in submitting to His Father’s authority in teaching what He did. The Father, at Jesus’ baptism and transfiguration, publicly affirmed that He was pleased with Jesus. Jesus is first and foremost our example.

The primary way Jesus pleased the Father is in submitting to His authority. Jesus is totally God, the second person of the Godhead, the Trinity. He is co-equal with the Father and the Spirit. And, He is in submission to His Father. He submits to all righteousness and is baptized. He submits to God’s plan for Him as king in the kingdom and is transfigured.

Do you please God in your submission? Every one of you, me included, is required to be in submission to God. All of us live in submission to others in some way. There is the government we live under by God’s providence. There are the Elders we serve under who shepherd us. There are bosses at work and teachers at school we are to submit to. There are husbands and parents who are to be respected and submitted to.

Now, submission is primarily of our wants and desires so that we submit our wills. This is why submission generally appears to be an issue when you are being asked to do something *you don’t want to do*. When you are struggling with submission, just ask yourself some simple questions, “What about this do I not want? Why don’t I want to?” Be assured that God has brought to that point to show you something about yourself. While the other person may well be sinning, *you are responsible to examine your own thoughts and motives*.

Are you pleasing God like Jesus pleased His Father?

## Our Need

### Hebrews 11:5-6

<sup>5</sup> By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death, and he was not found, because God had taken him. Now before he was taken he was commended as having pleased God. <sup>6</sup> And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.

Believing God in an obeying way is necessary to please God. Enoch was commended for pleasing God. Therefore, we know that he lived by faith. Why do we know that? Because you cannot please God without faith, without believing God in an obeying way.

So, we will seek to please God by faith. We will seek to grow in believing, trusting, resting and rejoicing in what God says about Himself and about us. Is this how you live? Does believing God in an obeying way characterize you at work? When your parent or your boss or your teacher unjustly criticizes you? Do you

live by faith in God, His providences and provisions when money is tight? Is your belief in God's promises actually allaying fears and worries so that you rest in His care?

Are you pleasing God by believing Him in an obeying way?

## Our Goal

## 2 Corinthians 5:6-10

<sup>6</sup> So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, <sup>7</sup> for we walk by faith, not by sight. <sup>8</sup> Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. <sup>9</sup> So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him. <sup>10</sup> For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.

Our goal in life and death is to be pleasing to God. Why? Because we are to walk by faith and not by sight. We are not to live according to what can be seen and understood by the physical eyes, sight. We are to live according to what can be seen and understood by our spiritual eyes, faith.

Throughout the Bible, faith is not a hand, but an eye. Faith is how one sees spiritually. Faith believes God and that is an act of seeing what is not seen. We understand this. Someone explains something difficult to you. When you get it, what do you say? "O, I see". Yes, you don't see it with your eyes; you see it with your understanding. So, we make it our goal to live pleasing to God by seeing what He says is true.

What are your goals in life? To become rich? To become popular? To get married? To be successful? To have a large ministry? A goal is something you will work towards. It helps you to say "yes" to the things that get you there. It helps you to say "No" to the things that will distract you and keep you from getting there. Paul's argument here is easy: since life is short and death takes us to Jesus, then let's make it our aim to bring delight to Him. So, you will try to obey God even when others don't. You will joyfully endure suffering and sorrowing and struggling. You will faithfully serve in the church, live in love with your spouse, be content whatever your station and lot, and work hard in your school, your work, your tasks at home. Pleasing God is not primarily about special spiritual exercise, but rather about the daily grind of living in a fallen world.

Are you making it your primary aim in life to please God?

## Our Work

## Ephesians 5:8-14

<sup>8</sup> For at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light <sup>9</sup> (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), <sup>10</sup> and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord.

<sup>11</sup> Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. <sup>12</sup> For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret. <sup>13</sup> But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, <sup>14</sup> for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says, "Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you."

Knowing who we are as Christians motivates us to try to figure out what pleases God. See what Paul does here? We are now light in the Lord so, live like who

you are and learn what pleases the Lord. Who we are dictates what we are to do. You will hear a lot talk about “Indicative and imperative.” This simply means that we must know what God says about us and then we will be able to do what God tells us. Doctrine leads to duty. Duty is built on doctrine. Doctrine and duty are united by delight – we joy in the God who describes us and commands us.

Now, through this series, we will often be in texts that are in the imperative or duty sections of a book of the Bible. We will try to make the connections to our identity in Christ from which those commands flow. But we will also unashamedly teach the imperatives, the commands of the Bible.

This is what Paul is getting at here. You are light in the Lord. The fruit of light is in all that is good, right and true. So, live as children of light. So, learn what pleases the Lord. Notice carefully the words here: “try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord.” The verb here is meant to convey an active, on-going discerning, judging or proving. It is our responsibility, since we are in the light and are to walk in the light, then we must shine the light on everything to see if it is good, right and true.

Paul illuminates this further by a negative command: don’t take part in what is dark, evil, secret, hidden. Expose it. Shine the light on it. Bring it under the scrutiny of the resurrected Christ.

Ah, pleasing God is going to mean taking your secret, in private, in the darkness sins and dealing with them. What about pornography? What are you reading ladies? What video games are you playing? What channels do you watch? Where do you go on the internet? Who are you talking to on IM or FaceBook or MySpace? What secret life do you live? What fantasies and imaginations do you play out in your mind? See, this text in its generality illuminates whole categories of sin and foolishness.

Does who you are and what you are to do connect to trying to learn what pleases God?

## Our Walk

## Colossians 1:9–11

<sup>9</sup> And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, <sup>10</sup> so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God. <sup>11</sup> May you be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy...”

We must know God’s will and grow in wisdom if we are to be pleasing to God. While the previous text focused on the negative aspects of pleasing God, this one focuses on the positive aspects. We walk in way that is worthy of God, pleasing Him, bearing fruit and growing in knowledge. So the way we live measures up to the worth and value of God when these three categories of things are taking place.

We are seeking to please the God of the universe. This then requires that we know His will (what He requires of us) and live His wisdom (connect truth to life). There is a sense in which this could be read: pleasing God which involves bearing fruit and growing in knowledge.

So, are you pleasing God in the fruit that you bear? Christian fruit is the result of the right seed, cultivated and watered regularly which grows up and produces a harvest of righteousness. But, it is produced by Christ through the Spirit. It is not magic. I am not going to take the time to work through a list of fruit, show what seed should be planted, how it is to be cultivated and watered and how to identify the harvest.

Are you pleasing God in how you are growing in knowing Him? Now wait just a minute. We are not talking about increasing in what you know about Him alone. We are talking about growing in your relationship with Him. What is the value of knowing all about my wife Esther – her likes, her dislikes, her joys, her pains, her history, her aims and goals if it does not cause me to love her more? We are not building a biography of God; we learning in order to love God.

Are you pleasing God, bearing good fruit and growing in knowing Him?

## Our Consciences

## 1 John 3:19-24

<sup>19</sup> By this we shall know that we are of the truth and reassure our heart before him; <sup>20</sup> for whenever our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and he knows everything. <sup>21</sup> Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God; <sup>22</sup> and whatever we ask we receive from him, because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him. <sup>23</sup> And this is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us. <sup>24</sup> Whoever keeps his commandments abides in God, and God in him. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit whom he has given us.

When we please God, we will have a clear conscience and confidence before God in prayer. What does it take to please God? To obey His commandments. What is that commandment? That we believe in Christ and love God. Then we will stay in Him and He in us. The Spirit causes us to know that this is so.

Like much of John's writing in this epistle, it is thick and thorny in places. For us this morning, I want you to see that believing in Jesus' name and loving God is pleasing to God. It is obeying Him for all are commanded to believe and repent. It is pleasing to Him for it exalts Christ. It delights Him that we grow in loving Him. The result is a mutual indwelling, remaining, abiding that grants quietness in our consciences, confidence in our praying and assurance in our relationship.

Once again we are faced with the Bible's heavenly logic. To remain in Christ, we must continue to believe in Him. We are enabled to continue to believe in Him by hearing the sweet goodness and joys that come from believing in Him. This does not mean that we can lose our salvation; it means that we are remaining in Christ by hearing and heeding that must be believing, obeying and loving God.

In the stillest of moments when there is no noise, no music, no TV, no videos, no talking, nothing that distracts you or drowns out the voice of conscience, is yours clear? When you come to pray, to ask God for the needs of those you love in your family or in the kingdom, is there nagging doubt because you know that you are not pleasing to God? In the full-length mirror of the Word of God, do you have a Bible-based, Spirit-given assurance that you abide in Christ and He in you?

Ah, the joy of a clear conscience, a confident communion and assured abiding when we are pleasing to God.

Pleasing God? Make it your aim in life to please God by working hard to know, believe and obey His will with humble wisdom.

## Our Enablement

## Hebrews 13:20–21

It would be easy by now to be in despair. How can you ever be pleasing to God just in these ways? How do you keep from turning being pleasing to God to performance for God? What do you do now?

Our last text is sweet and glorious because it tells us that God is working in us to make us pleasing to Him. For sin weary and struggling souls, here is the sweet nectar of medicine for our souls.

<sup>20</sup> Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, <sup>21</sup> equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

Listen to it from the New Living Translation:

<sup>20</sup> Now may the God of peace—who brought up from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great Shepherd of the sheep, and ratified an eternal covenant with his blood—<sup>21</sup> may he equip you with all you need for doing his will. May he produce in you, through the power of Jesus Christ, every good thing that is pleasing to him. All glory to him forever and ever! Amen.

Here is a complicated sentence that we often use as a benediction. Look and listen to what the author is saying:

God

The God of peace

The God who raised up Jesus, our great shepherd

The God who ratified the eternal covenant by His blood

May He equip you with everything you need to do His will

Working in us so as to actually produce everything that pleases Him

Through the (resurrected, shepherding, covenant-keeping) power of Christ

To whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen

While we are to be pleasing to God as something we work at, God will produce in us, through Christ, all that is needed for us to please Him. Hallelujah! Once again, it is God who is working and the result is that you are working. Pleasing God is my active response to God's active work.

So, God will equip you with everything you need to do His will. Do you believe that? Do you think that you are somehow deficient in what you need to do God's will and to be pleasing to Him? Is this not simply a lack of faith, a failure to believe what God says is true. That He will equip you is just as sure as who He says He is, the God of peace. That He will equip you is just as sure as what He has done to save you, that is raised Jesus from the dead and ratified the covenant.

OK, here it is. Ready? Be pleasing to God because you are pleasing to God and because God has enabled you to be pleasing to Him. How? By the power of Christ. Now, brothers and sisters, it is a high calling:

To please God like Jesus does;

To please God by believing Him in an obeying way;

To make pleasing God our primary aim in life;

To work hard at learning what pleases God;

To enjoy a clear conscience, a confident access and an abiding assurance by pleasing God.

And God is working all that in you as you are believing in Him in an obeying way.

What we will then be doing over this series is to pray that God will equip you through the preaching of the Word, through the work of the Spirit, through interaction with other believers so that you will be able to do His will and be pleasing to Him. Our confidence rests, not then in what we do to cause it, but in what God is doing to produce it.

In closing, may I be so bold as to repeat the exhortation to the church at Thessalonica for all of us today:

<sup>1</sup> Finally, then, brothers, we ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God, just as you are doing, that you do so more and more. 1 Thessalonians 4:1 (ESV)