



THE SUPREMACY OF CHRIST IN THE POSTMODERN WORLD

FULLY PLEASING – PART 1

Colossians 1:9-14

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Introduction – Praying to be Fully Pleasing

I left you with a homework assignment to memorize Colossians 1:9-14 last week. As I said previously, we are lingering in this magnificent passage with many great things to see. The second challenge is the pray it. I hope you did pray it because it would change your life and other people's lives not just because God responds to scriptural prayers like that but because it will change your expectations of your own life, of the Christian life. As you were praying it this week, did you have any trouble praying it? Not with verse 9,

...since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding.

But did you have any problems when you got to verse 10?

And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way:

Did you have any trouble praying that this week? Raise your hand if you are living a life worthy of the Lord. Your life is worth something to the Lord. It is worth a response from the Lord. Raise your hand if you are in that category. Or, perhaps this is easier: raise your hand if your life is pleasing God in every way. You laugh! So, there is a problem with this prayer, isn't there? Or is there a problem with us and our expectations? How do we pray this prayer with integrity and with conviction?

When I was in ninth grade, I was on the basketball team and got the closest I ever got, and probably ever will get to dunking a basketball. I had gone through my growth spurt and I was about 6' 2", and you are sort of springy when you are ninth grade; I could almost dunk it but the problem was I could not palm the basketball. I could dunk a volley ball and that made me feel pretty cool. But I could have prayed, "God, help me to dunk the basketball," and actually do it from the free throw line and a 360. But isn't that a pie-in-the-sky and totally unrealistic prayer? Wake up to reality! Is that what you would say to Paul? Who is living a life pleasing to the Lord in every way? And why are you praying that? Trying to pray this cuts across the grain of our expectation, doesn't it? When you start praying and asking, "Father, let me walk in a manner worthy of you today. Let me please you in every way today," and you start thinking, how is that possible? I don't even please myself much less God. Most of the time, I feel like I'm not even meeting my own expectations, much less when you start to think theologically about pleasing God and being worthy of the Lord! And yet, the Bible says God is the one whose eyes are too pure even to look at evil let alone be pleased with my little muddy mess of a life. And when you start having the language of Scripture come to mind, and then things really start to get worse

when it comes to praying this prayer with integrity. The phraseology and language of Scripture that have become cliché in our evangelical subculture, like Genesis 6:5,

The Lord saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become and every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time.

And you start thinking, "worthy of the Lord and pleasing him in every way." Or Jeremiah 17:9,

The heart is deceitful about all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?

And I'm going to live worthy of the Lord today and please him in every way? Or Isaiah 64:6,

All of us have become like one who is unclean,
and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags;

Yet we are going to pray for each other to live our lives worthy of the Lord and "fully pleasing" to him as the ESV translates it. Or Romans 7:24 where Paul says,

What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?

Fully pleasing? Pleasing him in every way? Is there something amiss here? If most of us were honest, we would say there is nothing really fully pleasing about our lives. It is at best partially pleasing. There are parts of my life, parts of the day, parts of the week, part of the year that actually amount to pleasing God. But pleasing him in every way as a practical description of the Christian life?

If we are honest, most of us would say at best we are fully tolerated—not fully pleasing. Fully tolerated like an old pet that you've got an attachment to but you can't really get rid of. We had a pet like that. We gave Libby to my dad for his fiftieth birthday. My dad gave Libby back to us for his sixty-third graduation from Libby, when he was sixty-three. She is an old dog now and we had her for about six months. She was one of those dogs that had a gray beard, with massive arthritis, was scared of the dark and could not go out at night to go to the bathroom. Doesn't fetch the paper, doesn't really do anything; she was like a cat. When the sun came through the window, she would lie in the sun; when the sun moved across the living room and she followed and lay in the sun. She was a black Labrador retriever and of course leaves black Labrador retriever hair all over the carpet. There was nothing fully pleasing about Libby. She was fully tolerated however.

Is that the way we view ourselves as Christians? Fully tolerated by God or fully pleasing—which one? This is important because your prayers will never rise above the level of your expectations. If you don't expect that God can heal, you won't pray, "God, heal." If you don't expect that God can convert the lost, you won't pray, "God, convert the lost." If you don't expect your Christian life to be a life that is worthy of the Lord, pleasing him in every way you won't pray, "Father, make me to walk in a manner worthy of you, and my wife or spouse, my children who know you, and my church walk in a manner worthy of you, fully pleasing to you."

Today and next week we are going to learn about the fully pleasing life. What is the fully pleasing life? It is (1) bearing fruit in every good work, (2) increasing in the knowledge of God, (3) being strengthened with every power according to his glorious might, so that you may have

endurance and patience and (4) joyfully giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us for something fabulous. That's the portrait of the fully pleasing life we are going to look at. For now we need to do a little theological ground clearing to get there. I suspect most of you had trouble praying the prayer, not because you didn't find the time to pray or you forgot to pray, but if you tried to pray, you are thinking, how does this really match reality? The point of this message is to say that the fully pleasing life is not just a mere pious aspiration of the Apostle Paul or just a little bit of wishful thinking on Paul's part. The fully pleasing life is a *practical reality* for the follower of Jesus Christ. That's the thesis for this morning's message.

First, God has Fully Revealed what it is that Pleases Him

How can that be? It can be, first of all, because God has fully revealed to us what it is that pleases him. That's the starting point for the fully pleasing life. We need to know *what* it is that pleases the Lord. The great thing about the Christian faith over against other faiths, particularly eastern faiths, is that God has revealed clearly what it is that pleases him. That is one of the distinguishing things about early Christianity from paganism. The pagans were running around offering sacrifices and libations, curse amulets and this that and the other thing. They were not sure if any of it worked. The power of the Gospel and of the Christian faith is that it was a revealed religion. It was quite clear what it was that God expected of his people because he made it fully clear. He was fully transparent about what it was that pleased him.

How do we know that? We see it first of all in the story of Israel—the flannel graph illustration of the Old Testament—what it is that God is looking for, what it is that pleases God. God brought Israel out of Egypt and redeemed him by his mighty right hand. He brought them to Sinai where he revealed his will, the Law. It makes crystal clear what it is that he expects and pleases his own heart, how it is that they can walk in a manner worthy of the Lord. That is what the Law is all about in the Old Testament. Then he sent prophets along, because Israel was not doing so well, to remind them and underscore what pleases him, to bring the Israelites back to what the Lord requires and what the Lord expects: to love justice, to do mercy and to walk humbly with your God. That did not seem to work very well either, and so he had to punish Israel, and send Israel into exile, and bring it under the curses of the Covenant rather than the blessings of the Covenant. But even in that, even in the exile of Israel, even in the punishment we see clearly what God's expectations are for his people.

We also see clearly what God's expectations are for a fully pleasing life in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. Is he not after all the consummate God pleaser? Remember how his life is book-ended by his baptism, the middle piece, the transfiguration, and the resurrection. What does the Father say of the Son at both the baptism and the transfiguration? "This is my beloved Son." Remember that language from Colossians 1:13—"transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son" is the way the ESV puts it, or "the Son whom he loves?" in the NIV. "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17). Jesus is the picture of the well-pleasing life. In John 8:28-29 when Jesus is wrangling with the Pharisees, as he often was doing, the Pharisees getting under his grill and harassing him a little bit, he says, "When you've lifted up the Son of Man,"—that's not lifting him up on your shoulders and carrying him like a champion but when you've lifted him on an executioner's stake—"then you will know that I am the one I claim to be and that I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me. The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone," Why? "for I always do what pleases him."

If you want an insight into how it is that Jesus was the fully pleasing person he was, don't think that he was drawing on his divinity, and thus, that's out of reach for you and I because we can't draw on divinity. Look at the verse that comes right before that in John 8:28, "I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me." You and I can do just that very thing! It is called walking by the Spirit, in Paul's terminology.

So we see what God expects and what constitutes the fully pleasing life in the story of Israel and in the life of Jesus. We also see it in the teaching of the Old and New Testament. That's what the Bible is, isn't it? The Bible is one massive revelation of what it is that pleases God, who God is and what pleases God. So in 1 Thessalonians 4:1 Paul says this remarkable thing as it relates with this message in Colossians 1:10,

Finally, brothers we instructed you how to live in order to please God, as in fact you are living.

Did you hear that? He is commending the Thessalonians: Yes, I taught you when I was with you and I planted the church in Thessalonica; I taught you how to live in a way that pleases the Lord and you in fact *are* living that way. And so Paul goes on to say,

Now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more.

So the fully pleasing life is a *practical reality* because God has been fully transparent in what constitutes the fully pleasing life. That is good news. We're not left in the dark. We can therefore observe what Paul says in Ephesians 5:10 where he says,

. . . find out what pleases the Lord.

You say, how do you do that? I say, read your Bible and memorize your Bible. And let the words or Scripture, the cadences of Scripture, the people of Scripture, the redemptive salvation acts of God in Scripture permeate your mind rather than surfing the internet. Surfing the internet is just a reality we live with; we all do it. But do two-thirds Bible for one-third surfing and you'll be much better off in life; it might not be as cool but you will be much better off. So that's the first thing.

Second, God has Fully Forgiven Us at the Cross

Second, we can live a fully pleasing life because we are fully forgiven at the foot of the cross. And this is the *foundation* of the fully pleasing life. Here is the important theological point. *Perfection is not the only thing that pleases a perfect God.* Let me repeat: Perfection is not the only thing that pleases a perfect God. Imperfect, pardoned people can please God. Do you see that? That is true, biblical teaching, friends—imperfect, pardoned people can please God! That is why the reality that verses 13 and 14 point to are absolutely crucial. Paul cannot pray the fully pleasing life and walking in a manner worthy of the Lord if the reality to which verses 13 and 14 point to were not there. And what is it? That he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness where there is no pleasing God. Paul says in Romans 8:8 the life controlled by the flesh in the dominion of darkness "cannot please God." But when God does that rescue act and liberates one by faith from the dominion of darkness and transfers you into the kingdom of his beloved Son with whom he is well pleased, and you hang out with Jesus and let the spirit of Jesus empower and move in your heart and life, the fully pleasing life results!

So, full forgiveness is the foundation of the fully pleasing life. And as we are thinking about the fully pleasing life, it's not an issue of leaning into our own resources as in "I'm going to try harder when I leave today. "The Pastor gave a good message on the expectations of the Christian life. It's going to be exciting to hear about how I've got to bear fruit in *every* good work next week and I'm really excited about how I'm doing to endure with patience annoying people by God's power all this sort of stuff next week. And I'm ready to go. I'm going to live this worthy life and I'm leaning into my own resources and not doing what Jesus did." Like Jesus who said, 'I draw on my divine resources for all that I do!' He does not say that! You will read the Gospels in vain for that kind of statement. He says "I do nothing on my own. I'm the consummate God-dependent one. Yes, I am God but as a human I am the consummate God-dependent one who does nothing on my own; all in reliance upon God." So, full forgiveness is the foundation of the fully pleasing life.

Third, God is Fully Committed to Work in Us a Fully Pleasing Life

The third and final point is this: that the fully pleasing life is a practical Christian reality because *God is fully committed to working in us* that which is pleasing to him. And that is good news too! You see, the good news of the Gospel is not just that there is justification by faith alone and the forgiveness of sins on the Cross. That is the foundation. The Gospel is also that we are sanctified by faith alone. God does not just forgive our sins, set us up on the track of sanctification and the Christian life and then go take a vacation or climb way up into the nosebleeds of the stadium and watch and cheer. That is not the way God works with us. If you come to him by faith in Christ he commits *all* of his power, "being strengthened with *all power*" (verse 11) *all* in Greek, all power of God, Almighty God unleashing power in your life to strengthen you for all, or great, endurance and patience. He does not leave us alone. He works *in us* that which is pleasing to him.

So, yes, God has expectations but he emanates out his power and glory and recreates us *in Christ into* the image of Christ and works *in us* what is pleasing to him so that, friends, he gets the glory in all things, for from him and through him and to him is *everything*. Every little ounce of obedience you or I muster is sovereignly given by grace. So, Hebrews 13:20-21,

May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Philippians 2:12,

. . . continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling,

So, live a life worthy of the Lord and fully pleasing to him. Work out your salvation with fear and trembling. Why should you do that? It says in the Word,

For it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.

God is underneath it all in *everything*!

So the fully pleasing life is a practical Christian reality! It should be your expectation, friends, for yourself if you're following Christ. It should be your expectation for others, not as means of laying on someone else or yourself a burden. You don't need to become a perfectionist. God will take care of that. You can lean into the Cross of Jesus Christ. Rely fully upon the working of God's Spirit in your life and the fruit of which will be a life that is worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him.

Amen.

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