



## THE SUPREMACY OF CHRIST IN THE POSTMODERN WORLD

### FULLY PLEASING – PART 2

Colossians 1:11-12

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<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, <sup>12</sup>giving thanks to the Father,  
who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.

<sup>13</sup>He has delivered us from the domain of darkness  
and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son,

<sup>14</sup>in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

### Introduction – Christianity has an Image Problem

I want to invite you on an imaginary journey this morning down to Barbara's Bookstore because there is a book discussion group that is happening this afternoon. We want to listen in on this discussion group. It is about six to eight young men and women between the ages of thirty-five and forty-five that are meeting, a diverse eclectic group of people. The book they are reading has a reference to conservative, evangelical Christians. It is interesting because as the conversation is unfolding and they come across this topic, they agree as a discussion group to linger on this topic and discuss among themselves how would you describe an evangelical Christian. None of them are self-identifying evangelical. They have heard of and know a few; so they want to take a few minutes to sketch out the profile of an evangelical Christian. I want us to listen in on what it is they sketch out and what do you suspect they might sketch out.

This imaginary conversation does not need to be imaginary now because the Barna Research group spent several years doing massive polling of young adults who are outside of the Christian faith, particularly the conservative evangelical tradition. The president of the Barna group have gathered it all in a book called, "Unchristian," in which he outlines the results of the study they have done. He identifies six broad themes that come up through all this polling data, hundreds upon hundreds of people have given their impressions of what they think about evangelical Christians; the most common themes of objections and skepticisms raised by outsiders. Here are the six themes that he has identified.

1. Hypocritical: Outsiders consider us hypocritical, saying one thing and doing another. They are skeptical of our morally superior attitudes. They say Christians pretend to be

something unreal, conveying a polished image that is not accurate. Christians think the church is only a place for virtuous and morally pure people.

This touches a deep cord in us because we have repenting to do. Father, we confess that our lives have not always been becoming of the gospel. So we repent. Will you forgive us and cause us to walk in a manner worthy and pleasing to you in every way, a way that is radiant and becoming of the gospel—adorning the doctrine of God with our lives.

2. Too focused on getting converts: Outsiders wonder if we genuinely care about them. They feel like targets rather than people. They question our motives when we try to help them “get saved,” despite the fact the many of them have already tried Jesus and experienced church before.
3. Anti-homosexual: it is interesting that it is listed as number three but if you turn a page back to page 27, it says “in our national surveys, we found the three most common perceptions of present day Christianity are, first, anti-homosexual,”—an image held by 91% of young outsiders. Outsiders say that Christians are bigoted and show disdain for gays and lesbians. They say Christians are fixated on curing homosexuals and on leveraging political solutions against them.
4. Sheltered: Christians are thought of as old fashioned, boring, and out of touch with reality. Outsiders say we do not respond to reality in appropriately complex ways, preferring simplistic solutions and answers. We are not willing to deal with the grit and grime of people’s lives. We’re a bit prissy.
5. Too Political: Another common perception of Christians is that we are overly motivated by a political agenda; that we promote and represent politically conservative interests and issues. Conservative Christians are often thought of as right-wingers.
6. Judgmental: Outsiders think of Christians as quick to judge others. They say we are not honest about our attitudes and perspectives about other people. They doubt that we really love people as we say we do.

So there is a profile out there of the evangelical conservative Christian. It is not a pretty profile. You might say, “Oh, that’s just perception.” That’s right; it is just perception and it matters. That’s the profile of evangelical Christians that would be sketched at Barbara’s Bookstore as we listen in on these six or seven young adults, Oak Parkers. Is it fair? Maybe more importantly is the question: What is the alternative profile?

### **The Profile of the Fully Pleasing Life**

The alternative profile is what is in our passage this morning. Last week, we began looking at the fully pleasing life from Colossians 1:9-14. The point of that message was the fully pleasing life was not a pious aspiration of Paul’s for Christians. It is actually a practical reality. There are several reasons why that is the case: God has made his will known, our sins are fully forgiven on the cross of Jesus Christ, and God is fully committed to empowering Christians to live in a life that would please him. So we talked last week about the possibility of the fully pleasing life.

This morning we are going to talk about the profile of the fully pleasing life. We are going to see four things to this profile. Recall the six things I just read you of the profile of the

conservative Christian. Here is the scriptural profile of a believer; four from this passage in verses 10, 11, 12:

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

Here it comes, four participles in the original:

bearing fruit in every good work,  
growing in the knowledge of God,  
being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience,  
and joyfully thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light.

So here are the four aspects of the profile of a Christian, scripturally speaking: Good works, Growth, Grace and Gratitude. You see the first one at the end of verse 10: good works. What is the first thing that comes to Paul's mind when he thinks about a life that is fully pleasing to the Lord?—that you would be bearing fruit in every good work. Is that a surprise that good works is at the top of the list of the fully pleasing life?

### ***Good Works – “bearing fruit in every good work” (v. 10b)***

It must be said that as evangelical Christians and as historic Protestants, we have had a ticklish relationship with good works, haven't we? We have been slightly squeamish about what to do with this small category called “Good Works” and obedience. The banner of Protestantism, particularly as it comes out of the Reformation of course, was we are saved not *by* works, good works or any other kind of works. We are not saved by works—and that becomes our *raison d'être*, our self identity, our reason for existence, our whole conception. “For it is by grace you have been saved through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.” (Ephesians 2:8-9) Yet what happens as we affirm that crucial biblical truth is that we can slip into, albeit inadvertently, thinking that good works are not really that essential or important for the Christian life. We think it is optional though no one would say it that baldly but we might live it that way. So the accusation of Titus 1:16 might unfortunately be said of us sometimes, that “they claim to know God, but by their actions they deny him.”

Think of the first aspect of that profile by the outsiders: hypocritical. There is a lack of correspondence between profession and practice. But for Paul, the leading edge of the fully pleasing life is *Obedience* and Good works. Wouldn't it be exciting, friends, if that was the leading edge to our witness to this community and to the nations? Good works, sharing, giving, praying, laying down our lives like Jesus, who, as Acts says, went around doing good. Yes, by faith. Yes, in reliance upon the grace of God but it was the thing he was distinguished for. Wouldn't it be beautiful if that is the thing we were distinguished for—good works? And it is key! Even though we as evangelical Christians have had a squeamish relationship with good works, let me say this: Good works is the goal of the gospel. Can I say it more plainly?

Some of you may be thinking, “Did he just say that?” “For it is by grace you have been saved through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.” (Ephesians 2:8-9) Remember what verse 10 says?

For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

It begins with “For. . .” That is interesting! You are not saved *by* works because you are created *for* works—for we are God’s workmanship created in Christ Jesus *for* good works. If you are in Christ Jesus this morning, you have been created for something very concrete, very specific, and it is called good works.

Titus 2:11-14 is a fabulous little paragraph. It begins with another “For.” In verses 1-10 are all these exhortations: women, help and love the younger women and teach them how to do this and that; men do the same thing; workers do this with your employees . . . “for” the grace of God has appeared. And what does it do?—takes us to school. And what does it teach us when the grace of God takes us to school?—“to say ‘No’ to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age,” while we are awaiting the blessed hope, the return of the Lord Jesus Christ who redeemed and rescued us, purified for himself a people who are “eager” (NIV) or “zealous” (ESV) to do good works.

Good works is the goal of the gospel, the goal of creation in Christ Jesus. Wouldn’t that be beautiful if that was the leading edge of our witness and ministry? Wouldn’t it be exciting if that was the leading edge of your life?—“That guy is always doing good! He is always busy doing good works”—bearing fruit in *every* good work. Where do I start? Start right where you are at. You can bear good works before you leave the building this morning. You can give, you can pray, you can encourage, you can edify, you can glorify God. You can bear fruit in every good work on your way home today in the car. Is anybody having lunch today? Who is preparing it? Or, who is cleaning up after? There are opportunities to be bearing fruit in every good work. Is anybody looking forward to a long, cushy afternoon with nothing to do? That will give you a lot of space for bearing fruit in every good work. So that is the first aspect.

### ***Growth – “growing in the knowledge of God” (v. 11a)***

Here is the second aspect of the profile of the Christian—Growth: growth in the knowledge of God. What greater privilege or higher calling could be laid upon humanity than to grow in the knowledge of God! Just think about it. To grow in your understanding, your intimate awareness of God himself—that is astonishing! And it is so soul elevating! I love the way Spurgeon puts it: he says nothing will so enlarge the intellect, nothing so magnify the whole soul of man as a devout, earnest, continued investigation of the great subject of the Deity—growing in the knowledge of God. It is not just soul expanding, friends, to know God; it adds weight to who you are. Do you know that? The Puritan pastor, Thomas Watson, talks about “feathery” Christians, who just flutter and flutter; they are light; they are superficial; they are sheltered; they discourse in trivialities; they are culture consumers, occasionally critiquers when they are in a bad mood and do not like something. But they really just float along with the drift of culture because there is not much weight and substance to them. You have been around people who know God, or you may be this kind of person who has a deep intimate knowledge of who God is. And it brings weightiness, doesn’t it? That kind of a soul is an enlarged soul; it is a weighty person. That is the second aspect—growing in the knowledge of who God is, “until”

as Paul says in Ephesians 4:13, “we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God, and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming.”

Growing in the knowledge of God: and where do you begin? You begin with your Bible—yes, your Bible. You cannot be profoundly influenced by that which you do not know. Bible reading is not very fashionable these days even among conservative Christians. We all need to heed the example of Jonathan Edwards, the famous American pastor, who had a number of self-commitments he made as a young person. One of his resolutions was this: “Resolved, to study the scriptures so steadily, constantly, and frequently that I may find and plainly perceive and see myself to grow in the knowledge of the same,” that is, to grow in the knowledge of the Bible because I will grow in the knowledge of who God is that way.

### ***Grace – “being strengthened with all power...” (v. 11b)***

So Good Works is the first, Growth is the second. The third is Grace, beginning of verse 11, “being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience...” It is probably good to have this come as the third aspect because after the first two aspects you may be thinking, “Ooh, sounds like a lot of pressure. He seems rather earnest this morning. Good works, growth, you got to read the Bible. Whoa, it’s kinda heavy.” You are probably thinking, “I’ve tried that! I want to live that way. I know good works. I want to do them but I just somehow get hindered.” Or, “I want to grow in my understanding of who God is, but I just sort of get distracted.” That is why this third aspect is so sweet—and it is Grace. You can hear how it sounds different than the first two: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, *being strengthened with all power*. It sounds different, doesn’t it? It’s got a different voice, and the voice is the passive voice. See? It is not bearing fruit, growing and strengthening, or exerting will power, getting on with discipleship—“The pastor said I have to get on with discipleship and I’m going to do it today.” It is not the active voice or even the middle voice—strengthen yourself, boost yourself up with some coffee or something like that. It is: lean into the grace of God fully and completely—being strengthened by God with all of his power according to his glorious might. God has got power to match all of our needs, did you know that? It is a glorious might, it is according to the strength he’s got for us—to his glorious might!

Our little Annie Claire is three and I love to ask a three-year-old, “Annie Claire, show us your muscles.” You know what little kids do? She flexes up her arm with tensed wiggling. She does not weigh fifteen pounds, I suspect. She is just a little thing and she is just showing off her glorious might. Just think about the glorious might of God himself that we have reflected on so well in the songs this morning. Remember the first song we sang as we are talking about the strength and power of God, what it was celebrating about the strength of God?—Creation. See the strength of God in creation, slinging all these universes, or planet, or solar systems into their places. You see the power of God in salvation which was the next song we sang: the author of salvation redeeming Israel with his outstretched arms and his right hand, out of Egyptian bondage and slavery. Who can do battle with Pharaoh and the Gods of Egypt? Who can match up to them in the ancient world? Yahweh, with his outstretched arm he demonstrates his power. That is the defining picture of God’s strength in the Old Testament—redemption of Israel from Egypt. Then you move to the New Testament. What is the defining act demonstrating the power of God?—the Resurrection. Jesus was raised from the dead by God

who reach into the grave and lifted Jesus Christ out. It is a clear and consistent in the New Testament; it is a demonstration of the mighty power of God so that Jesus Christ, as Paul says in Romans 1, is declared to be Son of God in power. We read it in Ephesians 1:18 that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened that you may be able to have just even a little glimpse of his power that is at work in you who believe, the power that raised Jesus Christ from the dead. So being strengthened is the third sweet and beautiful aspect of the Christian life.

### ***Gratitude – “and joyfully giving thanks to the Father” (v. 12)***

The fourth aspect we see from this passage is also beautiful, and it is Gratitude. Good works, Growth, Grace and fourthly and finally, Gratitude. Do you see that in verse 12? Step back into the end of verse 11 “... and joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light.” The Christian life is not just about good works or growth or endurance or patience; it is about gratitude—a life of gratitude, joyfully giving thanks to God. And does not gratitude sweeten the Christian life so much? Such a beautiful testimony when a life is adorned with gratitude and thankfulness and joyfulness. That is why I think gratitude plays such a key role in the book of Colossians. You can see it in chapter 2: 6-7, “So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith a you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.” Or in 3:15, “Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.” Or verse 17 of the same chapter, “And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.” Or 4:2, “Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful.” Thankfulness and gratitude ought to be characteristics of the Christian life. It is interesting in the study that was done, 87% of the respondents said that Christians are judgmental. Wouldn't it be great to supplant that perception with one that says Christians are grateful people? Celebrate the grace of God as it is shed abroad in Jesus Christ, and it is shed abroad commonly within humanity and the world; grateful people.

How do you begin with gratefulness and gratitude? You begin by faith: by receiving the gift of God by faith. What is the gift of God as it is highlighted in this passage? It is the glorious inheritance; it is to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light. It is good of God, isn't it, to shake up the United States economically, even though it is hard for many of us. And I am one who has a rent payment on one house and I own another house I am trying to sell; so I am with some of you. It is good of God because it enables Christians who are infused with scripture and the gospel to radiate a joyfulness and a gratefulness in this economically hard times. While I might lose my shirt in my house in Wheaton, I've got a share in the inheritance of the kingdom of light. It is imperishable, undefiled, cannot be touched, cannot be tinkered with, cannot be taken away; secured for me. That should generate in me a heart of gratitude and thankfulness that is unswerving and indomitable.

### **Conclusion – A Pleasing and Compelling Life**

So what are they? What are the four aspects of the fully pleasing life? Good works, Growth, Being strengthened, Gratitude: summary of the fully pleasing life, friends. And how does it compare with the profile that we hear about here? Wouldn't it be beautiful for us as a church and you as individuals, and me, to be known as people that are bound in good works, growth in knowledge of God, grace and gratitude? Wouldn't that be something beautiful? What a powerful

witness to the world! What a powerful witness to this community! And what good for own lives and relationships and families! May God make it so by his power and his grace.

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