



“Living to please God”

– John 8:12-30

by Pastor Tim Dodson
at JF Believers Church
in Menomonie, Wisc
on February 5th, 2017

John 8:12-30 (12) *Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, "I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life."* (13)

The Pharisees therefore said to Him, "You bear witness of Yourself; Your witness is not true." (14) Jesus answered and said to them, "Even if I bear witness of Myself, My witness is true, for I know where I came from and where I am going; but you do not know where I come from and where I am going. (15) "You judge according to the flesh; I judge no one. (16) "And yet if I do judge, My judgment is true; for I am not alone, but I am with the Father who sent Me. (17) "It is also written in your law that the testimony of two men is true. (18) "I am One who bears witness of Myself, and the Father who sent Me bears witness of Me." (19) Then they said to Him, "Where is Your Father?" Jesus answered, "You know neither Me nor My Father. If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also." (20) These words Jesus spoke in the treasury, as He taught in the temple; and no one laid hands on Him, for His hour had not yet come. (21) Then Jesus said to them again, "I am going away, and you will seek Me, and will die in your sin. Where I go you cannot come." (22) So the Jews said, "Will He kill Himself, because He says, 'Where I go you cannot come'?" (23) And He said to them, "You are from beneath; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world. (24) "Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins." (25) Then they said to Him, "Who are You?" And Jesus said to them, "Just what I have been saying to you from the beginning. (26) "I have many things to say and to judge concerning you, but He who sent Me is true; and I speak to the world those things which I heard from Him." (27) They did not understand that He spoke to them of the Father. (28) Then Jesus said to them, "When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He, and that I do nothing of Myself; but as My Father taught Me, I speak these things. (29) "And He who sent Me is with Me. The Father has not left Me alone, for I always do those things that please Him." (30) As He spoke these words, many believed in Him.

John Piper says often that “*God is most glorified when we are most satisfied in Him.*” Let me begin by asking today if you are indeed “satisfied in Him?” Is your life lived as an act of worship? Do you know and experience the peace of being in your place with Him? Are you “pleased” with your status and standing with Him, and moreover, is *HE* pleased?

Our culture today is one in which “everyone is a winner” and all contestants receive a trophy for “participation.” No one is a loser and everyone is a medalist. But is that the way it is in Christ? After all, we are God’s children and if the analogy plays out, then isn’t God always pleased with us as we are with our own children? *Oh wait...* I guess we *aren’t* always pleased with our children are we? Does the perfect love of God and His grace mean therefore He is always pleased with us? By default...*by the declared character attributes of God*, is He contented and satisfied, even “happy” with us? After all, is this not the very essence of “being pleased?”

It would seem that we are “all winners,” if we accept the plethora of blogs and online journals of the self-proclaimed writers and armchair digital pastors out there. It’s all so very convenient it seems! For to embrace such an idea, one need only ride the modern wave of religious thought...one that is quite accommodating, along with some convenient timing of worldly morality changes. It’s the modern idyllic thinking that is universally affirming and all together esteeming equally of all participants.

The idea of “pleasing” a God who has everything...who “owns the cattle on a thousand hills” and painted into reality the moon and the stars and every living thing, is all so baffling and humbling. One cannot help but feel small and insignificant under such pressure! Sadly, when we DO actually attempt to climb to the top of this Everest pinnacle, we either are entrenched in our own spiritual self-flagellation, or wholly surrendered to the principle that we can do no wrong in sight of God because He just loves us so much! Much of this error stems from the re-defining of our English vernacular and the struggle for a perception of personal safety and security.

We often hear the claim that God is *always and forever pleased with us*, when nowhere does scripture support that position. In fact, we read in 1 Corinthians 10:5 – “*I don’t want you to forget, dear brothers and sisters, about our ancestors in the wilderness long ago. All of them were guided by a cloud that moved ahead of them, and all of them walked through the sea on dry ground. In the cloud and in the sea, all of them were baptized as followers of Moses. All of them ate the same spiritual food, and all of them drank the same spiritual water. For they drank from the spiritual rock that traveled with them, and that rock was Christ. Yet God was not pleased with most of them, and their bodies were scattered in the wilderness.*” And Romans 8:8- “*Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.*” Hebrews 10:38 - *But my righteous one shall live by faith, and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him.*”

What IS truth is that God *always and forever loves us*. But it is a biblical and theological error to say He is always *pleased* with us. It is also contrary to the parental ideals that are understood and practiced as reflective of the spiritual dynamic He has with us and we are to have with Him. Scripture paints marriage and family as reflective of that spiritual dynamic. That’s why our family life is so crucial to our Christianity! We must acknowledge that few of us would even attempt to claim we are “*always and forever pleased with our children.*” We love them, but they can at times greatly displease us!

But being on the delivery side of that scenario in the context of a relationship with Christ seems to dance upon the edges of blasphemy for some odd reason. Many of us just can’t get our minds around the suggestion that we can “please” God, or that God might actually be ‘displeased’ with us, our living, and our life manifest. The latter camp is generally the “I-can’t-earn-God’s-love-by-what-I-do-so-therefore-I-intend-to-do-nothing” folks. But the flip side of that scenario is the fella that thinks God is FOREVER displeased with him and thus responds by jumping into every project, every ministry group, every activity, every work effort that the church offers, feeling that He must earn his standing with God and must do so via some serious calluses!

Yet some people just seem to innately “get it,” while so many others stand back in curious awe. Most of us are familiar with the famous 1924 Olympian runner Eric Liddell, author of “The Disciplines Of The Christian Life,” and the subject of the 1981 Academy Award Best Picture “Chariots of Fire.” In the movie we hear the famous quote by Liddell “...*when I run, I feel His pleasure.*” Liddell wasn’t teaching a Bible study or serving at church when He experienced that, He was *running*. He knew his place and calling, and understood that living it out pleased God. But the idea of that only ‘muddies the pool’ for many of us! Liddell said also “*I believe God made me for a purpose, but he also made me fast.*” I wonder if perhaps some of us have never known that feeling and have never experienced such, or perhaps we are just were unaware because we aren’t “tuned in” to the right spiritual frequency in order to hear and experience God in such a manner?

See, the fact is, there ARE both winners and losers! In fact Paul clearly said as much in 1 Corinthians 9:24 – “*Don’t you realize that in a race everyone runs, but only one person gets the prize? So run to win!*” Many of us may enter the race, but many will also fail to “*run to win*” and we will end our lives in the eternal ‘penalty box’, hearing only the words of our supposed Lord and Savior saying “*Depart from me, I never knew you.*” There are no trophies handed out for just showing up.

Thus it is a serious error to promote, *personally or corporately*, an ideal that says working for the Lord, service unto the God, church, and kingdom is on par with legalism and must be shunned. Because again, the Bible will be your corrector on that matter! We are in more than one place referred to as *slaves* to Christ. A slave *works*. Hard! He “lives his life as duty.” Ernest Becker, in his book “The Denial of Death” speaks of what it means to be a real man...that such is a “knight of faith.” He said “*This figure is the man who lives in faith...who has given over the meaning of his life to his Creator...who lives centered on the energies of his Creator. He accepts whatever happens in this visible dimension without complaint...lives his life as a duty...faces his death without a qualm...*”

Now let's set the record straight! God, the perfect parent, will not love you more if you are a diligent worker than if you are a lazy sluggard. But He may be more or less *displeased!* Does God want us to work and serve ourselves into exhaustion? I don't believe so, though there are many old sacrificial missionaries and consummate ministers of God who might argue that point! Scripture appears to be much more concerned with *fruit* than *labor*, with *production* rather than *sweat*. Thus it is not “what” or “how much,” but rather “results.” John 15:8- “*By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.*”

Note what it does *not* say. It does not say God is glorified by us working and serving ourselves into the ground. It does not say that God is glorified by “business.” But it also doesn't say that serving Him diligently is legalism. Can it be? Yes, but *you* make it that, not the church and not scripture! It doesn't say that God is ok with us kicking back and letting others do for us. It says He is “glorified by fruit!” It is this that makes us disciples. Not “believing *of*” but “believing *in*” and moving in light of that truth. Not theory, but *practice*.

What is fruit? Is it *accomplishments*? Not necessarily. Fruit is an outward manifestation of the life source within. An apple tree doesn't work hard to produce apples. It produces naturally because of good health and a hearty connection to good food and good water... (Bible and spirit). The apple tree doesn't anguish over what to be when it grows up, it just grows up and in health grows apples *because it is an apple tree*. Do you follow that line of logic? Jesus said, “*I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing,*” (John 15:5). When we are connected and *stay* connected, we produce. It just naturally happens as a result of proximity and relationship. Fruit isn't a duty or a mandate but a joyful byproduct of abiding.

The apple tree shows us that truly it is about *being* rather than *doing*! But let's turn the light on here! If I say I am a plumber, wouldn't you expect me to be diligently practicing plumbing? If I am a juggler, I juggle! If I am an auto racer, I drive a lot and drive fast! Is being a Christian then just listening to someone else talk about it, and we occasionally *read* about it, and we adhere mentally to the moral pinions of a faith-based philosophy? Such would never stand up in any real test of authenticity in any other principle or declaration of a person's “being” or “nature”, so why do we attempt to ram through such a false ideal when it comes to Christianity? Because of this strange phenomenon and practice, the word “Christian” has so depreciated that it has become something without real meaning or definition! It has been allowed to be so kidnapped by folks who desire the title but shun the biblical demands and qualifications, that nobody seems to even know exactly what it means anymore. I mean, *what's the standard? What is the tools and elements of measurement?*

Jesus began this passage by saying “*I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life.*” So what do we gather therein? That we firstly must *follow* Him...not just believe He is the Son of God. If we do not *follow*, we walk in the dark! James reminds us that “*You say you have faith, for you believe that there is one God. Good for you! Even the demons believe this, and they tremble in terror. How foolish! Can't you see that faith without good deeds is useless?*” (James 2:19-20)

And in order to “follow Him” we cannot “walk in darkness” and further we must actually *possess* the “light of life.” I know some folks who claim salvation but they are a sad lot: depressed, dark, withdrawn, isolated, negative, tired and bitter! How, in any stretch of the imagination, can such a person claim they are a possessor of the “light of life?” I’m not saying we all don’t pass through darkness...the “valley of the shadow of death”...but we walk *through* that valley and come out the other side! We don’t build a house there and plant some black roses out front!

Jesus repeatedly told these guys that they didn’t know him and they didn’t know His Father. These were the religious church going folks! But their *thinking* and their *church attendance* didn’t change anything because they still didn’t *know* Him. And it was because of *that* they would be eternally lost. He said to them that He was “...going away, and (they would) *seek* (Him), and (would yet) *die in* (their) *sin(s)*. And “*Where I go you cannot come.*” We walk away from this with no other interpretation than these guys...in all of their religious piety, were in fact still *lost!* Terribly, *tragically*, lost!

Are you occupied and busy about God? Liddell knew that no one just accidentally became an Olympic athlete. You do not inadvertently become a vocational success, you do not inadvertently win “best in class.” You do not just get lucky and become the most amazing football player the world has ever seen. Rather, it takes intentional effort, sacrifice, discipline and focus. In our spiritual life, we are given the free gift of becoming one of God’s chosen through trusting what Jesus did on the cross. And because of that act and the subsequent invitation, we have the power to live a dynamic life in the destiny and plan God has ordained for us before we were even born.

Yet, like the Olympian Liddell, it takes focus and discipline to grow and excel in your spiritual life. Like a car on the highway, without being steered toward a destination, we will never get there in one piece. If we are not aiming toward a specific goal, we will drift off course...in our spiritual lives, in our marriages, in our parenting, in our Christian lives.

Jesus, at the end of our passage, says “*The Father has not left Me alone...*” And **why**...because He was “The Son?” Because He believed that God was God? The passage tells us it was because He would “...*always do those things that please Him.*” It was what separated Him at least at that moment from those religious folks who were there with Him that day. He did please God, and they *didn’t*. It was an issue of **being** a child of God, not merely believing in some religious observations. Satan wants to convince you otherwise and will even use religion to make that happen! He will tell you that behavior and living doesn’t matter because you are “under grace.” But the Bible overwhelming teaches otherwise! How you live your life is who you really are. His grace will indeed cover your shortcomings. But to sight one more quote from “Chariots of Fire”, “*You can’t win if you don’t run.*”

Stand on the Word believer, not on the ever changing winds of doctrine. Ephesians 4:14-16 calls upon us to “...*no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ— from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.*”

“...*once you were full of darkness, but now you have light from the Lord. So live as people of light! For this light within you produces only what is good and right and true. Carefully determine what pleases the Lord.*” Ephesians 5:9-10