

It is hard to explain, for the concept quickly gets bogged down in the politics of religion—competing doctrines of “works” versus faith; free will versus servanthood; mindless, slavish adulation versus due worship.

Pleasing GOD

THIS MORNING WORK BEGAN IN EARNEST on the re-siding of our house. But the boss of the two-man team was not able to be here, sidelined by a recurring malady. So his right-hand man is working solo today.

As he waded into the work this morning, I entertained a fleeting speculation: Was the number two man concerned about what his boss would think about the amount and quality of work he did in his absence? Did he give any thought to *pleasing* his absent boss? He would do as his boss instructed, of course; that is simple obedience. But was there any desire on his part to *please* his boss—to bring him pleasure?

*Reflections
by the Pond*

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Do I want to please *my* boss—God? If I do, why? What is my motivation? Is there a difference between obedience and pleasing?

By one definition the Bible word for pleasing is “blessing,” expressed most emphatically in Psalm 103:

**Bless the Lord, O my soul,
And all that is within me, *bless* His holy name.**

Psalms 103:1

But aside from that, the concept of bringing pleasure to God is a slippery one in His word. As evidence of His grace, there is far more in Scripture about God blessing us, than our blessing Him. Our God is one to whom it is of high importance to shower His blessings upon His people, but He spends far less time or breath discussing the blessings which might come from our direction to Him.

God makes it clear that our obedience brings Him pleasure, so one could say that that is one form of our pleasing Him. But the pleasure He gains from that may be thin, since we are simply obeying that which has been commanded. That means it wasn’t our idea in the first place.

The deepest pleasure comes not from strict adherence to a direct-law, but from the sincerity of a voluntary act.

**Sacrifice and meal offering You have not desired;
My ears You have opened;
Burnt offering and sin offering
You have not required.
Then I said, “Behold, I come;
In the scroll of the book it is written of me.
I delight to do Your will, O my God;
Your Law is within my heart.”**

Psalms 40:6-8

What brings *you* the most pleasure: When your child obediently takes out the trash when you tell him to, or when he, out of his deep love for you, voluntarily washes the windows without your asking?

But how do we please an invisible, omnipotent God? We can’t wash His windows—we can’t even take out His trash.

The first way we please or bless our heavenly Father is with our mouth, when we exalt Him as God and Lord in our worship. As James points out, however, the part of our anatomy with which we do this is dual-purpose.

But no one can tame the tongue; *it is a restless evil and full of deadly poison. With it we bless *our* Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the likeness of God; from the same mouth come *both* blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be this way. Does a fountain send out from the same opening *both* fresh and bitter water?*

James 3:8-11

The second way we please our Father is with our behavior—not when we obey His precepts, for that is mere obedience, but when we voluntarily serve Him and His people out of our deep love for Him.

Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name. And do not neglect doing good and sharing, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.

Hebrews 13:15-16

Critical to pleasing God through these two ways and more is the condition of the heart. Are we doing it only because we were *told* to, or are we doing it because we *want* to? Is our motive to buy the

Lord's favor through our works, or to bring Him pleasure because we adore Him?

When our praise springs forth naturally from our abiding devotion; when we serve out of gratitude and joy, rather than obligation—when we take pleasure in the Lord, *He* finds pleasure in us.

O Lord, open my lips,
That my mouth may declare Your praise.
For You do not delight in sacrifice, otherwise I would give it;
You are not pleased with burnt offering.
The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit;
A broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise.

Psalms 51:15-17

*God does sometimes accept of willingness without the work,
but never the work without the willingness.*

Thomas Watson