

THE PLEASURE OF GOD

Colossians 1v19-22

Have you ever read a book, apart from the Bible, that has so helped you – a book so important, that you regularly recommend it or pass on copies? Henry Scougal's 'The Life of God in the Soul of a Man' was just such a book for Charles Wesley, a century after it was written. Scougal was a Scot, so brilliant he was at Aberdeen University at the age of 15 and a lecturer in Philosophy at 19. He died in 1678 before he could reach his 28th birthday yet his writing is still having an impact.

John Piper tells how this book inspired him to write 'The Pleasures of God'. *"About thirty pages into the book, I reached a section titled "The Excellency of Divine Love". One sentence riveted my attention. It took hold of my thought life in early 1987 and became the centre of my meditation for about three months. What Scougal said in this sentence was the key that opened for me the treasure house of the pleasures of God. He said, "The worth and excellency of a soul is to be measured by the object of its love."*

"The worth and excellency of a soul is to be measured by the object of its love." i.e. what you delight in says a great deal about your spiritual condition. And God Himself models this for us. Our text tells us something of what gives God pleasure and therefore gives a snapshot of the worth and excellency of God. We will look at this and then look at ourselves.

1. God's Pleasure

What gives God pleasure? Many things but five are mentioned here:

God takes pleasure in His Son

Over these past weeks we looked at the wonderful description of Jesus in **vv15-18**. Every word and phrase expresses God's delight in the Son. On a personal level some here can understand this with our sons and daughters'. Listen to the Father's voice at the baptism and transfiguration of Jesus. *"This is my Son, who I love; with Him I am well pleased."* (Matthew 3v17; 17v5) We catch a glimpse of the wonderful Father Heart of God.

God took pleasure in the Incarnation

i.e. coming to earth as a flesh and blood man in Jesus: **v19: For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him ...** What a contrast with the sub-Christian cults who grudge Jesus any identification with God. In contrast, God is pleased and delighted that His fullness dwells in Jesus. The word "fullness" speaks of unlimited, inexhaustible, overflowing capacity or supply. There is no holding back here, no hesitation or reservation as God lays His glory aside and pours Himself into a human frame. What amazing grace and humility; that God should become frail flesh.

God took pleasure in reconciling lost humanity

v20: and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven ... What a glimpse into the worth and excellency of God this gives us. Men and women have rebelled and pushed God away and the result has been catastrophic for the whole of human history. But instead of taking pleasure in vengeance and fury – as a tyrant would do, God took pleasure in an extraordinary and audacious reconciliation plan. This plan involved God Himself, God the Son, as a Go-Between.

God took pleasure in the Cross

God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him and through him to reconcile to himself all things ...by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross. Pleasure in the cross! But this was a terrible torture. Surely God could not take pleasure in seeing His Beloved Son die in agony. Does this tell us something terrible about God? Mary, Jesus' mother, didn't watch the crucifixion with any pleasure; it was like a sword piercing her heart. So how could God the Father take pleasure in the cross? because as He watched Jesus die He could see much more than Mary. He took pleasure through tears in the extent of the Son's obedient love; He took pleasure through tears in all Jesus was bringing about and making possible for us.

In our post Alpha group in Darras Hall we are working through John's Gospel. On coming to John 3v16 one in the group immediately recognised it as a precise summing up of the whole Christian message and said, *"If God had a web site this would be His mission statement."* "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." The death of Jesus on the cross was not about a wrathful Father taking it out on His Son; it was about a God of pure love, giving Himself - taking our just punishment by coming to us in Jesus.

God now takes pleasure in you!

Think about the prospect of meeting God face to face. Is this something which fills you with dread or with delight? Even if you are not at the end of either spectrum you will veer one way or the other. Our text says that He now looks at those who put their faith in Jesus, rather than themselves, very differently. **v21f: Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behaviour. But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation.** God looks at us now and it gives Him pleasure not sorrow because of all that was accomplished in Jesus.

God's Pleasures have told us a great deal about His worth and excellency. Now, what about you? What gives you pleasure and what do your pleasures tell you about your spiritual health?

2. Godly Pleasure

No doubt you can think of some examples of good things and others not so good. What does all this tell you about the worth and excellency of your soul? If you are anything like me you will be feeling somewhat chastened by this – as well as motivated to look again at your life. So what can we do?

Take pleasure in the things that give God pleasure.

We have already pinpointed five great pleasures of God in our text. It's worth asking, do these same things still cause you to be delighted or has familiarity caused them to lose their thrill? When I lose the thrill and wonder of my salvation I have found some specific things help me – particular songs, books, passages in Scripture, taking a long walk to think and pray. How about you?

We can also widen our idea of what gives God pleasure. The Bible says God “richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.” (1 Timothy 6v19) There are so many wholesome pleasures to enjoy. This amazing world God has made: the heavens, oceans and earth; wild life; the love of family, romantic love, the love of friends; home comforts and good food; the wonder and delight of newborn babies and small children; fun and wholesome laughter; hilarious memories; art, mathematics, technology, music, theatre, the various branches of science; films, literature, singing, games, fashion, architecture; and so on!

God takes pleasure in these things too and invites us to share His pleasure. We know, of course, that it is possible for us to take the things God has given us to enjoy – and misuse them.

We love someone – and then allow them to take God's place in our affections. We enjoy wine – and then start getting drunk or dependent on alcohol. We are fascinated by a particular singer or band or actor or sportsman and then make them an idol – there are still people whose homes are shrines to Elvis. We are delighted with a new computer game and then it becomes obsessional; we devote hundreds of hours to it and neglect more important things. We have amazing access to a world of information on the web – and then get lured by “weirdoes” or pornography. We take up a sport and then it becomes the most important thing in our life – more important than family, church or God. On a global scale – we make advances in nuclear physics and have the capacity to destroy each other.

So, how can we prevent legitimate pleasures taking us off course?

Make it your aim to please God in all you do

Jesus is our perfect model in this. He said “*I always do what pleases Him (the Father).*” (John 8v29)

In 'The Purpose Driven Life' Rick Warren writes: *"Anything we do that brings pleasure to God is an act of worship."* This is another reminder that worship is more than singing songs and hymns. *"Every activity can be transformed into an act of worship when you do it for the praise, glory and pleasure of God."* It may be some everyday activity – even something mundane and ordinary; or it may be in using some special talent you have.

"Whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus." (Colossians 3v17) Everything can be transformed by aiming to bring pleasure to God. As a new believer at the age of 18, this truth changed my whole perspective on study and learning; it made me want to be the best that I could be – for God. It wasn't just about me any more, it was to please God. And in doing so I discovered that pleasing God is the key to your own enjoyment of life. Some might call it "the secret of happiness"!

There is a lovely moment in the film 'Chariots of Fire' where Eric Liddell is explaining to his sister why he needs to race rather than launch immediately into missionary work overseas. He says *"I believe God made me for a purpose, but he also made me fast, and when I run, I feel God's pleasure."* Later he would feel God's pleasure as a missionary, but for now he could feel God's pleasure by competing in the Olympics.

It's not difficult to please God. In fact it is far easier to be a God-pleaser than a man-pleaser. People are so hard to please. If you live your life with one eye on what other people think you will end up miserable and frustrated.

And do you realize that even being tempted to sin is an opportunity to bring God pleasure? Yes, temptation can lead to sin causing God pain and grief; but it is also an opportunity to do the right thing. Every time you choose to do what pleases God you develop the worth and excellency of your soul. Do you think God sometimes allows us to experience temptation for this very reason?

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When we take pleasure in the things that give God pleasure and when we seek to please God - we demonstrate, and develop further, the worth and excellency of our soul. For some here this message could signal a new start: It certainly did for the great evangelist George Whitefield in the eighteenth century. Charles Wesley had passed Henry Scougal's book on to him when Whitefield was spiritually low. He wrote, *"O what a ray of divine life then did break in upon my soul! I fell awriting to all my brethren and to my sisters. I talked to the students as they came into my room. I laid aside all trifling conversation. I put all trifling books away, and was determined to study to be a saint, and then to be a scholar. From that moment God has been carrying on His blessed work in my soul."*

John Wilthew. March 2009

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In 'The Life of God in the Soul of a Man' (1677) Henry Scougal wrote: "*The worth and excellency of a soul is to be measured by the object of its love.*" i.e. what you delight in says a great deal about your spiritual condition. Our text gives us a glimpse of what gives God pleasure and therefore offers a snapshot of the worth of God's soul.

1. God's Pleasure

(i) God takes pleasure in His Son: Over these past few weeks we have been lingering on a wonderful description of God's Beloved Son in vv15-18. This gives us a glimpse of God's wonderful Father Heart.

God took pleasure in the Incarnation: v19: "*For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him*". What a contrast with the sub-Christian cults who grudge Jesus any identification with God at all. The word "fullness" speaks of unlimited, inexhaustible, overflowing capacity or supply. There is no holding back here, no reservation as God lays His glory aside and pours Himself into a human frame.

God took pleasure in reconciling lost humanity:v20: "*and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven*". Humanity mutinied and the result has been catastrophic for the whole world. But instead of vengeance & fury God took pleasure in an extraordinary and audacious reconciliation plan.

God took pleasure in the Cross: "*God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in (Jesus) and through him to reconcile to himself all things ... by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.*" Surely God could not take pleasure in seeing His Beloved Son die in agony! Yet as He watched Jesus die the Father took pleasure, through tears, in the extent of the Son's obedient love & in what was being achieved.

God now takes pleasure in you! God now looks at those who put their faith in Jesus very differently. (v21,22) God looks at us & it gives Him pleasure not sorrow.

2. Godly Pleasure

God's Pleasures have told us a great deal about His worth and excellency. Now, what about you? What gives you pleasure and what do your pleasures tell you about your spiritual health? You may feel chastened by this and motivated to look again at your life. So what can you do?

Take pleasure in the things that give God pleasure: Does your salvation still cause you to be delighted or has familiarity caused it to lose its thrill? The Bible also says God "richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment." (1 Timothy 6v19) There are so many wholesome pleasures to enjoy. We know, of course, that it is possible for us to take the things God has given us to enjoy and misuse them. So, how can we prevent legitimate pleasures taking us off course?

Make it your aim to please God in all you do: Jesus is our perfect model in this. He said "*I always do what pleases Him (the Father).*" (John 8v29) Every activity in life can be transformed by aiming to bring pleasure to God. It's not difficult to please God. In fact it is far easier to be a God-pleaser than a man-pleaser. Even being tempted to sin is an opportunity to do the right thing and bring God pleasure

When we take pleasure in the things that give God pleasure and when we seek to please God - we demonstrate & develop further the worth and excellency of our soul.

SUGGESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

Select the discussion starters which will work best for you.

1. Is there anything you would like to pick up on from Sunday's message, or something you would like to mention which made an impact on you?
2. What do you think of Henry Scougal's words: "*The worth and excellency of a soul is to be measured by the object of its love.*"? Do you think that he is right in suggesting that what you delight in says something about your spiritual condition?
3. Have you ever read a book, apart from the Bible, that has so helped you – a book so important, that you regularly recommend it or pass on copies to others?
4. Our text highlights God's pleasure in His rescue plan for humanity with Jesus at the very centre of His delight. What aspects of the Gospel particularly thrill you?
5. Rick Warren writes: "*Anything we do that brings pleasure to God is an act of worship.. Every activity can be transformed into an act of worship when you do it for the praise, glory and pleasure of God.*" (The Purpose Driven Life') Think about your everyday life – and talk about how your so-called ordinary activities may bring pleasure to God.
6. In the film 'Chariots of Fire' Eric Liddell says: "*I believe God made me for a purpose, but he also made me fast, and when I run, I feel God's pleasure.*" Do you ever feel God's pleasure when you are doing something you are good at and/or which you really enjoy?
7. How can we bring pleasure to God at this time when some of our church family are going through difficult health or financial challenges?