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Pataskala Church of the Nazarene
November 16, 2008

"The Life That Pleases God"

Colossians 1:9-14

Intro:

What does it mean to live a life that pleases God?

If you are like most people, that simple question can leave you tongue-tied.

It's likely that you never thought about the question in such simple form.

But, if you were pressed for an answer, you would probably list a number of external behaviors that we would have to have to please God:

You know certain experiences: i.e.
manner of conversion,
mode of baptism,
secondary experiences

The absence of certain vices
don't smoke,
don't dance,
don't watch "R" rated movies,
don't play cards

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It could even be the affirmation of certain theological issues
abortion,
view of the end times,
stance on spiritual gifts,
even the version of the Bible you like best.

Now I want us to all understand that these are all externals.

In fact, if we listen closely to our list we are really saying:

The one who pleases God is the one who is most like me!

I believe the reason this is so is because we want to live lives that please God.

So, we seek to define pleasing God by our own experience and beliefs.

But this morning I want to suggest a better way – a better approach.

I you to turn with me to the Apostle Paul to give us some ideas on what a life that pleases God looks like.

We see four characteristics of a life pleasing to the Lord.

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They are revealed by four participles in **verses 10-12**.

They are: **"bearing fruit";**
"growing in knowledge";
"being strengthened"; and
"giving thanks".

Let's look at them more closely.

1. The Life That Pleases God Bears Fruit

The idea of **"bearing fruit"** is not that foreign to us.

If we purchased a fruit tree, planted it, and took care of it we would expect to be getting fruit from that tree in a matter of years.

If after several years the tree was not yielding fruit, we would feel that the tree was defective or really not a fruit tree at all.

We might return it to the Nursery where we purchased the tree and complain.

The tree did not live up to the advertising.

Jesus says the same is true of people who profess faith.

He says, **"Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from**

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thorn bushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit." (Matt. 7:15-17)

How can we tell if someone is professing to be a believer, but isn't a believer?

We can tell by watching their lives.

If there is not a change in their living then we can conclude there is no change in their soul.

Our heart and our lives go together - they are not separate.

Now it is important that we remember that fruitfulness takes time.

You don't get any good fruit the first year you plant a fruit tree.

It takes time for the tree to mature.

The same is true for followers of Christ.

The change might not be immediately discernable.

However, over time we should be seeing a difference in the way people live.

Listen to these words of Paul to the Galatians.

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In this passage Paul contrasts the life of the sinful nature (the life that doesn't please God) and the "fruit (or life) of the Spirit."

Listen to the New Living Translation,

“When you follow the desires of your sinful nature, your lives will produce these evil results: sexual immorality, impure thoughts, eagerness for lustful pleasure, idolatry, participation in demonic activities, hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, divisions, the feeling that everyone is wrong except those in your own little group, envy, drunkenness, wild parties, and other kinds of sin. Let me tell you again, as I have before, that anyone living that sort of life will not inherit the Kingdom of God. But when the Holy Spirit controls our lives, he will produce this kind of fruit in us: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Here there is no conflict with the law. The person who is living to please God will begin to see a change in their values and we will see a change in their behavior.”

Those living together outside of marriage will get married.

Those cheating others will begin dealing honestly

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Those who have been abusive in their speech will move toward kindness

Those who were known for using others will begin serving others

Those who relished tearing down others in their whispering will now seek to build them up

Those who had hoarded their resources will begin investing their resources in the work of the Lord.

Listen to prescription of Jesus is: ***"Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me."***

Did you hear what He was saying?

We don't go out to bear more fruit . . . we seek to draw closer to Him and the fruit will come naturally.

It's not a matter of trying harder but it's a matter of drawing closer.

How do we know if our church is doing a good job?

It's not how people behave when they are in the church building . . . it's whether or not they are different in the day to day world.

The life that pleases God is the one that glorifies God in our daily life:

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In how we do our job;
How we treat our co-workers;
The tactics we use and won't use to make a profit;
The way we handle our mistakes; the way we treat our families.

2. The Life That Pleases God is One that Yearns to Know God Better

The life that pleases God is the one that **"keeps on growing in knowledge."** it is continually seeking to know God better.

But in order to understand the force of what is being said here let me state two negatives,

First, growing in the knowledge of God is not the same as seeking to learn how to get more from God.

Many of us are only concerned with how we can tap into God's resources.

We want to know how to get God to answer our prayers.

We want to know how to get God to meet our needs and banish our problems.

Let's try to understand it this way:

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If your children came to you only when they wanted something, would you feel that they loved you?

If your children spent their life studying how they could get you to give them what they wanted would you feel loved?

Of course not! You would feel used.

When our concern in seeking to know God better is to be able to **"experience more of His blessing."**

We are not loving God . . .we are using Him.

Second, growing in the knowledge of God is not the same as growing in knowledge ABOUT God.

We can spend all our time mastering information about God and not have a relationship WITH God.

Warren Wiersbe writes,

In my pastoral ministry, I have met people who have become intoxicated with "studying the deeper truths of the Bible." Usually they have been given a book or introduced to some teacher's tapes. Before long, they get so smart they become dumb! The "deeper truths" they discover only detour them from practical Christian living. Instead of getting burning hearts of devotion to Christ (Luke 24:32), they

get big heads and start creating problems in their homes and churches.

There is always a danger of substituting facts for a relationship.

The life that pleases God is the one that yearns to know more about God so that they can know God better.

I think this kind of person,

Reads the Bible not primarily for factual information but to discern the heart of God.

They look for direction not merely information.

Their prayer is not totally consumed with requests.

They take time to work on their relationship with God.

They are eager to learn of God.

They want to read or to be taught anything that might help them know God better.

They are like a boyfriend or girlfriend who enjoys looking at family pictures and hearing stories of the past.

They want to learn anything they can that will help them know the one they love better.

They are careful to make sure they are seeking truth and not just seeking ammunition to defend their own perceptions of God.

I have to remind myself that I am to read the Bible not for primarily for sermon ideas, or for arguments to defend my theological convictions . . .

I am to read the Bible because I want to know God better!

3. The Life That Pleases God Endures Troubled Times and is Patient with Difficult People

Paul tells the Colossians that a life that pleases God is one that is ***"being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might . . ."***

But notice the purpose of this power: it is given so we might ***"have great endurance and patience."***

The Word for endurance (or perseverance) literally means to "remain under".

We'd say "it means to hang in there."

It is a strength that helps us endure the troubled times of life.

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The word for patience has reference to our dealing with difficult people.

God gives us the strength to be patient with those people who annoy us, disturb us, and make us want to scream.

In my experience I have seen that God enables us to endure by giving us the strength of His Holy Spirit, the promises of His Word and by reminding us,

He is in control (Circumstances and people cannot overthrow His plan)

He only does what is good (I may not understand what is happening but I know it is purposeful)

He never makes a mistake. (Never).

This world is not our home. (Don't let the happenings in the world get you down)

So in hard times we don't complain . . . we trust.

We don't walk away . . we listen and try to learn.

We don't despair . . . we hang on tighter.

Being strong in the times of trouble is difficult.

But it may not be as difficult as the concept of patience with difficult people.

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There is nothing that tries my patience like someone annoying.

But do you see? That's the point.

People naturally react to difficult people negatively.

When we are in Christ He begins to give us a different perspective.

God teaches me patience with others by reminding me,

that I was (and sometimes am) a difficult person
that every one needs the benefit of the doubt (they may just be having a bad day)
that most difficult people are people who are hurting.
judging a person's heart and motives is something that is God's job, not mine.

God has a history of transforming people I would have written off.

4. The Life That Pleases God is The Life Lived Gratefully

Have you ever noticed how much we complain?

We complain about the weather (when we should be grateful to be alive)

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We complain about our income (or our taxes which take away our income) when we should be grateful that we have an income.

We complain about the government (though we should be grateful we don't live in anarchy)

We complain about how our food is cooked (or how long the waitress takes) when we should be grateful we have food.

We complain about other believers (they aren't as spiritual as we! We're the only ones doing it right)

When we should be thanking God that all members do not have the same function.

We complain about traffic when we should be glad we can travel with such ease.

We complain about crowds in the store (when we should be glad we are able to shop).

You get the idea.

We thank God for what He's given while at the same time feeling he should have given more.

We seem to think that if God really loved us we would have: less problems, more money, more stuff, more influence, less illness, more good times, less difficult times.

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But we tell God we're grateful.

If you were God, would you believe us?

Gratitude begins when we realize we do not deserve the inheritance that has been reserved for us.

We should spend every waking moment being grateful that God by His Spirit has pulled us from the jaws of Hell.

The Lord has taken our dead end life and set it on the course for eternity.

We must think often of where we would be if He had not drawn us to Him.

An attitude of gratitude grows as we learn to open our eyes to the blessings we take for granted.

When was the last time you thanked God for the breath you were able to take, or the blue sky, or the song of a robin?

When did you last thank Him for the Bible, for fellow believers, for the music that lifts your soul?

When did you last thank Him for a warm home and conveniences we consider "rights".

When did you last thank Him for your family?

When did you last thank Him for the diversity that exists that keeps us honest?

Or the trials that give us perspective?

We also grow in our gratefulness as we see how wonderful our Savior is.

Over the years I have been in Pataskala I have gotten to know you better I have found that I have come to appreciate, cherish and thank God for you (most of you) more and more.

This is even more true of Christ.

We have so little idea of His greatness.

As we study His words, His actions, and as we become more attuned to His character, we will naturally grow in our gratitude that we are united with one who is so magnificent.

Conclusions

I hope this quick survey has been helpful to you.

We have not exhausted the subject.

But I do want to caution you.

If you take these characteristics and use them to measure your own life I would think you would feel that your life is not very pleasing to God.

I know I feel that way.

But instead of getting depressed, please remember two things:

First, Paul is pointing to the goal.

This is what we are working toward, not where we should already be.

Second, we need to remember that we cannot bear fruit apart from Christ.

These are not traits we can produce in ourselves by greater effort.

We must remember that the key is not to work harder . . . it is to draw closer.

It's possible that you have listened today and realize that you don't have this kind of relationship with Jesus Christ.

It's possible that you have just been "playing along" every Sunday.

Friend, before you can live a life that is pleasing to God, you must receive the salvation that God offers.

Today I encourage you to acknowledge that Jesus died in your stead.

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I invite you to tell the Lord that you are willing to trust Him for your eternal destiny.

You are willing to rely on His provision for you.

I encourage you to let Him know that you are willing to let Him build a new life in you . . . the life you were created to live.

That's the first step . . . take that step today.

This is also a good time for those who profess faith in Christ to evaluate our lives too.

We need to be shaken from our complacency so that we will be spurred to a deeper relationship.

So here are some "So What" questions for you.

I have no doubt that you talk about faith but the question to ask is: do they see that faith in your living?

Do they see it in the way you handle tough times?

Do they see it in the way you deal with difficult people?

Do they see it in the way you talk about those who are different from you?

Do they see it in the way you talk about other Christians? (Ouch!)

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Do they see it in your business ethics?

Look at your life . . . What do YOU see?

Are you doing anything to grow in the knowledge of God?

Are you reading your Bible?

Are you spending time alone with God?

Are you reading anything that stretches you?

Are you listening to those who disagree with you?

Are you living gratefully?

Have you thanked God today for the blessing that surrounds you?

Do you appreciate the nature of your salvation in Christ?

Are you working to get better acquainted with Him so you can love Him more fully?

This passage is a call to a Christianity that is more than religious mumbo-jumbo.

It's a summons to a relationship with Christ that will transform us.

It's an invitation to a life that will invigorate us.

It's the doorway to a lifestyle that will make the world stop and wonder.

If you will step out of the pretend and dreary world of superficial faith and into a genuine, humble relationship with the Lord who calls us to Himself . . . wouldn't it be nice if someone could point at us and say, "Now, that's what it's like to live a life that is pleasing to the Lord?"

May God lead us to that end.

Amen.