

# Find Out What Pleases the Lord

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Preacher: Tom Muir

[ 0 : 00 ] It's worth reminding ourselves sometimes, isn't it, that the Bible, God's word to us, is deliberately and unashamedly directive.

In other words, it speaks into our situation to tell us who we are, who God is, and what he wants us to do.

That is the truth that you'll find throughout the whole Bible, throughout the book of Ephesians, and throughout the specific passages that we're going to look at today. Now that, immediately, might make a lot of people that we know very uncomfortable.

Don't like the idea that there's somebody over all our lives who can tell us what to do. It might even make us uncomfortable, even if we're Christians, because sometimes if we're honest, we find it hard to hear the call of God on our lives, what he wants for us.

The specific verse that I want us to focus on this morning encapsulates this truth. You'll find that when we come to it, a lot of the verses before and after are really summarised in this one key verse.

[ 1 : 13 ] It's a very short verse, but it's a very important verse, and it's a wonderful verse for us, particularly for Christians. Verse 10, Ephesians 5, verse 10.

Let me read from verse 8. For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. That's what it means if you're a Christian. Live as children of light, for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness, and truth, and find out what pleases the Lord.

That's God speaking into our lives, directing us, isn't it? Telling us what he wants for us. He wants us to find out what pleases him. He says, that's a good way for your life to be, to live a life, finding out and delighting in what pleases God.

Quite a challenging question, just a start on, really, isn't it? If we ask ourselves the question, how are we doing with that?

What is our response to that question? You sometimes read and interviews the question, if you could make one thing about your life better, if there was one thing that could improve the quality of your life, what would it be?

[ 2 : 20 ] Now, often there are loads of valid things that would make our lives easier. Very valid things, health, just a wee bit more coming in each week. But if we answer the question, as Christians, really what we should be saying is, if I had a greater sense in my life of knowing what it means to want to please God on a day by day and a week by week basis, is that what my heart wants to do?

To find out what pleases my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. So we're going to go through a little bit of this chapter, we can't look at all of it.

I want to look first of all, the way that the chapter shows us some juxtapositions, it deliberately shows us different ways of life. That's quite an obvious three when you read through this passage. We're going to look at three quick juxtapositions.

It sets up two different ways of living against each other. I'm just going to look at them briefly. First one's in verse three. You'll notice it says, it talks about holy people.

And then you'll notice it, if we read on a wee bit, it talks about immoral, impure or greedy people. So there's the first one, juxtaposition of holy people and immoral people.

[ 3 : 38 ] You'll notice if you look at verse eight, we get another one. Says this to us as Christians, for your once darkness, but now your light in the Lord.

You have the light of the Gospel that has come into your life to change your life. And in verse 15, be very careful then how you live.

Not as unwise, but as wise. Now we know as Christians that the start of wisdom is the fear of the Lord, isn't it?

That's what the Bible teaches us. The beginning of the wisdom is the fear of the Lord. So in other words, having a right understanding of who we are and who God is. And when we start to understand that and when we let that speak into a day to day understanding of who we are and what we're all about and what we do and what we want to do, the Bible says, well that's the beginning of the path of wisdom, knowing God.

So, what we're really talking about here is something that's unfashionable or unpopular. You'll probably find if you were to speak of this to some of your friends, they wouldn't like it.

[ 4 : 47 ] And as I said, sometimes we find this truth hard as well, don't we? This is talking about a right and a wrong way of living. This is what the Bible is directing us to in this particular passage. The God says, there is a way of life that is good.

There is a way of life that is not good. It's very clear on that and it doesn't make any apologies for it. It can be the hardest thing for us sometimes, can't it, for a conversation with a work colleague.

And everybody else in the room is saying one thing and we think, I know that God's word tells me otherwise and I'm the only person here who thinks that.

Isn't it the hardest thing sometimes to say, well, I disagree? We're going to look at a wee bit more closely though because this chapter goes into a little bit more detail about two examples of, first of all, I want to look at ways of living that are not what God wants us to do.

These are not ways of living that are pleasing to God. And the first is going back to verse three. So let's just take a little bit more time to look at verse three and then we're going to look at verse four.

[ 5 : 52 ] Two examples to avoid. The first is one thing what is not ours. Specifically in this context it's talking about sexually, relationally.

Let me read verse three. Among you, this must not be even a hint of sexual immorality or of any kind of impurity or of greed because these are improper for God's holy people.

Now I don't know if you've been reading the papers this week. I was looking at one online paper and it carried an interesting story. There was an article by a lady who's just written a book and I'm sure she was delighted to be given this column in this major newspaper because it gave her lots of free publicity.

She got to say pretty much a shortened version of her book in however many hundred words and I'm sure it makes for good sales because it's deliberately controversial.

The book is called *The New Rules Internet Dating, Playfairs and Erotic Power*. Basically what it says, what she was trying to say in her article was that marriage is good but so is having affairs and it's great to make yourself more interesting, to keep yourself interesting and to enjoy life by just basically if you see something you want, go after it, go and get it.

[ 7 : 20 ] That's fine. It's what we're for. If you feel something in your heart, in other words an attraction towards somebody else, go for it. Now that's in many ways one of the key belief patterns that I think a lot of people have nowadays isn't it?

If your heart says it then it must be right. Not according to the Bible because God's word speaks into that situation and says there must not even be a hint of sexual immorality, not even a hint. And so immediately God speaks into this situation to direct people and to say that is not the way I want you to live.

Another example in verse four, if the first one was about wanting what is not ours and just saying I'm just going to go for it because it's what I want to do, well in verse four we have people who kind of maybe deliberately speak to cause offense.

So let's read verse four. Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking which are out of place. When I read that the first thing I thought of, may not be the first thing you thought of was Edinburgh Festival.

[ 8 : 37 ] It's just about to finish. Some of it's good and some of it's not so good. But what's interesting about the Edinburgh Festival is how many comedians there are.

I don't know if you're brave enough to go and see comedians. I'm not nowadays. I'm scarred for life. I've had too many bad experiences. I was certainly never going to see a comedian with my mum. It would be too embarrassing.

And again reading the paper, it struck me how many times people were writing about the kind of comedians, the kind of jokes that comedians are coming out with at the Edinburgh Festival or generally on TV.

Because apparently the instances of comedians using jokes about domestic violence or misogyny or violence towards women, often sexually, is being used.

It's not incredible. And there's just a big debate. Is this okay? Is it not okay? And comedy is all about pushing the boundaries, isn't it?

[ 9 : 37 ] And maybe what we're tempted to think is that it's just edgy. They're just trying to get away. How much can we get away with? How much can we say that shocks people and that just provokes a reaction?

That's what much theatre or comedy is about. And it always has been the case. I was put through Greek drama when I was at university. It's one of the courses I had to read. To read some of the comedies.

Now, the interesting thing about the comedies of 2000 years ago, they may be relatively sophisticated in terms of how they're written. But what they're about is just so childish kind of smutty, it's not even real.

The main point in many of the comedies, the early Greek comedies, was to be as rooted possible to shock people just to get a reaction. So kind of nothing's changed really, has it?

Many people in theatre or in comedy nowadays just want to meet you gasp. What does the Bible say?

[ 10 : 44 ] Nor should there be obstinacy or foolish talk or coarse joking. Now, aren't we so boring for saying that? Isn't it just the most boring thing to have a Christian come along and say, well actually I just don't think that's funny, even though you might think it's funny?

God speaks into the situation and says in this context, this is not what I want you to be talking about. This is not the way I want you to be talking. I don't want you to talk that way about those people because it's out of place, says the Bible.

But what I want us to do just now is focus on two ways in which God says we should be behaving. You want to find out what pleases the Lord? Well thankfully, we're not just giving a list of things we shouldn't do because the Bible also directs us to how God wants us to be.

He tells us how He wants us to be. He tells us what is a good way for us to be living. Look at verse 4 again, because we get the flip side, don't we? This isn't about being a killjoy.

This isn't just about a miserable Christian who comes along to any cultural event that's going on and says, no, shut it down. We don't do the arts.

[ 12 : 02 ] Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking which is out of place, but rather thanksgiving. That's what God says that we should be. People whose hearts, because we're changed, because of what we know God has done for us, are full of thanksgiving.

This is what we talk about when Christians talk about joy, isn't it? Not superficial happiness. It's not happiness, a smileiness that is about pleasing people by just laughing at whatever is said.

It's about joy in your heart because you know the Lord has changed you, because He has saved you. So what do we do? We give thanks. That's the first thing that we notice here.

Here's another one, verse 18. This comes just after something that we didn't look at, but it's about drunkenness. The Bible's quite clear on this, isn't it? It just says, don't get drunk.

Because when you're drunk, how much harder is it not to laugh at inappropriate stuff? So the Bible says don't get drunk. What does it say to do?

[ 13 : 02 ] Verse 18. Well, from verse 17, therefore, do not be foolish, understand what the Lord's will is. Do not get drunk on wine which leads to debauchery, instead be filled with the Spirit.

That's what we should be, should be people who are filled with the Spirit. Are you giving time and space for the Spirit to work in your life?

Or are you filling yourself? I have to ask myself a question. Am I filling myself with stuff that's just not good for me? Or are we being filled with the Spirit?

And then look at what it goes on to say. This is important for us as a body of believers. Do not get drunk on wine which leads to debauchery. Be filled with the Spirit.

Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord. Because this isn't just about isolated Christians being told what to do, is it?

[ 14 : 02 ] Paul's writing to a church and he's saying to them, you know, you're not on your own and your fight against the way that the world wants to mould you to make you like it, you have to support each other.

So speak psalms and hymns and spiritual songs to one another, to be a blessing to one another, to build each other up. Speak the truth of the gospel to each other, remind each other.

And you know, that comes from an awareness in our hearts of our being saved. If we have no sense of being saved, it will be harder for us to do that.

And it will be easier for us to just go along with maybe our sinful inclinations. Whatever we find is the first thing that comes into our heart and wants us to do.

So as somebody of this passage, some of these verses that we've looked at is that God speaks into our lives to direct us what he wants for us and he says, find out what pleases the Lord and hear some examples.

[15:05] Here are some of the ways that I don't want you to live. Here are some of the ways that I do want you to live. Now, we have to pause at this point, don't we? Because if we're honest, we have to speak about the fact that that's not always easy.

As I said at the start, sometimes we find when we come to a passage like this that we're uncomfortable because, well, maybe we're just cold at the moment.

Maybe we find it really hard right now to be motivated to know the Lord and to follow the Lord because we're distant or because there are maybe many things in our lives that are difficult and that vie for our attention.

If we're honest, these things come upon us from time to time. But if we're honest also, sometimes we're just rebellious and we don't want to hear God speaking into our lives and showing us how we should live.

We're much more comfortable following the desires of our heart, the sinful desires. And so a Psalm like Psalm 119, remember we sang it about how the Stammer was saying that his heart delighted to hear God's words?

[16:14] Sometimes I found that a real challenge because I know that my heart doesn't feel the same. I don't find it as easy to love God's ways. Because that's because I'm rebellious.

Can I just read? I just looked over this last night. I was looking at the sermon and I just felt like reading this book. This is a book called Holiness. It's a book about the Christian life and it's a book about how we are to be challenged to live a holy life.

And I've been meaning to finish it for ages and I haven't. So I just picked it up and I just opened it, my place and I read this. Now I wonder read this because it challenges us if we're complacent about following God's ways.

This is for if we're if we're feeling like it doesn't really matter. Christian life, we're not really that interested. The author says this, but while I hold this, I maintain that believers are eminently and peculiarly responsible and under a special obligation to live holy lives.

In other words, to find out what pleases the Lord. That's our responsibility for believers. They're not as others dead and blind and unrenewed. They are alive unto God and have light and knowledge and a new principle within them.

[17:21] Use fault as if they are not holy, but their own. This is really hard hitting. It really struck me when I read it. He goes on to say, if the Savior of sinners gives us renewing grace and calls us by His Spirit, we may be sure that He expects us to use our grace and not to go to sleep.

It is forgetfulness of this which causes many believers to grieve the Holy Spirit and makes them very useless and uncomfortable Christians. Now as I said, that is important if we're complacent. If we just think it doesn't really matter how we live, we're saved so we can just carry on regardless. What do we do then if we have this feeling of struggling with this truth, with the fact that God directs us and He shows us how we are to live?

Certainly not easy for us just to say, must try harder. Must do better. Tomorrow it's going to be better. I'm going to stop sinning. I'm going to read my Bible more. I'm just going to make myself want to. That's really hard, isn't it? Just to kind of engineer within yourself some sort of extra love for God and for His word.

What I want to do is to turn back to Ephesians chapter 3 because while reading through Ephesians, I was struck by this passage as well. I think this is really important to help us to motivate us in the Christian walk and to help us and to motivate us to find out what pleases the Lord.

[18:49] We're going to look at just two things, two verses briefly. In Ephesians chapter 3, Paul's, you'll see from verse 1, he's just about to start a prayer.

For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus, for the sake of your Gentiles, you'll notice in verse 14 he carries on where he finishes off. I kneel before the Father.

That's him carrying on where he breaks off. What's he doing in between? Well he can't help but it bursts out of him in this letter. He wants to explain to them this mystery.

He says, I've got this mystery that I want to tell you about. I want to make it clear to you. I want to open it up for you all to hear and see. What is this mystery?

Let's look at verse 6. This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body and sharers together in the promise of Christ Jesus.

[ 19 : 47 ] Now when we say mystery here, we're not talking about something kind of spooky. It's really talking about something that God's will, some part of God's, what God wants for people that has always been true, that God has always known, but at this time Paul is saying it's being revealed.

So what he wants to do to the people is to hear as an aspect of who God is, what his purposes are for you, and at this point I want you to know them. I want you to be really clear on what God wants for you.

The Gentiles as well as the Jews can be saved. You might think, yeah, I know that. I know that. I've heard that before. I'm not a Jew and I'm a Christian, so I know that. But reading about this passage, a lot of the commentators would say that this is perhaps one of the most challenging for the original reader's parts of the letter.

That is an incredible controversy. Can people who are not Jews be saved? Would God do that? Would you really give this incredible blessing of salvation to these other peoples?

[ 20 : 52 ] Well, yes, he would. This is what we're being taught here. And this is what we know, isn't it, as Christians today in Edinburgh that this applies to us. This truth is for us, and it's really important that we don't take it for granted.

This is the truth that changes everything for us, isn't it? Our salvation, we don't take it for granted, our salvation is completely extraordinary. It's a work of God's free grace.

God came into our lives. Do you think that you engineered your salvation for yourself? Do you think this morning that by sitting here, by just attending maybe, by being a good person, that that's what pleases God?

Well, reading through this passage, we're challenged completely by that because it says that God in His mercy saved us, in His mercy He came into our lives, and He showed His love to us.

And He said, I want you to be my people. I want to adopt you into my family by grace, because of His love.

[ 21 : 54 ] So the problem really for us is when we just become too used to that truth, we become blasé. When we forget how remarkable it is that you're saved, you're a saved person. If that becomes, can I, like, yeah, I know that.

That happened to me 15 years ago, and now I go to church. Then it will be much harder for us to feel like following what we've read in Ephesians chapter 5, find out what pleases the Lord.

It will maybe become much more like a state of, I've got to do this, because this is what I'm told to do. I've got to follow, I've got to obey what I read in the Bible, because it's what I do.

But when we remember the fact that God has broken into our lives and sent His Son for us now, when we really focus on that, when it becomes the meditation of our heart, then we want to find out what pleases the Lord.

This is about identity, isn't it? It's about knowing who we are. It's about knowing who we are. It's not about being proud about who we are, like saying, I'm special because I'm a member of the free church.

[ 22 : 57 ] It's not nothing to do with that. It's just about knowing who God has called us to be. So as well as this, you know, it should be something that we're amazed at and that we talk about.

Do you remember the weather on Tuesday? You may not. I do, because I got completely soaking. At lunchtime, I took the dog for a walk and I thought, it's fine, it's quite nice.

I'm going to go out, went to the beach. I live not far from the beach. I had my shorts on, my flip flops, and there were some clouds in the sky. I thought, that'll be fine. And it wasn't fine. I got to the beach and the tide was quite far out, so I went way down the beach and everybody else seemed to be wiser than me.

They were all taken cover. I got absolutely soaking. Like, I think it was officially the heaviest rain shower I've ever been in in my life.

It lasted five minutes, of course, but when it finished, I could literally have rung my t-shirt out. So I decided to go home because I was feeling a bit cold. But what was interesting was what happened as I was walking back up through Portobello High Street.

[ 24 : 02 ] Everybody had run for cover, of course. I was coming up into the high street, people were just coming out of shops. And what was interesting was everybody was talking to each other. You know, strangers, people who would never normally speak to each other at all.

But they'd all been kind of hit by the fact that this was like a, what the weather had done was created a communal sense of like a shared experience. And everybody was like, wow, did you see the rain?

Yes. Yes, it was heavy. You know, and people were kind of comparing wet shoes and furling their brawlies and wondering if it was okay for them to move on again.

It had been such a dramatic storm, but they couldn't help but talk about it. Now, that just struck me as interesting. What has happened to us, by the way, have been saved from darkness into light.

The most incredible change has come to us by God's mercy. And can't it so often be the case that we find it the hardest thing to talk about? It can be easy, maybe, for us to talk about church, how we do church, what's wrong about church, what's right about church.

[ 25 : 09 ] But talking about our salvation can be the hardest thing for us to talk about. And so, weirdly, what we need to do personally is ask the Lord to renew our hearts, to remind us again of His salvation.

Lord, you've changed me. You've given me salvation. Help me to understand that. Help me to know that. And help me to share that with my brothers and sisters.

Briefly, finally, if we need to remember our identity, we also need to remember our purpose. And that's the last thing I want to look at from this chapter. So the identity, Gentiles, we are heirs together with Israel.

What's our purpose? If you look with me at verse 10, Paul has been saying that he wants to make plain to everybody the mystery.

He wants everybody to know this. And then he says in verse 10, his intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms.

[ 26 : 17 ] Now, what does that mean? The rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, simply angels.

Most of the commentators are agreed on the fact that this is talking about angels. So in other words, what this is saying to us believers is that our being saved by God and our being transformed, our being sanctified, our being made holy, so that as we're saved and as we're daily showing what that means to us and as we're daily encouraged by the Spirit to live a life that finds out what pleases the Lord, and as we want to do His work, as the angels in heaven see that happening to us, they learn more about the God that they serve and they bring Him glory.

They worship God because they see the work that He does in our lives. Now, that's an incredible truth. And that's something that should really change the way we think about what we're for.

We don't come to church to suit ourselves. You know, we must get away from this thought that we just kind of, it's just a kind of formal religion that we just come to church. Our purpose in living is to give glory to God.

Our purpose in living is to live in such a way that the angels in heaven, seeing the way that we're changed, not because we're amazing people, and because we're that spectacular, but because they see the way that God works in our hearts and bring us from people who are dark and ignorant of Him and who He is and what He wants for us, into people whose lives are filled with the light of the gospel, they want to praise God and they want to glorify Him.

[ 28 : 00 ] Let me just read this one line. The church therefore, this is a quote from a book I read, the church therefore does not exist for itself. It exists for God and His glory.

That's our calling. That's who we're called to be. And that's what we need to remember. The Olympics were, I didn't see much of the Olympics, I was on holiday. But I think what the Olympics were for a lot of the politicians in the country and the organizers of the Olympics were really what they wanted people to do when they looked at the Olympics was see like a window into Britain.

So London for, however, what is it, three weeks becomes a window into Great Britain. And they want people to look at it and say, wow, that was impressive. Isn't Britain doing well? Isn't that a great country? Look at how well they organized it. Look at how well their medal tally was. As the watching world looked in on London, what did they see?

Well, when the hosts of heaven look in on our lives, on St. Columbus, as a body of God's people, as a church, does it give them cause to praise Jesus?

[ 29 : 11 ] That's the question we finish with this morning. Does it give the angels cause to give glory to God for the way that He's working in our lives? That's what we're called to be. Do they see people's lives being transformed and praising their Savior?

And do they see people who are determined to pray and to ask God, Lord, help me to want to live a life that finds out what pleases you?

Let's pray. Lord, we thank you so much for this truth. We thank you so much for the great calling that you give us.

We thank you for the dignity of life that you want to show us is ours because of Jesus, our Savior, because He has come into the world to save us, but as well as saving us, He wants to change us. He wants to work in our lives to make us more like Jesus. So help us to think about that and to think about whether we want to become more like our Savior. Help us to encourage each other in that and as a group of Christians, to be people who want to live for you, to encourage each other and to be sympathetic to each other with all the ups and downs of life that we face, help us to encourage each other to be people who live to please you.

[ 30 : 30 ] We pray for those who are visiting here this morning. Thank you for them. Lord, we pray for them as they travel or as they go back to their homes and maybe to their home churches, that you would bless their fellowships also and may they also be places where the Christians gather, knowing their calling and knowing their sense of love for you so that they may bring glory to their Savior Jesus.

In whose name we pray. Amen.