

Catford Lectures 2009-2010

Part 3

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[00:00:00] Well, I'd like us to start with hymn number 423, 4-2-3.

God and Father, we thy children would in meekness hear thy voice, undistracted, hearts responsive as thy spirit strikes the chord. All thy mind we would be learning, as the desert path we trace. Thine we are, and would be leaning ever on thy boundless grace. 4-2-3 God and Father, we thy children would in meekness hear thy word, undistracted, hearts responsive [00:01:13] as thy spirit strikes the chord.

All thy mind we would be learning, as the desert path we trace.

Thine we are, and would be leaning ever on thy boundless grace.

Till the Spirit's revealing lights the glory thou hast giv'n, [00:02:07] and our eyes, by faith, are seeing Christ at thy right hand in hand.

As on earth this Lamb was trodden, ever subject to thy will, as the bed of all thy counsels, whom the universe will fill.

May our hearts this place accord him, when, as Isaac, he has come, [00:03:10] as the loam, spake out and grew in, as the Lord upon his throne.

May our hearts, Father, before him this world's glory worship thee, every hindrance let not vanish, for we're subject unto thee.

God and Father, thee we worship, praise thee evermore, [00:04:10] for that thou leadest us in triumph telling, O thy boundless love be known.

May we therefore still be learning in thy word thy counsels trace, till the day that thou display'st all the glory of thy grace.

[00:05:02] Christ, Amen.

Well, to introduce what I want to talk about, I'd like us to read one verse. Now, as we go on, I will point to other scriptures which we will read. But at this point, I just want us to read the first verse of 1 Thessalonians 4. 1 Thessalonians 4, verse 1.

Furthermore then, we beseech you, brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus, [00:06:05] that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, so ye would abound more and more. I'd like us to sing another hymn now.

I'd like us to sing number 200.

Number 200.

Father, how precious unto thee is thy beloved Son, in whom there does perfection see, thy holy, blessed One. When he in flesh the desert passed, he loved to do thy will. His food it was, through to the last, thy pleasure to fulfil. Number 200.

Father, how precious unto thee is thy beloved Son, [00:07:08] in whom there does perfection see, thy holy, blessed One.

When he in flesh the desert passed, he loved to do thy will.

His food it was, through to the last, thy pleasure to fulfil.

Only begotten he revealed thyself unto thy praise.

[00:08:11] The Father, until then concealed, was seen in all his ways.

As in his life, so in his death, he was devoted still.

For us in love preside his breath, obedient to thy will.

He glorified thee on the earth, thy work by him was done.

[00:09:16] And thou who knewest, for his worth is glorified thy Son.

Now crowned and seated on thy throne, he is thy joy and rest.

And we who are through grace thine own, in him are fully blessed.

[00:10:05] Ye preciousness itself to thee, to us is precious too.

With every beauty in him see, thy light of glory view.

Amen. It should always be true that those who speak from the platform should consider the application of their remarks to themselves. [00:11:12] I feel the Lord would have me speak on the particular subject that I'm about to speak about, but I have in mind that I'm very conscious that what I

say has to apply to myself as well as those that are in the audience. How do we please God? How do we please our Lord? Now that's a question that interests all of us, isn't it? And I suppose there's some obvious answers to this. I'm sure if asked, one thing that we'd say would be that obedience pleases him. And that's certainly true. Of course, it covers a multitude of practical matters. [00:12:04] But what I want to do this afternoon is not give an overview of the topic, really, but rather to note some of the things that are specifically stated in Scripture as pleasing him. Now, at the time available, I certainly won't refer to every Scripture that mentions pleasing God. This is not a complete overview of the topic, nothing like, but just some points that I've noted from Scripture, and I'm sure that you'll think of others that I haven't included and perhaps should have done. It's interesting to consider why certain things are mentioned specifically as pleasing the Lord, whereas others aren't mentioned directly in this way. And I think perhaps sometimes some of these are referred to as pleasing him because we might not naturally think of them as being that important, perhaps. [00:13:12] But clearly to the Lord they are. And for the Holy Spirit to note that such, specifically, please the Lord, leaves us in no doubt about the matter. Now, I want to give this talk a structure, because lectures, I find, are easier to follow, and the content's more memorable if I have some idea of the structure. So this is what I intend doing. First of all, I'm going to make some preliminary points about the Lord Jesus. Then I want to mention children as a distinct and important group. And then I want to mention, very briefly, some general principles. [00:14:01] And then I want to give some examples of specific behavior that are stated in the Scripture as pleasing God. They may seem to be somewhat miscellaneous examples, but they're ones that I've noted and that I want to bring before us. Again, I'd like to stress this isn't intended as a complete overview of the topic, but a description of some things that I notice in God's Word. So firstly, the Lord Jesus himself. The Lord Jesus is our perfect example, of course. If anyone was completely entitled to please himself, it was him.

But the Scriptures note that he pleased not himself. All he did pleased the Father. He always pleased the Father.

[00:15:02] And as we look at the Scriptures and think about this, we understand that it must be so, and that it's important. For one thing, it proves who the Lord Jesus is. That should be crystal clear to us all. A mere man could not always possibly please God. It also proves the unity in the Godhead. The three persons in the Godhead are one. The Lord Jesus pleased the Father. And it's interesting to see how the Scriptures record this. Now, I've written down here some of the Scriptures, which I'll read to you. I'm not expecting you to turn to these. Firstly, we find the Father himself testified that the Lord Jesus pleased him. And all three of the Synoptic Gospels record the baptism of the Lord Jesus by John in the Jordan. [00:16:09] And we read from Matthew, it says, And thou, a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. In Mark we read, And there came a voice from heaven, saying, Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And in Luke 3 we read, And the Holy Spirit descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon him. And a voice came from heaven, which said, Thou art my beloved Son, in thee I am well pleased. At the Transfiguration, later on, the Father reaffirmed that the Lord Jesus pleased him. As recorded in Matthew 17, we read, Behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice out of the cloud which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. [00:17:12] Hear ye him.

The Lord Jesus himself confirmed it when speaking to the Jews about who he was, who he is, in John 8. I'd just like us to read those. So if we turn over to John chapter 8 and verse 25. John 8, 25. We'll start from 25 just to pick up the context. [00:18:04] Then said they unto him, Who art thou? And Jesus said unto them, Even the same that I said unto you from the beginning. I have many things to say and to judge of you, but he that sent me is true, and I speak to the world those things which I've

heard of him. They understood not, but he spake to them of the Father. Then said Jesus unto them, When ye have lifted up the Son of Man, then shall ye know that I am he, and that I do nothing of myself. As my Father hath taught me, I speak these things. And he that sent me is with me. The Father hath not left me alone, for I do always those things that please him. I do always those things that please him.

Now this, of course, is what the prophets tell us. And I'd like us to turn over to Matthew 12. [00:19:10] In Matthew 12, the Holy Spirit records the words of God as noted in Isaiah chapter 42.

And tells us that they refer to the Lord Jesus. Matthew chapter 12, we pick it up at verse 17.

That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying, Behold my servant whom I have chosen, my beloved in whom my soul is well pleased. He is the one in whom my soul is well pleased.

[00:20:04] And the Apostle Peter confirms it in his first letter when writing about transfiguration. He writes, For he received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.

The Apostle Paul confirms in Romans 15 that Christ pleased not himself, with the obvious implication as shown by the context, that he pleased the Father. So the scriptures inspired by the Holy Spirit give confirmation from the words of God himself, the words of the Lord Jesus, the words of the prophets, the words of the apostles, that the Lord Jesus pleased the Father. More than ample testimony. It's so important it's repeated again and again. So when we think about pleasing God, we have our perfect example. [00:21:09] I want to move on to children now. When I was young, all those years ago, the speakers would often address their remarks to the young. I want to address the young people this evening, they'd say, and look at my sisters and my brother and myself, which make me wonder sometimes why they never address their remarks to the old. I've got something to say to young, briefly, and then I'll address those who are older. So those of you who are children, if you could concentrate just for a second on what I have to say. Okay? Do you want to please the Lord? Well, I'm sure you do. It's not difficult to understand what's needed. There's a verse in Colossians which says, [00:22:02] Children, obey your parents in all things, for this is well pleasing in the Lord. At least it isn't complicated. At least it's easy to understand. And that's the standard that God has set for children. This is what he's looking for from you. Of course, there may be times when you don't like what you're told to do by your parents. But unless there's an issue of being told to do something which goes against God, obedience is what God expects and that's what will please him. Just obedience to parents.

In practice, of course, this may not always be that easy. You might consider that your parents run reasonable at times. But always remember, this is what pleases God. Obedience to your parents. [00:23:02] And God can be depended on to give strength when it's difficult. Just ask him.

Right, now I'm going to address my remarks to the older ones. But of course, you youngsters can listen in if you wish. I want to consider now some underlying principles that scripture gives us. Romans chapter 8 and verse 8 says, They that are in the flesh cannot please God. But ye are not in the flesh but in the spirit. If so be that the spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the spirit of Christ, he is none of his. If any man have not the spirit of Christ, he is none of his. So there's a clear distinction here between those in the flesh and those in the spirit. [00:24:04] The one who does

not have God's spirit is none of him. Now we know that all who trust in the Lord Jesus are given the spirit to live in them. But sadly we can act as though we're still in the flesh. Behaviour based on this cannot please God. Okay, that's all I want to say on that. Now I want to move on to a second principle. And that's found at the beginning of Hebrews 11. Hebrews 11 verse 5.

In Hebrews 11 verse 5 we read, By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death and was not found because God had translated him. For before his translation he had this testimony that he pleased God. But without faith it's impossible to please him. [00:25:05] He that cometh to God must believe that he is and he's a rewarder of them that diligently seek him. Without faith it's impossible to please him. The disciples said to the Lord on one occasion, increase our faith. And the Lord refers to faith as small as a grain of mustard seed.

This is in Matthew 17. A tiny object.

Yet though very small it has life in it. And the Lord refers to what can be accomplished with faith even as small as that. Clearly there are degrees of faith. And clearly too the Lord honours even small faith. And one thing these verses in Hebrews 11 are telling us is that if there's no faith, [00:26:08] then pleasing God is impossible. Those who have no faith in him, those who refuse God's offer of mercy through our Lord Jesus Christ and do not put their trust in him, such are not in a state to please him. However pleasant they may be, however much charitable work they may do, however good they may look in the eyes of man, what they do does not have the effect of pleasing God. So I suggest we see two underlying principles here. It's impossible for those in the flesh and it's impossible for those without faith to please God. Now before we come to look at some specific examples, I want to put out a couple of matters that could be classified perhaps as to do with attitude. [00:27:01] Okay? Attitude.

First one, Psalm 147.

Psalm 147 verse 10.

Let's read the following.

He delighteth not in the strength of the horse. He taketh not pleasure in the legs of a man. The Lord taketh pleasure in them that fear him.

In those that hope in his mercy.

God takes pleasure in, God is pleased with those who fear him.

Of course when we talk about fear, for those who are believers and who are walking close to him, we're not talking about being frightened of God, but of thinking of him and speaking of him in the right way, [00:28:05] with reverence, with deep respect, remembering who he is, remembering the greatness and wonder of his person, remembering that he is the almighty, all-powerful, all-knowing, all-seeing God.

The last two verses of Hebrews 12 refer to serving God acceptably. The word actually means pleasingly. Serving God pleasingly. Serving God in a way that pleases him. And then it says with reverence and godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire.

So God is pleased with an attitude of reverence and he specifically tells us this.

And our understanding of who God is and what he's done for us through our Lord Jesus Christ [00:29:02] leads us to praise and thanksgiving. And that's the second matter that I'm considering here really as an attitude, if you like, an attitude of praise and thanksgiving. An attitude that's expressed in words, of course. God looks for praise.

The grateful praise of our hearts pleases him.

Thinking of what he's done leads us to thanksgiving. Let's read some verses from Psalm 69.

Psalm 69.

Psalm 69 verse 30 says, [00:30:28] Saul was told by Samuel to obey is better than sacrifice.

To hearken than the fat of rams.

Obedience is better than sacrifice. And here in Psalm 69 we also learn that praise and thanksgiving please the Lord more than sacrifice.

And I know from experience it's so easy to get caught up [00:31:05] with our own concerns that prayer times can become like a long list of requests. Of course, we can and should tell God our needs. And we can and should tell God our concerns for others. But let's be sure that we focus on him and praise him and thank him. Praising God's name and magnifying him with thanksgiving please him.

So we've seen our perfect example in the Lord Jesus Christ. We've seen how children may please the Lord. We've seen a couple of general principles that those in the flesh can't please God. And without faith, it's impossible to please God. And we've also seen attitudes, as I've called them, that please God. Firstly, reverence and godly fear. [00:32:02] And secondly, praise and thanksgiving. Now I want to turn to some particular behaviors that are specifically mentioned in Scripture as pleasing God. And I want us to turn back to 1 Thessalonians chapter 4 where we started. 1 Thessalonians chapter 4.

Furthermore then, we beseech you, brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus that as you have received of us how you ought to walk and to please God, so you would abound more and more. [00:33:02] For ye know what commandments we gave you by the Lord Jesus. This is the will of God, even your sanctification, that you should abstain from fornication, that every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honor, not in the lust of concupiscence, even as the Gentiles which know not God. That no man go beyond and defraud his brother in any matter, because that the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also have forewarned you and testified. For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness. He therefore that despiseth, despiseth not man but God, which hath also given us his Holy Spirit. But as touching brotherly love, ye need not that I write unto you. [00:34:02] For ye yourselves have taught of God to love one another, and indeed ye do it toward all the brethren which are in all Macedonia. But we beseech you, brethren, that ye increase more and more, and that ye study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands as we commanded you, that ye may walk honestly toward them that are without, and that ye may have lack of nothing. Paul and his companions had taught the Thessalonians how they ought to walk and to please God, the first verse says. And he wants them to abound more and

more. Now I take these next verses as expounding on this. And he's telling us, I think, particular behaviors that please God. [00:35:03] And I'd split what he says into three.

The first primarily concerns our relationship with God. The second, our relationship with each other. And the third, our relationship with outsiders. So first of all, we have sanctification.

And then secondly, we have brotherly love. Verses 9 and 10.

And finally, there are two verses on leading a quiet, orderly life. So let's just look at these briefly. Sanctification.

This issue primarily concerns our relationship with the Lord. Being holy.

This message comes through time and again in scripture. Be holy as I am holy, he says. To be holy is to be separate from wrongdoing. [00:36:02] Another scripture in Hebrews tells us that without holiness, it's impossible to see the Lord.

Now the particular issue mentioned here in these verses is sexual sins. God didn't call us to uncleanness, but to holiness. And we should note what Paul writes here, that if we sin in this matter, we're not just sinning against our fellow man, but against God. That's why I say this issue primarily concerns our relationship with the Lord. And we must all remember that as far as the Lord Jesus is concerned, holiness applies to our thoughts as well as our actions.

Secondly then, we see in verse 9, brotherly love.

As Paul writes, the Thessalonians themselves didn't need to be exhorted to exercise brotherly love. [00:37:06] But these two verses are included in scripture. And I think the history of the church shows why it's necessary that brotherly love be stressed. In both John 13 and John 15, the Lord tells his disciples that they should love one another. As I have loved you, he says.

This is the highest possible standard, of course. As I have loved you, as the Lord Jesus has loved us. It's difficult for us to understand the depth of the love of the Lord Jesus for us. We think about it, don't we? We meditate on it. It forms a key thought in our times together of remembering the Lord, but we can never get to the depth of it. [00:38:05] And yet the Lord's standards for our love for each other is his love for us. A selfless, self-sacrificing, giving love. Such love pleases him.

And finally here, verses 10 and 11.

Leading a quiet, orderly life.

This concerns how we are seen by outsiders. Verse 12 says that you may walk honestly toward them that are without.

How we're seen by outsiders is very important. It's part of our witness to the world. [00:39:03] So what behavior is noted by Paul as pleasing the Lord here? Well, first of all, we have study to be quiet.

We're not in this world to make a fuss.

We need to get on with what we're responsible to do, without hullabaloo, without a fanfare of trumpets. And then we get that we are to do your own business or mind your own affairs. It's not our responsibility to know other people's affairs, whether I'm believers, and that's the emphasis of this passage, I think, or even other Christians. And there are other scriptures that warn us against being busybodies and gossips. Of course, as far as other Christians are concerned, being members of the same body, we're not isolated, we're not independent of each other, [00:40:02] and we should bear one another's burdens, as well as taking a prayer for interest in each other. But let's make sure this doesn't go beyond this exhortation. And then to work with your own hands.

As Christians, laziness is not an option.

These issues of leading a quiet life, minding one's own affairs, and working do seem to have been a problem for some at Thessalonica, which is presumably why he mentions them. It's interesting to note that in spite of what he writes here, the problem remains.

And it has to be addressed again in his second letter. In 2 Thessalonians 3 he writes, [00:41:04] For even when we were with you, we commanded you this, that if anyone would not work, neither should he eat. For we hear that there are some who walk disorderly among you, not working at all, but being busybodies. Now we command and exhort those who are such by our Lord Jesus Christ that they work with quietness and eat their own bread.

So we see what the Thessalonians are told that would please the Lord.

Sanctification, brotherly love, and being quiet, minding one's own affairs, and working.

[00:42:04] I want to move on to something else that pleases God.

The Christians in Jerusalem were in great need.

Paul had spent a long time in Corinth, and the believers at Corinth had agreed to send a gift to support their brothers and sisters in Jerusalem. And if we look at the end of 1 Corinthians, we see how Paul advises the Corinthians to collect the gifts. Now earlier, Paul had presented the Gospel in Macedonia at Philippi and Thessalonica.

And those who met together as Christians in Macedonia were as far as human wealth goes poor. In contrast, those who formed the assembly at Corinth seemed to have been comparatively well off. [00:43:01] Yet by the time Paul comes to write his second letters to the Corinthians, those at Corinth still hadn't got their gift together, whereas those in Macedonia already had. They'd given.

So in 2 Corinthians 8, Paul writes of the generosity of the Macedonian believers, and he has to use them as an example to persuade the Corinthians to give as they had previously promised to do.

He writes of the Macedonians.

Let's just read it from 2 Corinthians 8. 2 Corinthians 8, verse 1.

[00:44:02] Moreover, brethren, we do you to wit of the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia, how that in a great trial of affliction, the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty

abounded unto the riches of their liberality. For to their power I bear record, yea, and beyond their power they were willing of themselves, praying us with much entreaty that we would receive the gift and take upon us the fellowship of the ministering to the saints. This was a real sacrifice for them. They had little, but they gave freely and willingly. I assume the Corinthians did give because Romans 15 refers to the gift from Macedonia and Achaia, the region including Corinth, for the poor in Jerusalem. But the Philippians didn't leave it at that. [00:45:03] This is what Paul writes to them. If we turn over to Philippians chapter 4. He wrote Philippians chapter 4.

Philippians 4 and verse 15, he writes, Now ye Philippians know also that in the beginning of the gospel when I departed from Macedonia, no church communicated with me as concerning giving and receiving, but ye only.

For even in Thessalonica ye sent once and again unto my necessity, not because I desire a gift, but I desire fruit that may abound to your account. For I have all and abound. I am full having received of Epaphroditus the things which were sent from you, [00:46:02] an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, well-pleasing to God. But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.

Their sacrifice pleased God. Verse 18, a sacrifice acceptable, well-pleasing to God. It's noted by Paul as pleasing God, and linked with this is the comment in verse 19, that my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus. They wouldn't go short.

That this pleases God is also emphasized in Hebrews 13, where it says, to do good and to communicate, forget not. [00:47:02] For with such sacrifices God is well-pleased.

Let's take one more example. Let's turn over to 2 Timothy. 2 Timothy chapter 2. 2 Timothy 2 verse 3.

Thou therefore endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life, [00:48:05] that he may please him who has chosen him to be a soldier.

A soldier on active duty shouldn't be meddling in affairs that are not his own. Another translation refers to civilian pursuits here. It's the soldier's responsibility to be focused on the job he's been given. And to me the military picture emphasizes both the fact that we're fighting an enemy and the importance of unquestioning obedience. A soldier doesn't question his officer. He just does what he's ordered to do, whatever the risk, whatever the consequences. And the 11 and Stephen and Paul, Paul's companions, [00:49:01] each standing up under great opposition to speak for the Lord Jesus, provide us with examples here.

And other scriptures show that we are servants. But it's not just that we're servants. True though that is, we're soldiers.

And in fighting the enemy, complete obedience to our commanding officer is vital. And the avoidance of hindering irrelevancies, shall we say, is essential. This is sometimes used as an argument for Christians not to be involved in politics. And undoubtedly its application is wider. Anything that would divert us from our objective of serving him, anything that would get in the way of pleasing our commanding officer, should be avoided. [00:50:03] Now, of course, we can find other thoughts from scripture on this topic of pleasing him. And I hope that some of those that we've noted here are good

reminders to us as we seek to please the Lord. I think repetition is often helpful. So let's just remind ourselves of what we talked about. We saw how the Father, the Lord Jesus himself, the Holy Spirit through the words of scripture, the apostles and the prophets, all note that the Lord Jesus pleased the Father. We saw him as our perfect example. We saw how children can please the Lord.

We noted that those in the flesh and those without faith cannot please God. We saw that an attitude of reverence pleases God, as do praise and thanksgiving.

[00:51:05] We looked at some particular issues as expressed by Paul to the Thessalonians, sanctification in relation to God, brotherly love in relation to each other, minding one's own affairs in relation to those outside, how these please him. We noted that giving pleases him.

Now, I want to turn over to Colossians chapter 1.

We have Paul's prayer for the Colossians. Colossians chapter 1, verse 9.

He writes, [00:52:01] For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you and to desire that she might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding, that she might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God. Unto all pleasing, that they would please the Lord. Something that Paul specifically mentions here in his prayer for the Colossians, that they would please the Lord.

And it's so important that our lives are pleasing the Lord that let's remember to pray for each other in this way too. One final scripture in Hebrews 13.

[00:53:09] Hebrews 13, verse 20.

By the God of peace that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen. Now, I find this verse very encouraging. It would be impossible to do it on our own, wouldn't it? We just couldn't do it. We couldn't please him. But he works in us. He works in us. Let's be encouraged by this. [00:54:01] When we see failure in our lives, we need to get back to him and allow him to work in us.

I'd like us to close with hymn number 207, which is based on these verses we just read.

Hymn number 207.

Now, may the God of peace and love, who from the silent grave brought back the shepherd of the sheep, omnipotent to save. Verse three. Perfect our souls in every grace to do his blessed will for all that's pleasing in his sight, inspire us to fulfil. 207. O may the God of peace and love, who from the silent grave brought back the shepherd of the sheep, omnipotent to save.

[00:55:15] Through the rich merits of our blood, which he uncountably spent, to make a gracious work secure on which our hopes are built.

Perfect our souls in every grace to do his blessed will [00:56:02] for all that's pleasing in his sight,
inspire us to fulfil.

For his the risen shepherd save, we every blessing pray.

With glory let his name be crowned through heaven's eternal play.