

Psalm 19

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[0 : 0 0] Do you most want to please? Who we want or try to please is a pretty good measure of who we are and who or what is most important to us. A small child longs to please his mom or dad.

And often some teenagers are desperate to please their friends or their peers. And it has to be said, not a few 20, 30, or 40-something teenagers are afflicted with a similar concern or obsession.

Maybe you spend an inordinate amount of time and effort trying to please your boss. Or maybe your deepest desire is to please your wife or your husband or your boyfriend or your girlfriend, your partner. But if we are honest, many of us would have to recognize that we are most concerned with pleasing ourselves. Well, who do you most want to please?

Who does David want to please? Well, we have the answer to that question very clearly presented for us in this verse that we are considering or are about to consider in Psalm 19 and verse 14.

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer. David is passionately concerned with pleasing God. This is his highest and deepest desire to please God. And I want us to think about this matter of pleasing God, not only from the perspective of the psalmist or ourselves, but also what David's language reveals about God. Or to put it in another way, our concern is not simply to identify a how-to guide to pleasing God, but to consider the fundamental and revealing implications of the psalmist's desire, namely, that God can be pleased, that God can and does experience pleasure or delight. Now, the psalmist simply takes that as a given, but it is a quite startling affirmation or assumption that he is making.

[2 : 5 0] That God can be pleased. I want to sketch out the route that we're going to take this morning as we think about this verse, and we're going to go along this route as follows. First of all, I want to notice what we've just commented, that God can and does experience pleasure or delight. But then we want to notice that we, men and women like David, we can be the cause of God's pleasure. Then we will notice the ways in which we can please God. David here very clearly identifies two ways in which he aspires to please God. And we want to think about the two ways that he speaks of.

But then I also want us to just think briefly about the reasons why God is pleased or can be pleased with our words and meditation. Why is it that if our words are as they ought to be and our meditation as it ought to be, why would that please God? And then very finally, I think we find in the verse an answer to the question of the motivation that we must have for pleasing God. We know that nearly everything we do is a function of what motivation lies behind our actions. And in this matter of pleasing God, motivation is also fundamental. And I think the verse hints at or gives us answers in this regard. So, that sketches out the route that we want to take. But before we do that, before we think of each of these elements, I do want to take a wee step sideways and deal with a possible and reasonable objection or concern. The whole sermon, as sketched out, is constructed on the grounds of the psalmist's declared desire that his words and meditation be pleasing to God. So, everything that we're going to think about revolves around this word that the psalmist uses, that which he says and thinks be pleasing to God. But the concern, and a reasonable one, could be, well, is this actually what the psalmist is saying? Those of you familiar with and brought up with the King James Version will know that the word, the Hebrew word that in the version of the Bible that we're reading is translated pleasing, is translated with the word acceptable. And indeed, other English versions also opt for the word acceptable rather than pleasing. So, if we are to opt for that word, the verse rather goes as follows, may the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer. Now, to our ears, that sounds quite different, at least to my ears. Acceptable and pleasing sound quite different. We recognize that they are connected words, but they're certainly not synonyms. The idea that is got across by the word acceptable,

I think to most of us would be quite different to the idea of the word pleasing or the meaning of the word pleasing. You know, we use the word acceptable often in the sense of that which is tolerable or that which is just okay. Those of you who are still at a stage in life where you have to write essays or hand in work to be corrected, what would you make of a comment at the bottom of an essay, this is an acceptable piece of work? Well, I think you'd say, well, I did just enough. You know, I got a 50 percent or 55 percent.

It was acceptable. It wasn't great. It wasn't, you know, it wasn't as good as it could have been, certainly. But, well, it was tolerable. It was acceptable. But far from pleasing in all probability for the poor lecturer or teacher who had to read through your composition. Now, if all the psalmist is saying is that God is capable of accepting or rejecting what we bring or offer, does that allow us to be so bold as to speak of God experiencing pleasure and delight as we have done and as we will be doing as we go through the sermon this morning? What is the right word to use? Well, both words, pleasing and acceptable, are legitimate options for translating the Hebrew word that the psalmist uses. Either is correct linguistically. Now, the attraction of opting for the word acceptable, as many versions do, is that it does bring to the fore what undoubtedly would have been on David's mind as he expresses himself in this way. Namely, the sacrifices that he and the people of Israel would bring to God as instructed by God for atonement of sins. David and the people of Israel knew that they had to bring sacrifices to God, and the crucial element of these sacrifices is that they be acceptable. The great concern of the worshiper was that what he would bring would be acceptable to God.

Such sacrifices had to be acceptable if they were to serve their purpose, and crucially, if they were to be received and looked on with favor by God. And so, just as David would wish that any sacrifice he offered to God be acceptable, so his desire is that his words and even the meditation of his heart also be acceptable to God. But the word pleasing, which we have in the Bible version that we use here in church, does seem to take things to another level. Now, I've already said that it is a legitimate option for translating the Hebrew original. In concluding this little, if you wish, introductory consideration before moving into our primary concern, in concluding this, I would ask the question and answer it very quickly, do we have to choose between the two words? And I would say that we don't have to choose.

[9 : 49] If we think of the sacrifices that the worshiper would bring to God within the Old Testament order of things, a sacrifice could be both acceptable and pleasing. Indeed, I would go further and suggest, or even affirm, that an acceptable sacrifice would, of necessity, be pleasing to God. How could God not be pleased with a sacrifice offered in both the manner and with the devotion that He Himself had established? And so, if the worshiper brought something that was acceptable, then that would necessarily lead to God be pleased with what was brought. So, with the matter of the words of David's mouth and the meditation of his heart, his inmost thoughts, as it is put in the metrical version that we've sung, his great desire is that his words and his thoughts be acceptable and pleasing to God.

So, having dealt with what could have been a legitimate concern of some as regards the very language that we find and the crucial word that we are considering, pleasing, having dealt with that, I hope, satisfactorily, we can proceed to go through this route that we've outlined in considering this matter of pleasing God. The first thing that we said that we would consider is this, God can and does experience pleasure or delight. I don't know what your picture or conception of God is.

When you think of God, what is it that is conceived in your mind? What characteristic of God is preeminent in your thought? Maybe when you think of God, you think of the One who is powerful. And yes, God is indeed altogether powerful. You maybe have a picture of great majesty, of the One who is awesome, and that is right and true. The Bible very clearly presents God as glorious and majestic and awesome. You maybe think of God as the One who is altogether just, and you do well to think of God in those terms.

You may be unenabled in the light of Scripture to consider and conceive of God as the One who is merciful and loving. And you would be right to think of God in that way. But what about God as happy or joyful?

Do you conceive of God as the One who is altogether happy, altogether joyful? The Apostle Paul uses intriguing and at the same time very revealing language in speaking of the gospel, the good news concerning Jesus Christ. As he writes to his young friend Timothy, there in the first letter of Timothy in chapter 1 and verse 11, he speaks of the gospel. He describes the gospel, the good news, and he does so in this way. He speaks of the glorious gospel of the blessed God. The Greek word there is makarios, makarios, makarios, and that Greek word makarios basically means happy. And so it would be quite reasonable and legitimate to translate what Paul is saying there as he speaks of the gospel in this way, the glorious gospel of the happy God, the glorious gospel of the joyful God. He says this gospel that we are experiencing, this gospel that we would communicate to the world is the gospel concerning, the glorious, happy, joyful God. Now, this language of Paul is not an isolated reference to the joy or the pleasure of God. Listen to Jesus as he anticipates the welcome that awaits God's faithful servants in the context of a parable that he shared with the disciples that we find in Matthew chapter 25 and verse 23. How does Jesus anticipate the welcome that we God's servants will receive? Well, we are received by God with these words, well done, good and faithful servant. Come and share your master's happiness. Come and share your master's happiness, not be happy that you're in heaven now. No, come and share your master's happiness. Come and share in the joy and the happiness of God.

[14 : 31] What is the ultimate source of God's happiness? Well, God, unlike us, is able to perfectly delight in Himself. Our understanding of God delighting in God is enriched in the light of what the Bible reveals concerning the triune nature of God, that God exists in three persons. Mysterious as that is, the measure of knowledge that we have concerning this truth does enrich our understanding of God's delighting in Himself. The persons of the Trinity can and do delight in each other. And again, this is not wild theological speculation. What were the words of the Father repeatedly addressed to Jesus, His Son, as He looked down from heaven at His Son, fulfilling the work that He had been given to do at His baptism, at the transfiguration. What were the words of the Father? This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. In whom I am well pleased. The Father takes pleasure in His Son. And just as the Son was, we can be sure, eternally beloved, so also we can be sure that He eternally pleased the Father. Now, there's no doubt that as He fulfills the mission that He had been given, that mission of salvation as He came into this world and was faithful and obedient. There was particular pleasure that the Father took in witnessing the obedience and the loyalty of His Son. But it would be ridiculous to suggest that the Father only began to take pleasure in the Son at the incarnation. Just as the Son was eternally beloved, so the Son eternally pleased the Father, and we can be sure that the feeling was mutual. God delights in Himself.

He delights in who He is. God delights in what He does. He delights in His work of creation. The psalmist declares in Psalm 104, may the Lord rejoice in His works. God delights in His work of redemption.

He delights in His Son, who perfectly executes God's saving mission. And He delights in those who are redeemed as He rejoices over a single sinner who repents, something that the Bible also tells us about. So, we can state with considerable confidence, not only in the basis of what is implicit in this verse, but as we consider the wider testimony of Scripture, of the Bible, that God can and does experience pleasure or delight. He is the joyful God. He is the happy God. But the second thing that I said we wanted to notice on the basis of this verse in Psalm 19 is that we can be the cause of God's pleasure.

You can be the cause of God's pleasure. That God would delight in Himself and in His works is a reality that we can, in a measure, get our heads round. But it's a step-jump to also contend that God can take pleasure in the likes of you and me. But He does. Again, if we listen to the psalmist, not only in the verse that we're thinking about, but on another occasion, in Psalm 149 and in verses 4 and 5, we read that the Lord takes delight in His people. Psalm 149, verses 4 and 5, for the Lord takes delight in His people. He crowns the humble with salvation. Let the saints rejoice in this honor and sing for joy on their beds. The psalmist doesn't simply state boldly that the Lord takes delight in His people. He goes further. He says that this in itself is an honor that is cause for our rejoicing. As we consider and as we contemplate and as we grasp this astonishing truth that God delights in us, so that is a source of joy for us. To consider that the Almighty God would delight in the likes of us is a joyful thing for those who are the objects of His pleasure and a delight.

Now, that we can be the cause of God's pleasure is implicit in our text there in verse 14. The psalmist takes it as a given that God can be pleased with Him. And this, of course, is the psalmist's great desire.

[19 : 24] It would be incongruous, indeed perverse, to propose that God would place in the psalmist's heart a desire that could never be realized. How incongruous that would be if the psalmist expresses with such passion and such conviction, my great desire is to please God, that my words would be pleasing to God, that my thoughts would be pleasing to God. How incongruous if that were not possible. If we were to say, well, God is so set apart from the likes of us, so indifferent to the likes of us, so self-sufficient in that sense that what we do and what we say and what we think has no impact on Him. That would be entirely incongruous to what we read here of the psalmist's great desire, his great concern that his words and his thoughts be pleasing to God. So, we can state again confidently not only that God can and does experience pleasure or delight, but that we, you and me, sinners though we are, can be the cause of God's delight or pleasure. The third thing that we said that we can draw from this verse on this matter is the following, and that is we can identify the ways in which we can please God. Now, here we limit ourselves to what we have in our text, which clearly is not intended to be an exhaustive list of the ways in which we can please God, but nonetheless, that which is mentioned is pretty comprehensive.

Well, what are the ways in which we can please God? Well, it's very clear there in verse 14, the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart. Now, some suggest that the psalmist here has in mind this very composition, this psalm that he has penned, and his concern as he closes the writing of the psalm is that this psalm that he offers to God in worship and praise would be pleasing to God, and that seems reasonable. But though that may indeed be true, I think it's also fair to say that the concern of the psalmist extends beyond these verses or this psalm. He is concerned that all the words he utters and all the thoughts of his meditating heart be pleasing to God. Well, let's think a little bit about that. What words would please God? Well, words of praise provoked by delighting in God's creation and in God's spoken word, which is precisely what the psalmist has been doing in this psalm.

He has been contemplating God's voice as it speaks in creation. He has been considering God's voice as he speaks in his spoken word, and he has been delighting in that voice of God. And he gives expression to his delight with the words of his mouth. And so words of praise are words that please God, words used to exalt and commend God to others, words that transmit the love and the compassion of God, words that reflect God's justice and God's holiness and God's truth.

And we could go on, such words please God. Such words delight God. Such words are delightful to the Almighty. And we cannot move on without asking ourselves, what about our words? What about your words? Are your words? Are your words the words of your mouth? Let's leave the psalmist to one side for a moment. What about the words of your mouth? Are the words of your mouth pleasing to God? Does God take delight in the words of your mouth? I remember a wee poster in a home across in Peru, and it said something along these lines, and this is a rough translation, if what you're about to say is not to bless, then shut up. Well, it's rather in your face, but it's thought-provoking. The words that we speak, are they to bless?

Are they to up-build? Are they to commend? Are they to help? Are they to encourage? Are they to correct in a loving way? The words of our mouth? Are they pleasing to God? But what about the meditation of my heart?

[23 : 57] The psalmist recognizes that this is another means by which he can please God, by the meditation of his heart. Now, the word meditation to our ears, certainly to my ears, I don't know how you receive that word or how you process that word, but to my ears, the word meditation has an otherworldly feel to it.

Something monks in a monastery might have time to do, but not for the likes of us. But we would be wrong in so thinking. I think there are three things that we can say about the biblical meaning or implication of meditation, as the word is used here, the meditation of my heart.

And this certainly isn't an exhaustive treatment of the subject, but three things that are important and that hopefully help us, as we would see, to meditate in a manner that is pleasing to God.

The first thing that we would say about meditation is that meditation requires an object. We have to meditate on something. And clearly here, biblical or Christian meditation, the meditation that the psalmist is considering, is meditating on God. God is his object.

We meditate on God and we meditate on the means that he uses to reveal himself to us. That's the whole point of this psalm. Meditating on creation. Pondering on what God is like as we look at creation.

[25 : 20] Meditating on his spoken word and pondering on the implications of who God is and what he's like and what he requires of us in the light of his word. We meditate on God and on the word that he gives to us. It requires an object. But the idea of meditating also brings to bear this idea of thinking or pondering carefully on what it is you see and read and the implications of it.

It takes time. It's not sufficient to, in a cursory way, read a passage of the Bible. No, to meditate is to give pondered and considered thought to what we read and the implications of it. And that obviously cannot be done if we don't dedicate time to it. It's a second aspect of meditation. But a third one that I just want to mention is this, and that is that its ultimate purpose is practical obedience. And this certainly, I hope, would cut down any thought that this was some otherworldly impractical discipline to meditate. Perhaps the passage in the Bible that most clearly reveals meditation as having a practical purpose, and that being of obedience, is Joshua, a passage that we're certainly familiar with in Joshua. And in chapter 1, we have this very same word that the psalmist uses in Psalm 19 on the lips of Joshua. And what does he say? Well, in Joshua chapter 1 and verse 8, he is, rather, it's Moses who is addressing God's people. And notice the way in which this word meditation is used in verse 8. Do not let this book of the law depart from your mouth.

Meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. I don't want to dwell on that too long, but it's so clear. Meditate on it so that you may be careful to do everything in it. So, not some otherworldly discipline that you do up in the hills, and then you come down and you forget about it. No, to meditate on God's Word is to consider the content of it that you might then put it into practice. And what David is saying is that he desires, above all, that the meditation of his heart, his consideration of God and His Word be pleasing to God. And of course, it will be in the measure that that meditation results in practical obedience. Two ways, then, that we can please God by our words and by our meditation that finds expression in obedience. But a question arises, a very real question arises at this point, and that is, can we actually do it? We might say, in theory, in principle, hypothetically, this is true. If our words were as they ought to be, God would be pleased with them.

And if our meditation was as it ought to be, then that would be pleasing to God. And we say, yeah, that's hypothetically possible, but actually we don't do it. That's a real problem. And of course, it is true that in our own strength, we cannot please God with our words or with our meditation.

We need help. And so, with the psalmist, we must ask God to help us. The psalmist says what he says precisely because he is conscious of his own inability. Hence, he prays, may the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight. He is praying to God. He's saying, help me, help me, help me to speak God-pleasing words, help me to think God-pleasing thoughts.

[29 : 28] But we move on to one other aspect, a penultimate aspect of what we want to think about this morning, and that is the reasons why God is pleased, or in any case, can be pleased with our words and meditation when they are as they ought with God's help. Why does that please God? Why does it please God when we speak words that are consistent with his word and exalt his name? Why does that please God?

Why is God pleased when our thoughts are as they ought to be? Well, one of the reasons it pleases God is because he loves us and he wants the very best for us, and he knows that the believer whose tongue is controlled by the Spirit of God and whose meditation is on God and on his word will be fulfilled and fruitful and happy. So, God is pleased because he loves us and he wants the best for us, but God is also pleased because he loves his Son, and he delights in the evidence of his Son's saving work in us, of Jesus' His saving work in us. We can't please God in our own strength. We could only speak God-pleasing words and think God-pleasing thoughts in the measure that we are being transformed by Jesus into the likeness of Jesus. So, when the Father looks down and sees that that is happening, he is pleased, he is delighted because of his love for his own Son and the evidence of his Son's work being vindicated and finding concrete expression in the lives of believers. But God is pleased also because he loves the world and he knows that God-pleasing words and God-pleasing thoughts are powerful instruments in the extension of his own kingdom and in the ingathering of his own people. And so, there is good reason why God is pleased and why God takes delight in the words of our mouths and the meditation of our heart when they are as they ought to be. But finally, and we close with this, the motivation for wanting to please God.

You see, you may well be able or be willing to concede that God can be pleased. You can tick that box and say, yes, well, in the light of Scripture, that would seem to be a reasonable claim to make.

You may accept that we are able to please God, at least potentially. You may understand that you can do so by the words of your mouth or the meditation of your heart. All of these things you may be willing to concede, but do you want to please God? Do you want to please God? What is the motivation that drives the psalmist and explains his deep desire to please God? Well, we can discover his motivation in the manner he addresses God that reveals the relationship that he enjoys with God.

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer. The psalmist addresses God as, O Lord, God's covenant name, Yahweh.

[32 : 58] The psalmist is conscious of belonging to God's covenant people. He is conscious of being the object of God's covenant privileges. He knows that God has fixed his eyes upon him and the people he is part of in a special way. And this is a driving force in his own motivation to please God, who God is, and the relationship that he enjoys with God. And so I ask of you if that is the case. When you approach God, do you approach a God who is your God? Are you conscious and do you have reason to conclude that you are part of God's special people and family, the object of his special favor? Because in the measure that you are conscious of that, well, in that measure there will be a motivation to please God. O Lord, my rock, my rock. The word that David uses here is very much a word that is intended to portray God as his protector, as his refuge. Often the words rock and refuge are used together by the psalmist himself. And so what David is saying is he is saying, this God whom I wish to please, he is my refuge. He is the one who protects me. He is the one who has proven himself dependable and trustworthy in all my many difficulties and problems in the midst of so many issues and enemies. He is my rock. He has proved himself to me. He is trustworthy. He's my refuge. And so, of course, I want to please him.

Of course, I want to please the one who is my refuge. Of course, I want to please the one in whom I find protection. Of course, I want to please the one under whose wings I find comfort and help. And so, his motivation to please God is the relationship that he enjoys with God as his refuge. O Lord, my rock. And then he closes, and my redeemer. David's deep desire to please God is grounded in his appreciation of God as his Savior, as his Redeemer. God has redeemed David, and David in gratitude desires to please God. And this is the only sure ground for pleasing God, heartfelt gratitude.

If you want to please God on the grounds of duty, you will fail miserably. It's not sufficient motivation, nor will you be able to please him. The grounds upon which we are to be motivated to please God has to be the ground of gratitude in recognition of what God has done for us, in recognition of his continuing help and enabling that we would be able to please him. And so, this morning, I ask you, is God your Redeemer? As I stand here, I am persuaded that he is the Redeemer, and that in his Son, Jesus, we have the most glorious expression of his saving purposes. Jesus is the Savior. He is the Redeemer. But my question is not, is he the Redeemer? My question for you this morning is, is he your Redeemer? Is he your Savior? Because in the measure that he is your Savior, or perhaps more accurately, if he is your Savior, if you have placed your trust in him, if you have sought refuge and forgiveness in him, then you have the motivation that you need to live a life that is pleasing to God.

We know about God as our Redeemer in a very special way, in the light of the incarnation, in the light of the coming of his Son, Jesus. He is the Savior. He came to rescue sinners. He came to die on the cross in the place of sinners. He is the Savior of the world. But is he your Savior? Let us pray.