

# Why We Must Do What is Pleasing to God

by Jeremy James



The ‘pandemic’ crisis in world affairs has opened the eyes of many Christians to the existence of countless individuals whom God has called the congregation of the dead:

**“The man that wandereth out of the way of understanding shall remain in the congregation of the dead.” (Proverbs 21:16)**

For all their wandering, these social ‘believers’ always remain in the same place. That place is the congregation of the dead. They have no understanding of God or His ways. The necessary knowledge was offered to them, but they chose not to accept it.

The congregation of the dead is extensive. It is a place where mild-mannered preachers give mild-mannered sermons to mild-mannered people, making them even more luke warm than they already are.

Members of this assembly tend to believe whatever they are told. They lack the understanding that would enable them to detect a lie:

**“The simple believeth every word: but the prudent man looketh well to his going.” (Proverbs 14:15)**

The prudent man knows that the world is a dangerous place and that the Enemy never sleeps. The simple man, however, lacks any sense of danger and believes every word. If anything harmful was afoot, he reasons, then these mild-mannered people would tell him. After all, as everyone knows, mild-mannered people are nice people. They are seldom deceived and never lie.

More than ever before in our history, Christians who are truly born again must avoid the congregation of the dead. They should spend no more time than is necessary among people who profess to be Christian but who gladly imbibe a lie. If they are not using the yardstick of God's Word to measure everything they are told, if they scorn the warnings sounded by prudent believers, then they have wandered far from **"the way of understanding."**

### **All flesh is as grass**

The Enemy has employed many devices to disguise our mortality. Man in his vanity for forgotten how frail he is. When the LORD instructed the prophet Zechariah to tell the children of Israel how **"sore displeased"** he was with their behavior, he asked a very pointed question:

**"Your fathers, where are they? and the prophets, do they live forever?"  
(Zechariah 1:5)**

We need to be reminded often of our mortality. It ought to have a sobering effect. The Psalmist even asked that his understanding of this basic truth be expanded:

**"LORD, make me to know mine end,  
and the measure of my days, what it is;  
that I may know how frail I am."  
(Psalm 39:4)**

What a wonderful prayer!

Isaiah was called to alert the nation of Israel, and by extension the whole of humanity, to the fragile and fleeting nature of our existence. Unless men heard and understood this warning, they would never acknowledge their need for a saviour:

**"The voice said, Cry. And he said, What shall I cry?  
All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is  
as the flower of the field: The grass withereth,  
the flower fadeth: because the spirit of the LORD  
bloweth upon it: surely the people is grass.  
The grass withereth, the flower fadeth:  
but the word of our God  
shall stand forever."  
(Isaiah 40:6-8)**

This is a stirring image, a field of radiant wild flowers which takes our breath away, and yet, within a few weeks, not a trace remains. Every last one has withered and disappeared.

It is significant that, in his first letter to all believers, the Apostle Peter made a similar appeal:

**“For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away: But the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you.” (1 Peter 1:24-25)**

This warning is really no different from the warning that God gave to Adam: Don't eat the fruit of the tree lest you die.

Alas, the prospect of death did not dissuade Adam. He could comprehend the concept of death – otherwise God would not have used it – but the serpent had dulled his understanding. Like Eve he wanted to believe he was untouchable.

### **All men are beguiled by the same lie**

All men today are beguiled by the same lie. They just can't bring themselves to accept that their flesh is as grass, that it will fade and decay like the flower of the field. They have fallen for the same deception that trapped Adam.



Mild-mannered preachers skirt around the devastating finality of death. They do this mainly by avoiding the subject of sin, which brought death into existence. Death is not part of life, as the New Agers teach, but the absolute negation of life. It is the complete rejection of everything that the LORD God accomplished during the Six Days of Creation.

The Enemy has blinded mankind to the horrific consequences of sin and fed our fallen imagination with dreams of immortality. In our alienated state – **“having no hope, and without God in the world” (Ephesians 2:12)** – we submit willingly to whatever distractions the world has to offer.

When we hear the Word of God and respond to the precious truth of the Gospel, we can see – perhaps for the first time – that our flesh *IS* as grass and that in a very short time we will die. The grand illusion is shattered and we see ourselves as we really are.

Only then will we accept Christ Jesus as our Saviour, the wonderful being who died in our place and paid our sin debt for us. We appropriate this gift **ONLY** when we repent of our sin – the fatal poison – and believe with our whole being that Jesus suffered and died in our place.

### **The plan to kill “useless eaters”**

The world today is rapidly speeding toward a place where death will reign like never before and the fourth generation described by Agur will arise and attack mankind:

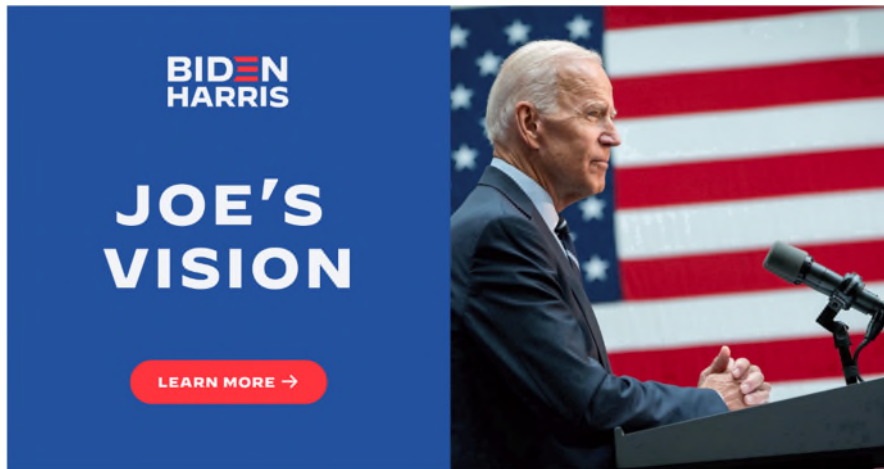
**“There is a generation, whose teeth are as swords, and their jaw teeth as knives, to devour the poor from off the earth, and the needy from among men.” (Proverbs 30:14)**

The “poor” and “needy” are the billions of *useless eaters* whom the Ruling Elite despise and are determined to destroy (**“to devour...from off the earth”**).

These are the ones who rule in the centers of power – Washington and New York, London and Rome, Paris and Berlin, Beijing and Moscow. They control the wealth of Wall Street, the mega corporations, and the world banking system. The Adversary puts his people where they can exercise the greatest influence on his behalf. As his committed servants they must do his bidding, **“For they sleep not, except they have done mischief; and their sleep is taken away, unless they cause some to fall.” (Proverbs 4:16)**



The rate of decay has accelerated and America today is led by a man who is no more dependable than a child: **“Woe to thee, O land, when thy king is a child, and thy princes eat in the morning!” (Ecclesiastes 10:16)**



## Why we need to hate evil

The congregations who listen to mild-mannered preachers have long ceased to hate the things that God hates. The Word of God says, **“Oh, do not this abominable thing that I hate.” (Jeremiah 44:4)**. Alas, we are far from the days when professing Christians, seated in their pews, were moved by these words. Indeed, it is doubtful whether many congregations today have heard them expounded from the pastor’s podium.

And yet there is hardly a verse like it in the Bible!

As true believers we hate what God hates – or we should! Twice I have heard church leaders (a pastor and an elder) read aloud from Psalm 139 and skip over two verses as though they weren’t there:

**“Do not I hate them, O LORD, that hate thee? and am not I grieved with those that rise up against thee? I hate them with perfect hatred: I count them mine enemies.”  
(Psalm 139:21-22)**

We do not *choose* to see these people as our enemies. Rather, we see that they ARE our enemies because they hate God. We are required to shun (“hate”) those who hate God, who foolishly choose to wage war against their Creator. Like Jesus, we are **“grieved for the hardness of their hearts” (Mark 3:5)**. Only in love do we retain a genuine concern for their lost souls.

If Adam had hated evil he would have been shocked by what Eve was suggesting. Perhaps he was, but he thought he knew better. In his pride he decided that evil was something that he alone could adjudicate.

Pride says, "Yes, we can."

Sound familiar? This is the chant of the antichrist spirit.

These are the people who don't understand – or refuse to accept – what Jesus meant when he said, **"...for without me ye can do nothing." (John 15:5)**

The pastors and preachers who go from one end of the year to the other and never rail against the devastating consequences of sin are not men of God.

A real preacher knows that God hates wickedness. He never pretends it doesn't exist. His thoughts are never far from the Cross because he knows that this was the price that had to be paid to settle the question of sin and undo the works of wickedness. He knows that all men are as grass, that they will soon decay like the flowers of the field. So he has but a small window of opportunity to awaken their hearts to the truth of the Gospel. If they leave this earth without it, they will perish.

### **God hates wickedness**

**"For thou art not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness: neither shall evil dwell with thee. The foolish shall not stand in thy sight: thou hatest all workers of iniquity." (Psalm 5:4-5)**

**"The way of the wicked is an abomination unto the LORD: but he loveth him that followeth after righteousness." (Proverbs 15:9)**

**"He that justifieth the wicked, and he that condemneth the just, even they both are abomination to the LORD." (Proverbs 17:15)**

**"The thoughts of the wicked are an abomination to the LORD: but the words of the pure are pleasant words." (Proverbs 15:26)**

**"These six things doth the LORD hate: yea, seven are an abomination unto him: A proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, feet that be swift in running to mischief, a false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren." (Proverbs 6:16-19)**

### **How to love what God loves**

The Psalmist tells us that **"The glory of the LORD shall endure forever: the LORD shall rejoice in his works." (Psalm 104:31)**. It is reassuring, in our fallen condition, to know this!

No doubt the damage inflicted on Creation by sin has greatly reduced the joy that God can take from His works. Perhaps He too is looking forward to that glorious day at the end of the Millennium when the perfection of all things will be restored.



We are given a glimpse of the joy that God took from His works before the Fall when He assigned to Adam the task of naming the animals and then watched **“to see what he would call them.”**

Here we literally see the LORD God spending time with His son. As each pair of animals came before him, Adam must have taken great delight in what he saw, while his Creator looked on and rejoiced in His works:

**“And out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof.” (Genesis 2:19)**

### **The Eyes of the LORD**

Even in our fallen condition we can please God through our obedience to His holy will. The idea that a created being, damaged by sin, can please God is truly astonishing. This was made possible through Calvary: **“For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him.” (2 Chronicles 16:9)**

This verse from Second Chronicles reveals that God seeks out those who love Him and walk in His ways. He is continually scanning the length and breadth of the earth to ‘find’ those precious souls **“whose heart is perfect toward him”**, and when they call on Him, He answers.

The prophet Zechariah tells us that the seven lamps of the Menorah represent **“the eyes of the LORD, which run to and fro through the whole earth” (Zechariah 4:10).**



We see this most emphatically in the case of David, where **“the LORD hath sought him a man after his own heart” (1 Samuel 13:14).**

David was a man after His own heart because he loved, and sought to love even more, the things that God loved. As we have seen, he also hated the things that God hated.

As children of God we need to understand our Father’s heart. Much confusion would vanish from the lives of many believers if they immersed themselves in a remarkable passage from the book of Jeremiah. While it is not possible for God to describe Himself – at least in a way that our sin-damaged minds can comprehend – He goes a long way toward revealing His heart when He tells us what He does and, most importantly, the pleasure He gets from doing it:

**“But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the LORD which exercise lovingkindness, judgment [justice], and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the LORD.” (Jeremiah 9:24)**

We come to understand our Father even more through those passages in His Word that reveal what grieves Him. For example we learn in Genesis 6 that it grieved the LORD to have to destroy the whole of mankind in the Flood, preserving only eight individuals to repopulate the earth:

**“And it repented the LORD that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart.” (Genesis 6:6)**



No doubt many have read this verse and failed to see how momentous and personal it is. In just a few brief words the LORD God of all creation reveals how much it hurt Him to have to deal with mankind in this way. It grieved Him **“at his heart.”**

We see the same remarkable concern in a couple of passages relating to the destruction of Samaria, one before the event (Hosea) and one after (Jeremiah):

**“How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee, Israel? how shall I make thee as Admah? how shall I set thee as Zeboim? mine heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together.” (Hosea 11:8)**

**“Is Ephraim my dear son? is he a pleasant child? for since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still: therefore my bowels are troubled for him; I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the LORD.” (Jeremiah 31:20)**

What pathos we find in those immensely sensitive words: **“mine heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together.”** The LORD did not want to deal with Samaria (Ephraim) as He had dealt with the cities of the plain (Sodom, Admah and Zeboim) but their sin had gone too far and they had disdainfully rejected the many warnings He had sent by His messengers, the prophets.

The verse in Jeremiah is a striking echo of the one in Hosea, but this time the LORD is speaking after the event: **“Is Ephraim my dear son?...I do earnestly remember him still: therefore my bowels are troubled for him.”**

As students of God’s Word, we can learn a great deal about our heavenly Father by reflecting prayerfully on these passages.

### **The Mystery of Iniquity**

We are heading into a time when God must judge all who dwell on the earth for their misguided decision to add indefinitely to their reservoir of sin. They have rejected the call to holiness. Their rebellion has gone on for so long that most of mankind has forgotten how it started or why their alienation from God is certain to end in their utter destruction. They foolishly imagine a great future for themselves even as hell itself is opening its jaws and preparing to unleash its fury like never before.

Most of mankind has yet to realize that Christ alone can save us from the Mystery of Iniquity.

God asks very little of us. The prophet Micah put it simply:

**“He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?” (Micah 6:8)**

Moses put it like this and added three simply words:

**“And now, Israel, what doth the LORD thy God require of thee, but to fear the LORD thy God, to walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to serve the LORD thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul, to keep the commandments of the LORD, and his statutes, which I command thee this day for thy good?” (Deuteronomy 10:12-13)**

The three words? “For thy good.” We are given these laws so that we can live eternally with God! They are all for our good. There are no other laws and no other precepts. Either we choose life or we choose death.

The LORD gave the law at Sinai to show man that he can never attain perfection by his own efforts. Fallen man can never pay his own ransom. But the law must stand. So, how can these two propositions be reconciled? It seems impossible, but they are perfectly reconciled in and through Christ. For those who trust him to have done so, he has paid our ransom. He has also eliminated the propensity to sin – our old sin nature – from our future glorified state.

### **The apple of His eye**

Through His Holy Word, the Bible, God is sharing with us the story of His Son. Humanity is part of that story, but only a part. We are being invited by the Holy Trinity to become adopted children of God. Through his great sacrifice, Christ made this possible. All who reject that invitation, for whatever reason, are irredeemably lost.



The love that God has for those who accept His Son is beyond understanding.

In Deuteronomy 32:9 we are told that the LORD’s ”portion” or share is His people:

**“For the LORD'S portion is his people; Jacob is the lot of his inheritance. He found him in a desert land, and in the waste howling wilderness; he led him about, he instructed him, he kept him as the apple of his eye.” (Deuteronomy 32:9-10)**

Since Jesus is the **“firstborn of every creature” (Colossians 1:15)**, he is entitled to a double portion. This additional portion is his second flock, the church. Just like Jacob, all born-again believers are **“the lot of his inheritance”** and **“the apple of his eye.”** We too were found in the **“waste howling wilderness,”** dead in trespasses and sins.

We need to take to heart all that the LORD has said about His portion, His chosen people, the lot of His inheritance – for we too share in that love, we too are the apple of His eye:

**“Keep me as the apple of the eye, hide me under the shadow of thy wings, from the wicked that oppress me, from my deadly enemies, who compass me about.” (Psalm 17:8-9)**

**“Their heart cried unto the Lord, O wall of the daughter of Zion, let tears run down like a river day and night: give thyself no rest; let not the apple of thine eye cease.” (Lamentations 2:18)**

**“For thus saith the LORD of hosts; After the glory hath he sent me unto the nations which spoiled you: for he that toucheth you toucheth the apple of his eye.” (Zechariah 2:8)**

## **The simplicity of the Christian life**

Once we see how faithful the LORD has been to Jacob – a whorish, proud and rebellious spouse – we can better appreciate the delight He takes in every believer who lives with simplicity the Christian life:

**“The steps of a good man are ordered [established] by the LORD: and he delighteth in his way.” (Psalm 37:23)**

God is fully acquainted with everything we do, and when we live as we ought to live, it is pleasing to Him. It is truly a great loss in the modern church that preachers and pastors have failed to teach this as they should. Many make light of obedience, as though it was an attempt on our part to ‘earn’ grace, but this is a false teaching and, in our opinion, a dangerous one. As born-again believers we are blessed with the indwelling assistance of the Holy Spirit. It is through His indwelling that we are able to cultivate a living relationship with our heavenly Father and draw ever closer to Him.

Our heavenly Father will acknowledge – and nourish – our relationship in the same way as a caring human father:

**“For whom the LORD loveth he correcteth; even as a father the son in whom he delighteth.” (Proverbs 3:12)**

How easily we forget that the LORD delights in His creation and that we, too, are part of that creation! We are the work of His hands (Job 10:3). He delights in us in the same way that a father delights in his own son.

Take the case of David. Though he was chastened by God to what seemed like the limits of his endurance, he never lost sight of the fact that his heavenly Father loved him and took delight in him:

**“He brought me forth also into a large place; he delivered me, because he delighted in me.” (Psalm 18:19)**

It pleased David to please God! If we were to talk about a ‘spiritual attitude’, I think this is it.

When all is said and done, we can only please God by asking Him to show us how to do so and to guide us in His ways. The author of Hebrews put it like this:

**“Now the God of peace...make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is wellpleasing in his sight...”  
(Hebrews 13:20-21)**



**The valley of Achor, where Achan confessed his sin.**

## **CONCLUSION**

As created beings we can please God because, through our obedience and good works, we reflect in a small way the great sea of glory which our Father sees in His only-begotten Son. We are a continual reminder to Him of what Christ achieved on our behalf on Calvary.

Consider the sin of Achan. The LORD would abandon the whole of Israel for this one sin, the disobedience of a single individual. In its horrifying implications it was like the sin of Adam. The twelve tribes would be left to fend for themselves, alone and exposed in a land populated with fearsome enemies. Without the LORD they would be annihilated, and they knew it. This one sin had to be addressed:

**“And Joshua said unto Achan, My son, give, I pray thee, glory to the LORD God of Israel, and make confession unto him; and tell me now what thou hast done; hide it not from me. And Achan answered Joshua, and said, Indeed I have sinned against the LORD God of Israel, and thus and thus have I done:” (Joshua 7:19-20)**

By confessing his sin, Achan gave “**glory to the LORD God of Israel**”. By confessing his sin, he pleased God. He bore no fruit and produced no works. Quite the opposite – his behavior was abominable, but through his confession he pleased God. Through his act of contrition he was looking, however vaguely, to the atoning work of Christ. And this was pleasing to God. The valley of Achor became a door of hope.

Achan paid for his sin with his life, as did his family, but he saved his soul. As Micah said:

**“Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? he retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy.” (Micah 7:18)**

The mercy of God is made possible through the atoning work of Christ. It is through the shed blood of His Son that God is able to forgive sin and delight in mercy.

The Word of God made a dramatic reference to this on two occasions. The first was at the baptism of Jesus (Matthew 3:17, Mark 1:11 and Luke 3:22) and the second on the mount of transfiguration (Matthew 17:5 and 2 Peter 1:17). When God speaks twice from heaven and testifies that “**This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased**” we are being granted divine confirmation, not only that Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God, but that Jesus, through the unsearchable multiplicity of his virtues, is immensely pleasing to God!

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