



DUDLEY'S MONTHLY MESSAGE

JOHN 15:10

JULY 2018

How to Please God

A friend recently spoke of the prevalence of “Adam’s itch” in all of us.

He was talking about the compulsion to do something to get back into the good favor with God—back in the Garden of Eden—back to where we can be the recipients of God’s blessing rather than the object of curses. Like all itches, Adam’s itch begs to be scratched, and it feels so good for the moment, but later causes further inflammation and infection. It seems that we will go to any length to hear another clever way to pull the blessing lever. We are vulnerable to religious offers of knowledge, rites of passage, and mystical experiences. Some peddlers of novel interpretations of scripture have built multimillion-dollar kingdoms from scratching the itch. They have honed their sales pitch to convince enough people to buy in. Everyone wants to somehow please God enough to get his blessings.

The gospel eliminates the itch by means of a mediator. Jesus came as a human to be obedient to God’s requirements and receive the blessings commensurate with perfect human obedience. He alone gets the covenant blessings promised by the covenant God. We are given the privilege of enjoying these blessings when we are in Christ, trusting him alone for favor. By becoming the last Adam, the old Adam’s itch was healed. We now have the compulsion to honor the Father as our mediator and covenant partner, Jesus, does. We itch to honor him, so to speak.

But, what about all those New Testament commands to us? Are we to ignore them? If we are resting in the finished work of Christ, does that mean that any work we do is disrespecting his work? The answer is clear when we read through the gospel lens. When Jesus said in John 14:15, “If you love me you will

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keep my commandments,” he was not ascribing guilt for not loving him enough like a lonely and manipulative aunt might. (“If you really loved me, you would come to see me more.”) He was stating an inevitability and a normal consequence of love. He goes on to describe the unbreakable connection with love and obedience to his commands:

If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love.

John 15:10 (ESV)

The issue for God is being loved by him; and thereby, becoming carriers of the love we have received. Obedience to any perceived commands of God without love is not obedience at all but some attempt to either appease God or put him in debt to you.

Paul goes into great detail in Ephesians 4:17–5:21 explaining how the people of the new race are to live. We are not to even embrace the thinking process that once characterized us. It was filled with deception and manipulation. That is how the heathen still live, but we are members of a new race of people. We have learned Christ (4:20). We can now put off the old way of thinking and doing, and because of a renewed mind, we

can think and act new. We are not enslaved to wicked works that are inspired by the resentment that consumes the evil one. Neither are we entrapped by the dead works of man-made religion, trying to gain ground with God. We are now free to do the good works for which humans were designed. (See Ephesians 2:8–10.)

How could we possibly imitate God? The temptation is to give up.

Commands in the New Testament call out of us the life that God has placed within us by his indwelling Spirit. He knows that his divine love has been poured out into our hearts. So, he calls us to love like he does. That would be impossible if not for the new life we share with Christ. As old Adam's kids, we could want to love like God, but we could never get it done. Remember that when Jesus was on earth, demonstrating this new kind of life, he commanded a man with a withered hand to stretch it forth—impossible if not for the enabling that came from the one who gave the command. And what about poor ole Lazarus? He was dead, and Jesus commanded him to come out of the tomb. Certainly impossible if there was no enabling in the command.

We read such shocking statements as,

Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you. Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

Ephesians 4:32–5:2 (ESV)

At first, it seems ridiculous. How could we possibly imitate God? The temptation is to give up. But the command is to imitate God as he lived in the flesh as the Son. He walked in love, and his life was a sweet-smelling fragrance in the nostrils of the Father. We imitate God by walking in the same love that is the essence of the life Jesus shares with us.

What is there about sacrifice that smells good to the Father? Surely it goes beyond the smell of cooking meat. In the Old Testament, the people of God would bring the prescribed sacrifice to be offered on the altar and God was pleased with the aroma. Yet, at times he would rebuke them for their sacrifices. They didn't smell good to him. The difference is in the heart of the one making the sacrifice. When would-be worshippers are trying to use the ritual of sacrifice to put God in debt to the worshipper, it smells rotten. It is not

a sacrifice. It becomes a bribe. A true sacrifice is giving up to God that which we could keep for ourselves, but had rather honor him with it. Jesus, as the model human, is the only one who could, with pure motives, offer a sacrifice that fully pleased the Father. He gave himself up when he could have kept his place in heaven. He gave up his life when he could have called ten thousand angels to rescue him from the puppet kings of earth. He gave his Spirit to his church when he could have settled in at the right hand of God to enjoy the benefits of his kingship. Love is characterized by giving up that which one could keep for himself.

The Father is pleased when his children are **embracing the fullness of his blessing.**

Here is the shocker! This love has been poured into our hearts, and we too want to live a life of sacrifice. We know that our sacrifice is simply a reflection and outgrowth of Jesus's complete sacrifice. He put a permanent smile on the face of the Father. Because of his smile we live desiring to honor him. The New Testament writers are not embarrassed to call out holy living from the saints. They know the truth about what effect

regeneration has on us. They know we are not satisfied to live a life characterized by self-absorption. We are a new race with a new perspective. The apostle Paul is not being cruel when he says flatly,

But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints.

Ephesians 5:3 (ESV)

He is recognizing what is in the saints and calling it out. For the first time since before Adam and Eve sinned, humans can do what is right both motivationally and behaviorally.

The Father is pleased when his children are embracing the fullness of his blessing. He rejoices to show himself strong in those who acknowledge that apart from him, they are weak. His love never ceases. His acceptance is complete. His commitment is forever. We are his family. Like all fathers, he enjoys seeing us love each other and give ourselves up for even those who don't appreciate it. We, like all normal sons, have a driving desire to honor our Father. Because of what Jesus has done in our stead, we can continue to be a sweet fragrance to him.

This is such a new way of thinking; we are challenged by the scriptures to give all diligence to renewing our minds. After eleven

chapters of declaring what God has done in Christ Jesus for us, Paul exhorts believers to present themselves to God as a living sacrifice. It is acceptable to him. We are then to renew our minds to think like what he has been describing in those previous chapters. As we do, our perspective on everything changes. Instead of thinking like a slave or even a servant, we learn to think like a son. Instead of being buffeted by fear, we learn to live in love. Instead of trying to get more for our own pleasure, we learn to give more for the pleasure of others. Instead of trying to figure out how to prevent God from punishing us, we learn to expect God to work with us.

Bottom line: God is pleased. Live like it.



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