

God's Goal and Faith's Target

a sermon in the series
Hebrews: An Epistle of Encouragement

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Hebrews 11:6

But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.

I want to talk about how to please God. The ultimate, greatest, loftiest desire of a child of God is to please his heavenly Father. But I think we're going to have to cease thinking about pleasing God in terms of only what we do, and also focus our attention on our hearts. As a husband, I often think about how I can please my wife. And what I mean by that is, what can I do to make her happy? What can I do to bring her pleasure? So it's natural to think of actions when you begin to think about how to please God. But when it comes to our Lord, another element has to be discussed, and that element is the heart. When I use the word "heart," I'm simply meaning what you really think or feel about that person you love and want to please. Now it would stand to reason that if I'm talking about pleasing a spouse, you could assume that your heart truly loves that person.

But, what about when it comes to pleasing a Scrooge-like employer? Is it true, is it possible, that you want to please him for any other reason but love? Yes, very possible and quite likely. We can try to please someone for other reasons than love. Why do we strive to please such a person who is unkind? We can't say it's love, there's another reason. Something other than love is motivating us.

I think many approach the subject of pleasing God in the same spirit. They view God in a much different light than that in which the Bible describes our God. They see Him as some Heavenly Scrooge, and they see the whole subject of pleasing God as a matter of religion, something that we do by following certain rules and regulations, some type of habit and duty. Perhaps today you are fulfilling one of those self-imposed requirements to please God by coming here "to church." The truth is though your heart really isn't involved, love has nothing to do with it.

I want to speak to us on how can we truly please God in a manner that really brings Him delight. If you are coming with a mindset that focuses on your actions, what you do and what you don't do, then you're not really pleasing God.

I personally subscribe to the motto of Augustine, who said, “Love God and do what you please.” Of course that sounds so dangerous, and some have abused it in a most dangerous fashion. They’ve said, “Well, if you just love God, then you can go out and do anything you want to, as long as you love God.” That’s not what Augustine meant by his statement. What he meant was, if you really love God with all of your heart, soul, mind, and strength, then what pleases you is doing what pleases Him. Augustine understood the relationship of love and pleasure. He knew if you really love someone, you really want to please him or her.

But pleasing God does not just include love. For example, can you love someone and not trust them? Yes, it may not be easy, but you can love someone and not trust them. You have probably already thought of someone who has betrayed you, lied to you, hurt you, harmed you, but there’s still an affection of love towards him or her. You just don’t trust them. Can it be possible that we love God but not trust Him? I think we miss something when we read the great commandment, love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and we look at love as being the only proper motive and method with which we please God. We eliminate faith and trust. It pleases the Lord when we not only love Him, but when we also trust Him.

God’s goal for your life is in verse six of our text. It is the same goal that faith has. In other words faith is going to propel you towards this target. If you were here last week you realize that we stopped at verse three. We’re going through the entire book of Hebrews on Sunday mornings. Now you would assume that I would pick up at verse four, but I’ve skipped verses four and five to go to verse six because verse six is describing and defining faith, showing us how to apply it to our everyday lives. Everything that’s said about Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, and all in this list of God’s Hall of Fame is based upon verses one, two, three, and six. It is important, before we go through the long list of some of the great champions of faith, that we understand what faith really is and what it does in your and my life. The writer of Hebrews says in verse six, “But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.”

FAITH’S PREREQUISITE

I want to share, first of all, that faith has a prerequisite. There is something that must be functioning daily, minute-by-minute, in your life if you’re to have faith in God. It doesn’t matter how much you know about God if you don’t trust God. Many of us have a great wealth of knowledge about God. We’ve grown up in church, some have had the privilege of going to a Bible college or seminary, but, friend, knowledge of God alone may not necessarily grow faith. It can actually hinder faith. It doesn’t matter how much you know about God if you don’t trust Him. So the question for us is how can we trust Him and thereby bring pleasure to Him? Well, again I say to you that faith has a prerequisite and that prerequisite is humility. If you’re going to exercise great faith in God, you must first exercise humility.

Humility is simply defined as no confidence in yourself to please God. It is an accurate assessment of your ability to please God. The accurate assessment this morning is, you can’t please Him. It is

impossible. Romans chapter eight and verse eight says, “So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God.” It just cannot happen, dear friend. You and I, no matter how often we attend the house of worship, no matter how many times you’ve been baptized, or how many times you’ve prayed the sinner’s prayer, you, in these acts alone, cannot please God. Whether you have taught a Sunday School class or a preacher, it is impossible for you to bring delight and joy and pleasure to the heart of God in these things alone. If I am going to trust God for that which I cannot do, I must be humble. Sir, that’s all faith is, the ability to trust God for that which you cannot do but you must do. This requires an accurate assessment of who you are.

An accurate assessment of ourselves brings us to the realization that we are not sufficient. It is this very assessment that Jesus meant when He said, “for without me ye can do nothing” (John 15:5). This lack of confidence in ourselves should create in us a state of what I call “holy panic.” Surely you have experienced the feeling of panic that comes when life calls upon you to do something that you know you cannot do well or at all. Often God requires of us things which it is humanly impossible to achieve. For example, “Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect” (Matthew 5:48). Now who is sufficient for this? None! Yet, God does not reduce His standard. “Be ye perfect” is the command. As we ponder this command we must feel absolutely hopeless in ourselves to do it. We are doomed before we even try. Surely a desperation arises from a feeling of frustration. Without this sense of desperation you can never hope to walk in faith. You are not going to please God, because pleasing God requires an absolute desperateness in our heart, a sense of total helplessness that causes us to depend upon the sufficiency of another. And so if you’re going to have faith, you first must have humility that says, “Lord I look to nothing in me to please you. I look to you and your grace.”

FAITH’S HEARTBEAT

Now let’s look at faith’s heartbeat. Faith has a heartbeat. Did you know the human heart has two rhythms? There are two chambers to the heart from which blood flows in and then out. Faith has two rhythms as well. The writer of Hebrews gives us these two rhythms to the heartbeat of faith.

A Confidence in God’s Existence

The first rhythm is a confidence in God’s existence. Let’s look at our text again.

But without faith it is impossible to please him:

But it is the next phrase that is the first rhythm of the heartbeat of faith,

for he that cometh to God must believe that he is.

The first pumping of faith in the soul is the certain assurance that God exists. It is a confidence in His existence. Go back to last week’s text, Hebrews chapter eleven verses one through three.

Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. For by it the elders obtained a good report. Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear (Hebrews 11:1-3).

Let's recall our definition of faith. Faith is the God-given ability to see reality as God sees it. In the above text the author shows that there are things in a reality unseen that we could never know without God revealing them to us. It is this revelation that produces the faith to believe it. God speaks to your heart by the Word and shows you things of the supernatural, the things that are not in the physical realm necessarily, but are just as real, the invisible.

The first reality of the unseen is the reality of God and His existence. I feel quite safe in saying that no one in this auditorium has looked upon the face of God. How then do you know that God really exists? What empirical data can you bring forth to prove His existence? In short, none. Notwithstanding the apologist who tries to prove the existence of God through evidential proof, it cannot be done. God is an invisible reality. In Colossians chapter one verse fifteen, the Bible says, speaking of Jesus, "Who is the image of the invisible God." The Apostle Paul recognizes that God is invisible, no eyes can see Him and live to tell about it, and yet faith believes in Him. In I Timothy chapter one and verse seventeen, Paul, praising the Lord, says, "Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible." Again, God is recognized as being invisible. So how can I know that there exists a God?

We must turn to Romans chapter one, beginning at the eighteenth verse. Paul is giving us a synopsis of mankind and its rebellion against God in this first chapter, allowing us to see the total depravity of the human heart. And he says in the eighteenth verse, "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness." A very interesting word is the word "hold." It literally means to suppress. The truth of righteousness is in every person, but they suppress it. The apostle continues, "Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them." I am certain because of this verse that everybody has a sense or a consciousness of God. Everyone. "For God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen." God has left His footprints in the sand; He has left His fingerprint of His existence on the creation. Everything you see that's real, that's tangible, is empirical data that we receive and process in our minds. And thus we can reason that there is a God.

If I'm walking along the beach and I find a watch and I pick it up I do not think that there was some cataclysmic, chaotic chance having taken place at a point and time, all by mere coincidence or accident, that produced the watch. No, I look at a watch and I say, there has to be a watch-maker. And God has created a universe of perfect order, design and purpose, and man in his arrogance and blindness rejects the divine purpose and order of creation and says it all happened by chance. He's a fool and the Bible says "The fool hath said in his heart, there is no God" (Psalms 14:1). God in the world has left Himself known. The invisible God is known by the visible. David says in Psalms nineteen, and verse one, that the "heavens declare His handiwork."

The question then is how does the visible reality of God's creation generate faith in God's existence? In other words, how can I see all that I see in the universe and be brought into relationship with this God? Can I look at nature and fall in love with Jesus? Can I look at my surroundings and say, "Oh there is a God, there is a Christ. I want to repent of my sins and trust Him for the forgiveness of sins. I want to give Him my life?" No. Nobody's ever got saved by hugging a tree. Nature and creation is a visible fingerprint that God does exist, but it doesn't draw you into relationship with God, and it never can.

There is an exhilaration that comes from nature that leads the soul to worship, for David said, "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help" (Psalms 121:1). There is a glory that comes into my heart when I begin to view the world and God's creative acts. "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork" (Psalms 19:1). But nature doesn't teach me the cross, nor death to self, or being alive unto God. Therefore, faith is a supernatural work of God in the wicked heart of a sinner. You cannot assign it to anything else. Faith is an act of supernatural grace, and that's all grace is, it's supernatural. It is God's lovingkindness being deposited into your soul to give you the desire and the power to obey God. Where there was no desire, where there was animosity and hatred towards God, now there's a desire to love Him and follow after Him. That cannot be done by a man without the aid of God.

You must remember last week when I said that faith is the substance of reality implanted in the believer? The author says in verse one of this eleventh chapter, "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for." That means that faith becomes the very essence or nature of the thing you're hoping for. Faith is the very essence of God in the believer. Friends, this is paramount to anyone's salvation that faith is not standing in front of a church, saying, "I profess faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and I believe in Him with all of my heart." Faith is not facts about God that you recite. Faith is the actual receiving of the very essence, the very substance of God. And without the experiencing of the substance and the essence of God, there is no salvation. Many today have hope in a salvation that they have created, or a church has created for them, but that hope is not the experiencing of the substance of God. Ephesians chapter one and verses thirteen and fourteen say that at the moment I am converted I am sealed with the "Holy Spirit of promise," which is the earnest of what I'm looking for, the inheritance of God. The Holy Spirit is a part of God, He is God, and He's in me. Jesus said, I'm going to leave you, but I'm not going to leave you without a comforter, I'm not going to leave you like orphans, I'm going to send the Holy Spirit to you, and He will guide you into all truth. Hear me, God in me, God in you, that is "the hope of glory" (Colossians 1:27). I believe you can envelop the whole Bible in this as the final goal of God, that He is glorified in the indwelling of His people and His people sharing in His life. Thus, faith is nothing more than God planting within you His very nature. And that doesn't happen because you prayed a prayer, because you joined a church; it happens because God in His mercy grants you grace and supernaturally works His nature in you by the new birth. Is the new birth yours, have you experienced it? Have you experienced that moment of conception when God broke into your dark, dark heart with the light of the gospel, and your heart was melted in its opposition to God, and you seized the cross as now your only hope and trust? Have you embraced in your heart the same Jesus who said He would manifest Himself to the man that loved Him? Do

you know Him today, not because a Sunday School teacher taught you truth about Christ, but because you have met Him personally? That is the difference, and it is a vast difference. Like the woman at the well who met Christ, you have left your well that could not satisfy with a heart flowing with living water than can never be dammed up on the inside. Therefore, the first beating of the heart of faith is that there is this assurance of His existence, and you know that He exists because you know Him, the Creator.

A Confidence In God's Worth

Let's look at the second rhythm of the beating heart of faith. The second rhythm of the heartbeat of faith is, "And that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him." The word "diligently" here comes from the Greek word *ekzhtew* (ek-zay-teh'-o) which means to seek out, to investigate, to scrutinize. It can also be defined as a craving. There are some things about this verse that I think we have wrongly viewed and have consequently been misled about faith. This latter part of verse six is often preached that when you pray and seek God, whatever you pray for will be answered. I'm sure you've heard that, as I have. I am convinced that is not what the author is dealing with here. That can be stated as an application as we'll see in the life of some of these people of faith in this eleventh chapter. The author is saying something quite different.

The key to rightly understanding this verse is to be sure we know what the author is saying is the object of the seeking. What is being sought for? There are some things in your life that you lose that you don't care that you lost them. I mean a few extra pounds, unwanted pounds, are one of those things that we don't care about losing. I've never seen or heard anybody who has lost some weight intentionally get on the scales, and say, "Uh oh, I've lost some weight. Where is it? Let me find it. I want it back." There are certain things we don't care about losing, but oh, my dear friend, there are some things that we become frantic when we lose them. We want to reclaim them in the worse sort of way.

Now intense and desperate searching occurs because the thing we are searching for is considered valuable to us. Again, I say such kind of searching does not happen unless the item misplaced is considered important. The writer of Hebrews is saying that God exists and you must believe it, and secondly, you must believe that He rewards those that diligently seek for what they want. And what is it that he says is the object of their seeking—Him. It is God that faith diligently seeks. Faith beats with a passion for who God is and finds Him the great reward. That's what the text is saying. It's not going to God for things, it's going to God for God. The Lord will reward those who desperately seek Him as the greatest reward, the prize of all prizes.

Is He a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him in order that they might have their prayers answered? No. A rewarder of those who diligently seek health, wealth, prosperity? No. It says, "diligently seek Him." Him! Sir, He's worth more than your bills being paid, He's worth more than your body being healed. He's worth more than your home being secure, and, dear friend, He is worth more than the salvation of any soul. Does that shock you? Shouldn't we be seeking God for the salvation of souls? Absolutely, but never, ever, ever estimate one soul, no matter whose

soul it is, even if it's your own, as being more valuable than God. This verse is telling us that which we are to seek with all of our heart, soul, life, and strength, it is Christ and Christ alone! He is the greatest of all rewards, and God will always reward those who seek for Him like this, who crave for Him, who desperately search for Him. And the greatest reward they find is not their health, their bills paid, or even the salvation of their souls, they find Jesus, their greatest reward.

This should tell us how to rightly pray. We should seek God for the saving of the lost. And it is not wrong that we should bring to God our needs. But we should pray and seek for these things in light of God's glory. Ah, that it is it. We should seek the salvation of people so that God should be glorified. Herein is the faith's target—God and His glory. God's glory is the one thing that we seek above all these things, and we do not desire these things unless God can be glorified in the granting of them.

This is a fundamental difference with much of Christendom today. God is not the focus or the goal. It is man. We have taught men to seek God for His blessings for the sake of the blessing. It is believed that God's ultimate goal and purpose is to make our lives full and comfortable. This is a perversion of God's goodness and mercy. His mercy towards us is ultimately for a much more important reason than our self-centered wants and desires. It is for the glory of His name. It is that we should seek God as the ultimate prize that exceeds all the other things our hearts could ever long for. Faith has its eyes always on this goal—the apprehending of God and His glory.

I want you to look at Jesus again. He's your greatest reward and if you're not seeking Christ today, you're not enjoying Christ today; you're not experiencing the blessing of His presence. It is all because you don't crave Him. Now does God help me survive and pay my bills? Has He blessed me with health? Yes, today, but tomorrow if He doesn't, I'm still going to pursue Him, and I'll still have the best reward. All the blessings that God gives me can never outshine or outweigh the Giver. Should He give us all things and place under our feet ten thousand worlds, they would be but a smoldering wick compared to the light of the sun.

Answered prayers are nothing more than the testimonies of God's greatness. And so don't look at verse six, and say, okay I'm going to diligently seek God for these things, and therefore I will have faith, trusting God will give them to me. I know that's what we hear on television and radio, and we read in the best selling books on faith. We're told that faith is all about getting things from God. Are there rewards to seek? Absolutely, but those rewards are nothing more than His expressions of love to us, they are not more valuable than He.

I want to bring this to conclusion and I want to do so by looking at verse two. Verse two tells us how we can gain the faithful accommodation of God, that good report, that good testimony. In Hebrews chapter eleven and verse two the author says, "For by it," that is by faith, "the elders obtained a good report." All the people that we are going to read about in this chapter received from God the words, "Well done thou good and faithful servant." They all got the report that they were acceptable and pleasing to God. If faith is the ability to see the invisible God as being visible, then the way to gain a good report is to live in that manner that you know Him and that

He is the greatest reward, because of His great worth. That's why these people received the good testimony. You're going to find out that it's not the big things that we judge as being important that make a "hero of faith." It's not parting Red Seas necessarily, it's not calling down fire from heaven, but what it is, is just simply having the substance of God in you being evidenced by the pursuit and craving of God as the greatest of all rewards.

Why else could it be? As you read Hebrews eleven, you find out that Abel is commended is because he committed a sacrifice. What is so important about offering a sacrifice? It wasn't the sacrifice, it was his heart that believed God to be the greatest value and treasure. It says Jacob was a great man of faith because he leaned on his staff and blessed his boys. Now at first appearance that doesn't seem to take a lot of faith. What is so great about that? Yet God says of Jacob, good job. And all Joseph did to receive a good report was to give his funeral plans. Dear friend, the reason why those small things seem so insignificant to us is because we miss the essence and target of faith. Faith is having the essence of God in you and finding God the greatest treasure of all rewards and pursuing Him. Nothing more. That's it. And so if you're not pursuing Christ, you're not craving Christ.

Because the essence of God is in the Christian, he craves Christ above all things. Sometimes he is not as fervent as he ought to be. At times the fervency and the passion are not as then ought to be, but oh, there is still innate within him this hunger, this intense desire that only God can satisfy. Faith is the ability to hunger and to pursue God as the greatest of all rewards. Amen.