

PLEASING GOD

Proverbs 15:33 - 16:11

The top priority for most people is to do what they want to do and everything else is really far down on the list of what is important in life. As Christians we have been taught that our priorities are to be God first, family second, our nation, and then ourselves. Many of us can get the order right whenever we are asked about what really matters. However, if we are cognizant of the choices we typically make on a daily routine basis, we may discover that “the last has become first” and the “first has become last” in what really motivates us. It is very easy to slip into the “natural” way of doing things rather than “having God in all our thoughts.”

Most of us don’t do a lot of thinking and meditating about the aims, goals, and purpose of our existence. However, these are essential parts of what make up our world view and consequently impact the way we live our lives. If we were to search for what the great philosophers tell us we can find a lot of different answers and advice as to what our world view should be. For Christians we can find that many church groups have adopted and some will regularly recite the Westminster Shorter Catechism which tells us that “man’s chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.” It probably will sound like heresy to say that this statement could be improved in that while it focuses on God in the first part, it turns its attention to mankind in the end. It has a good beginning but a questionable ending.

The Word of God (Revelation 4:11) clearly states that the main objective and purpose of all of creation is to show the glory, honor and power of the Lord and that the enjoyment or pleasure belongs to Him. A revised statement (that would parallel Rev 4:11) could be that “man’s major purpose is to glorify God, and to be pleasing to Him forever.” We would certainly anticipate and be confident that a consequence of fulfilling the purpose for which we were created is that we would, indeed, find our joy in the Lord.

In the context of our study in Proverbs, we can be confident that God is pleased with His children when they choose Wisdom over Folly. As we explore what Solomon shared on this subject we will find selected verses that can be grouped together to help us gain insight in being pleasing to God.

Wisdom Demonstrated – 15:33, 16:8

³³ The fear of the LORD is the instruction for wisdom, And before honor comes humility.

⁸ Better is a little with righteousness Than great income with injustice. Proverbs 15:33 & 16:8 (NASB95)

If the way of Wisdom pleases God, then we need to learn Wisdom’s way. The learning process begins with honoring God by paying attention to what He has said and is constantly saying to us and then to put what we have learned into practice in our lives. So many times we read God’s word and we listen to lessons and sermons that help us understand the meaning and application and “forget” to “actually DO” what the word was intended to teach us to do. It can actually happen that we can “get the message” and even tell others what it said and still not practice it.

The second part of verse 33 may have a double meaning in that we will not “fear the Lord” or honor Him if we are filled with pride which leads to rebellion and refusal to listen to and learn His ways. It could also teach us that when we have humility, God lifts us up and “honors” us with true success in our lives.

I find it interesting that the reaction of most people to others who are proud and boastful is similar to what we are told is God’s reaction to pride: God resists the proud. Most people of good will are also favorably disposed toward a person who shows humility in what they do.

Warren Wiersbe said “Humility is not demeaning ourselves and thinking poorly of ourselves, it is simply not thinking of ourselves at all.”

Solomon’s commentary on how wisdom is demonstrated is related to that in which we place our values. If we are prideful, then we will have a tendency to want more and more materialistic things and focusing on “getting things” may tempt us to bend or even break the rules of what is right and just in the way we deal with others. If the only way to have material success is by ungodly means, then we need to realize that being pleasing to God is much more valuable than “things.”

Eventually, these considerations come back to being influenced by our world view. If our concepts of the spiritual realm and divinity issues are flawed and our idea of what is valuable or deemed to be worthy are aligned with the world, then our aims, goals, and purpose of existence will produce grief rather than joy.

Accountability Established – 16:1, 4-5, 9

¹ The plans of the heart belong to man, But the answer of the tongue is from the LORD.

⁴ The LORD has made everything for its own purpose, Even the wicked for the day of evil. ⁵ Everyone who is proud in heart is an abomination to the LORD; Assuredly, he will not be unpunished.

⁹ The mind of man plans his way, But the LORD directs his steps. Proverbs 16:1,4-5,9 (NASB95)

This group of verses can be thought of as a reminder that God is sovereign and that those who choose to be rebellious against God and try to please themselves rather than be pleasing to God will not alter the outcome of God’s will. Verses one and nine are parallel ideas that support the same truth. Whether we seek to honor God or rebel against Him will have a positive or negative impact on us and even on others in our sphere of influence. Exercising our will rather than humbly aligning ourselves with God’s will produces outcomes that are direct consequences of those choices. Ezra Taft Benson is known for a statement that is a good commentary on verse one. He said “You are free to choose, but you are not free to alter the consequences of your decisions.” Verses one/nine and Benson’s quote show the interaction of “man’s free will” and “God’s sovereignty.”

The meaning of the first half of verse four seems fairly straightforward; however, the second part may leave us wondering what is the basic idea. Some might see a typical translation of the second part of this verse and conclude that God made some people evil and others were made good. John Gill (who was a Calvinist) commented that such an interpretation is erroneous and points out that “God made man upright, and he [man] has made himself wicked.” Young’s Literal Translation gives some insight regarding what Solomon wrote in this verse. Loosely translated in today English we would read “God created things and works to accomplish His good will which is contrasted with the fact that the wicked build things and work to accomplish an evil outcome.” Verse four could be a “proof text” of the truth that “everyone (including God) has an agenda.” God’s agenda is simply His will and it is His will that pleases Him so He works to make it happen.

Just as it was pride that initiated the rebellion of Lucifer against God, it is pride that causes people to day to invent or create their own agendas that are contrary to God’s will. The most basic definition of “evil” is anything that is against or counter to God’s will. Since God is holy, then anything evil is repugnant to God and will lead to death and destruction either from a cause and effect relationship or from direct action from God to stop the rebellion before it impacts and ruins others.

Motives Matter – 16:2, 10-11

² All the ways of a man are clean in his own sight, But the LORD weighs the motives.

¹⁰ A divine decision is in the lips of the king; His mouth should not err in judgment. ¹¹ A just balance and scales belong to the LORD; All the weights of the bag are His concern. Proverbs 16:2,10–11 (NASB95)

Some people live their lives in such a way that what most others see is a cleverly created facade that hides the reality that is the real person behind the facade. Other can be more open and they are just “who they are” without a lot of pretense confusing the picture. We like to think that open is better and that hiding behind a facade is hypocritical. As it turns out, a lot of the time the facade will crack and fall away and the real person is revealed or in some cases the facade is so thin that many see through it and are not fooled by the outward appearance.

There is an even more serious side of this and it happens when we fail to realize that the facade is blocking our view of ourselves. It is one thing to attempt to fool others, it is worse to fool yourself. Solomon knew this was an issue with humanity (in general) as we see expressed in the first part of verse two. We tend to rationalize whatever we do so that it fits our ideas or precepts of what is pleasing to God. We tell ourselves (and perhaps others) why we do “what we do” and can end up actually believing what we say. Solomon’s sober warning is that God sees through the facade and He doesn’t need to hear what we say since He knows our innermost motives. The New Testament commentary on this verse is found in Hebrews 4:12 where we see that the word of God separated even the “thoughts and intents of the heart.”

What is true for our individual behavior is also found to be the way those in positions of leadership operate. The similarity is that both know what should be done and both can be deluded into rationalizing what is done while ignoring the fundamental foundational truths that we know will please God. True leaders should be doing the right thing as they deal with those they lead just as God has our best interest in mind in dealing with us – “for God so loved the world” as we see in John 3:16. Using that as the perfect example we can know what leaders should do and that is to use Godly precepts, speak the truth, and avoid making error that result from ignoring God’s commandments.

The parallel thoughts we find in verse eleven tell us that God has scales for weighing the motives (as mentioned in verse two) and has a collection of known weights (principles and precepts) that will be used on the scales of justice. These are already predetermined and these have been made available to us for our individual use and for use in the broader sense of our governments. What we tend to lose awareness of sometime is that God actually cares whether we use His weights rather than false weights when we are making judgments.

Blessing Assured – 16:3, 6-7

³ Commit your works to the LORD And your plans will be established.

⁶ By lovingkindness and truth iniquity is atoned for, And by the fear of the LORD one keeps away from evil. ⁷ When a man’s ways are pleasing to the LORD, He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him. Proverbs 16:3, 6–7 (NASB95)

These verses could be developed into a formula labeled “the secret of success.” Most people want to be successful and Solomon was teaching his sons and us the simple “how to have success in life.” Earlier we saw that people can plan things but the outcome is predetermined depending on the elements of the plan. If the plan has faulty and irresponsible steps, then the outcome is going to be disappointing at best. If we want the outcome to be classified as “good and successful,” then the way to ensure that will happen is to align our plans with the precepts, principles, and commandments of the Lord’s. We also noted earlier that God’s will for the grand scheme of “whatever happens” is going to be fulfilled – in other words, “they are established.” Therefore, the logical conclusion is that when our plans are aligned with His, then our plans will be established also.

A casual reading of the first part of verse six could easily be misinterpreted to mean that we can atone for our sins by doing the right things as we interact with others. However, we know that “it is not by works of righteousness” that we are saved but by the “mercy and truth” of God Who by His grace provides a way of salvation. Our proper response to God’s grace in forgiving us of our iniquity is to make choices that take us away from evil so that we “go and sin no more.” This is the way of wisdom and it begins with honoring (reverential fearing) God.

As we consider verse seven in light of verses three and six, we can logically see how these concepts and ideas fit together and support the overall message that living in a way that is pleasing to God results in life that has meaning and is beneficial to those in our sphere of influence and especially to ourselves. We start with the same idea that we find in the first of the Ten Commandments that we shall have no other gods before the One true God. This committed focus is essential if we are to properly honor (or fear) God. That commitment will logically lead us away from the ways of the world and to align our ways with God’s ways which will ensure lasting significance in what we do. Even when we make errors in life (which we are all prone to do), we have the assurance that God’s grace will be sufficient to get us back on the right path. Those who are committed to living in a way that is pleasing to God will be gracious to others and that produces peace among men of good will.

If we really want to “make the most” of opportunities (the present moments of time), if we really believe that the highest purpose in life is to glorify God and be pleasing to Him, if we really accept the premise that imitation is the sincerest means of glorifying God, and if we realize that Jesus Christ is the express image of God, then we can grasp the truth that “every moment and every incident of life is given to us for the main purpose of transforming us into the image of Christ” which is absolutely pleasing to God.