

Christmas | Celebrating & Discipling

I. Doing good things for selfish reasons don't please the Lord.

- Romans 8:6-8; Ephesians 5:18; Romans 8:12-13
- If unbelievers can give gifts and spend quality time with family and sing Christmas carols and volunteer and give to charities and work toward peace on earth . . . and still displease the Lord, then what guarantees that I'm pleasing Him when I do those things?
- If those who are in the flesh cannot please God regardless of what they're doing, what causes me to please God? Is it simply my position in Christ? Is it merely the outward, noble deed I'm performing? Does becoming a Christian automatically sanctify everything I do?
- That can't be true otherwise it would be impossible for Christians to sin, but we do sin. And when we sin, the Lord is not pleased.
- Paul answers the question. A. We need to be positionally in the Spirit. That's the first part. But B. We also need to walk in the Spirit.
- "Putting to death the deeds of the body" is not a passive, unconscious thing that happens whether I want it to or not. It must be a conscious choice that leads to a conscious desire to please the Lord by doing what He wants, how He wants, for the reason He wants, in the power He provides. Then and only then may a Christian please the Lord.
- This is where intentionality is so important. So this is where we need to have a plan.

II. Doing bad things for any reason doesn't please the Lord.

- If we have any Christmas traditions or activities that we know don't please the Lord, then we need to stop doing those. The concept is easy to accept, but the application is far more difficult.
- For example the Bible condemns drunkenness. It would be a sin to get drunk as part of your Christmas festivities. And there are other very clear biblical expectations that people ignore this time of year.

III. So how do we intentionally please the Lord this Christmas?

- The first part of obedience is that we must do the righteous things. Can giving gifts be righteous? Yes, it can. I believe that as Christians give gifts as a picture of God's greatest gift to us, gift-giving can please the Lord. But just giving gifts isn't enough.
- This is where the second part of obedience fits. We must do the righteous thing in the righteous way. Now, it's kind of hard to imagine a "wrong" way to give a gift, so allow me to use a different illustration for this point. Most people assume that playing games with the family is good, but we have to do it the right way. Complaining when I don't win, cheating, and demanding that everyone play the games I want to play would not be playing games in a righteous way.
- And why might I do the right things in the wrong way? Well, that has to do with the third facet of obedience. And this one is the single most important part of all Christ-honoring obedience. I must do the righteous thing for a biblically righteous reason. And there's only one reason I should do anything. I Corinthians 10:31, "*Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.*"
- To give glory to God is to cause people to think rightly about Him. This is identical to Christ's words in Matthew 5:16, "*Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.*"

- What's the right reason to give a gift? Well, I should give you a gift solely because I want to please the Lord. And that means that I need to do it in a way that pleases the Lord. I need to do it because it's in God's best interest for your life that I give you this gift. That requires intentionality for sure! My gift giving becomes less about what I want to give you and more about the best way I can show love for God and love for you.
- When we do God's things in God's ways for God's reasons, people won't be able to help but see God in it, and whatever we do in true obedience will give the attention to Him, not us.
- Before we move to the fourth point, we need to address a potentially wrong thought. Sometimes people hear me or a pastor or someone talk like that, and their immediate response is that all of our gift-giving has to be Bible-oriented. We can't give legos or cute outfits or DVD's or game systems because we imagine that those things can't possibly be in God's best interest for anyone. Well, if that's true, then we shouldn't want those things to be part of ours or anyone else's lives. But that's not the case.
- It can be God's best interest that I purchase a game system for my family. If we're going to use it to His honor and glory, then it may be a great idea. If we're going to use it to celebrate Him in our family time and serve each other and grow in our redemptive relationships, then God will be pleased by the gift. If I'm going to use that gift to teach my kids how to be mature in their time management and learn to place the correct priority on entertainment, then, yes, the Lord will be pleased by that and my gift of a game system could very well be in their best interest.
- But there were a lot of "ifs," "ands," and "buts" in that description.
- So, what's the fourth part of true obedience? Well, if I do the right thing in the right way for the right reason, I will have access to the right power. That's right, this is when I am filled with the Spirit and walking in the Spirit. This is when I have the divine enabling to live righteously — something I can't do in the flesh. Romans 8:26 illustrates this in our prayer lives.
- When our motivations are aligned with God, we consciously work to do righteous things in biblical ways, and when we strive to intentionally live like that, the Holy Spirit comes alongside us and empowers us to be victorious in our obedience all to the glory of God.
- Our ability to celebrate God and disciple our loved ones this Christmas is directly tied to our ability to truly obey God in our worship this Christmas. When you're baking cookies, do it in the Spirit. When you're watching movies, glorify God. When you're exchanging gifts, make sure that the honor is the Lord's. And the same goes for the time we spend in the Scriptures and in prayer and in discussion about God.
- If God were to come over for Christmas, how would we respond to Him? Would we be like Martha — more concerned for our hosting and food prep that we basically ignore Him? Would we allow Him to give a 15 minute challenge or recitation of the incarnation, but then not let Him speak the rest of the time? We would hope that we would want Him to take full ownership of our entire celebration and that we would hang off His every word, movement, and desire.
- God is omnipresent, so — in a way — He will be at your Christmas party. But will you converse with Him?
- God talks to us from His Word and we talk back to Him in prayer. We should seek to pray without ceasing on Christmas as much as we did on Thanksgiving. We should intentionally plan times to focus on God's Word so as to be instructed and encouraged and built up by Him.
- We hope in all of your talk you remember to discuss God's grace. I also hope you work in our salvation focus for this Season . . . glorification. Glorification is the goal for our relationship with God. Until we are sinless, we cannot enjoy the purest relationship with the Father. But when we are glorified, we will be able to know Him as we are known.