

Delighting in Doing Good

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"Whether you eat or drink or *whatever you do*, do all to the glory of God" we are commanded in 1 Corinthians 10:31. But how do we best glorify God? By seeking our own pleasure. I will argue that pursuit of our own pleasure and pursuit of God's glory are not two separate pursuits at odds with each other, but are in fact one and the same pursuit. This is because, as John Piper has said, "God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him." Therefore, to abandon the pursuit of our pleasure is to abandon the pursuit of God's glory. We will then examine how our pursuit of joy in God should cause us to do good deeds. This will provide a further answer to the question of why we cannot love people or please God if we fail to seek our own pleasure in doing good.

What does it mean to glorify God?

God's glory is the infinite beauty and splendor of His perfect character. It is the radiance, or shining forth, of His amazing perfections. God has always been and always will be infinitely glorious without man's help, and He therefore cannot become any more or less glorious than He is and always has been. Glorifying God, then, does not mean making God more glorious and supreme. Rather, glorifying God means acknowledging, making known, delighting in, reflecting and valuing the awesome and lovely majesty of God's perfect character. Put another way, *glorifying God simply means calling attention to the infinite value and excellency of our great God.*

For example, when I tell someone of the love of Christ that moved Him to die for me, He is being glorified because I am calling attention to an aspect of His character (His love) and what it caused Him to do (die for me). When I marvel at God's love in profound amazement, I am glorifying Him because I am delighting in an aspect of His character. And delighting in something calls attention to the excellency of it more than just acknowledging it. This delight in God expresses itself in praise. "Shout joyfully to God, all the earth; sing the glory of His name; make His praise glorious. Say to God, 'How awesome are Thy works!'" (Psalm 66:1, 2). You cannot "shout joyfully to God" if you do not have joy in Him.

Because of the excellence and perfection of God's character, those who are truly born again will naturally cherish and treasure God. For conversion is the awakening of a taste and love for God in our hearts (see 2 Cor. 4:6-7; Matt.22:37; 1 Cor. 16:22). Our one passion and desire in all of life will become to

see more and more of Him. And the pursuit of our own happiness, we find, is not a sinful thing to be denied, but a wonderful thing to be splurged--on God! Why? Because God is what makes us happy! God is the object of our delight, since He has granted us a love and attraction to Himself. So I cannot pursue God without pursuing my own pleasure, since He is my pleasure! "O taste and see that the Lord is good!" (Psalm 34:8). "O God, Thou art my God; I shall seek Thee earnestly; my soul thirsts for thee, my flesh yearns for Thee" (Psalm 63:1).

This delighting in God, remember, is one way in which He is glorified for it shows the worth and excellency of His character. If God's children were sad and unhappy at seeing His character displayed, would that show the excellency and beauty of His character? Absolutely not! God's glory is shown to be marvelous because it causes us to delight and rejoice! Delight confers more honor than simple acknowledgment. As John Piper has said "My wife does not accuse me of selfishness or greed when I tell her that I am drawn to her because in her presence I feel such happiness and contentment. This is a way of extolling her power, beauty or virtue."

We must therefore conclude that *God is most glorified in us when we are most delighted (or happy) in Him*. Therefore pursuit of our own pleasure and our pursuit to glorify God are not at cross-purposes, but are one and the same pursuit! Isn't this good news! God makes us happy, because we cherish Him and treasure His fellowship once we are born again. Therefore, we seek Him more and more so that we can delight in more of Him. God is more honored when we seek Him because we want to and because we enjoy Him than if we seek Him because "it's just right," but He doesn't make us happy. "Delight yourself in the Lord!" says Psalm 37:4.

I think it should be obvious now why it is not selfish to seek God out of delight. Selfishness is a matter of where you have your focus, and in our case the focus is on God. We delight in God, therefore our focus is on God. We would only be selfish if we delighted in ourselves, for that would put our focus on ourselves. We would be self-centered instead of God-centered. But seeking pleasure in God is necessary to honor Him because this most glorifies Him and is most God-centered.

How is our delight in God related to doing good?

Glorifying God, as we have seen, is proclaiming, acknowledging, and delighting in God's character. Good deeds glorify God because they proclaim who He is and show what He is like. This calls attention to His infinite worth and thus glorifies Him. When we delight in God it further glorifies Him because it shows that He is infinitely valuable and wonderful, since what is wonderful and valuable will always bring us delight. But how does our passion for the joy of God's glory result in good deeds to help others?

First, we will do good deeds because they *glorify God by demonstrating His character and calling attention to His greatness*. Since God's glory is our delight, we will naturally want to see Him glorified in our everyday life. If we cherish God, we will naturally want to see His character displayed, not just pondered in our heads. So I forgive one who has hurt me because God is a forgiving God and therefore I delight in forgiveness more than bitterness. "Thy testimonies are wonderful, therefore my soul observes them" (Psalm 119:129).

From this it should be clear that pursuit of our own pleasure is a necessary motive to any good deed -- since we are to seek the joy of God's glory, and good deeds glorify God, must therefore pursue the joy of promoting God's glory in every good deed. We cannot be indifferent towards an act that displays our greatest delight! So, to phrase this first point another way, *we do good deeds because we delight to see God glorified*. "I delight to do Thy will, O God" (Psalm 40:8).

Second, our joy in God will cause us to do good deeds because *it is the nature of joy to share and expand itself*. "But even if I am being poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I rejoice and share my joy with you all. And you too, I urge you, rejoice in the same way and share your joy with me," Paul writes in Philippians 2:17, 18. From 2 Corinthians 1:24-2:4, John Piper shows that love is "the overflow of joy in God that gladly meets the needs of others" (Piper, *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist*, p. 96). He notes four things from this passage. First, it shows that love is a work of divine grace (v. 1). Second, this experience of God's grace fills us with joy (v. 2). Third, this "joy in God's grace overflows in generosity to meet the needs of others. [As Paul wrote], Their abundance of joy...overflowed in a wealth of liberality" (v. 2)." Fourth, we are to give because we *want* (i.e., delight) to (vv. 3-4).

When we do good we are not attempting to make up for a lack of joy in ourselves that can only be met by our good deed. Rather, as this passage shows, we are already full of joy from our relationship with God and our delight in His character. Then, since it is the nature of joy expand itself and share itself, our joy in God *overflows* to gladly meet the needs of others. When you experience something good, you naturally want to share it so that others can rejoice with you! We give because it is our joy--the extension of our joy in God. When I do good for someone, I am seeking to double my joy in God through the delight of sharing my joy.

Third, *we will do good to others because we delight to help them*. Because it is our joy! This is different from just saying "do good to others because it helps them." *The moral value of a good deed is not diminished to the extent that we pursue our own pleasure. In fact, the deed is only morally valuable to the extent that we do seek our own pleasure*. I am not saying we should use others for our own selfish gain. I am trying to correct the notion that pursuit of our own pleasure

is *separate* from pursuit of another's welfare. The truth is that they are not two separate, mutually exclusive pursuits, but that they are *one and the same pursuit*.

I do not seek to get joy from using others to my own ends; rather, my joy is *in* the joy of the one I help. My joy is not "from" the one I help but "in" the welfare of the one I help. In other words, I am not loving just by seeking my neighbor's joy. I am loving if I seek *their* joy as *my* joy. Isn't this what it means to take an interest in another person's welfare--that your joy is tied up with their joy? And if you are not really interested in another's welfare (which means seeking your joy in their joy), how can we call your good deed genuine? "For he who loves seeks his satisfaction in the happiness or perfection of the loved one," said the philosopher Leibniz.

A simple example should clarify this. Let's say I give food to a friend in need. He thanks me and says "I really appreciate you doing this." What if I shrug off His comments with "No problem, it's my duty as your friend. I do not take pleasure in this." My act is absolutely free from self-interest. Yet, something is wrong. He is not honored in my giving Him food. Why? Because *delight honors more than duty*. He would have been honored if my motives had been something like this: "It's my pleasure. I enjoy helping you because I love to see you happy."

As we can see, true love seeks its joy in the joy of others. Paul brings this out in 1 Cor. 1:24-2:4 when he says "*We work with you for your joy...for if I cause you pain, who is there to make me glad but the one whom I have pained? And I wrote as I did, so that when I came I might not be pained by those who should have made me rejoice, for I felt sure of all of you, that my joy would be the joy of you all. For I wrote you...to let you know the abundant love that I have for you.*" Here Paul says that their joy is his joy and his joy is their joy. Since Paul further says that he wrote to let them "know the abundant love I have for you" he makes the connection between joy and love explicit: "Love abounds between us when your joy is mine and my joy is yours. I am not loving just because I seek your joy, but because I seek it as mine" (Piper, p. 99).

Clearly, then, it is not selfish to seek your joy in the joy of the one you help. Selfishness is seeking your own interests at the expense or exclusion of others. It means either using others or refusing to share with others, or both. But doing good out of delight in the way I am advocating is not at the expense of others, but means that you put such a value on their welfare (since their welfare will declare God's glory) that you cherish it. And what you cherish always delights you. This puts your joy not at their expense, but genuinely in their welfare. Further, this is not a private joy I seek or a delight in my own welfare; it is a delight in the welfare of others. That is not selfish, but most honoring to the one I am helping.

Fourth, *we will do good deeds so that we can participate in what we love, not just observe it*. For example, if someone loves football, they are usually not content just to sit back and watch it on TV (if they are physically able to play). Rather,

they want to also play football themselves (say, in the backyard). They want to participate in it, not just watch it. In the same way, we want to participate in God's holiness and love by having it work through us, not just consider God's holiness in our minds. We want to be a part of God's plan to glorify Himself, not just an observer. So, we are moved to actions which display the love and character of the God we cherish. This is perhaps a hidden key to motivation to godly living that is missing very much in our church today. "Serve the Lord with gladness, come before Him with joyful singing" (Psalm 100:2). "The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart" (Psalm 19:8).

So here I have suggested four ways in which our love for God and our joy in His glory will motivate us to do good deeds for others. When others benefit from our acts of kindness, they see God's character in action and delight in Him and praise Him for who He is. When God works His grace in our heart we are filled with a joy that overflows to gladly meet the needs of others and in doing this my joy is doubled by being shared. When God's character is reflected and shown in the world He is glorified because His name is being proclaimed, made known, and delighted in by the people who are helped, the people who do the helping, and the people who see the helping. And when we delight in something we want to participate in it, not just observe it.

This, I suggest, is how to own up to the commands to "love mercy," not just do mercy. (Micah 6:8) and to "remember the words of the Lord Jesus. It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35) and that "God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Corinthians 9:7). This is how to delight in doing God's will (Psalm 40:8) and "serve the Lord with gladness" (Psalm 100:2).

This is the ultimate welfare we should seek in doing good to another person: That they will praise God more fully and deeply by seeing more of Him and experiencing more of Him and therefore delighting more in Him. God is glorified not just by His name being proclaimed (spoken), observed (seen), or experienced (participated in), but most fully by being delighted in. However, before God's name can be delighted in, it must first be proclaimed, observed, and experienced.

This is how our delight in God causes us to do genuine, sincere, and loving deeds. And it is important to have these reasons in view, for it is possible to seek to glorify God in the wrong way. For example, if we have as our hidden motives the idea that we will be exalted when people see us act kindly, and think God will be gloried by that, we are deluding ourselves. Pursuing God's glory in doing good requires doing it for the right reasons--because God makes me happy and I cherish seeing more of Him and I delight in the joy of meeting another's need so that they may glorify God.

Motives to guard against

To ensure that we guard against the danger of selfishness, we must continually examine ourselves with two questions. The first is: *Why* do I delight in doing this good deed? If my honest answer is because it will make *me* look good and exalt myself by showing how "smart" or "righteous" I am, I have sinful motives. The only answer can be because I rejoice in helping others and it also demonstrates and reflects God's character, which I delight in because God is my greatest joy.

The second question must be: *Why* do I cherish God? The answer must be because He is magnificently wonderful and supremely excellent; because He is a worthy God. If my answer is simply because He can help me and I do not have a delight in His character, then there is a problem. Our delight in God must be a response to His worth, not a response to my welfare.

True happiness

As you can see by now, a Christian's delight should be in making much of God, not making much of ourselves. This is the road to true humility because it puts the focus wholly on God and not at all on ourselves. And this is where true happiness is. I will leave you with the following thought I had one night: "The treasure that will fulfill you is of another world, and you must deny yourself to find it. It is totally opposite of the sinful pleasures the world seeks, and you cannot even desire it unless God opens up the path of a new capacity in you to desire and cherish the glory and purity of Himself."

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