

Pleasing unto God?

Does the Bible ever seem to contain contradictory statements? Do you ever read a verse only to think, ‘but this verse over here says . . .?’ There are many reasons for these apparent contradictions. Sometimes there is a dispensational difference. “Visiting the perversities of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children’s children, unto the third and to the fourth generation” (Ex. 34:7). While Jeremiah 31:30 reads “But everyone will die for his own perversity;” The former viewed the way things are and the later the way things will be. Sometimes we confuse the audience. “Give no offense either to Jews or to Greeks or to the Church of God.” (1 Cor. 10:32). But we read in Galatians 3:28, “In Him there is no Jew or Greek.” The former speaks of unsaved and the Church and the second only of the Body of Christ. We confuse ourselves by interpreting passages speaking of present tense salvation as past tense salvation. “For by grace you have been saved by faith . . . not from works” (Eph. 2:8a, 9a) but James writes, “What benefit is it my brothers if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Is that faith able to save him?” (2:14). Paul refers to the entrance and state of salvation while James the daily walk of faith and continued growth in salvation of the believer.

Sometimes a different doctrinal aspect is being considered. Recently I heard a popular, well respected radio minister declare several times within a month, “Is there anything that you can think of by which you can please God that is not expressed in the Law?” To which he said, there is nothing. Thus, when we read several times throughout the New Testament that the believer is not under Law but under grace (cp Romans 6:14) such Bible teachers attempt to point out that this refers only to our not getting saved by Law in the past, but that we are under Law in the present. One such writer elaborates, “The Law of God consists of commands, not suggestions that we may take up if and when we *want* to.” Then, “One is *commanded* to love God and his neighbor and himself with all his heart, soul, mind, and strength. That is *not optional*. It is *absolutely necessary*.” [John Gerstner, *Wrongly Dividing the Word of Truth*, pp. 222-223]. Another writes, “And if God is perfect and unchanging, His law is also perfect and unchanging (Ps. 19:7; James 1:25)” [Keith Mathison *Dispensationalism Rightly Dividing the People of God?* p. 86]. Later he writes, “Since the law of God does not change, we can presume that it continues to apply unless God tells us otherwise.” [p. 86]. But God does just this, “For Christ is the end of the Law for righteousness to all the ones believing.” (Rom. 10:4).

Is there anything that you can think of by which you can please God that is not expressed in the Law? Recently, while studying the priesthood of the New Testament Believer, we have seen several things which we can do that are “pleasing” to God, even “well pleasing” and “acceptable”. And these are things which were not possible under the Law. One of them even stands in stark contrast to the Law. Let’s take a brief look at the idea of this priesthood and then at those pleasing things which the believer does.

New Testament believers referred to as priests in 1 Peter 2:5, 9 and Revelation 1:6, 5:10. In 1 Peter 2:9 we find that some of these to whom Peter wrote were not Jews, in fact they had formerly not been a people. Peter does not point to a special group of believers either by nationality, spirituality, or by maturity. He addresses these scattered saints alike as being part of a holy priesthood and a royal priesthood. All New Testament believers whether young or old, male or female, rich or poor are priests.

How does God make us priests? In 1 Peter 2:5 we find that we are living stones being built a spiritual house a holy priesthood . . .” Paul clarifies where this is taking place, “Then therefore, you are no longer strangers and aliens, but co-citizens of the saints and household members of God, being built upon the foundation from the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being

the chief corner stone. **In Whom** all the building being joined together grows into a holy temple **in the Lord, in Whom** also you are being built together into a dwelling place of God by the Spirit.” (Eph. 3:19-22). Three times Paul tells us where this spiritual building is being built - **in Christ**. Our priesthood exists as a result of our position in Christ. Since our priesthood is part of our position in Christ, we need to direct our reflective mind [*phren*] to our position in Christ if we desire to function as priests.

What difference does being a priest make? What can a priest do? Peter explains that we offer up spiritual sacrifices (1 Pet. 2:5). The New Testament writers also use three terms to describe the priestly service of the believer: *latreia* - service or work (derived from a Greek word meaning a hired worker); *leitourgia* - priestly service or work (derived from a word describing one who served the state at their own expense); *ierourgeo* - to do temple work (derived from *ieros* - temple and *ergos* - work). The last term Paul used of his ministry of the gospel of God with the purpose that the offering consisting of the Gentiles might become well accepted (Rom. 15:16). This good news was important in making the Gentiles an acceptable offering, since Paul was a priestly minister [*leitourgos*] of Jesus Christ in view of the Gentiles. Thus, while Paul does not use the term priesthood of the New Testament believer he described himself as doing the work of the priests and being a priestly minister.

To the Hebrews, Paul wrote that Christ’s blood cleanses our conscience with a view to do priestly [*leitourgeo*] service to the living God (9:14). Believers are encouraged to have grace through which we do priestly service [*latreuo*] (12:28). To have grace does not mean to be gracious. Paul is writing of the believer’s appropriation of the grace that is always ours in our position in Christ (Eph. 1:6 [“Accepted” A.V. is literally “graced”]). That grace strengthens us in our position in Christ (2 Tim. 2:1). That grace is found at the Throne of Grace (Heb. 4:16). The Throne of Grace is far more than a reference to the believer’s access to God in prayer. It is a veiled reference to our position in Christ where the believer is graced (Paul is attempting to get these Hebrew Christians to come away from Judaism and rise to their position in Christ and rest). So again we see that the activity of a believer priest is definitely tied to his position in Christ and his being strengthened by the grace that is there. If you want to use your priesthood, abide in Christ!

Now what has our priesthood to do with these well pleasing activities? As a priest we offer spiritual sacrifices. We can offer our bodies as a **living** sacrifice (Rom. 12:1). Paul describes that sacrifice as holy, **well pleasing** to God and our logical priestly service. This is the act of presenting our bodies to God as the vehicle which He has already purchased (1 Cor. 6:20) for manifesting His character, which is emphasized in the idea of transformation in verse 2. In Philippians 2:17, Paul refers to the sacrifice and priestly service of our faith. The believer is to walk by faith in response to the promises and hopes described in God’s Word. This walk of faith results in works (Jas. 2:14-26) The act of giving to the needs of other believers is a sweet smelling sacrifice, which is acceptable or fit to be received and well pleasing to God (Phil. 4:18). Paul mentions three sacrifices in Hebrews 13:15, 16 - praise - the confession of God’s character [A.V. “Thanks” - literally Gk. - *homologeio* - to confess]; doing good; fellowship. Again, Paul describes these sacrifices as well pleasing. Doing good for the Hebrew saints involved moving on to maturity (6:3), enduring the persecution that they might do God’s will (10:36) which ultimately would involve a coming out from Judaism [the camp] and a coming to that heavenly altar in their position from which the earthly Jewish priests had no authority to eat (13:10-13). It can also refer to the use of our spiritual gift for the benefit of other believers. Fellowship as two sides, frequently it refers to sharing materially with believers who have needs (Acts 2:42-45; Rom. 15:26, 27; 1 Tim. 6:18 et

al) but it also refers to a sharing in common on the spiritual level, that is two or more sharing an appreciation and experience of God's ongoing saving work in their lives (1 Jh. 1:3, 6, 7; 2 Pet. 1:4; Phlm. 6). None of these were required much less possible under the Law. There was no "living sacrifice" under the Law. One could not live by the Law and walk by faith (Gal. 3:11, 12). The doing good as it related to maturity was not possible under the Law (Heb. 7:19) for it required the bringing in of a new Hope [the rest in Christ - Heb. 4:1; 6:18-20]. One could not use a spiritual gift prior to the giving of spiritual gifts which began at Pentecost. As to giving and fellowship, Old Testament saints could give above their Tithe [which doesn't apply to us] and share with others. But they could not share in common in the life of God (1 Jh. 1:3, 5). Therefore, "YES! There are things the believer can do which are pleasing to God and not stated in the Law!" And that's good news, for we are not under law.

Now, to return to our original dilemma, if we stand in grace apart from works, how can these priestly activities be "well pleasing" to God? Doesn't that imply a gaining of merit? Not at all. These sacrifices are not demanded. In fact, Paul is encouraging the Roman and Hebrew saints to offer sacrifices because, though they were already believers, they weren't offering them. Since the offering of these sacrifices is at that altar which is at the Throne of Grace (Heb. 4:16; 13:10ff), the believer needs to be reflectively thinking upon his position in Christ in order to function as a priest and offer these sacrifices. In keeping with the nature of this Throne of grace, it involves no meritorious works on the part of the saint. In fact, Paul writes, "There remains a rest for the people of God, for he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God from His." (Heb. 4:9, 10). The believer that enters this rest does so realizing that God has already done it all and rests in Christ. What does that mean for these sacrifices? God calls these sacrifices well pleasing (etc.) because those offering such are not trying to gain any standing or merit with God. They are offering sacrifices as they rest in Christ. How unusual to find someone doing something with no intention or desire of earning anything in return! We can offer these sacrifices simply because we have been graced in Christ and have such an unprecedented privilege. This is certainly one of those great things God has prepared for those who are loving Him (1 Cor. 2:9).