

**Well Pleased**  
**Matthew 3:13-17**  
**January 8, 2023**

Today we look at the baptism of Jesus by John. We know John was thinking he should be baptized by Jesus and not the other way around. John knew Jesus was the Son of God and for him to baptize Jesus, why? Why would He need to be baptized, He wasn't sinning as others and even John, himself. John asked why and maybe you have too? So why did Jesus, HAVE to be baptized? Jesus said it was to fulfill all righteousness but He was already righteous.

The writer to the Hebrews wrote: Hebrews 4:15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. He wrote what we know and yet in this passage God the Father speaks from heaven and says: Matthew 3:17b "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."

Jesus, just coming to the earth should have pleased God the Father and I'm sure it did but why at His baptism? What was going on that day? People were coming, confessing their sins and being baptized. Jesus came, couldn't confess any sins but what did the people see? They saw a man who didn't place Himself above them. He was one of them. Even He, the teacher came to be baptized, putting Himself in their shoes, tempted in every way as they were. In order to fulfill all righteousness He had to step into human shoes or sandals as the case may be.

God the Father had just witnessed the Son of God, stepping fully into creation by showing Himself as a sinner in need of baptism even though He never sinned. Yes, in this act, He was committed to taking on the sins of the world, just as was agreed upon by the Triune God He would do.

This taking on the sins of the world was well pleasing to God. If being baptized and then going about His ministry leading to His death was pleasing to God, you might wonder what would be well pleasing to God as He looks to us?

When you look around the world, what is pleasing to the gods of the world? For Muslims, it might be dying in a Jihad. For others it might be offering the right sacrifices like the Jews did in the Old Testament. For many who claim to be Christians, it is living life better than the next guy or gal.

What would you say is the way to please God? Follow the Ten Commandments? Come to church 45-50 Sundays out of the year? Say your prayers regularly? Give 10% or more of your income to the church or other God pleasing enterprises?

These are all great things that God would have no problem with but would they "please God?" If you were God you probably would think these things would be pleasing to you but what about the real God? What is pleasing to Him when He looks at you?

You try to be a good person but good is based on what you think is good. As Jesus told the guy who talked about Jesus being a good person, Jesus said only God is good. You are not God so it isn't your goodness that is going to be pleasing to God. So what is it?

I wear a graduation ring from Seminary. If you were to look close at the wording around the cross that is on the face of the ring you would see three solas, three alike words that mean alone. The other three words that go along with those solas mean grace, faith and scripture, with the cross in the middle, the cross that only Jesus could have hung on for the sins of the world. Sola fide, sola gratia, sola scriptura, and sola Christus. Faith alone, Grace alone, Scripture alone and Christ alone.

There can be nothing added to those solas. Whenever something is added to them, then whatever is added seems to always take away from the total substitutionary work of Jesus and over time seems to become almost more important than what Jesus did for our salvation, our justification, our pleasing God.

In our baptism, we received Christ's white robe of righteousness. It is the white robe furnished to the wedding goers in the parable in the Bible. The one who didn't have one of those robes was cast out of the wedding feast. He tried to get in without it, we can't enter into the wedding feast of the Lamb unless we are clothed with the white robe of righteousness. No amount of good works can get us that robe, it is a free gift from Him in our baptisms.

We believe that to be true so when someone makes an inference that our belief has to be followed up with our working, it can get a little confusing. Such is the case with one of the Portals of Prayer devotions last year on the 27th of December which Belinda Burmeister pointed out to me.

The author of the devotion pointed out that the teaching of salvation by grace and faith alone is front and center in Holy Scripture, which is how we are justified before God but He points out a teaching in the Epitome of the Formula of Concord that says, "We also believe, teach and confess that all people, but especially those who are born again and renewed by the Holy Spirit, are obligated to do good works.

Does that word "obligated" raise the hair on the back of your neck? Kind of sounds like works are involved in what we believe.

I don't think it was the best idea to point this out from the confessions without going into explaining what was meant by "obligated". When we hear, "obligated", our ears hear we need to do something. Yet we know that our works can't justify us before God so how do we reconcile these seeming opposite teachings?

If the devotion could have been longer and could have fleshed out what this "obligation" entailed it might not be so confusing. Here is what included in with that statement of obligation.

In the paragraph after the one with the word obligation, it states that "This is of course, not to be understood in any other way than as the Lord Christ and His apostles themselves

explain it, that is, regarding the liberated spirit, the spirit that doesn't act out of fear of punishment but out of love of righteousness, the righteousness of one of the children of God as pointed out in Romans 8:15, For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!"

It goes on in the next paragraph to point out that this liberated spirit is not perfect but is encumbered with great weakness, as St. Paul complains in the famous 7th chapter of Romans and in his letter to the Galatians. In Romans he complains: For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin. For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good. So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.

So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin.

That is his writing in Romans. His letter to the Galatians in 5:17 states this: For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do.

We might think that Jesus wouldn't understand this and yet what was said earlier that He being a full human was tempted as we are. And even though we are weak in our works which are never perfect as His work was, Paul earlier in verse one of chapter 8 writes this: There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. No condemnation? Even though those Good Works that we do are not our works. They are the works of the Spirit working through faith, preserving faith and salvation in us. It says Good Works are a testimony of His presence and dwelling in us.

Because the Holy Spirit is living in us, He is in charge of making those works good based on what Jesus has done. Yes, we want to do things for our neighbor to aide them to look to God for their source of salvation and hope as we do. Yet, even though we do all sorts of things as we get to know them, we hope they will better understand the gift they have in Jesus, but we also know the only way any works we might call ours can be called good is because of the Holy Spirit making them good.

We are obligated because the Holy Spirit is working in any work we do. As people of faith, we will do good works, any works done in the Lord are good works even though we still sin and can't do a perfect work which would be good. With the Holy Spirit working through our sin tainted world, He makes it good because of Christ.

This is what is well pleasing to God. Looking to Him to use us to do Good Works which are really works of the Holy Spirit through us.

Is it as clear as mud? It is that word "obligated" that messes with our minds. Obligation implies that we have to do something. With us as people of faith, as we go about being Christians, we will do good works because of the faith given us. We are wanting to do good works as Paul wrote in chapter 7, our flesh is working against us.

It is like a hunting dog. If it has the right breeding, it is in a sense obligated to do what it is bred to do. If it is a pointer, it will lock up, still as a statue, pointing at that bird that you may not even see. It will do what it is supposed to do. That is what we do, as faithful Christians.

We know the many times when we have wanted to do the good work of witnessing only for our flesh to find one reason or another to not witness. What harm could it do, we might be used by the Holy Spirit at just that time to bring hope into the person's world.

We want others to be brought to faith in Jesus. If we are to look to their futures, what two possibilities exist for them the the leave this world? It is either heaven or hell.

People want to go to heaven. This is what they will normally say as to where they are going when they die. It may be a wish or a hope but heaven is preferable to hell especially if they have any idea of what hell will be like.

Image the person before you undergoing the terrors of hell. Could you want anyone to have to endure that for eternity? No, I can't imagine you could and yet without the salvation won for them by Jesus, that is where they are headed.

Would it be worth some of your time and talent to let them know what awaits them? Could we sinful humans still be used by God to bring the law and the gospel to them? What better work could we do?

What is well pleasing to God? For us, it is to do the work of the Holy Spirit who dwells in us. That work, made good by Him is to let others know of the sure hope we have in Jesus who began at the waters of the river Jordan and continued to show and tell of the Messiah, who came to this world willingly, to die on the cross for the sins of the whole world, Jew and Gentile alike. He is pleased as we are His sons and daughters, made His through the water and the Word.