

Holiness: Living Fascinated in the Pleasure of Loving God

I. STARTING WITH THE RIGHT FOUNDATIONS

- A. I will present two foundational truths and three practical principles for our pursuit of holiness.
- B. God calls us to holiness *because He is holy*. In being holy, He has the highest, most pleasurable, and exhilarating quality of life in existence. He wants to share this life with us forever.
¹⁶“Be holy, for I am holy.” (1 Pet. 1:16)
- C. He has called us to enjoy the superior quality of life in the liberty of holiness. Many see holiness only as the drudgery of self-denial.
- D. God created every human being with a longing for pleasure and fascination. It is His design. Understanding these two longings is foundational to pursuing holiness in a biblical way. The call to holiness is a call to the *superior pleasures of being fascinated* by the revelation of Jesus.
- E. Holiness equips us to enjoy life together with God forever. We must not approach holiness in a negative way with dread. It does not keep us from pleasure, but equips us to experience it. The power of holiness frees us from the vain imaginations of lust, pride, and bitterness.

II. FOUNDATIONAL TRUTH #1: BEING PREOCCUPIED WITH SUPERIOR PLEASURES

- A. God is the author of pleasure. He created us to enjoy physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual pleasures. Our longing for pleasure is part of our created design and must be satisfied; it will not go away. The devil tempts us with “counterfeit” pleasures that are outside God’s will.
- B. The greatest pleasures available to the human spirit are spiritual pleasures that come to us when God reveals God to our spirit. This exhilarates our spirit at the deepest levels. We are liberated from the *inferior pleasures* of sin by experiencing the *superior pleasures* of the beauty of Jesus.
- C. The Spirit discerns the deep things of the Father’s heart and mind including the delight He feels for Jesus, the saints, and His kingdom. The Spirit helps us feel some of what the Father feels.
¹⁰The Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God...¹²We have received...the Spirit...that we might know the things that have been freely given to us. (1 Cor. 2:10-12)
- D. The Spirit escorts us on a divine treasure hunt into the beauty of Jesus. He takes the things Jesus is thinking and feeling, and He reveals them to us. This is divine entertainment at its highest.
¹⁴He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you. (Jn. 16:14)
- E. God releases small measures of insight and inspiration from the Word, which tenderize our spirit for a few moments. These subtle flashes of glory are to be a regular part of our relationship with God. Over time, this holy influence changes us emotionally.

- F. The best way to overcome darkness is to turn on the light. No one seeks to remove the darkness in a room by opening a window to throw out buckets of darkness. They simply turn on the light. The way to decrease darkness in our lives is to focus on increasing the amount of light we enjoy.
⁵*The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. (Jn. 1:5, RSV)*
- G. We will not overcome the darkness of immorality, bitterness, or pride by focusing on it; we do not decrease darkness in us by focusing on the darkness. We must change our focus to become preoccupied with gaining more of the ***“light of the superior pleasure of the revelation”*** of God.
- H. David had revelation of God’s personality and leadership as being full of joy and pleasure. The throne is the epicenter of joy and pleasure for the entire universe. Our God is a happy God with happy holiness. God’s holiness is filled with joy and pleasure.
¹¹*In Your presence is fullness of joy; at Your right hand are pleasures forever. (Ps. 16:11)*
- I. The “river of pleasures” describes the Spirit revealing the beauty of God to the human spirit. The Holy Spirit causes rivers of living water to flow in the heart of a believer (Jn. 7:37-39).
⁸*You give them drink from the river of Your pleasures. (Ps. 36:8)*
- J. One of King David’s lifelong goals was to encounter the beauty of God regularly. As king, David was head of the government and the army. His *hands were occupied* with his occupation, or ministry assignment, as king, but his *heart was preoccupied* with the beauty of God.
⁴*One thing I have desired...all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord. (Ps. 27:4)*
- K. In the end times, God will fascinate His people with Jesus’ beauty beyond any time in history.
²*In that day the Branch of the LORD [Jesus] shall be beautiful and glorious. (Isa. 4:2)*

III. OUR LONGING TO BE FASCINATED

- A. God created us with a longing for the pleasure of being fascinated or awestruck and filled with marvel and wonder. We are fascinated most when we are fascinated by revelation of Jesus. Paul was preoccupied with being fascinated by the knowledge of Jesus. It was key to his life vision.
⁸*I count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ... (Phil. 3:8)*
- B. We cannot repent of our longing for fascination. It is a significant part of our creative design. We will either satisfy it in God or in darkness. It is not neutral and will not be silenced or go away.
- C. The secular entertainment industry has identified and targeted this human longing. They have exploited this God-ordained craving to their profit and our ruin. Entertainment is the desire to feel a “wow” in our hearts. It is one of the primary felt needs in human life.
- D. Without a sense of awe in our relationship with God, we will live spiritually bored and will be more vulnerable to Satan’s tactics. A spiritually bored believer is weak. A fascinated believer is strong. For example, a fascinated believer has no need of pornography.

- E. We must be preoccupied with a superior fascination. We will not successfully resist temptation if we live in a “*fascination vacuum*.” Everyone seeks to be satisfied, either by God or by the flesh.
- F. We sin because we believe that it will provide a pleasure that is superior to obeying God. The power of temptation rests on a deceptive promise that sin will bring more satisfaction than living for God. Scripture calls this the deceitfulness of sin or deceitful lusts (Eph. 4:22; Heb. 3:13).
²⁵ *...choosing to suffer affliction...than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin. (Heb. 11:25)*
- G. John Piper says, “Sin is what we do when our hearts are not satisfied with God. God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him.”
- H. The call to holiness is the call to enjoy God by living fascinated. The battle for holiness is the battle to be preoccupied with the right thing and is won in the pursuit of enjoying God. The way forward in holiness is to embrace a new preoccupation with the pleasure of living fascinated.

IV. FOUNDATIONAL TRUTH #2: SETTING OUR HEART ON 100% OBEDIENCE

- A. It is *empowering* and *satisfying* to set our heart to love God with 100% obedience.
- B. *Empowering*: The pursuit of 98% obedience has a limited blessing. The last 2% positions us to live with a vibrant heart. Powerful and surprising dynamics occur in our emotions as we pursue the last 2%. There is a “spark” of the Spirit in our heart as we “reach,” or aim, to live this way. The Spirit speaks to many about their lack of agreement with Him instead of God’s beauty.
- C. Aiming for 100% obedience includes *bridling our speech* (Jas. 3:2), making a *covenant with our eyes* and refusing to look at anything that stirs up lust (Job 31:1), disciplining our *appetites*, and *managing our time* (for service and prayer) and our *money* for the increase of God’s kingdom.
- D. This reach must be so deliberate that it gets into our daily dialogue with God in our prayer times. It is more than a casual commitment to obey God in a general way.
- E. Aiming for 100% obedience is different from attaining it. However, when we sin, we repent, receive forgiveness, and renew our resolve to “reach” to obey God fully, with confidence that He enjoys us now and values our journey to grow in love. We are equally yoked to Jesus, not by the *size* of our love, but by the *all* of our love. Our all may be small, but it is *our all*.
- F. *Satisfying*: God created us with a longing to be wholehearted in our love for Him. It is necessary for our emotional health. The human heart does not function properly without wholeheartedness.
- G. *God is self-sufficient*: He desires us, but does not need us. His insistence on our full obedience is not because He is an insecure narcissist looking for human affirmation. He knows that only in fully loving Him are we able to experience the fullness of what it means to be human. By requiring our full dedication and helping us to sustain it, He equips us to experience great joy.

V. VICTORY OVER SIN: 3 PRACTICAL PRINCIPLES (ROM. 6:11-13)

- A. Romans 6 tells us how to access, or experience, the power, favor, and blessings of God, which are freely available to us because of what Jesus did on the cross. Transformation in our life begins by *knowing* who we are in Christ—seeing ourselves in the way God sees us in Christ. God requires us to cooperate with His grace. He will not do our part, and we cannot do His part.
- B. Principle #1—**Knowing Principle (Rom. 6:11)**: We must know who we are in Christ and what we have received in Him. We *reckon*, or see, ourselves as **alive to God**—alive to the realm of God—which includes seeing that we are fully accepted and *enjoyed* by God, *empowered* to use Jesus’ authority, and *indwelt* by the Spirit. The Spirit’s peace *resides in our spirit* from the very day that we are born again (Gal. 5:22). We access His peace by acknowledging it and thanking Him for it. The simple act of thanking the Spirit for His peace in our spirit releases it to our soul (emotions).
¹¹***Reckon [see] yourselves to be...alive to God in Christ. (Rom. 6:11)***
²²***The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness... (Gal. 5:22)***
- C. Principle #2—**Resisting Principle (Rom. 6:12-13a)**: We resist sin, Satan, and sin-provoking circumstances. We resist the inward prompting of sin and the schemes of Satan. Paul emphasized self-denial. God chose the denial of our lustful desires as one arena in which we express our love to Him (Jn. 14:15, 21-23). We refuse circumstances that inflame sinful desires. Therefore, we do not go to places, buy items, or look at or talk about that which stirs up sinful passions.
¹²***Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts.*** ¹³***And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin... (Rom. 6:12-13a)***
- D. Principle #3—**Pursuing Principle (Rom. 6:13b)**: We serve and relate to God and people in love. We present ourselves to God, and our bodies as His instruments, that He may use us to bless others. Our first call is to love God with all our heart as worshipers of Jesus—we are to cultivate His presence in our life (intimacy with God). Then we express God’s love to people by offering our bodies as vessels for the Spirit to use to bless them.
¹³***But present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. (Rom. 6:13b)***
- E. **Summary**: We must **know truth**, **resist darkness**, and **pursue God and people**. We love God and people as we resist sin, Satan, and sin-provoking circumstances, and grow in the knowledge of who we are in Christ and experience God’s heart as a Father and Bridegroom.
1. None of these principles can be omitted. Some pursue God at prayer meetings without knowing who they are in Christ or resisting sin; some know the truth about who they are in Christ and even resist sin, but without pursuing God and loving people; etc.
 2. If we embrace all three of these principles in the context of the two foundational truths of being preoccupied with the superior pleasures of God and seeking 100 % obedience, then the Holy Spirit will dynamically work in and through our life.