

Desiring God - Lesson 3

by John Piper

It is our duty to delight in God and pursue our pleasure in Him relentlessly.

Duration: 1:12:04

Scripture: Deuteronomy 28:47-48, Psalm 37:4, Psalm 100:2, Isaiah 55:1-3, Jeremiah 2:12-13, Matthew 6:33

Topics: "Christian Hedonism", "Godly Satisfaction"

Description

In this sermon, Pastor John Piper discusses the concept of Christian hedonism, which is the belief that our highest duty is to pursue delight in God. He argues that there are biblical commands to pursue joy in God, such as Psalm 37:4. Piper also emphasizes that God is most glorified when His people are most satisfied in Him. He urges listeners to turn away from fleeting pleasures that do not satisfy and instead seek true satisfaction in God.

Transcript

The following message is by Pastor John Piper. More information from Desiring God is available at www.DesiringGod.org Good morning and welcome to our second half together for this seminar on Desiring God. I want to read for you a few verses from the beginning of Isaiah 55.

Oh everyone who thirsts, come to the waters. He who has no money, come buy and eat. Come buy wine and milk without money and without price.

Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Hearken diligently to me and eat what is good and delight yourselves in fatness. Incline your ear and come to me. Hear that your soul may live.

And I will give you an everlasting covenant. I will make with you an everlasting covenant. My steadfast, sure love for David.

That's a pretty lavish invitation, isn't it? Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and labor for that which does not satisfy? That's the message of the gospel. Why, oh why, world, will you die? Why will you die? Father in heaven, as we begin our session this morning, would you address those words to us very personally by your spirit, and summon us out of the sins, and out of the habits and preoccupations that do not satisfy. The pleasures are fleeting, and they are shallow, like a child making mud pies in the slum, because he cannot imagine what a holiday at the sea is like.

And so we're asking now, Lord, this morning that you will open our eyes to see what a holiday at the sea is, and to be drawn into your delectable fellowship. Lord, guard us from the evil one right now, who entangles us with all kinds of short-term pleasures that do not satisfy. Break his power in the life of this people, and make us breakers in the lives of others.

Give us the tongue of those who are taught, that we might sustain with the word him who is weary. Lord, make ministers, make missionaries, make mighty men and women of God, make sages out of everyone in this room, I pray, so that we may open our mouths about the glory of Christ in such a way and with such an anointing that light shines, and the aroma of Christ is perceived, and people are drawn away from the poisonous atmosphere of sin. Lord, use the word here.

You have inspired it once, I pray that you will illumine it now, that we might see things that we've never seen before as we look at your scriptures, and that they might be effectual in powerfully transforming our minds and changing our hearts. I pray that the churches we represent in this room would feel the force that you have worked in our lives in these hours together for good. And now we dedicate the morning to you.

Give us strength. Give us energy. Give us focus.

I pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Okay, let's recap just a minute so we know where we are here.

We've been through the first five points on the outline, and we've arrived at number six. And the juncture where we are is that if it's true that God glorifies Himself in our enjoyment of God, if that's the way God is most glorified when His people are most satisfied in Him, when they do what they do for the delight there is in Him, then the implication is it is our duty to delight in God. It is our duty to pursue our pleasure in God relentlessly with all our heart and mind and soul and strength.

And all of point six is an argument to defend that and to answer objections against it. So that's where we are this morning. Jonathan Edwards wrote a book called *The Dissertation Concerning the End For Which God Created the World*, and it is one of the most influential books in my life.

I view myself as kind of a modernizer or contemporizer of what Jonathan Edwards saw in the scriptures. But here we are at our first argument, and we have so much material that I will do my best, again, to be selective as we move over these twelve points, not lingering too long on each one, so that we can get to number seven, which is kind of the so what, the how to, how should we then live or fight, or what do you do in view of all of this amazing biblical truth. So here are my twelve arguments in defense of what I would call Christian hedonism, namely that it is our highest duty to always be pursuing delight in God in everything we do.

First, there are biblical commands to pursue our joy in God. Delight yourself in the Lord, Psalm 37, 4, and He will give you the desires of your heart. So that's a commandment.

Delight yourself in the Lord, imperative. Psalm 32, 11, Be glad in the Lord and rejoice, you righteous ones, and shout for joy all you who are upright in heart. Psalm 33, 1, Sing for joy in the Lord, O you righteous ones.

Praise is becoming to the upright. Psalm 67, 4, Let the nations be glad and sing for joy, for you will judge the peoples with uprightness and guide the nations on the earth. So not just some limited group of people, but let the nations be glad and sing for joy, which is why the last part of our mission statement says, For

the joy of all peoples.

That's based right there squarely on this. Let the nations be glad. That's the great commission in other language.

Psalm 100, Shout joyfully to the Lord, all the earth. Serve the Lord with gladness. Come before Him with joyful singing.

So yes, we serve the Lord, but if you want to be obedient, In other words, remember last night's issue of the philosophical problem of hedonism and whether you do right for right's sake. And I said, Well, you should do right. You should serve God.

But it matters how you do it. Matters a lot how you do it. It isn't virtue if it isn't done with the right heart.

And the right heart is serve the Lord with gladness. If you're a Sunday school teacher or a minister of the word in any way, small group leader, and you do your work consistently, begrudgingly, you have a defective ministry and you need a change of heart. Philippians 4,4, Rejoice in the Lord always and again I will say rejoice.

So point number one is there are commands in the Bible to pursue your joy. It's not an option. It's not a suggestion.

Argument number two. There is a biblical, at least one, threat if we will not pursue our joy in God. Deuteronomy 28,47 says, Because you did not serve the Lord your God with joy.

In other words, because you didn't, you didn't obey Psalm 100. Because you thought serving is all that mattered. Because you did not serve the Lord your God with joy and glad heart for the abundance of all things.

Therefore, you will serve your enemies whom the Lord will send against you. Jeremy Taylor paraphrased that. God threatens terrible things if we will not be happy.

So the atmosphere around this book is very serious. I think the first sentence in the book says, This is a serious book about being happy in God. This is serious.

We go to hell if we don't have hearts transformed to delight in God. This is not icing on the cake. This is not a caboose at the end of the train.

Our affections are at the center, not at the periphery. Argument number three. The essence of evil and sin is to pursue satisfaction outside God.

Key text, Jeremiah 2,12. Be appalled, O heavens, at this. Be a shudder.

Be very desolate, declares the Lord. For my people have committed two evils. What are the two evils? What is evil? They have, number one, forsaken me, the fountain of living waters.

And number two, they have hewn for themselves cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water. So the essence of evil, the essence of sin is to be confronted with the deity of God, the beneficence of God, the power of God, the greatness of God. And if you know, like the Jews did about special revelation, the fountain of living waters, and to turn away from what would have satisfied you, to hew out a well, a bowl of

some kind in the dirt to catch water, and it's broken, and it won't hold water.

There are no fountains that satisfy apart from God. So Jeremiah, at least, is willing to define sin as the abandonment of the pursuit of your pleasure in God. The abandonment of the pursuit of your pleasure in God is evil.

And I grew up, frankly, breathing the air that said evil is the pursuit of your pleasure. It's just the opposite. Evil is the abandonment of the pursuit of living water in God.

We need to say that. Argument number four. An essential element of saving faith is being satisfied with all that God is for us in Jesus.

In other words, what I'm going to try to do here is show you that while the Bible makes faith central to a right relationship with God, you can't have a right relation to God without trusting Him. I want to argue that when you penetrate to the heart of what saving faith is, you find that it is not a mere intellectual assent. It's not a mere exertion of willpower.

It is a cordial, as the old Puritan word, a cordial, a delighting embracing of all that God is for you in Jesus. It has at its center an affectional element that cannot be taken away and leave faith in existence. You take away that element and an essential element has been removed so that what is left is not saving faith.

So, therefore, every place the Bible talks about saving faith, it is really also talking about the pursuit of your delight in God. So here's an argument for that. Hebrews 11, 6 says, Without faith, it is impossible to please God, for he who comes to God must believe.

These are similar stems in Greek. There are two words in Greek, one for faith and one for belief, or one for have faith and one for believe. The Greek word pistos or pistou, the noun and the pistia, whatever, the noun and the verb are the same for believe and have faith.

So don't ever distinguish those two. If you have faith, you believe two things. One, that he is, that God is.

And two, that he is the rewarder of those who seek him. Now that's a remarkable way for the writer of Hebrews to put it. And it fits his whole tendency in verses, in chapters 10 through 13.

We're going to look at those other texts relating to this later. But he says, the faith that pleases God embraces two realities. That God is, and that God is a rewarder.

So you can't please God unless you come to him for reward. Now I think that reward is not streets of gold. It's not primarily health.

It's not primarily reconciliation with a loved one who's going to be with the Lord. It is primarily God himself in fellowship with him. But it's viewed as a reward.

It's viewed as positive. It's viewed as blessing and benefit. You can't turn that word rewarder into a stoical, no benefit thing.

So those who try to teach us that you should come to God, like they say, do what's right because it's right, or come to God because God says to come to God. A lot of reformed people talk that way. This one book that I interacted with tends to talk that way.

God the commander or God who commands. You should do what God says because he's God and he has authority. Now if that's all you say, and if that's the only reason you respond, I don't think you're a Christian.

Because the text says, the faith with which we please God comes to him as rewarder. You must come to him as rewarder. You can't come saying, I don't want to have any reward in mind.

I don't want to have any reward in you because reward contaminates my coming to you. Can't be a Christian. If you succeed at that rewardless coming, that's scary.

That's scary. Because there are a lot of people philosophically trying to persuade the church that that's the way you come to God. They just can't carry it through.

They can't carry it through their prayers. They can't carry it through when they read Isaiah. Oh, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters.

Not to drink. Don't like it when you come. Don't enjoy it.

Come to the waters, he who has no money. Come buy and eat. Oh, but don't enjoy what you eat.

You can't carry it through. You can't read the Bible and preach the gospel and carry through an anti-reward mentality. There's another text that gets at the same thing.

Jesus said to them, I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will not hunger. And he who believes in me will never thirst.

And I think if you do a word study in the gospel of John about coming to Jesus, when Jesus was on the earth and he talked about coming to him, that meant trusting him, believing him. Coming is believing. I think these are parallel words right here.

He who comes, da da da. He who believes, da da da. These coming and believing.

One is a metaphor and the other is what the heart is actually doing. And what you experience in this is a coming not to hunger and a believing never to thirst. So I would define faith for John's gospel, the way Jesus uses it, as faith is a coming to Jesus so as to find your soul satisfied in him.

That's what I base on that verse. Faith is a coming to Jesus so as to find your soul satisfied in him. Or, same thing here, faith is a coming to God so as to find him to be your great reward.

Here's an interesting verse from the Apostle Paul, 2 Corinthians 1.24. He says to them about his own apostolic authority, Not that we lord it over your faith, but we are workers with you for your joy, for in your faith you are standing firm. Now we'll come back to this near the end and talk about this word workers. But for now, what I want you to see is the parallel or the seeming interchangeability of these two words here.

Wouldn't you have expected him to say, not that we lord it over your faith, but we are workers with you for your faith. That's what he's really saying. But in his heart and in his mind, he knows that an essential component of this faith is joy in God.

So he can say, I don't lord it over your faith. I want to come in alongside you and labor and lay down my life. This is an awesome pastoral calling.

Or if you lead a small group or if you teach a Sunday school class or if you just have a friend, let this be the goal of your life. Get up in the morning and if you lie there in bed and say, why am I on planet earth? What's the point of my life and what's left of it? This is a great answer. Today, I am going to be a worker with somebody for their joy.

Now, everybody can think of a way to do that every day. And it can get very profound and very deep if you think it through in relation to faith like Paul does. Not that we lord it over your faith.

Rather, we work with you for your joy. Or if you used Philippians 1.25, you could call it the joy of faith. So that's argument number four.

Essential element of saving faith is being satisfied. Let me pause there and see if you want to ask any questions about those first four arguments in defense of pursuing your joy all the time. And of faith.

The joy of faith. Now, that's the old King James Version and it's very literal and very right. Others tend to paraphrase.

Any other? Yeah, go ahead. Let me just see here which three was. Oh, does 6.3, the essence of evil and sin is to pursue satisfaction outside God.

Does it boil down to autonomy? Well, I would say autonomy is probably the root expression of the abandonment of God. I am sufficient. But there are probably a lot of people who are drinking at the broken cisterns of other people that don't feel autonomous at all.

They feel absolutely addicted to a relationship or they feel utterly dependent on their child or their or their wife or their job or their drugs or whatever. And if you said your problem is autonomy, there's a my problem is not autonomy. My problem is dependence on a false God.

So I would say autonomy is dependence on yourself, forsaking the living waters for your own resources. But there are other forms that it can take as well. Other questions? Yes.

You're getting you're getting headburned down to number seven. You're right. And we will tackle how we cultivate that faith and the role of the Holy Spirit in it when we get down here to the how to.

So good observation. Number five, the affections. That's the older word.

And by the word affections, Jonathan Edwards and all the Puritans before him meant the whole range of the lively actings of the heart and the will, both negative like grief would be an affection and love would be an affection and joy and so on. The affections or emotions are biblically essential to Christian living. Now, here I'm responding to this objection.

Someone might say, look, Piper, this approach to Christianity that highlights the pursuit of one's delight or satisfaction or pleasure in God. Elevates the affectional dimension of Christianity all out of proportion to what the Bible really teaches and runs the danger of making us people victimized by emotionalism. Some would strive for balance.

Others would say they're really quite peripheral. So what I want to show you is that they're not peripheral and that they are very, very essential and that the prevalence of them in the Bible is perhaps more than people realize. Let me clarify something before I look at these texts with you.

The word emotions today, as we have learned more and more about the human brain and chemicals in the body and hormones and so on, it is very easy to become materialistic, mechanistic and naturalistic about the human emotional framework so that you go in with a brain surgery and touch a little part of the brain, feel hunger. Touch a part of the brain, feel lonely. Touch another part of the brain, feel anger.

You say, oh, well, clearly all we are is a bunch of chemicals. That's scary. If I'm just a bunch of chemicals, then let's eat, drink and be merry and sleep in on Saturday morning, for goodness sakes, instead of doing this sort of thing.

Here's what the Bible would say to that. There are many, read C.S. Lewis' essay called Transposition and read something profound about that. But the Bible teaches that God has the whole array of affections and has no body or brain.

And it teaches that when I die, I go to be with Jesus. And that is far better, better to be at home with the Lord, apart from the body, at home with the Lord. So that relationship that I will enjoy with Jesus while my body is rotting in the grave, with this gray matter rotting in the grave, was sad.

The Bible maintains that there is a person called John Piper, you, whose personhood is transcendent to your brain. And in this life, there is, and this is what Lewis wrestles with and the whole mind-body problem wrestles with, there is, by God's inscrutable ordinance and design, an overlap and an interlay of that supraphysical personhood with the physical personhood, so that yes, when I don't get enough sleep, I do have certain bad emotions. And yes, when a certain gland is not functioning right, a thyroid gland, say, or a woman after a hysterectomy, until they get it all worked out, things are just haywire at the emotional level.

That doesn't say she's not more than hormones. What it says is that God has ordained in this world, from conception to the resurrection of the body, or the abandonment of the body temporarily in heaven until we get it back, He's ordained that there be an interplay that we just have to live with, we have to reckon with it. But do not give in to the argument that because there's this interplay of brain and affection, hormone and affection, sleep and rest and diet and exercise and happiness, that all you are is a bag of chemicals and hormones and electrical impulses jumping around between these little synapses.

Don't give in to that. It doesn't follow. It leaves out of account much reality.

Okay, so please, when you hear emotions and affections here, understand that I mean those things not just that make you have sweaty palms or shake or get an upset stomach, butterflies, but those things which you will also have in heaven or hell when there's no body. Now, what we want to do is illustrate that affections are essential to Christian living, not peripheral. Let's list a whole bunch of them with text.

You're not supposed to covet. Covet is an affection. You shall not covet.

That is, don't have inordinate desires for things which desire belongs to God alone. Contentment. Make sure that your character is free from the love of money.

Be content. Be content with what you have. That's a commandment.

You are commanded to feel contentment, fervent brotherly love from the heart, not just willpower love that enables you against all your desires, almost to stop your car and help somebody on the highway, but rather fervent from the heart. Since you have, in obedience to the truth, purified your souls for a sincere

love of the brethren, first Peter 1.22, fervently love one another from the heart. There's a lot of people who try to argue that love is not an affection, has no affectional component.

It's just an act of the will. I remember in college reading the book Situation Ethics by Joseph Fletcher, in which he argued that love cannot be a feeling or have a strong feeling component in its essence because it's commanded. And you can't command the emotions because you can't turn the emotions on and off like a water spigot.

So the only things that can be commanded are things you have immediate power to control with your will, and therefore love can't be an emotion because it's commanded. That's a stupid argument, or at least it's an unbiblical argument. I remember in 1967 in Millard Erickson's class, first floor, right-hand side of Blanchard Hall, hearing that argument and intuiting there's something wrong with that argument.

I wasn't a Calvinist in 1967. I just intuited there's something wrong with that argument. And what I discovered is what I'm showing you here.

Emotions are commanded everywhere in the Bible. And all kinds of emotions are commanded. Therefore, to argue that love can't be an emotion because it's commanded has a premise that's wrong.

Namely, you can't command the emotions. That's a wrong premise. And if you start with wrong premises, you draw wrong conclusions.

And so I'm trying to blast that premise out of the water with these texts. You see, behind that really is what I would call an Arminian notion that says God can only ask of you what you can perform on your own. He can only demand of you what you, in your fallenness, can do without His irresistible help.

Now, if you believe that, then you have to believe what Joseph Fletcher said. Philosophically, you're driven to it. Because God does demand love.

So you have to believe it's in my control. I have to be capable of producing love. But, the fact is, all these emotions, covetousness, contentment, fervent brotherly love from the heart, hope, these emotions are commanded and you can't turn them on and off like a spigot.

We'll illustrate that as we go. Hope. Why are you in despair, O my soul, and why are you downcast, disturbed within me? Hope in God.

It's a command. Feel hope. Fear.

I will warn you whom to fear. Fear the one who, after he is killed, has authority to cast into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear Him.

You're commanded to fear. If you don't fear right now, God says fear. Or, Romans 11, 20, quite right.

They were broken off because of their unbelief, unbelieving Jews. But you stand fast by your faith. Do not be conceited.

So don't have feelings of conceit, but fear. We're commanded. You're commanded to have peace.

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. You're commanded to have zeal and fervency. Romans 12, 11.

Do not lag behind in diligence. Be fervent in spirit. Be fervent in spirit, serving the Lord.

Zeal or fervency is commanded. In other words, if you're lukewarm, you're commanded not to be lukewarm. Sorrow is commanded.

Romans 12, 15. Rejoice with those who rejoice. Weep with those who weep.

Of course, joy is commanded. Or James 4, 9. Be miserable. Mourn.

Weep. Let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy to gloom. We're commanded, if we're sinning, to be miserable.

Be miserable. You should look into a sinner's face and say, Be miserable. And they're obliged to obey.

Whether they can do it or not. We are commanded to desire, like newborn babies long for. Desire the milk of the Word, so that by it you may grow.

So if you don't have any desire for the Bible this morning, you're commanded to have desire. Get desire. And if you say, How? I can't.

That's what number seven is about. Tender heartedness. We're commanded, be kind to one another.

Tender hearted. If you're a hard hearted person, not a tender hearted person, you're commanded to be tender hearted. These are emotions and they are not peripheral.

Gratitude. Speak to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs. Singing, making melody in your heart to the Lord.

Always, always giving thanks for all things in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father. We're commanded to be grateful. Now that's not a command to say the words, thank you.

You can say to a little child when he gets a present from his friend or his uncle or aunt or grandmother, that he doesn't like, say, black socks or underwear or something on Christmas morning. You can command that child to look up to his grandma's face and say, Say thank you, Ben. Say thank you.

Thank you, Grandma. You can command that. But you can't create gratitude in his heart.

And yet he's commanded to have it toward God. Lowliness is commanded. Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with lowliness, regard one another with lowliness.

If you don't feel lowly and broken and contrite in spirit, you're commanded to. So the problems after this long list of commanded feelings, emotions, affections, is can we govern them? And to what do you do if they're not there? What do you do now? I don't want to answer those completely right now. I think that you cannot govern them immediately with your own innate fallen powers.

But you can look to God in various ways for him to create what he commands. Augustine saw these things very clearly. St. Augustine, which is why he said with regard to the command for continence and not lusting sexually.

He said, command what thou wilt and grant what thou commandest. And that's where we are shut up. Now we're at number six.

That argument was that the objection raised against Christian hedonism to the effect that it elevates emotions or affections or feelings out of proportion to the Bible, I don't believe is true in view of all those passages we just looked at, which show that emotions, affections, feelings are commanded and they are commanded throughout the whole Bible and they are not optional. You see, this is why we need to stress the reality of the new birth and not just decisions in becoming Christians. Decisionism that simply goes around trying to get people to pray prayers, sign cards, walk aisles and call them saved, is filling our churches with unborn again people who don't have any of these emotions.

And then we wonder why the worship is dead because we haven't evangelized the way we ought and people have not been born of God. They've just been recruited to the services. This is very, very important that we recognize our own dependence upon the power of God to change people and that we seek the mighty outpouring of the Holy Spirit to regenerate people, to change them.

So that brings us now to conversion. The meaning of conversion is the awakening of delight in the glory of God. So there are a few texts I want you to see and they begin with the promises of the new covenant.

In the Old Testament, it was required that we trust God, love God, delight in God. These commands are all over the Old Testament. But it was also true that the Holy Spirit was not given in the same measure and extent that it was poured out at Pentecost.

And the Old Testament therefore looks for the day of a new covenant. Not like the old covenant which you disobeyed, Jeremiah says, but the new covenant. Now what will mark this new covenant and who sealed the new covenant? Jesus.

This cup is the new covenant in my blood. So when Jesus shed his blood, he was purchasing the benefits of the new covenant. He was establishing the new covenant.

He was sealing the new covenant with his blood. So what is the new covenant? We are a new covenant people, we Christians. We relate to God not merely in terms of an old covenant but a new covenant.

What is it? What's new? And I've got three or four passages to highlight what it is. Deuteronomy 30, 6. Moreover, the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants to love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, so that you may live. In other words, Moses looked at these recalcitrant people of Israel whose hearts were uncircumcised and were rebellious over and over again.

And he said, someday, someday God is going to assemble a people for himself, Jew and Gentile, and he is going to do this. Circumcise their heart. What does that mean? It means so work upon their heart that they will love the Lord their God with all their heart.

God's going to do that. That's the new covenant. What was purchased for me at the cross was a work of God to make me love him.

In the old covenant, God largely left the Jews to themselves. And the effect of that for many of them was simply to become legalists as they tried on their own to merit his favor by keeping the law. Here's the way Jeremiah puts it in 32:40.

I will make an everlasting covenant with them that I will not turn away from them to do good. And I will put the fear of me in their hearts so that they will not turn away from me. So when Jesus died and shed the

blood of the covenant for me, he was purchasing perseverance for me.

He was purchasing this promise fulfilled in my life. I, the Lord, will put the fear of God in John Piper's heart. And I will so work in him that he will not turn away from me.

So when I woke up this morning, about 645, and there came out of my lips, Hallowed be your name, that was God preserving me for another day. And I lie there thinking, I could wake up swearing. Why not? I'm capable of swearing at God, renouncing God, forsaking God.

I can do that. Unless the new covenant, they will not turn away from me, has been purchased by an infinite price, such that God would dishonor the blood of his son by not keeping his own. Here's the way Ezekiel puts it.

Ezekiel 11, 19 to 20. I will give him one heart and put a new spirit within them. And I will take out the heart of stone.

Now we're getting close to conversion. This is conversion. Got a loved one? Surely everybody in this room must have a loved one that you want saved.

How do you pray? Pray these texts. Pray these texts. Pray, oh God, circumcise her heart, that she may love you.

Oh God, put the fear of you in her heart. Oh God, take out the heart of stone. If you want to know how to pray, pray new covenant promises, that they would become beneficiaries of these things.

So I will take out the heart of stone out of their flesh, and I will give them a heart of flesh that is a heart that is touchable and sensitive. And if you prick it, it bleeds. It's just alive to being touched.

Not like a dead stone that you love and preach to and nothing. I tell you, I got such an encouraging email yesterday. I'm dealing with probably about five marriages that are in the process of one stage or the other of dissolution.

And I just cry out to the Lord day after day. Oh God, soften these hard hearts who just resolutely disobey and know they're disobeying. And I got an email from one man who said, I got a phone call from my wife, she's not living with him, and she was weeping.

And she said, I'm so sorry for the pain I've been causing you and the children. And maybe, maybe, maybe we could work on it. When I read that, I just went, yes! Work, work, work! Oh my God! Because there's no hope if God doesn't do it.

You all know people that are hard as nails. They can be as soft on the exterior and inside. I am doing what I want to do.

There's no touching it unless God Almighty takes out the heart of stone, puts in the heart of flesh, that they may walk in my statutes and keep my ordinances and do them. Then they'll be my people and I'll be their God. Now the point I'm getting at here is to be a new covenant person, that is to be a believer, that is to be a Christian, to relate through the mediator of a new covenant to God.

This has to happen. This is not the signing of a card. This is not the walking of an aisle.

This is not the praying of a prayer. This is a supernatural, miraculous, transcendent event by which the core being of a person's life is exchanged. I want you to see this passage from John 3, getting closer to conversion now.

John 3, 19 to 20. This is the judgment that light has come into the world and men loved darkness rather than light. This is the main problem in the world.

Men love darkness. It's not a problem primarily with thinking. It's primarily a problem of loving.

People love the darkness rather than the light. It's a love issue. It's a passion issue.

It's an addiction issue at the spiritual level. Four, their deeds are evil. If you stay in the darkness, then you can keep persuading yourself that these pleasures that you live for are not so bad after all.

And they may not be so bad after all. It might just be a couple hours every night in front of the computer, wasted, while the wife is upstairs crying her eyes out because she never has any intimate conversation with her husband. And he's not even doing pornography.

Maybe, but he's not necessarily. He's just down there, vegging in front of the computer. And she's up there reading some romantic novel, trying to feel what she thinks she ought to feel.

And so the gospel comes to him, and he doesn't compute all this. He doesn't articulate all this. He just doesn't want that thing in his life.

He loves darkness. Why? Because then he can just keep doing what he's doing without having to make any changes, without having to revolutionize his heart. Everyone who does evil hates the light and does not come to the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed.

So what has to happen in conversion is a change of love. You've got to stop loving the darkness and start loving the light. Here's the way Paul describes it.

The God of this world has blinded the minds of unbelievers so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. We'll look at verse 6, parallel to that. God who said, light shall shine out of darkness.

That's the day of creation where light is brought forth. He is the one who has shown in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. Now notice the parallels here.

The light and the light parallel. Light of the gospel parallels light of knowledge. Gospel of the glory of Christ parallels knowledge of the glory of God.

And in the face of Christ, and who is the image of God, parallel. So two times he describes for us the event that has to happen in conversion. So what has to happen in conversion? The gospel has to be preached, first of all, or shared over a lunch table at work, or through a tract, or on TV, or somehow the truth of the gospel has to be laid before somebody to look at.

Then, God who said, let light shine out of darkness, has to do a similar thing, a similar creative act as let light shine out of darkness. He has to shine, he has to shine in the heart to give light. So we get different images here.

We were talking about a hard heart, and stone has to come out, and the fleshy heart has to go in so it's sensitive. Now here we're talking about a dark heart and light. Light has to shine in the heart, and it's light that has knowledge.

And that knowledge doesn't come out of nowhere. God does not save people apart from the gospel. Knowledge has to be inserted through ear, or eye, or fingers if you're reading braille.

It has to be inserted into the mind. But now what? Okay, you've got knowledge now. Christ died for sinners.

All who believe in Him will be saved. He holds out eternal life and hope. He is infinitely glorious and valuable and beautiful.

He'd satisfy your heart. Come to Him. What has to happen? There has to be glory seen.

Gospel of the glory of Christ, or knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. And when glory is not seen, there's no conversion. There has to be an enlightenment of the heart to see glory.

That is to see beauty, to see desirability, to see reward. Now let me pause there and see if you want to ask a question about anything in these last few minutes that I've said, or any of these texts. The point here being, this last point, that conversion, full, deep, authentic conversion from being a dead, lost, perishing sinner to being a living, found, heaven-bound saint involves the awakening, the quickening, the coming to life of a heart that has affections for God and His glory.

It's not just a decision. It's a new life imparted by God. Go ahead.

The question is, does that come further after a decision is made, or does it happen right at the time? And what I would say is that there is definite progress in the Christian life, but the new birth is an immediate life-giving work of the Holy Spirit, so that at least the seeds of new affections are there. So if you were to ask me, how much do you need to see at the beginning of a baby's conception? I would say probably not much. Probably not much.

But what you say, it's what you say to a convert. What do you say to them? Do you say, now feelings really don't matter here. What matters is, you've prayed, and you've decided, and so you are God's, and don't let anybody call your assurance into question.

Or, do you say, you have drawn near to God, you have cast yourself on Him for mercy, you have cried out to Him and laid hold on the promise that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved, you have put your faith in Him, and you have done that because He's been drawing you and working in you, so that you now have warrant to believe that He's in you, and you are His. Now, confirm your calling and election, like 2 Peter says you should, by growing in Him in your life of joy and your life of obedience. You put it on the agenda.

You make it plain to them that what happens in their heart matters. I was reading a letter this week from a man that I've talked to on the phone, and I didn't know his conversion story, and he told me it in the letter. He said, I grew up in an utterly pagan home, never read the Bible, got onto drugs, was into the bar scene, became a bouncer because I was a bodybuilder, and it started to happen that at the gym where I worked out, there were these Christians who worked out with me, and they'd be talking about Christ and how great it was to know Him and who He was and what He was like.

And they would tell me, and I would hear. And my first thoughts in those first weeks was how ridiculous and boring this was. And then he said, one night he was listening, and suddenly he was listening differently.

And as he got in the car, he found himself trembling. And as he was driving home, he said, suddenly I said to myself, that's true, I believe that. And suddenly he shouted out, I'm a Christian.

And he experienced the most remarkable revolutionizing of affections and emotions that one could imagine. And now today, he's preparing for the ministry and has all kinds of questions. Yes, speak to the issue, Justin says, about the varied expressions of emotions for people who have different personalities and different cultures, and sometimes age enters in.

And I think we have to be realistic about that and say that, first of all, all of us are emotional cripples. And we are cripples partly genetically and partly because of dysfunctional families and partly because of our own sin and partly because of demonic deception. And I'm sure there are many other factors that play in.

So we're cripples, meaning that we are not able to express what we ought to express. And when we do express them, sometimes our expressions are wacko, all out of proportion to the thing we're expressing emotion about, or at a time when they shouldn't be expressed or in a way. It's like the Proverbs that say, you know, he who sings to a grieving heart is like dripping of an eye or something like that.

You know, there's a time to sing and there's a time to cry. There's a time to embrace and there's a time to refrain from embracing. There's a time to weep and there's a time to dance.

So when I talk about emotions, I'm not mainly talking about expressions. So I want to give the benefit of the doubt to as many people as I can who say they have the right affections. However, when I read the Bible and I read the Psalms and the varied ways in which emotions are to get out, with shouting and groaning and weeping and leaping and dancing and singing, I'm inclined to think for many of us, we should be moving along the continuum towards a fuller array of expression of emotion than saying this is just the way I am.

Don't pressure me to do anything demonstrative here. That's just the way I am. I doubt that people should talk that way.

That's just the way I am. Well, it is the way you are. And so do you just stay there or do you pray and move towards fuller orb of expression? There are happy, bouncy people who need to learn the profundities of emotion in reverence and awe.

And there are the reverence and awe people who think there's no place for lively shouting and clapping. And both of those people are wrong and need to learn from the other. Well, there's lots more that could be said on that, Justin, but I worked through this text with you last night, Philippians 1, 19 to 23, praising God is in essence prizing God.

In other words, if you want to worship as you ought to worship, there must be a prizing of God, not just a verbal statement of God's greatness. There is such a thing as hypocrisy. See, it's not sufficient to say, come to church on Sunday morning or get alone in your closet and say the right words.

Say, I praise you, God, you are great and greatly to be praised. Saying words while your heart is far from him is called hypocrisy in the Bible. And so genuine worship is not hypocritical worship.

It is authentic worship and authentic means that beneath the praising is the prizing. He is gained to live as Christ and to die is gained. And in chapter three, verse seven, he's gained while we live as well as when we die.

So we must prize God. So on Sunday morning, for example, when we do corporate worship, the issue is a supernatural spiritual one, not just a functional human one. And the great danger today, and it's always been a danger, is that we have strategies for whipping up natural affections that have no spiritual connection with God.

They only connect with the rhythm or with the organ or with the atmosphere of the room or with the articulate, logical flow of a sermon or something totally natural, and there's no spiritual reality in it. That's the danger that every church is facing today because every church wants life. You know, you can go to a charismatic church and they'll whip it up one way.

You go to a liturgical church and they'll try to make it feel deep another way. Everybody wants there to be vitality and life, and you can do it without God. If you have the right kind of music and the right kind of dress and the right kind of flow and the right kind of lighting and the right kind of art and the right kind of greeters at the door, you can do it.

You can make it happen with no God. And so we have all those things. This is a nice building.

Those are nice lights. This is a pretty good atmosphere for preaching on Sunday morning. Those are nice banners, and I do my best in preaching, and Chuck does his best with music.

And so where's God? And the answer is you seek him. That's why we pray at 8.15 downstairs. I wish we had 100 people praying at 8.15, crying out to God to show up here on Sunday morning and show up in power and be on the music and on the greeters and in the art and in the lighting and in the sermon and in the praying.

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