

The Fading of the Flesh and the Flourishing of the Faith Outline

Various Scripture

I. A theology of pleasure.

A. *“God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him”* -- J. Piper

1. Christian hedonism—*“Our problem is not that we desire pleasure, but that we don't desire it enough”*
2. The human race is desperate for pleasure and knows not how to get it.
3. When God is our greatest pleasure, when we truly delight in Him, in God we are truly satisfied.

“In Thy presence is fullness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures forever more” Psalm 16:11

- a. St. Augustine—400ad
- b. George Swinnock—1650's
- c. William Perkins—late 1500's
-- Theology—*“the science of living blessedly forever.”*

II. The dynamic.

A. God has designed us *for His pleasure*. *Our pleasure* is found in Him.

1. This dynamic repulses modern unregenerate man.
 - a. It presents a “selfish God
 - b. If God exalts himself, he draws attention to the one person who can us happy forever, Himself.

III. What stands in our way of finding absolute pleasure in God?

A. Psalm 73—A Psalm of Asaph: *“The nearness of God is my good.”*

1. Psalm 73:1-14-- *“The trials of godly man—the grievous conflict between the Spirit and the flesh”*.
2. Psalm 73:15-28-- *“The godly man's triumph: the glorious conquest of the Spirit over the flesh.”*

3. The root of Asaph's conflict is envy (Verse 3).
 - a. The wonderful life of the wicked.
 - b. Because of Asaph's flesh, he is wavering, his faith is being challenged, his sin has extinguished his joy, his pleasure, his satisfaction in life.
- B. The cure.
1. Asaph has bad "eyesight", for his life really was not as bad as he saw it and their life was not as good as he saw it.
 2. The first thing he does is (17) **enter the sanctuary of God**—gets close to God.
 - a. Place his attention on God.
 - b. His heart was redirected off the flesh and on to Him.
 - c. He heard the word of God.
 3. "Slippery places..."
 - a. God places in front of us temptations (slippery slopes) as a test. When you fail, you are on a slippery slope and God seems distant.
 - b. On the slippery slopes you become like an "animal" (verse 22).
 1. No conscience
 2. No concept of good or bad, evil or good.
 3. No concept of eternity
 4. They just search all day for what will satisfy their flesh.
- C. The secret.

“The nearness of God is my is my good”

Psalm 73:28

- D. *“The Fading of the Flesh and the Flourishing of Faith...”*

IV. The connection with our new series on 1st Corinthians.

- A. 1st Corinthians has more situations and issues regarding the flesh than any other book in the New Testament.
- B. We need to keep at the forefront of our minds as we go through this book, that for a truly "pleasurable" life, we need to be victorious over the flesh and get nearer to God.

The Fading of the Flesh and the Flourishing of the Faith Pastoral Notes

Various Scripture

This morning we will begin new series on a very special book in the New Testament... Going back to a verse by verse exposition which is where I like to live... this most likely... Lord willing take us through all of next year.

As I was driving my eighteen hours down to California a couple weeks ago I passed the time as I always do listening to various podcasts and sermons from other pastors... I was listening to Al Mohler, president of Southern Seminary begin his series on Genesis which was to be sure a few years in the execution.

He told about John MacArthur of Grace Community Church in Los Angeles who has been preaching through the Bible... specifically the New Testament for over fifty years... verse by verse! Can you imagine that?... He began preaching through the New Testament in the 1960's and he finished with the New Testament around 2000....

What was interesting was that the people of Grace Community marked their major life milestones by which book MacArthur was preaching at the time.... *"I was born during the 1st Corinthians series... eleven years later I was baptized during the John series... got married during the Revelation series.... And five years later had our first baby during the ...Revelation series"*.

I have nowhere the collection of sermons MacArthur has... I've only been doing this nearly 20 years... it may feel longer than that to some of you... the point is... what we call progressive expository preaching takes time... a lot of time... going through a book of the Bible verse by verse.... But it is so rich.... This morning will be introduction.... actually it will be an introduction to the introduction which will be next week... Lord willing.

In choosing the next book of the Bible to go through...

With so much negativity in the world today... I wanted to do something optimistic... go through a book that will yield hope and fullness in life.... regardless of what is going on around us... there are no books in the Bible that give us platitudes... no frilly words to make us feel good about ourselves...

Rather God's word is a constant penetration into our hearts... not to be mean... but attacking just what is standing in our way of having blessed lives... finding true happiness, satisfaction... even pleasure.

I want to begin with how and why I chose this particular book... actually I would like to present to **you a theology of pleasure** regardless of circumstances... as a basis for this book... the book

itself attacks what gets in our way... and as we go week by week, verse by verse... I would like us to keep this “theology” at the forefront of our minds.

It is not the book I intended to do... on my short sabbatical I took study materials for 1st and 2nd Timothy... Titus... all the John’s... and Genesis... I really would like to someday do Genesis... if I have enough time in my life!

But this particular book kept coming at me... I read it over and over again and decided this is a vital and relevant book for us today....so here’s the basis I would like us to place this book in... I’m going to spend some time on this...in fact we may not even open the book this morning.... Before I’m done I will tell you which book it is however!... but these are the words I’d like to present to you this morning:

Let’s pray

These words were on a banner on the entrance wall to a church I visited last Sunday... They are not new to me... If you’ve been A Christian for any length of time you may have run across this statement... first said about twenty years ago by John Piper... it has become a motivational force for many Christians over those years... for good reason.

They are simply this “*God is most glorified in us when we are **most satisfied in Him***”... I looked up some of Piper’s explanations for these words... they originated in a book of his called “*Desiring God: Meditations of a **Christian Hedonist***” 2003.... I dusted the book off my shelf and revisited it.

“*Christian Hedonism*” sounds like an oxymoron... Hedonism by definition in philosophy is that ***pleasure is the highest good and proper aim in human life***... the purpose of life is to seek pleasure... by itself it is contradictory to Christianity... but add Christianity to that it means something way more nuanced...

We all would be less than honest to say we don’t care about pleasure... every one of us want life to be pleasurable... somehow we have equated the idea of seeking pleasure as opposed to Christian beliefs... that the Christian life is austere... strict... serious... nearly oppressive.... A life of behaving and keeping the laws of God.... “*don’t smile*”...

As I reviewed that book again after twenty years... something that Piper wrote struck me... *Our problem is not that we desire pleasure, but that we don’t desire it enough*... that may sound strange for a preacher to say.... I look around the world... especially the world I just returned from and it seemed to me that everyone was seeking, desiring and obtaining much pleasure.... Especially over Labor Day!

The truth is... that God DESIRES for us to have ultimate pleasure in life...and by the way... I'm not trying to change our vocabulary or the meaning of the word pleasure... GOD TRULY WANTS US TO HAVE GREAT *PLEASURE* IN LIFE!

Our problem...in our humanity... we seek pleasure in all the wrong places and in the wrong manner...and we have a wrong definition...{*Ah, I knew it, he's going to change the definition of pleasure!*}...we seek pleasure for all the wrong reasons resulting in errant outcomes... ***The human race is desperate for pleasure and knows not how to get it.***... at least get true, lasting, amazing, ultimate pleasure...and I do mean pleasure!...true pleasing pleasure.... It's not that there is worldly pleasure that is satisfying and then there is austere Christian pleasure that isn't really pleasurable!.... NO!...Christian pleasure

Pleasure that doesn't dissipate the moment you step off the beach and return to your job on Monday mornings.... *God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him*...in other words... when God is our greatest pleasure... when we truly delight in Him... in God we are truly satisfied... we find the greatest pleasure.

As that becomes a reality in our lives... **God is most glorified!**...see the dynamic?...the Psalmist wrote in Psalm 16:11 **"In Thy presence is fullness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures forever more"**

It's the picture of being positionally close to God... the closer we are to Him...the greater joy....sheer pleasure.

Let's get high church here quoting from Augustine who wrote in his "*Confessions*" written some 1800 years ago... Augustine put his finger on it...I'll comment as I go to get us through it:

How sweet did it suddenly become to be without delights of trifles! "When I finally let go of stuff!... when I saw through the façade of the world and its trinkets that I thought were so valuable..."

And what at one time I feared to lose, it was now a joy to me to put away...

The things I thought to be so valuable... so necessary for happiness and pleasure... things I worked so hard for all my life... when I finally saw their true value... and put them away...got rid of them... only *then* did I begin to experience true joy and pleasure....how did he get to that point... how did he do it?... HE DIDN'T!

For Thou didst cast them away from me...apparently Augustine didn't do it on his own... he didn't just reason it all out... God took them away from him... when you are going through tough times... when you begin to lose your possessions... when it appears that your life is falling apart... it most likely is God casting away the things that have gotten in the way of *His glory and your true pleasure!*...listen to what he says:

*Thou true and highest sweetness. Thou didst cast them away, ...Now if God walked away right then...He just took away everything and disappeared that would be a bit harsh!...that's not what He did... and instead of them, **didst enter into Thyself**—sweeter than all pleasure, though not to flesh and blood; brighter than all light, but more veiled than all the mysteries: more exalted than all honor, but not to the exalted in their own conceits.*

In other words... I shifted my search for joy, happiness and ultimate pleasure from things of this world...things that die...dissipate... **that moth and rust destroy**.... And found true and highest sweetness... satisfaction.... In God Himself..... some have termed this as finding “**sovereign joy**”.... Joy that is found ONLY in God.

[George Swinnock—puritan pastor/theologian...Back in the mid 1600's preached at his cousin's husbands funeral... Caleb... His cousin, Jane, was distraught at the loss of her husband.... Swinnock says to her “*God is teaching you two lessons... first, that your affections be taken off from earthly possessions... second, that you choose the good part that shall never be taken from you*”.... He then compares our earthly the objects of our earthly affections as small candles...

And what he is saying is not that you shouldn't be sad at the loss of your husband.... Or that having affections for him is now wrong... but that he is one of the candles burning in your life... there are perhaps many candles burning in your life... your children... your family... your house... your job...

If **all** your affections are on any of your candles...if you haven't placed your greatest affection on God... when those candles get snuffed out... taken from you... you have nothing left!...so “God puts out our candles”.... Takes away what is dear to us, “that we may look up to the sun”.... the greater light.]

Another old book by the puritan William Perkins...(actually I read three puritan books while I was gone so don't be surprised if I “puritanize” you!) he defined theology as “**the science of living blessedly forever**”... we don't think like that enough!...in fact... we associate theology probably with arguing...should we baptize babies or believers...election and predestination...but theology is the knowledge of God.... listen to some of his words:

God enjoyed is man's happiness

*Man's happiness stands in his likeness to God, and his fruition of God. ...What we see is that there is this dynamic... it is in God's design for mankind... God designed each one of us for **His** pleasure... and what gives Him pleasure is that we find our pleasure in Him!*

Interesting but this strain of thinking repulses the world today... the idea of such a “selfish” God who created the world for His pleasure...such a selfish God... and that the only way we will find true pleasure is through Him...he designed us that way?... how self-centered!

I found the following in an article on this subject...it sought to answer the question *Why did God create the world? The biblical answer.... God created this world for the praise of the glory of his grace displayed supremely in the death of Jesus. The problem is that at the heart of that answer is God's self-promotion. God created the world for his own praise — for his own glory.*

And then gave some responses to that by some very famous people:

Oprah Winfrey, Brad Pitt, the early C.S. Lewis, Eric Reece, Michael Prowse all walk away from such a God. They stumble over God's self-promotion.

Oprah walked away from orthodox Christianity when she was about 27 because of the biblical teaching that God is jealous — he demands that he and no one else gets our highest allegiance and affection. It didn't sound loving to her.

Brad Pitt turned away from his boyhood faith, he says, because God says, “You have to say that I'm the best. . . . It seemed to be about ego.”

C.S. Lewis, before he became a Christian, complained that God's demand to be praised sounded like “a vain woman who wants compliments.”

Erik Reece, the writer of An American Gospel, rejected the Jesus of the Gospels because only an egomaniac would demand that we love him more than we love our parents and children.

And Michael Prowse, the columnist for the London Financial Times, turned away because only “tyrants, puffed up with pride, crave adulation.” NOW GET THIS...

If God exalts himself, he draws attention to the one person who can make us happy forever, himself. He is not an egomaniac. He is an infinitely glorious, all-satisfying God, offering us everlasting and supreme joy by inviting us to join in Himself.

God is the ONLY being... the ONLY source of true joy and pleasure... it makes sense that He is a very jealous God... jealous when man seeks compromised, temporary pleasure in trivial sources of pleasure...

God is most glorified in you when you are most satisfied in him. God's design to pursue His own glory turns out to be love. And our duty to pursue God's glory turns out to be a quest for joy. That's the solution to the problem of God's self-exaltation.

I like the response the author of this article answers these people:

No, Oprah, if God were not jealous for all your affections, he would be indifferent to your final misery.

No, Brad Pitt, if God didn't demand that you see him as the best, he wouldn't care about your supreme happiness.

No, Mr. Lewis, God is not vain in demanding your praise. This is his highest virtue, and your highest joy.

No, Erik Reece, if Jesus didn't lay claim on greater love than your children do, he would be selling your heart to what cannot satisfy forever.

No, Michael Prowse, God does not crave your adulation, he offers it as your greatest pleasure.

So what stands in our way?....for that group it was surely pride... the audacity of God desiring and taking a supreme position over them!

But what stands in our way of finding absolute pleasure in God all the while elevating Him to the highest?....why does this sound good but seems to be elusive in our reality?.... why can't I just find total pleasure in God?... we may conceive of this intellectually but in reality it doesn't happen.... What's in the way?

The Psalms are a great place to uncover our frustrations... Please turn to Psalm 73... take a few minutes to look at this Psalm of Asaph...Asaph according to 2nd Chronicles 29:30 was a prophet and in 1st Chronicles 15:19 a musician...anytime you read in the Old Testament that someone was a musician... most if not all the time that person was a Levite... musicians in the temple had to be from the tribe of Levi.... This is the time of David and Solomon...

In my Bible the heading is right on our subject... "**The Nearness of God is My Good**" ... that's so good!... that's *God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him*... Asaph presents to us our condition and the answer to it.... we can divide Psalm 73 into two parts...

Verses 1-14 we could call what George Swinnock titled 450 years ago "**The trials of godly man—the grievous conflict between the Spirit and the flesh**"...and then verses 15- 28 "**The godly man's triumph: the glorious conquest of the Spirit over the flesh.**"...

In today's terms... the Christians battle with the flesh.... And the Christians victory over the flesh...let's work our way through this Psalm:

1. Surely God is good to Israel

To those pure in heart!

Do you ever feel like this?... We don't doubt that God blesses those who are devout... those who totally put their lives on Him...follow His word perfectly.... *But I'm not like that!... I'm a*

Christian... but I keep blowing it! ... that's what Asaph is feeling...and by the way...ALL Christians should feel that way

**2. But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled,
My steps had almost slipped.**

Then we find out his problem... **the root of Asaph's conflict is "envy"...**

3. For I was envious of the boastful (arrogant, foolish)I saw the peace of the wicked.

He's troubled because he looks around and sees the prosperity of the wicked... everyone around him is doing better than he is... and they are the opposite of godly...but they have nice houses... nice clothes... nice cars.... They all have Teslas... they plug them in at night... run their coal burning generators to charge them--- *I'm still decompressing from California!*

one compared them to a weed infested corn field....

Their prosperity is like weeds that infest the ground, are watered plentifully, and grow exceedingly, while good corn is thin and lean.... It is like the lion and the raven, unclean creatures that are spared, while the innocent lamb and dove are sacrificed.

This is the message we saw in Habakkuk right?... a message we find in Jeremiah 12

**12 Righteous are You, O Lord,
when I plead my case with You.
Yet I speak with You about justice.**

Why does the way of the wicked prosper?

Why do all the treacherous thrive?

2 You planted them, so they have taken root.

They are growing, bearing fruit.

You are near in their mouth,

yet far from their mind.

Same as Asaph...but Asaph is wavering.... Because of his flesh....his flesh is pushing out his faith....It is creating much distance between God and himself.

4 For there are no pains in their death, and their body is fat (they seem to go through life in good health.....no pain...they're not going hungry, in fact they're getting the best foods!...they get all their groceries from Whole Foods...) **5 They're not in trouble as other men** they're life is easy!

and they are not stricken along with the rest of mankind. Therefore lofty pride is their necklace. The garment of violence covers them.

7 Their eye bulges from fatness They look out of fatness... they're not going without anything.... They are fat. **The delusion of their hearts over flow.**

8 They scoff and wickedly speak of oppression: they speak from on high... 9 They have set their mouths against the heavens. And their tongues go through the earth. Life is good for them!... life is PLEASURABLE... and they have nothing good to say about God... they blaspheme Him... what they say... their tongues... their insolent speech... is heard throughout all the world....in fact that's the message the world hears.

12 Behold these are the wicked and always at ease, they have increased with wealth. 13 Surely in vain I have kept my heart pure... and washed my hands in innocence... for I have been stricken all day long and reprov'd every morning.

So... Asaph's problem... his lack of joy... his lack of having any pleasure in life is all because of his fleshly sin... He's tried to live the good Christian life... much of it I think was out of duty... and yet... everyone else,... the wicked.... **THEY'RE THE ONES LIVING PLEASURABLE LIVES!**...

One who's sin is envy is always comparing their lives to others... This is where social media has been an accomplice... *"how come that family looks so happy and ours doesn't even talk to each other.... Look at all the amazing vacations they go on...it's a big event when I get to go to Lewiston, to Home Depot!"*

SO he is steeped in envy...to paraphrase Mathew 20:15 **An envious eye is an evil eye...**now here is a believer in God... who is tempted to hang it all up and pursue the delights of this world.

So...what the cure?

First of all... Asaph has bad eyesight... for his life really was not as bad as he saw it... and their life was not as good as he saw it... that's what happens when you focus on the flesh....the flesh is a liar!

When we get to verse 15... we see Asaph come to his senses... he gets his vision back!...

Read verses 15-16

"If I had given up my faith in God... If I had given up my life in Him... not only would I have betrayed Him... I would have betrayed even the fellow people of God..." **Your children**....what made him see this?..... what gave him back his eyesight?

Read verse 17

What began his seeing the truth?.... He went to church!... that's what Clovis Chappell a preacher from the last century said:

What then did the Psalmist do? The answer will seem perfectly childish...he went to church!...just what others got out of the service we are not told. But the Psalmist came into

possession of certain gripping conviction that steadied him and enabled him to walk in the after days with firmness and assurance.

Asaph... in his frustration and mental misery....caused by sin... walked into the worship center... in effect... he made a move to get closer to God.... he began to:

1. Place his attention on God.
2. His heart was redirected off the flesh and on to Him.
3. He heard the word of God

When I came into the sanctuary... when I moved close to God... my eyes were opened and all the fleshly visions I saw of the pleasures of the wicked... became clear to me.... the important thing to see is what got in the way of his truly satisfying and pleasurable life was his own flesh.

Read verse 18

Notice God does this?....The way I picture it is that God places in front of us temptations... He places objects of this world that are “slippery places”... and if we are enticed by them we go onto literally slippery slopes...ever been on a slippery slope?

Spurgeon said this:

“Surely You set them on a slippery places. The vanities you enjoy make your place slippery, for they are all like ice which shall melt before the sun. You have no foot-hold, sinner, you have no sure hope, no confidence. It’s a melting thing you trust to.”

Read verses 19-21

“When my eyes focused on the flesh.... The slippery slopes... You became distant!...and it wasn’t God who moved.

Read verse 22

What’s an animal like?...

1. No conscience
2. No concept of good or bad, evil or good.
3. No concept of eternity
4. They just search all day for what will satisfy their flesh.

Read verses 23-24

Asaph come’s to the place that is essential for us to see and hopefully embrace ourselves... when we can finally get to the place in our lives when we can see that there is nothing in this world that satisfies,... nothing in this world brings true pleasure.... Asaph reveals this through a question:

25 Whom have I in heaven but You? And besides You, I desire nothing on earth.

“People all around me abound in sensual pleasures, but I have something infinitely better... Swinnock says They have streams which will run pleasantly for a season, but will soon dry up. On the other hand I have a fountain which runs over and runs forever!

They like grasshoppers, skipping up and down the earth, have their songs... Nevertheless, what tune may I sing?... I am mounting up to heaven to enjoy God...who is unspeakably more desirable than anything in is in either heaven or earth.!

Read verses 26-27

Now here is the secret... highlight it...underline it... brackets around it... exclamation points beside it...

Read verse 28

The nearness of God is my is my good.....it is a positional issue in our lives... as we pursue the flesh we move away from God... as we go nearer to God we move away from the flesh... the closer we get to God, the higher we place Him in our lives...the more we glorify Him.... the statement *God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him* becomes our reality.

So... what does this have to do with the book we will be going verse by verse through?... well, I should tell you which book...it is the book is *1st Californians!* Actually, that is what we called it in seminary some 40 years ago...in California.... and I can get away with this because as you know I am a native California.

1st Corinthians takes place in a region of the world that in so many ways can be compared to California... even the climate is similar... Corinth was a thriving commercial and trade center of the world... At that time it was a major seaport in the Mediterranean...

It was a very affluent and influential city to the rest of the world... high fashion... exotic foods... much wealth... and it was full of the flesh...hedonistic.... next week we will look at some more details about Corinth....

The apostle Paul wrote 1st Corinthians to the *Christians* in Corinth... he called them “Saints” in chapter one... these are people like you and me if you are in Christ..... sanctified... deemed as righteous in the sight of the Lord... **SAVED!**

They were like Asaph in the first part...and Paul addresses them as “infants”.... Babes in Christ... Why?... they were indulging in the flesh.... Rampantly indulging in the flesh.... As Paul comments in chapter three **You are still fleshly**...remember what that is?... God is not near!

1st Corinthians 3:3 You are still fleshly, for there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, are you not walking like mere men?

1st Corinthians I am sure has more situations and issues regarding the flesh than any other book in the New Testament..... maybe the Bible.... So two things are not being realized... they are not near to God, glorifying God.... and because of that.... They are NOT getting true satisfaction and pleasure in life! God is not being glorified and they are not being satisfied....**they operate in their flesh!**

So, as we go through this book...as we pull apart the flesh that the apostle Paul will put in front of us...I hope that you will keep as a banner in front of you the secret that Asaph landed on....

But as for me the nearness of God is my good!.

The title of puritan George Swinnock's book is *The Fading of the Flesh and the Flourishing of Faith*...

We could put that title on our entire 1st Corinthians series as our theme... ***to fade our flesh and have our faith flourish***.... When we are victorious over our flesh...will find true **everlasting** every day, every moment....pleasure.