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SESSION 2 | The Danger of Counterfeit Joys

I. INTRODUCTION

“Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. But that is not the way you learned Christ!—assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.” (Ephesians 4:17–24)

“The fight for joy is the fight to see and believe Christ as more to be desired than the promises of sin.” John Piper

“When we accept in a deep way that we are going to die, that reality can stop us expecting too much from all the good things we pursue. We learn to pursue them for what they are in themselves rather than what we need them to be to make us happy...Instead of using these gifts as means to a greater end of securing ultimate gain in the world, we take the time to live inside the gifts themselves and see the hand of God in them.” David Gibson

II. EVERYONE WANTS TO BE HAPPY

- “God has put eternity into man’s heart...I have perceived that there is nothing better for them than to be joyful and to do good as long as they live, also that everyone should eat and drink and take pleasure in all his toil—this is God’s gift to man.” (Ecclesiastes 3:11-13)
- “Every man... desires to be happy.” Augustine, *Nicomachean Ethics*

- “The soul always wills or chooses that which it judges most agreeable, or which seems most desirable to it.” Jonathan Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*

A. Created in the Image of Happy God

- “The gospel of the glory of the blessed (happy) God” (1 Timothy 1:11)
- God “rejoices over you with gladness...exults over you with loud singing” (Zephaniah 3:17)
- “God is infinitely happy in the enjoyment of Himself.” Jonathan Edwards
- “Man’s chief end is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.” *Westminster Shorter Catechism*, Question 1.

B. Redeemed Creation is Fullness of Joy

- “In your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.” (Psalm 16:11)
- “The dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.” (Revelation 21:3–4)
- “Eden” means pleasure – that was the intention and that is going to be the restored state

C. Sin has Marred the Picture

- “So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired...” (Genesis 3:6)
- Romans 1:21–23 – Exchanged glory for images
- “The heart is a factory of idols.” John Calvin

III. THE LURE OF IDOLATRY

- We sin because we think it will make us happy – remember Edwards + Augustine
- Calvin: “In curvatus in se” – bent in on self
- “Sin is what you do when your heart is not satisfied with God.” John Piper, *When I Don't Desire God*.
 - “Covetousness, which is idolatry” (Colossians 3:5)
- “We separate, and then we elevate.” Joe Rigney, *Strangely Bright*
- “I do the very thing I hate” (Romans 7:15)
- “For my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water.” (Jeremiah 2:13)
- “We are far too easily pleased.” C.S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory*

A. The Warning of idolatry

- “There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end leads to death” (Proverbs 14:12)
- “The end of those things is death” (Romans 6:21)
- “You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself a carved image...for I the LORD your God am a jealous God” (Exodus 20:3-5)

B. Idols Make Promises

- False promises: “You’ll be in control” / “You’ll be loved” / “You’ll be secure”

- “We hold the good things of this world too tightly and lavish our affections on them too freely. We strive and strain for the same kind of gain as everyone else around us.” David Gibson, *Living Life Backward*, 36.
- “If you gorge yourself on pumpkin crunch cake, you lose the proper enjoyment of pumpkin crunch cake. Joy in God's gifts depends in part on what C.S. Lewis calls resisting the impulse of Encore, that itch to overly indulge our earthly appetites and to have things over again and again and again. The lust for Encore attempts to treat a single good as though it were the only good...Rather than allow God to give us a symphony, we insist on playing the same note over and over and over again.” Joe Rigney, *Strangely Bright*

C. Idols Break Promises

- “Sin has its sweetness, but also its sting.” Thomas Watson
- “If you don't feel strong desires for the manifestation of the glory of God, it is not because you have drunk deeply and are satisfied. It is because you have nibbled so long at the table of the world.” John Piper, *When I Don't Desire God*.
- **Illustrations:**
 - Tom Brady: “Is this all there is?” after Super Bowl win
 - Disney World meltdowns – Joy can vanish even in abundance

D. A Note on Anxiety, Discontentment and ingratitude

- “The real estate of the human heart has enough space for only one throne...Anxiety may be a symptom of worship that has gone amiss. Sometimes our hearts are anxious because we have shifted our allegiance back and forth from God to something else...The multiple gods that are competing for our hearts unavoidably produce inner turmoil.” Paul Tautges, *Anxiety: Knowing God's Peace*.
- “A little in the hand, with God's blessing, is better than much without it.” Jeremiah Burroughs, *The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment*

- “But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.” (Matthew 6:33)

IV. KEEPING GOOD THINGS IN THEIR PROPER PLACE

- “When I have learned to love God better than my earthly dearest, I shall love my earthly dearest better than I do now... When first things are put first, second things are not suppressed but increased.” C.S. Lewis, *The Four Loves*
- “Everything created by God is good” (1 Timothy 4:4)
- “Every good gift is from above” (James 1:17)

A. Called to Enjoy God’s Gifts

- “Great are the works of the Lord, studied by all who delight in them.” (Psalm 111:2)
- “The expulsive power of a new affection.” Thomas Chalmers
- The call of the gospel is not merely “stop sinning” but “come to the better banquet” (Isaiah 55:1-2)

B. Remembering the Giver

- “Forget not all His benefits” (Psalm 103:2)
- “It’s just the thin end of the wedge.” John Stott (quoted by David Gibson, *Living Life Backward*)
- “Taste and see that the Lord is good.” (Psalm 34:8)
- “You have put more joy in my heart than they have when their grain and wine abound.” (Psalm 4:7)

C. Giving Thanks

- “Give thanks in all circumstances” (1 Thessalonians 5:18)
- “The climax of God's happiness is the Delight he takes in The Echoes of his excellence in the Praises of his people” John Piper, *Desiring God*
- "We don't test our faithfulness to Psalm 4 (“You have put more joy in my heart than when their grain and wine abound”) by throwing dull parties. Instead, we seek to have the best party possible and at the end of the night and in the midst of our joy, say, 'This, even this, is but a picture and foretaste. Eye has not seen what God has for us.' So don't throw out the grain and new wine; instead, gather in the sheaves and the grapes, add the fatted calf and the pumpkin crunch cake, and teach the world what feasting really is." Joe Rigney, *Strangely Bright*.

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