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Our Chief End, Part 2

In 1986, John Piper suggested a change to the Westminster Shorter Catechism question on man's chief end. According to the WSC #1, "Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever." Piper suggested changing the "and" to "by" making the answer, "Man's chief end is to glorify God BY enjoying Him forever." He called this *Christian Hedonism* which has some merit. There is no question that there is a symbiotic relationship between glorifying God and enjoying Him. You can't enjoy a Being you do not know. You won't know a Being very well whom you do not enjoy.

In this regard, the Bible contains verse after verse encouraging/calling upon the believer to enjoy God:

- Psalm 37:4a: “Delight yourself in the Lord...”
- Psalm 34:8a: “O taste and see that the Lord is good...”
- Psalm 32:11a: “Be glad in the Lord and rejoice, you righteous ones, and shout for joy...”
- Psalm 42:5b: “...hope in God, for I shall again praise Him *for* the help of His presence.”
- Psalm 34:2a: “My soul shall make its boast in the Lord...”
- Psalm 64:10a: “The righteous man will be glad in the Lord, and will take refuge in Him...”
- Psalm 73:25b: “...there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you.” (ESV)
- Psalm 90:14a: “O satisfy us in the morning with Thy lovingkindness, that we may sing for joy and be glad...”

These are but a few of the many commands, descriptions, and personal testimonies in Scriptureⁱ which call the child of God to delight, glory, and so enjoy the Lord! Think of it, Christ said this when asked about the essence of salvation:

Luke 10:27, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind...”

That is why it is no surprise that when the Westminster assembly was called, the greatest theological minds of the day answered from Scripture the question of man’s purpose with, “Man’s chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy Him forever.” Biblically speaking, they hit it on the head!

Yet what does it mean “to enjoy God”? And how do we do it?

Psalm 73:1, “Surely God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart!”

This constitutes the theme of this entire Psalm... “the goodness of God” manifested to the “pure in heart.” Now who are the “pure in heart”? We know from Paul that man lacks righteousness.

Romans 3:10, 13-14, “...there is none righteous, not even one... Their throat is an open grave, with their tongues they keep deceiving, the poison of asps is under their lips, whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness.”

From this we conclude that there is NOT a man on this earth who innately is “pure in heart.” Accordingly, for any to have a “pure heart” God must give it to them!

2 Corinthians 5:21, “He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”

It is only through Christ that we receive a pure heart!

In light of this, THE theme of this Psalm is God's goodness manifested through His redeeming work! And yet as we will see, it is more than that. For it is the individual made "pure in heart" who is enabled to participate in THE Grand Theme of time and eternity: Enjoying God! // But that is getting ahead of ourselves. First Asaph relates the detrimental effects of making much of man instead of God.

Psalm 73:2, "But as for me, my feet came close to stumbling, my steps had almost slipped."

The idea behind "stumbling" is NOT tripping in our walks, for that happens all the time. Rather it speaks of falling so hard that you don't get up!

Proverbs 24:16, "For a righteous man falls seven times, and rises again, but the wicked stumble in *time of calamity*."

Truly in the Poetry books, "stumbling" carries the idea of falling and NOT getting back up. Yet that is NEVER the case for the believer. When they fall, they always rise for God lifts them by the hand! And thus, in Christ the believer can and many times does "come close to stumbling"... they "almost slip"...

Psalm 37:23-24, "The steps of a man are established by the Lord; and He delights in his way. When he falls, he shall not be hurled headlong; because the Lord is the One who holds his hand."- think of the toddler walking hand and hand with the parent. They stumble, but they do not fall headlong to the ground, for the hand of the parent prevents it!

So it was in Asaph's life which in fact inspired this Psalm. Psalm 73 was written in light of a recent near miss when it came to "stumbling" on the part of Asaph. How did he almost fall? He woke up one day and for whatever reason began to make much of man.

Psalm 73:3-5 (3-12), "For I was envious of the arrogant, *as* I saw the prosperity of the wicked. For there are no pains in their death; and their body is fat. They are not in trouble *as other* men; nor are they plagued like mankind."

The Psalm goes on like this for seven more verses where Asaph expresses his envy on account of their:

1. Pride, v. 6a.
2. Vengeance which seem to go unpunished, v. 6b.
3. Fatness on account of the abundance of food that they consume, v. 7a.
4. Ability to do seemingly anything they desire, v. 7b.
5. Brazenness in which they mock God and man, vv. 8-9.
6. Success in which they have anything and everything money can buy, v. 10.
7. Independence from God- as they have set themselves up as islands, v. 11.

8. Easy life, v. 12a.
9. Wealth, v. 12b.

Seeing this and making much of the independence of the wicked, Asaph came close to stumbling- thinking:

Psalm 73:13, "Surely in vain I have kept my heart pure, and washed my hands in innocence."-

Here Asaph considered what he tangibly faced as a child of God in spite of his pursuit of God. And what was that?

Psalm 73:14, "For I have been stricken all day long, and chastened every morning."

As it is with EVERY child of God in this state of sin and misery, it seems as though all that they reap in return for their "good effort" is trial, hardship, and suffering! Is that true? The answer is a strong "NO!" However, we must reaffirm the time and place for which we are seeking reward; it is NOT the here and now, BUT the next age. Recall the exhortation of Christ in this regard,

Matthew 6:19-21, "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."

Our Psalm this morning clearly teaches that! Insofar as Asaph made much of man, his valuation of what constituted "treasure" shifted from eternity to the temporal things of this life such that he almost apostatized (Psalm 73:15)! Now, what is it that kept him from falling? God held his hand- which took the form here of manifesting a facet of His glory to Asaph.

Psalm 73:16-17, "When I pondered to understand this, it was troublesome in my sight until I came into the sanctuary of God; *then* I perceived their end."

The end that Asaph perceived is detailed for us in vv. 18-20! Yet what was it that jostled Asaph from his spiritually sickened state? Beholding the glory of God- which we'll talk about in a moment. Yet all of this brings us to the climax of this Psalm which is our passage this morning- specifically Asaph's response to what he saw in God!

The Enjoying of God, vv. 25-26.

Psalm 73:25a, "Whom have I in heaven *but Thee?*..."

This is much more than a statement of realization... it is a statement of wonder, praise, and awe! *NOTHING* on or in this earth can be said to be anything of real substance! All is

temporal... all is decaying... all is dying! This truly is the *Shadow Lands*! “The substance belongs to Christ...” (Colossians 2:17)!

When Asaph entered the “sanctuary of God” and there beheld God, he was jostled back to reality in which he realized that what he was longing for and envying was dust! With this, Asaph came to a very important realization:

Psalm 73:25b, “...and besides Thee, I desire nothing on earth.”

This is the language of enjoying God... taking pleasure in *Who* He is and *What* He has done!! In the Hebrew the word is *חַפְּזִים* (*chaphets*) which means “to experience emotional delight.” In light of His glory/weightiness/substance, Asaph is taken aback! In his folly, Asaph was longing for something that this world could never give... all the while he had it God! Recall the words of C. S. Lewis,

If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world. If none of my earthly pleasures satisfy it, that does not prove that the universe is a fraud. Probably, earthly pleasures were never meant to satisfy it, but only to arouse it, to suggest the real thing. (Lewis, 1960, pp. 118-121)

Christian, come to understand that God is the real thing! He is that for which we have been made. Until we have Him- NOT in part BUT in whole- we will always feel incomplete and so be tempted to fill that which we lack with the futile things of this life. For don't miss it:

Psalm 73:26a, “My flesh and my heart may fail...”

Literally, the text reads, “My flesh and my heart... fail!” Asaph is talking here about physical as well as emotional/mental/spiritual depression. As Christians, you are going to face these giants in your life: Giant Ill-Health and Giant Despair! The fact that you suffer these things is NO indication that there is something aberrantly wrong with you today! Truly, “...such is common to man” (1 Corinthians 10:13)!

We do know that Giant Ill-Health and Giant Despair are exacerbated by doubts when it comes to God and by acts of rebellion. When David sought to get from this earth that which only can be found in God, he fell into greater despair than what is usual in this state of sin and misery.

Psalm 32:3-4, “When I kept silent *about my sin*, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night Thy hand was heavy upon me; my vitality was drained away *as with the fever heat of summer.*”

So yes, depression and despair can be deepened on account of sinful thinking and/or living.

Yet, and the point of this text, as long as we are on this side of the grave, “our flesh and our

heart” are going to fail! There are going to come those days when you wake up and wish you hadn’t! Yet *AT* these times, *BEFORE* these times, and *AFTER* these times we must learn that.

Psalm 73:26b, “...God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.”

You cannot fix a spiritual problem with a physical solution... Exercise, alcohol, drugs, sex, relationships, jobs, and the like will never address our greatest need. What only can and will? God! “God is the strength [rock] of my heart!”

Yet notice Asaph does NOT say here that God strengthened him (though that undoubtedly is true). RATHER, Asaph said that “God is the strength of my heart and my portion...” In other words, the more Asaph went to “the sanctuary of God” and there meditated upon His Savior, the more He beheld “the beauty of the Lord” (Psalm 27:4)! And so it wasn’t what God DID that strengthened Asaph here, BUT what God WAS: the object of his praise, glory, adoration, wonder, amazement, joy, love, and more! The more Asaph delighted himself in the Lord- the more he genuinely enjoyed the Lord- the stronger he got and the more his heart was lifted!

From this you must see that it was when Asaph took delight in the Lord — duly responded to the Person of God — that he was filled! And the more that he was filled, the more he magnified and so exalted God.

And so what, Biblically, is man’s chief end? It is my turn to modify the statement, “Man’s chief end is to glorify God by enjoying Him and glorifying Him... forever!” Again, it is symbiotic! Glorifying God (living in light of His substance) leads to enjoying Him. And enjoying Him leads to glorifying Him! That truly is THE reason God made us!

Now we all easily can confess this. Our greatest problem is doing it! Does this passage contain elements that might aid us in this endeavor? Yes indeed! In fact, four things,

The first is our salvation.

Psalm 73:1-2, “Surely God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart! But as for me, my feet came close to stumbling...”

Asaph includes himself amongst those to whom God is good. As such, Asaph wrote this Psalm as a child of God for the child of God.ⁱⁱ Accordingly, we conclude that Enjoying of God — which again is the focus of this Psalm — is the exclusive prerogative of a redeemed individual! You want to enjoy God and so fulfill your end? You must first become a child of the living God!

Recall how Christ summarized the essence of a saving relationship with God.

John 17:3, “And this is eternal life, that they may know Thee [which speaks of a love relationship], the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent.”

With this, allow your default view of God to be challenged. Today in our circles, when we think of God we tend to think of His greatness, holiness, awesomeness, transcendence. While this is true of God, that is NOT how God would have us first think of our relationship with Him, What are the first words out of a newly redeemed individual?

Galatians 4:6, “And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba! Father!’”

How are we to approach God in prayer? When asked about how we are to pray, Christ said this:

Matthew 6:9, “Pray, then, in this way: ‘Our Father who art in heaven...’”

All of this is to say that when we think of approaching God as believers that which must come to our mind is that of His child... He is our Father!

Secondly, we are enabled more and more to enjoy God by responding to God’s glory.

Psalms 73:16-17, “When I pondered to understand this, it was troublesome in my sight until I came into the sanctuary of God; *then* I perceived their end.”

How is it that simply moving from one location to another made a difference in Asaph’s struggle? He went from being outside to coming into “the sanctuary of God.” It was NOT the location that made a difference, BUT what happened when he entered into “the sanctuary of God.” It was then, gazing upon God, eternity, and so the Last Judgment, that “he perceived the end [of the wicked].”

In other words, it wasn’t where he was that made the difference, BUT what he did... Asaph came to respond to the person and work of God! Based on our study last time, we would say he responded to the weightiness of God — who He is and what He someday will do! We see it further in verse 28.

Psalms 73:28a, “But as for me, the nearness of God is my good; // I have made the Lord God my refuge...”

When he drew near to God — or rather, when God drew near to him — Asaph responded by taking refuge in the Lord. And so rather than seeking protection from the wealth or dwelling of the wicked, Asaph “ran into the name of the Lord” (cf. Proverbs 18:10)!

Family of God, this is huge! When Asaph came into the Sanctuary of God, He was confronted with the reality of God. At that moment, he had a choice/ He could have fled, dismissed, or downplayed what he saw. Or, he could have imbibed in God — in the words of David, he could have “...tasted and seen that the Lord is good; how blessed is the man who takes refuge in Him” (Psalm 34:8)!

That is exactly what Asaph did here!

Now practically speaking, what does it mean to “imbibe”/take refuge in/taste the Lord? It involves three things:

- It involves Knowing Him- which begins the moment a person is saved (cf. John 17:3), and yet increases as we endeavor to grow in our understanding of the Lord.
- It involves Valuing Him!
- This is a choice! Asaph said, “...I have made the Lord God my refuge...” (Psalm 73:28b)! This no doubt is why Christ exhorted us...

Matthew 6:19-20a, “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal.”

As Christians, each and every day we must make a choice as to that which is most important to us- that which is of most value! It is so true: *“What we eagerly desire, we easily believe!”* And so, it is one thing to profess that God is most important! Yet it is quite another to align our thoughts to reflect that. Enjoying God involves a deliberate choice of value- which always translates to action.

And with that we are brought to the third facet of enjoying the Lord, it involves responding to your valuation of Him! How is it that Christ ended the verse I just quoted, Matthew 6:19-20?

Matthew 6:21, “For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”

When we make the conscious choice that God is most valuable AND THEN live in light of this choice by adjusting what we do, think, and say to that valuation, Christ says here that “our heart” will follow suit!

We see it in our relationships! Recall Paul’s exhortation to Euodia and Syntyche, conflicted saints:

Philippians 4:8, “Finally, brethren, whatever is true [in the other person], whatever is honorable [in the other person], whatever is right [in the other person], whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, let your mind dwell on these things [when it comes to the other person].”

I’ve said this so many times: if you spent any time thinking of the worst when it came to any person here, it wouldn’t take long before you hated them. Accordingly, in our relationship with one another, God calls upon us all to guard our heart and so think upon only that which is “true, honorable, right, pure, etc.” And so it must be in our walk with God!

- How much time do you set aside on a daily basis to think about God?

- How much time do you spend praising Him for who He is?
- How much of your life has been determined based on the previous two responses?

When a young man/woman determines to value a relationship with another person of the opposite sex, much of their life is rearranged in order to spend time with that person. Are we NOT Christ's bride? Ought we NOT to rearrange our lives to maximize our day that we might spend time with Him?

And that brings us to a third catalyst in growing in our enjoyment of Christ, being subject to the counsel of God whereby our faith is renewed.

Psalm 73:23-24, "Nevertheless I am continually with Thee; Thou hast taken hold of my right hand. With Thy counsel Thou wilt guide me, and afterward receive me to glory."

Asaph's ability to enjoy God was a direct result of his spending time with the Lord in His word. It was AFTER being with God in His word that Asaph wrote, "Whom have I in heaven but Thee?" (v. 25) Time in the word — where you do more than simply learn fun facts about God, BUT genuinely fellowship with Christ in response to His talking to you that morning in His word — is a major component in our call to enjoy God!

Romans 10:17, "So faith *comes* from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ."

The word of God, when appropriated, feeds our faith/trust/reliance upon Christ. And when this occurs, what happens?

Psalm 19:7a, "The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul..." (ESV)

A "revived soul" is a soul that advances toward the person God redeemed us to be! And how again is this brought about? By gazing upon the beauty, glory, and splendor of the Lord as He is revealed to us in His word! This gazing breathes life into our dry bones, refreshing our lives! What is the net effect of appropriating the word of God unto our growth in both knowing and enjoying the Lord? Isaiah said that the net effect of God's word in our lives is this:

Isaiah 61:3, "To grant those who mourn *in* Zion, giving them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a spirit of fainting. So they will be called ^{oaks} of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that He may be glorified."

A fourth and final element we learn from this Psalm when it comes to growing in our ability to enjoy God is repentance.

Psalm 73:21-24, "When my heart was embittered, and I was pierced within, then I was senseless and ignorant; I was *like* a beast before Thee. Nevertheless I am continually with Thee; Thou hast taken hold of my right hand. With Thy counsel Thou wilt guide me, and afterward receive me to glory."

Asaph's statement here implies a massive act of repentance wherein he went from man trust to God trust! As just referenced, this involves a turning from self and self-dependence to God and so God-dependence! In fact, herein we have come full circle. Recall the opening words of this Psalm:

Psalm 73:1, "Surely God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart!"

Being "pure in heart" is NOT innate to us, BUT that which God gives as we turn from self-dependence to God-dependence. In other words, God is good to the broken and contrite of heart! Yet what is "the good" that is promised here for them?

Matthew 5:8, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."

That in a nutshell is "the ultimate good" promised to the "pure in heart"- they in this life shall behold God more clearly and so enjoy God more deeply!

So, you want to cultivate your love, passion for, and so enjoyment of God? Cultivate the daily habit of turning from self-dependence to God-dependence in and through all things! This requires a conscience choice, but not one that is exhausting. It is the choice to make much of God and so little of man, self, or self-trust!

What are the results of enjoying God?

- Health in our Walks, "The nearness of God is my good"- טוב (*tob*)
- Intimacy with the Lord, "I have made the Lord God my refuge."
- A Longing to Share of the Hope that is Within Us- Evangelism, "That I may tell of all Thy works"

References

Lewis, C. S. (1960). *Mere Christianity*. New York: Macmillan.

End Note(s)

ⁱ Cf. also Psalm 105:3; Job 19:26-27; John 17:3 and so much more!!!

ⁱⁱ Consider further verse 15, "If I had said, 'I will speak thus,' behold, I should have betrayed the generation of Thy children." You cannot "betray" someone you aren't in relationship with. Clearly, Asaph wrote this as one who enjoyed a saving relationship with God.