

A Synopsis of the Perils, Purposes, & Vanity of & Longings for Pleasure

Perhaps the greatest difficulty or obstacle to the Christian faith and qualitative growth as a person is the problem of pleasure. Consider, what most often governs your decision-making? (a) A feeling of happiness or satisfaction? (b) Gratification of the senses? (c) Recreation, relaxation, or amusement? (d) Some source of happiness, joy, or satisfaction? (e) Somebody's desire or preference? Simply put, pleasure is a desire, an inclination or preference. All too often we are intoxicated by pleasure. Unfortunately, pleasure can lead us to places we never thought we would go. Yet the Bible is clear that some pleasures are designed by God to be enjoyed such as deep friendships, marital intimacy, aesthetic experiences, & biblical worship. Paul R. Shockley (copyright, 2010). www.prshockley.org

Perils of Pleasure:

False Pleasures vs. True Pleasures:

2 types of pleasures are deduced from Proverbs 5:

False pleasures:

Illicit or illegitimate pleasures that fall outside of God's purposes (e.g., adultery).

True pleasures:

Pleasures that are in keeping with God's purposes (e.g., marital intimacy).

7 Principles:

1. Cultivate biblical wisdom: vv. 1-2;
2. Wisdom enables you to discern the nature of false pleasures: vv. 3-6;
3. False pleasures extract the best parts of your life: vv. 7-14;
4. True pleasures can satisfy you: vv. 15-20;
5. The price of true pleasures is paid before hand whereas the price of false pleasures are paid afterwards;
6. True pleasures are God-given;
7. It is your responsibility to choose: vv. 21-23.

Purposes of Pleasure:

2 lessons about the purposes of pleasure are deduced from Prov. 9:1-18:

True pleasures point you to God whereas false pleasures take you away from God.

When you encounter a true pleasure, enjoy it, but do not exclusively focus on it. Rather, follow the pleasure along to its ultimate source. Why? True pleasures are designed to take you to God.

False pleasures are designed to captivate you. But they are not merely meant to captivate you; they are also meant to capture you. But they are not merely meant to capture you; they are meant to slay you (e.g., addictions).

Since false pleasures can mimic true pleasures, how can we sort out a true pleasure vs. a false pleasure?

1. Carefully discern whether the particular pleasure will: (a) weaken your reason; (b) impair the tenderness of your conscience; (c) obscure your sight of God; (d) diminish your thirst for spiritual things; (e) increase the authority of your body over you mind (S. Wesley).
2. Remember: False pleasures are not only a problem "out there," but they are also a problem "within." False pleasures appeal to the dark aspects of our lives. Interestingly, we are so sensitive to false pleasures but insensitive to true pleasures. Nevertheless, the "flesh" can never be improved or reformed. Our hope is in Christ. Practice both vivification & mortification. Abide in Christ; yield to God. Intimately know His Word.
3. False pleasures are "agenda driven" by the counterfeit kingdom. Are you struggling? Ask yourself "Why?" Be observant, careful, & sober.

The Vanity of Pleasure:

2 pleasures are deduced from Ecclesiastes 2:1-11:

Earthly pleasures & Spiritual Pleasures.

Earthly pleasures are temporal pleasures (e.g., car, home, money) that are not designed to last. In contrast, **spiritual pleasures** are satisfactory because they promote intimacy with God (e.g., fear God; keep commandments).

Spiritual pleasures allow you to be used by God in ways you may never thought possible-all for His glory. When we follow hard after God by conforming ourselves to His commandments, precepts, & principles, by means of the Holy Spirit, our lives becomes vibrant & exciting.

How should we then live?

1. Remember that earthly pleasures will not fulfill the spiritual longings in your heart. 2. Enjoy appropriate earthly pleasures but hold on to them loosely for they will evaporate, fall apart, & can be taken from you 3. Ask yourself how earthly pleasures can be used to promote God's priorities for earthly pleasures can contribute to spiritual pleasures (e.g., meeting the practical needs of others). 4. Build your life upon spiritual pleasures.

The Longings for Pleasure:

Ecclesiastes 3:11-13:

Do you ever long for something to be more than what it is, that is, longing for something to truly satisfy. But you find yourself asking once you experience that pleasure, "*Is this all there is?!*"

As a result, do you consider your expectations or dreams to be illusionary?

After each disappointment, do you find yourself saying that the "*grass is greener on the other side?*" So, you try & try again?

Are you crushed when certain expectations are unrealized-even after repeated attempts to see them become realities in your life? Has bitterness seeped into your worldview?

Do you find yourself scaling back on your expectations saying, "*I refuse to expect more from things than they actually are?*"

Or have you come to the conclusion that "*nothing truly satisfies.*"

What should we do?

We should not lower our expectations. Instead, we should raise them even higher. Why? Nothing but God Himself fully satisfies. We should yearn for God even more for only God Himself fully satisfies.

Our careers, churches, jobs, relationships, & studies will not fulfill our deepest longings no matter how honorable or worthy they are (vv. 12-13) for they are not designed to fulfill our deepest longings.

Rather, our disappointments sharpen our focus on one specific truth: **ultimate satisfaction is only found in the God of the Bible (vv. 10-11).**