

The Heart of Christianity

The Biblical Gospel and the Future of the Church

4 What is the “Best” about the Gospel? Part 1

January 27, 2019

Habbakuk 3:17-19

17 Though the fig tree should not blossom
And there be no fruit on the vines,
Though the yield of the olive should fail
And the fields produce no food,
Though the flock should be cut off from the fold
And there be no cattle in the stalls,
18 Yet I will exult in the LORD,
I will rejoice in the God of my salvation.
19 The Lord GOD is my strength,
And He has made my feet like hinds' *feet*,
And makes me walk on my high places.
For the choir director, on my stringed instruments.

To the Glory of God

Now this morning, I have three Questions to ask and answer:

1. What is the *highest* and the *best* and the *final* and the *decisive* “Good” of the “Good News” (the Gospel)?
2. What is the *highest* and the *best* and the *final* and the *decisive* “Good” of the Good News, without which all of the other “Good” of the Gospel would *not* be “Good”?
3. What is the *highest* and the *best* and the *final* and the *decisive* “Good” of “Good News”, to which all of the other “Good” is pointing?

Another way of me asking these Questions is this:

To what “End” are we saved?

In other words, my Question is "Why?"

- *Why* did God go to so much trouble to take on Human Flesh and be born of a virgin, and then live 30 years BEFORE His Ministry, and then spend about 3 years in Ministry, and then be captured, tortured, and tried by a kangaroo court, and then be brutally and violently murdered by Crucifixion, and then rise from the dead on the third day and ascend into Heaven after 40 days and now sits at the Right Hand of the Majesty on High?
- *Why* did God set up the "One", "Holy", "Universal", and "Apostolic" Church in the earth?
- And *Why* did God reach out to me, while I was very happily engaging in sin? Why did He choose to *interrupt* my "already planned-out life" on that Friday night in 1971? Why did God *violate* my Will and *insert* Himself, *forcefully*, in my life, to save me? In other words, what is the *finality* of the Gospel?

And I would suggest that most people would answer that Question with this Answer:

"We are saved so that we may go to Heaven and pass through the pearly gates and walk on streets of gold and be re-united with loved ones who have gone before us."

Now please understand that I absolutely believe that all of that will happen. I absolutely believe in a place called "Heaven", and I plan on being there. I am working very hard and praying very hard and repenting very hard and trusting very hard to make sure that I am going there. But if *that* is the Answer to *why* we are saved, if that is the *highest* and the *best* and the *final* and the *decisive* "Good" of the "Good News", then I have another Question:

If we could have Heaven and *everything* Heaven contains, and yet *not* have Jesus, would it be okay? Would we be satisfied if Jesus was not in Heaven? Would we be content if we had everything in Heaven the Bible says we will have, and yet Jesus not be there? Would it be worth what God paid for it?

... and most people would say, "No". Heaven *is* Heaven precisely *because* Jesus is there. Amen. So, without Jesus, Heaven would just be a very nice vacation resort. But, in saying that, we are saying that Jesus is *better* than Heaven. And that means that Heaven is NOT the *best* or the *highest* or the *final* or the *decisive* "Good" of the Gospel, or else there wouldn't be anything *better*.

Another example is when we say, "*Jesus saved me because He loved me*". Now when we say this, we are telling the Truth. And what a glorious Truth it is! The Owner and the Creator of the Universe loves us! He really loves us! But reading the Bible and reading the Puritans and reading Jonathan Edwards has caused me to go *beyond* the obvious and to push *past* the Headlines, and get to the "Final End", the "Small Print", and find out what exactly is God's "*Main Goal*" in all that He did.

So, what do we mean when we say, "*Jesus saved me because He loved me?*" Are we saying, "We are the *primary focus* of God?" Are we saying, "We are *so valuable* and *so important* to God that He became Flesh and died to save us?" Now even though many in the modern church categorically *do* believe they *are* just that valuable and just that important to God, I think saying this is blasphemy. I think that, while absolutely true, it is absolutely *incomplete* to say, "*Jesus saved me because He loved me*". And that statement actually becomes wrong because that "half-truth" gives the wrong impression, which actually leads to deception. I think the correct statement would be:

"Jesus saved me because He loved me, so that by saving me *I would love Him.*"

Because, you see, I think the Goal of God in Salvation is the very *same* Goal that He had in Creation and *everything else* He does:

For My Glory!

or

For my Name's Sake!

or

So they will know that I am the Lord!

And that means that Salvation is God radically changing wicked rebels (by what He alone does for them through the Death of His Son), so they will find the *fullest* measure of Delight and the reach the *highest* measure of Satisfaction, and attain to the most *final* and *decisive* experience of Joy in Jesus Christ! And that means that the Goal of God in Salvation (and in everything else He does) is God!

So, the *highest* "Good" of the Gospel is God, *not* Heaven. The *best* "Good" of the Gospel is *not* God forgiving our Sins, but God Himself! The *final* "Good" of the Gospel is *not* me being able to pass through the pearly gates, but it is God! Just God! And the *decisive* "Good" of the Gospel is *not* walking on streets of gold or being united with loved ones, but it is God!

Now when I say "God", I also need to remind you that the *highest* and the *best* expression of the Glory of God is Jesus Christ. So, that means that Jesus is *better* than Heaven. Jesus is *better* than "Eternal Life". Jesus is *better* than all the "Trappings" and all the "Benefits" and all the "Pleasures" of Salvation!

Now again, I'm not diminishing any of the wonderful Benefits of Salvation by saying this. I am simply going *past* all these amazing and glorious Benefits to the *best* Benefit as to why God saved us in the first place. But, as we ponder all of this, I also need to say that Jesus is *better* than anything God does down here as well. So, Jesus is *better* than Healing! Jesus is *better* than Miracles! Jesus is *better* than Material Blessings! Jesus is better!

Now if you were publicly educated like I was, you might find it hard to read things that people like Augustine wrote. Aurelius Augustinus was the Bishop of Northern Africa¹ around the 4th and 5th Centuries. And, as far as I am concerned, Augustine was one of the greatest thinkers that was ever produced by the Christian Church (at least in its first 1,000 years of existence). And Augustine wrote a number of books that I would highly commend for you to read, such as:

- ✓ *The City of God*
- ✓ *Confessions*
- ✓ *Letters to Pelagius*

¹ The region back in those days was called, "Hippo" and it equates to modern day Algeria.

... but be warned, these books are hard to read. But they're not hard because he uses big words. It is hard to read Augustine because he is so radically "God-centered" that his words sound strange to us. Most of us are simply not used to reading people who are almost *exclusively* "God-centered". Most of the best-sellers of our day, even among the saved, are various versions of more and more "Man-centeredness".

But Augustine and Jonathan Edwards and many of the Puritans breathed that "rarified air" of true, genuine, biblical "Spirituality" that is almost non-existent these days.

But what Augustine gave to the Church is not merely his "high and lofty rhetoric". Because in his excellent defense of the Christian Faith against heretics, God used Augustine to develop several key "Cornerstone Doctrines" that are very "down-to-earth", and "fundamental" and "basic", and that we use almost every day, such as:

- Original Sin
- The Concept of "Just War"
- God's Absolute Sovereignty
- Grace
- Salvation by Grace through Faith alone

His book, "*Confessions*", is the only book I have ever even heard about that contains *nothing* but a series of confessions and repentance of his own personal sins to God. Truly we should measure a man's "godliness" by how deeply and how often he repents. And, in that book, Augustine said:

"He loves Thee too little, who loves anything together with Thee,
which he loves not for Thy Sake."²

... and even though I'm not the brightest star in the sky, that quote changed my life. Augustine said that saved people love God, but they love God "too little" when they love *anything that God made or anything that God gave them "together with God"*, that they do not love *solely and finally and ultimately* for the Glory of God alone. And when you carry that concept out to its logical conclusion, you come up with this:

² *Confessions*; p54

We, who are saved, love God too little...

... when we love what God *gives us* and what God *does for us*...

... when we don't love those things *solely for God's Sake*

In other words, the *best* measure of God's Love toward us is *not* in how much stuff God gives us or in what God does for us. And that is true even when we discuss Salvation. But we should measure God's Love toward us by how much what He gives us and what He does for us, *changes us, so that we grow in our love of Him!* And I'm not referring to merely being *appreciative* for what God gives and does. I am talking about actually *loving God, delighting in God, enjoying God!* Just God, without anything else!

And that means that the *best* thing about Salvation is NOT simply that God saved me because He loved me. Of course, that is wonderful, and it is absolutely true. But it isn't the *best* thing that God did in Salvation. Because, if it is, then the *best thing* about Salvation is God focusing on *me* and putting *me* at the very Center of all that He did. And I would suggest that this makes God to be radically "Man-centered".

So, the *highest* and the *best* and the *final* and the *decisive* thing that God did in Salvation was to save me because He loved me, *so that by saving me I would love Him!* And this is what the Apostle Paul was talking about when God the Spirit "moved him along" to write **2 Corinthians 3&4.**

Now I'm not going to do a full exposition of these two Chapters this morning. But, in Chapter 3, the Apostle teaches that there is a "veil" over the face of everyone who is lost³. And this veil *hinders* these people so that they may not see/behold the "Glory" that *surpasses* the glory of the Old Covenant. And, at the end of the Chapter he says:

2 Corinthians 3:16-18

but whenever a person turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being

³ Even though Paul uses the unsaved Jew here as an example in these Chapters- we are correct to apply the Truth of what Paul is teaching with all the lost- Jew or Gentile.

transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.

... so, when the veil is removed in Salvation (in Christ), we are gifted with the ability to **“behold... the Glory of the Lord”** that we could *not* behold when the veil was over our eyes. And what is the result of saved people “beholding” God’s Glory? We are...

... transformed into the same image from glory to glory...

... and then, in **2 Corinthians 4:6b**, Paul teaches that we behold the *fullness* of God’s Glory...

... in the Face of Jesus Christ

So, three very important things happen in Salvation that are *infinitely* “better” than what many people normally focus on:

1. We behold the Glory of God in Jesus.
2. We love what we see.
3. We are changed into what we see.

... but that means that these Issues are the *primary* Reason *why* God saved us, *not* all of the Benefits of Salvation that most people focus on. And that means that the *best* and the *highest* and the *final* and the *decisive* “Good” of the Gospel (Good News) is:

The Glory of God in the Face of Jesus Christ, for our everlasting Enjoyment.

Because when God’s Glory and God’s Value and God’s Worth is able to be seen and marveled at, through what God alone did for me (Salvation), the “End Result” becomes God rather than me. And that brings *more* Glory to God, and it displays God’s Grace *better* and more *fully* than my Repentance and Forgiveness.

And that means that the *ultimate* Goal of God in Salvation is *God and His Glory*, and *not* me. And this allows for God to be radically “God-centered”.

So, it is in Salvation where I am changed so that I have the privilege of seeing/ beholding Jesus as Who He already is, the most beautiful and desired Treasure of the Universe. And so, that is the main Purpose in Salvation. Now be careful that you understand that my Salvation does not make Jesus to be that Treasure. He *already is* that Treasure. I just don't know that. So, in my lost condition, I am blind and ignorant about the most important, the most Beautiful, and the most Glorious Being in the Universe. My own Sin and the Fall of Adam has blinded me so that I cannot "see" (behold) the Glory of God in the Face of Jesus Christ.

And that is why lost people strive so hard to find Joy in money and in sex and in power and in fame and in material possessions. But the effort to find the fullness of Joy in things that have been made and in things that are passing away *belittles* God's Glory. It *insults* the Beauty and the Majesty of God. The desire to find Happiness and Delight in something, *anything, besides* God is what "falling short" or "trampling under foot with disgust" the Glory of God means (**Romans 3:23**). And the Bible calls that "Sin".

But even *after* I am saved, my flesh is so dominant, and my understanding of the Bible is so shallow, that I feel completely satisfied when God gives to me and does for me what I want. And the reason this satisfies me is because when I imagine God doing things for me and giving me what I want, that is God putting me "first". So, if I'm not careful, I will only feel loved by God when God puts me "ahead of Himself", and does for me so that I can delight in what He does or what He gives, but never delight in Who He is. And while it is "Good" for me to delight in what God does for me and in what God gives to me, it is *not* the "best". Exulting in only what God does or gives is *not* the "highest" or the "final" or the "decisive" "Good" of the Gospel. God Himself is. And until I begin to delight in Him, and not merely in what He does or in what He gives, I am *not* fulfilling the "Main Goal" or the "End Result" of the Gospel.

Now you may say, "*Wait a minute, Brother Blair, God DID put me first when Jesus took my sins and died with them on the Cross so that He could absorb all of God's Wrath on my behalf.*" Yes, He did. But my point is Jesus did all of that for us for *another* very important Reason other than merely "putting us first". The entire point of my Message this morning is to answer this Question:

To what End did Jesus and God the Father and the Holy Spirit
“put me first” in Salvation?

Did They simply “put me first” and that was it? And because They “put me first” in Salvation, They will now *always* put me first? So, was Jesus’ Sacrifice for me on the Cross a powerful demonstration of how much God thinks of me, of just how valuable and meaningful I am to God, that He would allow the Darling of the Trinity to be brutally murdered on my behalf? And, if so, may I now “feel loved by God” *primarily* because I believe that God will actually do things for me, *even to the point of His Own harm?*

So, should I now believe that God the Father thinks more of me than He does Himself or His Own Son? Is *that* the Message of the Cross? Is *that* what I should get out of the fact that Jesus was sacrificed on my behalf? And is *that* the basis of why I feel loved by God?

Or did all three Persons of the Trinity *temporarily* “put me first”, but only so that something *better* and *higher* and *final* and *decisive* could be accomplished through that Sacrifice?

Now you may realize that this one point, the difference in me delighting in what God does for me and not delighting in Him, is very small. But I hope you can also see that it makes all the difference in the world between just who is valued and treasured.

Because, again, if I am not careful, all that Jesus will be to me is a “Cosmic Tool” that God the Father uses to give me what my heart *really* craves for. And it will always be something else *besides* Jesus. And so, I will praise Him for all that He does for me and all that He gives to me, but I will never find my final Delight in Him. But Habakkuk did.

Some 600 years before Jesus was born, God the Spirit “moved along” a man named “Habakkuk”. And God chose this man and anointed him and called him as a “Prophet” to God’s people. And in the Book that bears his name, we find a “Prayer” in Chapter 3. And *part* of that inspired Prayer gets into the very Issue that I have been talking about. Habakkuk begins by saying:

**Though the fig tree should not blossom And there be no fruit on the vines,
Though the yield of the olive should fail And the fields produce no food,**

Though the flock should be cut off from the fold And there be no cattle in the stalls,

So, Habakkuk is saying, "*Even though God doesn't choose to do anything for me, Even though God doesn't choose to bless me, or provide for me, or grant me material and earthly Blessings, Even though the Heavens are silent and I have no tangible Issue to be happy about...*" Then the Prophet says:

Yet I will exult in the LORD, I will rejoice in the God of my salvation.

So, here, Habakkuk is *not* praising God for what God has "done" for him or what God has "given" to him. No, this man is rejoicing simply in God! Just God! This Prophet is *not* exulting in God's *Performance* on his behalf or any display of God's Goodness. No, this Prophet is exulting in just Who God is! And, by doing this, Habakkuk is teaching us that God Himself is *better* than what God "does". God is *better* than what God "gives". And God is *better* than any of the Benefits that God may or may not grant to us.

So, six centuries before Jesus was born, this obscure Prophet that we know very little about, discovered the *highest* and the *best* and the *final* and the *decisive* "Good" of Salvation (Good News). God was Good to Habakkuk to *not* allow him to be satisfied with *only* the blossom on the fig tree, or the fruit on the vine, or the yield of the olive, or the abundant harvest, or the over-flowing fold, or the full stall. God was good to take this Prophet to the *highest* Good, the *best* Good, the *final* Good, and the *decisive* Good of the Gospel, of His Salvation. And Habakkuk could say:

I will exult in the LORD, I will rejoice in the God of my salvation

... so, even if God didn't choose to give any of those things, Habakkuk's Joy and Rejoicing would not be diminished in the least.

And that tells me that I must guard my own heart that I don't feel loved by God only when I am being bragged on, or only when I am the center of God's Attention, or only when I am being "made much of". I must rejoice and celebrate that God has so abundantly blessed me that I now have the privilege of loving God!

Now you might remember that last week we looked at a Passage from **Luke 8:26-29** about Jesus confronting the Legion of demons in the man of the Garasenes. And we found out several interesting things from these demons:

- They knew/believed/trusted/confessed *verbally* that Jesus was **“Son of the Most High God”**.
- They bowed before Jesus.
- They prayed to Jesus.
- They knew/believed/trusted/confessed that their sinfulness separated them from Jesus.
- They knew/believed/trusted/confessed there was a specific time coming for them to be tormented.
- They knew/believed/trusted/confessed Jesus was Sovereign over their future Torment.

... which, according to many modern-day Evangelicals, would qualify these demons for Heaven. But we know that these are fallen angels, horrible, evil, vicious demons, who are *not* saved, and who *can't* repent, and who are *not* going to be in Heaven.

And what we are trying to discover this morning is what these demons were missing. What were they lacking? Why could they “do” and “say” and “believe” many of the things that the Bible says that saved people are to “do” and “say” and “believe”, and yet not be saved? And we also discovered what James said about the demons:

James 2:19

You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder.

So, these demons fear God. They *really* fear God! They tremble and shudder in fear of God. They correctly confess Who Jesus is. They correctly believe that Sin has separated them from God. They properly bow before Jesus. So, the Theology and the Doctrine of these demons was right about Jesus, and it was right about Sin and it was right about Hell, and it was right about Sovereignty. And, yet, they're not saved. And my Question is, “*Why?*” What is missing? What has Salvation done for *us* that it obviously did not do for the demons?

It can't be an Issue of Theology, because theirs is Biblical. It can't be a "Doctrinal Issue", because the Doctrine that these demons hold to is right. It can't be an Issue of Fear or Reverence, because they fear God much more than almost any Christian I have ever met. It isn't Worship, because they freely and easily bow before Jesus. And it can't even be an Issue of Eschatology, because what they believe is coming upon them in the future is both frightening and true. So, what do demons lack that we have in Salvation?

- ✓ Demons do not *love* God
- ✓ Demons do not *treasure* Jesus Christ
- ✓ Demons do not find the *fullness of Joy* in God
- ✓ Demons do not *Hunger and Thirst* for Righteousness
- ✓ Demons do not *Long* for the Presence of Jesus
- ✓ Demons do not *Pant* after God, as the deer pants after the water-brooks
- ✓ Demons do not *Delight* themselves in God
- ✓ Demons do not find any *Pleasure* in God

... and they *do not* because they *can't*. And demons *can't* love God, because God has not *allowed* them to. God has not *gifted* demons with what is the *best* and the *highest* and the *final* and the *decisive* Issue of Salvation, a love for God.

But we have to know that lost people don't love God either. And they *do not* love God, because they *cannot*. And lost people *can't* love God, because they *don't want to*. The Apostle Paul said:

1 Corinthians 2:14

But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.

But look what the Apostle John said God gave to those He saved:

1 John 4:19

We love, because He first loved us.

So, saved people love God. And we love the “things of the Spirit of God”. And we love all of God’s people. And we even love our enemies. Why? Because God...

...first loved us.

So, it is God’s Love *for* us and *to* us that *gifts* us with a love for God. It is God’s Love for us that God “set on us” *before* the Foundation of the world, *before* we were born, and *before* we did anything good or bad, that is the *catalyst* or the *origination* or the *initiation* of our love for God.

But that means that God’s Love toward us is NOT the “End Game”. Us, being so radically changed because God loved us so we now love God, is the “End-game”. And God’s Love to us *first* is the catalyst that makes the “End Game” possible. So, at best, if all you know is that God loves you, then you are getting the wrong idea, unless you come to know WHY He loved you. So, over time, that very true “summary statement” will warp your understanding of the *highest* and the *best* and the *final* and the *decisive* “Good” of the Gospel, and that is that God loved evil sinners so that by loving us we would be so radically transformed, that *we would love Him!* So, that we would find the fullness of our Joy *in Him!* So, that we would see Jesus as the Treasure of the Universe, and actually delight *in Him, regardless* of what He does for us or gives to us!

So, John says, “*We love God*”. Well, *who* loves God? Do lost people love God? No. Do demons love God? No. But “we” love God. So, who are the “we” here? “We” are those God chose to save.

But *why* do we love God? Do we *already* possess a love for God *in and of ourselves*? No. How do we know that? Because, if human beings already possessed a love for God, then lost people would love God. And the fact that nobody loves God until God loves them first tells us that human beings *do not* already possess the ability to love God without God sovereignly moving on that individual *first*, to give us that ability.

But from where did saved people get this love for God? From God. How? God gave it to us. Based on what? His Own Divine Prerogative. We didn’t do anything to earn it, and God was not obligated to give it. So, based on nothing that we did, God chose to freely give us this love for Himself.

But, when did God give us this Love for Him? Before the foundation of the world, before we were born, and before we did anything "good" or "bad". Why did God do it like that? So, that He alone would get the Glory. But what is the result of God loving us? We now love God.

So, we need to understand that our love *for* God is a gift *from* God. We can't simply "work" this kind of love "up". We can't *manufacture* it or just suddenly *choose* or make a decision to love God. No, God must set His Love on us, *first*. And the result of God setting His Love on us is that we now love God. And without that gift, *nobody* loves God.

But does God love all the other people? Yes, but not in the same *Way*. The Bible teaches that God loves *everyone*, but only in a certain *Way* and to a certain *Extent*. So, yes, God loves the non-elect. And God is Good and Kind and Merciful to those He has no plans to save. For example, God graciously gives many of them long and fruitful lives. He loves many of them to provide many wonderful and kind and good things for them in this life. He loves them by giving them the Benefits of "Common Grace", like anti-biotics and bifocals and air conditioning. So, Yes, God loves everyone, in a million different ways.

But God's Love to the non-elect is basically manifested in His kind and merciful "Benevolence". So, God doesn't love the "non-elect" in the same *Way* or to the same *Extent* that He loves the "elect". But how do we know that? Because God loves the elect to the *Extent* that He saves them. God loves the elect by "setting His Love" on them, and they respond by loving Him. And, like the "non-elect", God loves the elect in, by, and through, His Benevolence. But God goes much *further* with the elect, and God loves them *savingly*.

So, God loves the elect to the *Extent* that He will *not* leave them in their sins. So, God will "trouble" the elect and "deal" with them and "draw" them to Jesus. God will "disturb" the elect and make them utterly *uncomfortable* in their sin. God *supernaturally* and *sovereignly* and *effectually* "draws" the elect to Jesus for Salvation. And that means that God loves the elect by *interrupting* their plans. He loves them by *inserting* Himself into their lives. And God manifests His Love to the elect by *violating* their fallen and sinful will, and by *imposing* His Will onto them, so that they will be saved. And we call this "Divine Interruption", and this "Divine Insertion", this "Divine Imposition", and this "Divine Violation" "Grace".

But what is the result of God sovereignly “dragging” these elected sinners to Jesus? Jesus gladly receives them (no matter how sinful they may be), and then washes them clean. And God the Father effectually *applies* the Sacrifice of God the Son to their sins, and they are forgiven and redeemed!

So, what is the result of God being Good and Kind and Merciful to the “non-elect”? They may be Grateful, or not. They may be Humble, or not. They may give Thanks, or not. They may even go to church, or not. The non-elect may or may not respond to God’s Goodness. But what is the result of God doing all of this for the elect? They love God. And how is this love for God that was given to them by God, how is it manifested? They now strive to follow and obey Jesus, They now *crave* His Presence, They now *delight* themselves in Him, They now *enjoy* God, They now find *Pleasure* in God, They now *hunger and thirst* for God, They now *pant* after God, and they struggle against the lusts of their flesh to find the *fullness* of their *Joy* in Jesus Christ, and not merely in what He does for them.

So, in reality, all of our “Service” to God, and all of our “Obedience” to God’s Word, and all of our “Following” of Jesus are merely human *responses* to this radical Love for God that God Himself has gifted them with, in, by, and through Jesus and His finished Work. And that is *why* our “Service” and our “Obedience” and our “Following” pleases God, even when it isn’t carried out perfectly. All of these things are merely a *reflection* of a heart that has been radically transformed by being gifted to be able to “behold the Glory of God in the Face of Jesus Christ”, and enjoying what we see.

But what does God do to the “non-elect”? He leaves them alone. And, in that State, God allows them to “do” and to “act” and to “believe” *whatever* is in accord with their own fallen and sinful desires. Now God does not *make* them or *force* them to sin. But God doesn’t do anything to rescue them either. So, who do the “non-elect” love? They love Sin and Self. Do any of the non-elect love God? No. And they *don’t* love God because they *can’t*. And they *can’t* love God, because they don’t *want to*. And we also need to know that all of the various “religious” expressions that the “non-elect” engage in do not honor or please God. They are merely fallen and lost and unsaved people worshipping devils (sometimes they are worshipping *themselves*), but they are *not* worshipping or loving or enjoying the one, true, and living God.

Now, just like the demons in the Bible, these lost, unsaved, non-elect people are able to go to Church. And they can read the Bible and accept what it says as Truth. They can sing Hymns and sing praises and they can bow down and they can pray. Most of these people would like for God to give them a better life down here on earth. And many of them ask God to help them. They don't want to be damned by God. And they don't want to be hurt or to be sick or to be poor or to be alienated either. All of these people want to be happy. And they want to experience joy and they want to delight in things. They want a better Marriage, and they want their children to have a better life, and they would like for God to bless them and heal them and give them many, many wonderful gifts. And they may even credit God for doing that. And they may even acknowledge that it was God Who blessed them.

But they do not love Jesus. And because they don't love Jesus, they do not *enjoy* Him or find the fullness of Joy in Him. They are completely blind to God's Glory found in Jesus. But they can do all of those other things because *none* of those other things require that they love Jesus. And that is *why* we should not measure our Salvation based in those other things.

So, the non-elect may find *some* degree of pleasure in Church. But they do not find any genuine Pleasure in Jesus Himself. They may delight in reading the Bible. But they can't Delight in Jesus. And they may even want to go to Heaven. But they aren't excited about spending all of Eternity with Jesus.

Remember, in the Bible, people who were not saved, and who would not ever be saved, stood in line all night long so that Jesus would heal them and feed them and bless them. And they called out His Name and they reached out for Him and they gave God credit for giving them things and they were thankful when God did things for them.

But these same people also screamed for Jesus to die. They gladly turned against Him in an instant, as soon as Jesus didn't perform to their liking. As soon as Jesus had the audacity to make demands on their lives, they walked off and left Jesus standing in the middle of the road. As soon as Jesus acted in a way that was different from the "Messiah" they had invented in their minds was *supposed* to act, they *despised* Jesus and wanted Him dead.

And they did all this because they did not love Jesus. And they couldn't love Jesus because they were not saved, and they had not been gifted with a supernatural and ever-growing Love for Him.

And so, to whatever extent they responded *favorably* to Jesus, they really didn't magnify or worship or exalt or please or value Jesus. Because, unless you "delight" in Jesus, you're really *not* "magnifying" Him at all. Unless you "enjoy" Jesus, you're really not "worshipping" Him at all. And unless Jesus becomes "better" and "more valuable" to you and "more important" to you than *anything* or *anyone else*, you're really not giving Him the Glory that He deserves and is entitled to.

Joyless Obedience is not really Obedience at all. Following Jesus without *savoring* Him is *not* what shows His full Worth. Reading the Bible and praying and going to Church and learning all sorts of interesting facts about God and about the Bible is nice, but it isn't what brings God the *highest* and the *best* Glory.

But sinners *delighting in God* rather than delighting in what God does, Fallen sons and daughters of Adam *finding the fullness of Joy in God*, rather than in what God does, and rebels *being genuinely satisfied in God*, and not merely by what God gives them, is not normal. It isn't natural. It is a breathtaking miracle. It is a powerful and supernatural and a sovereign Act of God that gives God *all* the Glory.

But we must understand that these are *not* Issues that we are to simply "believe in". These are *not* things that we are to merely "agree about". These are *not* aspects with which we are to "confess" or "trust in". And these are *not* categories that we are to merely "talk about".

No, these are things we must *experience*. And we must experience them *personally* and *individually*, or they're simply not real to us. They are nothing but words on paper unless we possess them, and unless they possess us.

So, rather than ask, "*How does it feel to be loved by God?*", we need to ask, "*How does it feel to love God?*" What does "enjoying God" look like? How does it feel to be so fundamentally "re-born" that we actually "hunger and thirst" after God? And what would be the results of us experiencing this? For example, how would me "panting after God" alter my mind and change the way I think? How would me being so radically transformed that I truly "long for God's Presence", how would that alter the way I live my life and how I pray? How would me "delighting in God" change what I would desire and how I spent my

money? How would me "finding the fullness of Joy in God" motivate how I would raise my children and how I would treat my wife? And how would me "finding Pleasure in God" change what I would labor for?

So, I would suggest to you that *these* Issues are what is the *highest* and the *best* and the *final* and the *decisive* "Good" of the Good News. What God has done *for us*, in Jesus Christ, is absolutely amazing and wonderful and astounding and beautiful and glorious. And we should rejoice and sing about it and talk about it and spread the news far and wide. But then, we need to also ask, "*To what End did God do all of that? What is God's 'End-Game' in coming and dying and rising again?*" So, I would suggest that the *highest* and the *best* and the *final* and the *decisive* "Good" of the Good News is:

The Glory of God in the Face of Jesus Christ for our everlasting Enjoyment.

So, Yes, me having my sins forgiven is absolutely wonderful! And it is very Good, indeed! But me being so radically transformed (because I am forgiven) so that Jesus becomes the Treasure of the Universe to *me* is a much *higher* "Good"! Yes, God taking on flesh so that all my sins could be "paid for" is very spectacular. And it is very Good. But me, being so changed by and through my sins being "paid for", that I now delight in God above all that God has made or given to me or done for me, is an infinitely *better* "Good". In fact, it is the *best* "Good".

God pouring out the full Fury of His Wrath on Jesus, so that I may escape Hell, is grand, indeed. And it is Good. But me being so changed because God's Wrath is no longer against me to the point where I literally "hunger and thirst after God", rather than what God does for me, is a *final* "Good". And Jesus rising from the dead to prove that God is satisfied with all that Jesus did and said is fantastic. And it is Good. But me being so re-born that I now find the "fullness of *my own* satisfaction" in the Man, Who lived and died and now Who lives again, is a *decisive* "Good".

So, yes, we should ask for Help from God. And, of course, we should exult in God when God gives us that Help. But exulting in God *Himself* is infinitely *better* than exulting in what God gives or what God does, and it brings God *more* Glory. Why? Because when human beings genuinely exult in Who God *is*, and not only in what God *does* or

gives, that demonstrates a much *deeper* and much more *profound* Work of Grace in that individual. And that honors God *more*.

So, it is “Good” to exult in God for what He *does* and what He *gives*. But it is infinitely *better* to be so radically transformed (by what God alone has done in and for us) that we see God Himself as being more Valuable and more Important and more Beautiful and more Glorious than *anything* else, even *including* God’s gracious Help.

So, if it is true that the Salvation of wicked rebels glorifies God more than creating a super-nova, because saving people is the demonstration of the Glory of God’s Grace, then it is the *highest* and the *best* demonstration of that glorious Grace is when those sinners are not merely *forgiven*, but radically *transformed* into people who can exult in God *Himself*, rather than in only what God has done!

Amen. Let’s pray.

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The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen. Be watchful and quicken your pace. Soli Deo Gloria. For the Glory of God alone.