

Wonder, Part 2

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

The promise of the Beatitudes is a life of joy. Joy in knowing God through the process of conviction and repentance which lead to salvation, joy in humbling ourselves before God's sovereign will, joy in hungering and thirsting for a deeper relationship with God, joy in reflecting God's mercy to the world around us, and as we saw in the last lesson, joy in sanctification—becoming holy like God is holy.

If joy comes from applying these truths to our life, then the opposite must also be true. A failure to embrace the truths of the Beatitudes will result in a life lived poorly and unhappily. Sadly, many Christians allow their lives to be exactly this. Rather than the unfettered joy we are to portray to the world around us, many live lives that look no different from the surrounding culture. Rather than transformed minds, they have compliant, feeble minds that accept as true whatever society has recommended to them. They are, as Socrates so famously stated, unexamined lives.

The truths of God's Word are never intended to be negative straitjackets. Yet for too many, even Christians, this is the way they see the Bible. They believe it is a book of "thou shalt nots" rather than what it is—an invitation to live the best life ever. How sad and how testimony destroying!

Jesus sets forth in this Beatitude the incredibleness of what is on offer with the adoption of His life-changing process. The journey of becoming more like Him is not a soul-destroying slog. It is an exciting adventure of joy and wonder. Follow Him, trust Him, allow Him to show you the unexamined parts of your soul; and you will experience life as you have never known it before. This is the promise of sanctification.

One day, yes, we will stand before God face to face. What a wonderful moment that will be, one we cannot fully comprehend in this life. But the joy of a pure heart, of seeing God is not just a future promise. It is also the joy of daily walking in the Spirit, of never being alone, of never being weak and powerless, of never being without hope. Sanctification brings us daily before the throne of God as we seek to be clean and transparent before He who is All-Holy and All-Righteous. All we can do is kneel in wonder.

Can God be seen in our world today? Yes, in the lives of those who reflect His glory. Open your life to Him, humble yourself before Him, and watch in wonder as He shows Himself to you. You will be in awe of the work that God can do in your own life and in the lives of others. You will be in awe of the work that God can do in the world around you—your church and your city. And you will experience true joy. As David exclaimed in Psalm 16:11, *"in Your presence is fullness of joy; at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore."*



The Joy of Perfect Vision

The real thing, not a cheap substitute.

Seeing God at Work *Becoming what He wants us to be.*

Sanctification, our growth to becoming more like Christ, appears at first glance as a solitary fixation. And to the extent that we need to transform our mind through prayer and Bible meditation, it is. But that is just the behind-the-scenes preparation for how we live out our sanctification before others. Read **Philippians 2:12-15**. How does Paul refer to task of sanctification in verse 12? *“Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling...” It is a personal journey.*

What does Paul say is the point of this effort of sanctification? *Our testimony and witness to the world.*

It is worth remembering that Paul’s audience in the book of Philippians was the church of believers there. What does he call the church to in verse 14? *Unity.*

The way that we shine for God is in our relationships with others. How we love others defines our journey towards perfection as a Christian. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus gave instruction on how to love others in a sincere, transparent way.

Being Chaste

In an overly sexualized world, as in both the Roman era and our era today, the command to be chaste is often seen as quaint. People frequently live in sexual sin within the church just as freely as they do outside the church. Jesus directly got to the root of the issue in **Matthew 5:27-30**. Where did He say sexual sin began? *Sexual sin begins in the mind. We don’t suddenly go out and have an affair; we first begin to have an affair in our minds.*

One of the flashpoints in our culture in the past couple of decades has been homosexuality. Some claim that having homosexual *desires* are acceptable to God, if one does not act upon them. What clarity do **verses 29-30** bring to that idea? *Here Jesus specifically deals with improper desire. Using hyperbole to make His point clear. Improper desires of any kind are to be rejected because of the power of those thoughts to undermine a holy life.*

What relevance does this have in regard to porn? *Same issue. Porn is ultimately about a sinful desire to please oneself. It is the desire that is sinful, thus engaging in porn feeds those sinful desires.*

In **1 Thessalonians 4:3-7**, Paul explicitly links sanctification to sexual purity. How does sexual immorality degrade our love for our neighbor? *We are taking advantage of them, sinning against them. We are dragging them down for our own pleasure. Rather than acting for their good, we are harming their sanctification and disrupting their relationship with fellow Christians. The irony is that we often call this “love”, but it really isn’t true love for the other person. It is instead selfish love for ourselves. Fulfilling our desires at the expense of someone else, even if it seems that they want to be involved.*



Being Faithful

Divorce is not a modern concept. In the Law of Moses guidelines were set for obtaining a divorce but it could only be initiated by the husband. However, the Roman culture of Jesus' day freely accepted divorce initiated by either husband or wife. In fact, it was used frequently by the Roman ruling class as a way of establishing better alliances. For instance, John the Baptist called out Herod Antipas' marriage to Herodias because she had divorced her husband Philip to marry Herod (Luke 3:19). Evidently, this culture adaptation had made divorce a common occurrence in Jesus' day. So much so, that in **Mark 10:2-12**, Jesus is asked about divorce by the Pharisees. What does He say was God's original intent for marriage?

Jesus quotes from Genesis 2:24 where God established marriage. It was the first institution of three that He ordained. (The others are government and the church.) How does Jesus underline God's involvement in the foundational nature of marriage in **verse 9**? *Marriage is something we enter into in the eyes of God. It is not just a simple hand-shake agreement (it is a vow—more on that later). Just as we see God involved in the actions of government and the church, so we see God involved in marriages. Great damage is done when these foundational institutions stand against God's will.*

What is Jesus' explanation for the rule in the Law? *"Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, permitted you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so."*

Jesus was showing here that God understands the process of sanctification. He sets the standard at perfection but knows that we might not be able to achieve it. What does this say about God's love for us? *This points to the reality of God's mercy in our lives. He knows we aren't perfect and understands that humanity sometimes needs to be protected from the consequences of their own sin.*

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus drilled down to the root of the issue. What was to be the primary concern in initiating a divorce according to **Matthew 5:31-32**? *"causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a woman who is divorced commits adultery." Thinking of what was better for the spouse because if he wasn't already living in sin by committing sexual immorality, remarriage would cause him to. The point of the sexual immorality here is not that it is an excuse for someone to want a divorce, but that it removes the concern for the spouse's spirituality in committing adultery, because he is already living in sin. Just like sinful desires, unfaithfulness has its roots in selfishness, thinking only of oneself rather than the other.*

The implications of the cost of faithfulness were not lost on the disciples. How did they respond to this teaching in **Matthew 19:10**? *"If such is the case of the man with his wife, it is better not to marry."*

What does this tell us about how we grow in sanctification through faithfulness? How can faithfulness be a testimony to the power of God in our lives? *Faithfulness requires God's power working in us. It requires overcoming temptation to develop sinful relationships when we are unhappy or unfulfilled in our marriage. God is able to be all that we need as an emotional support when our spouse refuses this role. It also points to the importance of our relationship as a testimony to the world (1 Peter 3:5). Both in avoiding sinful behavior or in responding after sinful behavior. We can overcome the difficulties of adultery or sin in our marriage through God's power. He is able to restore our relationship when we forgive and commit to being faithful regardless of our spouse's sin.*



Our closest neighbors are our family. They are also the ones who know us the best and are the most aware of our hypocrisy and imperfections. How does loving our neighbor become even more challenging at times with those we know so well?

1. We know how *to provoke* them. *We know what buttons to push.*
2. We *behave the worst* around them. *We are more willing to let down our guard around them.*
3. We become *comfortable with their sin*. This plays a role in accountability. *We may end up justifying their sin just like we do our own—that's just who they are. This is misplaced love, what psychologists call enablement. This can result from shame and an intense loyalty to family secrets. A lack of transparency is always a warning sign that we are not honoring God.*
4. This can lead to us becoming *involved in the same sin*. *This is often seen in the spread of addictions and in the abused becoming involved in abusing others.*

Being Trustworthy

Read **Matthew 5:33**. Note the beginning of verse 33, "...you have heard that it was said..." This is a pattern Jesus used repeatedly throughout His teaching in the Sermon on the Mount. Each time, He was contrasting the legalistic teaching of the Pharisees with the underlying spiritual truth of the command. Note what the Mosaic law said about vows in **Deuteronomy 23:21-23**.

1. Vows were to be *fulfilled promptly*.
2. Failure to keep a vow was a *sin*.
3. Vows were *voluntary*.

The taking of vows, such as the Nazarite vow, were commonplace in Jewish history. But in Jesus' day, it appears that the Pharisees had made spiritual vows into an elaborate system that totally defeated their purpose. Jesus pointed out an example of this in **Mark 7:10-13**. What was this loophole allowing them to refuse to do? *It was a loophole that allowed them not to provide for their aging parents as they were expected to do by the Law.*

Although we rarely call them this anymore, we still take spiritual vows. The most common are marriage vows, although there has been an effort to weaken these through the use of "self-written" vows that have no meaning and often make no commitment. Another area where we take vows is in the giving of offerings such as commitments to a building fund or missions. How should we think about these vows according to this teaching? *They are a vow to God and so must be taken seriously because to refuse to fulfill them is a sin. Jesus is encouraging us not to be flippant in the way we view our vows, not to see them as aspirational goals. If we've made a vow to God, we must depend upon God to help us fulfill that vow. Notice also that the law didn't say you had to take a vow—they are voluntary. If you feel you cannot fulfill a vow, do not take one.*

Read **Matthew 5:34-37**. What problem do we see described here? *Invoking God in a casual and unserious way to promote the illusion that we are honest.*



Again, Jesus' example for this teaching was the practices of the Pharisees which He described in more detail in **Matthew 23:16-22**. What stands out to you in their approach to oaths?

1. Their speech was designed to deceive. *They were threading needles to give themselves loopholes. It is the same way we often hear politicians or high-pressure salespeople speak. In our day and time, we warn people to "read the fine print" to avoid falling prey to those who don't fulfill their promises.*
2. Their intent was for personal advantage. *This speaks to the problem of taking God's name in vain (Exodus 20:7). Invoking God in minor transactions or in our business dealings. We should not put God's name and reputation at stake in situations that are about our own strength to fulfill and where in the end, we are at risk of making Him seem like He is untrustworthy.*

What connection do we see in **Proverbs 12:17-22** between our speech and our spirituality? *The standard of truth is God's Word. The content of what we say should be based upon God's truth rather than on worldly ideas. This is especially true if we want what we say to others to endure and bear fruit in their lives. God delights in us when we are honest in our dealings with others and will reward truthfulness.*

How does our speech affect our emotional health according to this passage? *It's not just others that are wounded when we speak dishonestly, it also harms us. This is because ultimately, we are more impacted by our own words than other people are. Even if we think we haven't thought about them, the words coming out of our mouth have already been filtered through our mind, therefore, we personally believe them and live them out. We come to believe our own lies which is self-destructive.*

Wise and peaceful words promote joy in our life. Both because it is a sign of the kinds of thoughts we are thinking and because it leads to better interpersonal relationships.

In **Ephesians 4:25-27, 29**, how did Paul describe the underlying problems with dishonest speech? *It is like the eye lying to the foot and telling it there is not a nail where it is getting ready to step. Lying is destructive to others and harms our efforts to work together. Ultimately, it is allowing the devil to control us rather than the Spirit.*

What should be the purpose of our speech towards others according to verse 29? *To build them up not to get our own way. Note that even if this may mean occasional criticism, it is to be done in grace and with a purpose of building them up not just because we are angry at them. We should speak through the wisdom of the Spirit, not under the devil's control.*

How does our speech provide us with a measuring tool for our progress in sanctification? *Speech is the most visible way we interact with others. It is the external manifestation of what is going on in our hearts. An inability to be honest or control our tongue is a sure sign of spiritual immaturity. Even more telling is how we deal with failures in this area. Do we repent, ask forgiveness, make amends? An inability to accept responsibility for our poor speech or respond to spiritual correction are also signs of spiritual immaturity. Accepting spiritual counsel by avoiding particular behaviors and focusing on positives rather than negatives are all good indicators that we are showing progress in our sanctification.*



Jesus taught that outward sinful behavior is a reflection of the true nature of what is in the heart. We may think we have our sin well hidden from others, but the reality of our sin will eventually come out for all to see. Uncontrolled lust becomes sexual sin. A self-centered heart leads to a failed marriage. A dishonest heart leads to untrustworthy speech. All of these sins revolve around a heart that seeks only to satisfy itself rather than the needs of others. To love others well, we must seek purity of heart through sanctification.

When the focus of our relationships with others is love, we seek the best for those around us, even when it is personally difficult. But the payoff is that in the end, we enjoy better relationships. While this seems counterintuitive, the change of focus is the key. Rather than a hyper focus on ourselves and our problems, we turn our attention to those around us, and our problems fade in comparison. We often come to realize that our problems are really not that severe compared to those of others around us. This change of perspective leads to an even greater desire to show our love to those around us and the joy of watching God work in their lives through our efforts.

