

## **The Purpose of God's Perfect Discipline, Part 2 (Hebrews 12:9–10)**

Romans chapter 8. Two familiar verses that I'll begin with, verses 31 and 32: "What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?"

Now, that is a profound promise, because it is an argument from the greater to the lesser describing God's intention to give to His people—His elect, for whom He has nothing but unlimited and infinite redeeming love and grace—God's intention to give to them everything less than Christ that is for their good. Everything less than Christ that is for our good, God will lavish that gift upon us.

Now, what things are less than Christ? That's everything. And that's Paul's point. If God did not spare His own Son, but instead delivered up for us the highest and the greatest and the best thing that God could give to us, and if that is for our good, and it is—it's for our redemption and our salvation, for our sanctification, eternal life, the glories of the kingdom and the new age to come, all of that is all ours because of what Christ has done, because of what God has done in giving up Christ for us. If God has lavished upon us the greatest blessing that can be given, then does it not logically follow that anything else that is for our good that is less than Christ, that He will lavish that upon us as well?

Why would God give us the very best thing and say, "No, but the lesser things that are also for your good, those things I will withhold from you. Those things I'm going to be stingy and not give those things to you," even though He has already given to us the very best that He has? That's Paul's argument. If God, who has not withheld from us His only Son, how will He withhold from us anything else that is lesser that is for our good? Ultimately, God's purpose is to give us every good thing. God has no ill intentions whatsoever toward any of His elect. Everything He does is for our ultimate good. Everything He does is for our glory. He will withhold from His own no good thing. He will accomplish what is best for us.

And God's eye is not just on this life and what transpires in this life, but God's eye is on eternity. He is looking forward to the life that is to come, and He is accomplishing in this world, through all of our afflictions and all of our suffering, everything that is necessary for our ultimate good and our ultimate enjoyment. God is looking forward to the future, caring not only for us here in this life with an infinite and familial love, but He is working everything in this life to accomplish our ultimate and eternal good. Not just our good in

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this life, as if the things in this life are all going to work out for good, and we get to the end of this life and say, you know what? Yeah, my wife left me. Yeah, my child died. Yeah, I lost that job. But ultimately it was for good. That's not the point. The point is that everything in this life is preparing us and directing us for that ultimate good, so that when we stand in His presence, we will look back at this life and say, "God took everything that happened in this life and worked it for my ultimate joy and betterment."

How will He, after giving us His son, not afterward give us every good thing to accomplish our ultimate good?

Don't answer this out loud because this is a trick question. Some of them I warn you about, some of them I don't. I'm warning you about this one. Don't answer this one out loud, but this is an easy one. This is true or false. True or false to this statement: God is not interested in your happiness; He is interested in your holiness? True or false? Just think about it. God is not interested in your happiness; He is interested in your holiness. In other words, God is accomplishing in this world not the things that will necessarily make you happy, but the things that will necessarily make you holy. Is that a true statement or a false statement?

Some of you would probably say true to that. Some of you would probably say false to that, depending on what I mean by happiness. Because, really, that's at the heart of the issue. What do we mean by happiness?

If by happiness what I mean is that God will give me everything that my flesh desires, everything that I, in my sinful, earthbound, created, fallen-creature state, think will ultimately make me happy in this life, then that is true. God is not interested in that happiness, but instead He is pursuing my holiness. Because God is not interested in appeasing our sinfulness or placating our temporary comforts or making us happy in this life. That is not His ultimate goal or His aim if by happy we mean "what my flesh desires." God is not interested in providing those things.

But if by happiness we mean our ultimate and highest delight and joy, if by happiness we mean the perfect state of soul in which we enjoy all that is truly good, truly beautiful, truly lovely, and truly glorious, and we enjoy it to the fullest, if that's what we mean by happiness, then yes. (Sorry. What was the question?) If that's what we mean by happiness, then no, God is not pursuing my holiness over my happiness.

Here's the answer to the trick question. I forget even what the question was now. Here's the answer to the trick question. God does not have to choose between holiness and

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happiness for us. Because here's the key, Christian: your ultimate happiness is the result of God making you holy. He makes us happy *through* holiness, not in opposition to holiness. And He doesn't make us holy without making us happy. Because, ultimately, you and I are created for enjoying and sharing in God's holiness for all of eternity. And God is going to give us, then, our ultimate happiness, what is truly best for us, and that is intimately connected to our holiness. So God doesn't choose between your happiness and your holiness. He makes you happy by making you holy.

Furthermore, He makes you happy by causing you to love holiness and then to share in His holiness and to delight in His holiness. That is true happiness. And when you pursue happiness at the sacrifice of holiness, you're pursuing a mirage. That is the devil's decoy that gets us pursuing and chasing after things that can give us no true happiness at all. We think we have to sacrifice and give up holiness in order to be happy, to pursue happiness. And we mistakenly and sinfully and unbelievably think that if we pursue holiness, we have to sacrifice happiness on that altar, and we don't have to choose between those two. God accomplishes both of those things for us, for His people. Happiness without holiness is a cheap imitation. He is working to make us eternally happy, infinitely happy, joyfully happy. And in this life, we get a little bit of that happiness, but that happiness is tied to God progressing us in holiness so that we may share His holiness.

Charles Spurgeon said this: "I would sooner be holy than happy if the two things could be divorced." Stop there for just a second. He's saying, "I would rather, if I had to choose between holiness and happiness"—as if, Spurgeon said, you could just cut them and divorce them one from another—"if I had to choose between holiness and happiness, if the two things could be divorced, I would sooner be holy than happy." Now listen, start over the quote. Here it is. "I would sooner be holy than happy if the two things could be divorced. Were it possible for a man always to sorrow and yet to be pure, I would choose the sorrow if I might win the purity, for to be free from the power of sin, and to be made to love holiness, is true happiness."

To be free from the power of sin and to be made to love holiness is true happiness. See, we cannot separate those two things. If true happiness, then, and holiness cannot be separated, and if the goal of all of God's workings with us is to create in us holiness, to share, in the words of verse 10 of Hebrews chapter 12, His holiness with us, if that is God's design, then ultimately, all of His discipline is designed to make you happy. Do you follow the reasoning? If God is pursuing your ultimate holiness, and if He is disciplining

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you to create in you holiness because His ultimate aim is to make you happy through that holiness, then all of God's discipline is intended for your happiness.

Now, you say, that's not what verse 11 says. It says "All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful." That's right. For the moment. But, see, we live in the moment. What we do not understand is how God is using the discipline to create in us holiness for our ultimate happiness. And it is a happiness that you and I can enjoy when we are made to love holiness in this life. And it is a happiness that we will get to enjoy for all of our lives. We are created in Christ Jesus for holiness. We are sanctified to be made holy. When we see Christ, we will be made perfectly holy, just as He is perfectly holy. We will be separate from sin and we will share in His holiness. And that is our ultimate happiness.

It is impossible that you and I could enjoy God's highest good and not be happy. It is impossible that you and I could enjoy God's highest good and not be happy. Well, if God's highest good is our holiness, then holiness and happiness must go together. He will share with us His holiness. We will be made to love holiness. We will be made holy, and then we will be happy. And we are happy when we are made to love holiness.

Now, we're looking at the purpose of God's discipline in Hebrews chapter 12. And I have been arguing that we are obligated to respectfully submit to God's discipline since He disciplines us in a far better way, for a far better purpose, and with far better wisdom than any of our earthly fathers ever disciplined us.

There is an intentional contrast in verses 9 and 10 as he is describing for us the ultimate purpose of God's discipline, which is at the end of verse 10: "So that we may share His holiness." There is a contrast in verses 9 and 10 between the discipline that our earthly fathers gave us and the discipline that our heavenly Father does for us. He, our heavenly Father, is the Father of spirits. That's verse 9. And He is working for us discipline. He is disciplining us, not just so that He may train our outward conduct. He is not after merely outward conformity to some standard, but instead God is after our soul. He is shaping our soul and conforming us into the image of Christ, making us just like His Son, which, in effect, is the way in which He shares His holiness with us. So God's ultimate purpose is so that we may share His holiness.

And this is a higher and better end for His discipline than anything that our earthly fathers and mothers ever did for us. They could not create in us holy conduct through physical discipline. It's impossible. And as much as our earthly parents—if you had godly parents who disciplined you well—as much as they might have wanted to produce in

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you a hunger and a love for holiness, no amount of earthly discipline by an earthly parent can accomplish that. All they can do is give you a hatred for the pain that disobedience is attended with. They can give you that. But they can't create in you a hunger for holiness. I wish it were possible for us as earthly parents to do that, but we can't.

God's ultimate purpose is so that we may share His holiness. Now we are obligated, since that is God's ultimate purpose, sharing His holiness, and since that holiness is the path to our happiness, ultimate and full happiness, then you and I are obligated as obedient children to submit respectfully to His loving discipline.

Notice in verse 9—this is just a couple sentence recap of what we looked at last week: “Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live?” There is this contrast between earthly parents and their discipline, and our heavenly Father and His discipline. And if earthly parents, in spite of their limitations and their inequities and their failings in discipline, if we respected them, how much more should we respect a Father who disciplines us perfectly, always perfectly, and has our ultimate good in mind? That's the contrast he's making.

So now in verse 10 we're going to look at a couple of the contrasts between earthly parents' discipline and our heavenly Father's discipline. There are a number of imperfections that are mentioned here. Notice, first of all, in verse 10, “For they [that is, our earthly parents] disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but [now notice the contrast. But our heavenly Father . . . ] He disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness.” There's the contrast. Notice the first limitation of earthly parents: they discipline us for a short time. That refers to the relatively short period of time of the earthly discipline that earthly parents give to their children. It is a short time.

Now, when you are the parent of a newborn, it doesn't seem like it's a short time. You think, fifteen years? I can't even imagine what ten, twelve, fifteen years is going to be like. That's your first kid, and if you have kids after that, then you're looking even further down the road, and you think, that's a long time away, isn't it? Fifteen years is such a long time away. And then when they turn fifteen, you're like, wow, that went by like that. It's such a short period of time.

And I say fifteen because in the ancient cultures, they had to adopt adult responsibilities and adult status far earlier than we do in our culture. In our culture, you can have a

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prolonged adolescence that goes on into your late twenties, early thirties, where you're living in Mommy's basement, still playing video games and living off the family checkbook, and they think that this is OK, this is somehow agreeable and reasonable and acceptable when it's not. In the ancient world, you got to be thirteen, fourteen, fifteen years old and you adopted sometimes the family name, family responsibilities, family business. You were reckoned an adult much earlier in that culture than we are today.

I'm not entirely opposed to putting those kinds of responsibilities on people, so long as they think that they can handle it and so long as they can handle it. But when you're a parent and you've got ten or fifteen years to discipline your child, on the front end of that, that might seem like a long time. When you get to the end of that, it's not a long time. It's a very brief period of time.

And then there comes a point in disciplining your children where the discipline changes and the relationship changes, begins to change, and those children become more equals in some sense than they were when they were much younger. That period of time that you have to shape and mold their soul and to teach them truth is very brief. That's the author's point. They disciplined us for a very short period of time. It's just a few years.

And so, woe to the parent who neglects this or delays in it. Because you say, I'll put that off. I'll teach them that later. Now's not the time. I'm too tired. I'm too busy. I'm too occupied. I have other things. And then your child is going to grow older and get to be a certain age, and you're going to realize that you missed a lot of opportunities to shape their soul and to teach them truth. And those missed opportunities never, ever come back in the same way that you had when they were younger.

So if we submit and respect earthly parents who are only disciplining us for a short period of time, how much more then should we respect our heavenly Father, who never puts down the rod of love, who is always watching over us? From the moment that we become His till the time that He takes us home, He is always watching over us, always shaping our soul, always doing what is best for us, always conforming us to the image of Christ. He never puts down the rod. He never ignores us. He never does what is in His own self-interest. He always pursues us.

So, if the brief discipline that is exercised by our earthly parents is worthy of respect, then how much more a God whose holy interest and familial and redeeming love for our good never leaves us and never stops? Our earthly parents just get us for a little bit. And

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yet that little bit of discipline, that little window that shows us that they love us, they care for us, they're shaping us, they want us to know the truth, if that little bit creates in us a respect, how much more a God who, from the moment we become His till the moment He takes us home, He is never off of us? His gaze never comes away from us. His love is never removed from us. His rod is always there. His interests, His pursuit of our holiness is always actively in our lives and forming us and shaping us and molding us into the person of Christ. He deserves a lot of respect, doesn't He? And that we would submit to that discipline? That's the point.

Notice the second limitation in verse 10. "They disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them." Now, there's two ways you could take that or understand that phrase "as seemed best to them." And translations are a little different. Some translations translate this according to one sense, and some translations translate it according to another sense. There are two ways that we could understand it.

First, that parents operate on limited information and are often doing the very best they can, even though they don't necessarily know what is best. Right? They just disciplined us according to what seemed best to them in the moment. Parents are fumbling through this. It appears to be best. They're doing what they can in the moment to try and do what they think they should do. But often parents are acting on limited information, or they really don't know what the best approach to discipline is. And yet they try their best. This is how the NASB translates it: "as seemed best to them." The NIV likewise: "as they thought best." That's the first sense. Parents don't always know what the best course of discipline is, do they?

If you're a new parent, you've been a new parent, you understand this. You don't always know. Sometimes you're going on poor information or scant information. You're in the kitchen and you hear the screams coming from the bedroom upstairs and you run upstairs and your two kids are up there playing. And here's little Karyn on the floor with her toys, and her brother Shembley. Karyn and Shembley [similar to the names of the speaker's grown children]. This is hypothetical, so any similarities to persons living or dead is completely coincidental. But Karyn and Shembley are sitting in the middle of the toys there, and they are both red in the face and crying. And for the last thirty seconds they have been throwing curses and calumnies at each other that would make your hair curl. And you walk in. You have no idea what has happened, what has precipitated this, what caused it, who is at fault. Both of them are professing to be completely innocent in the matter. They are angels who, in that moment, could walk on water. It is the other

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devil incarnate who has caused all of this chaos. And both of them would swear before a court that this is exactly what has unfolded, according to their story.

And you walk into the midst of that, and how do you handle it? You've got limited information, don't you? You don't know what has happened. You don't know how long this has been going on. You don't know who is guilty. Both of them could be guilty. It could be just an innocent misunderstanding—I doubt it—that escalated. But you have no idea what has caused it. And you have no idea who the real perpetrator is. One of them is the perpetrator and one of them might be innocent, or they both might be guilty. You don't know. How do you discipline in that moment? In that moment, you've only got to go with limited information and do what seems best in the moment. If you do nothing, then somebody has gotten away with a crime against humanity. If you do something to both of them, then one of them is getting punished too severely and probably the other one not severely enough. And if you punish both of them, then maybe one of them is entirely innocent. You don't know.

Sometimes, as parents, we are too lenient. We're lazy and tired and exasperated. We just don't know how to fit the discipline to the sin or the situation. We don't know how to make it right. We don't know how to right the wrong that has been done. Sometimes it's just too harsh. We overcorrect and punish out of anger and bitterness and frustration and pent-up resentment over these kids who are doing this yet again. Sometimes we discipline the wrong child for the wrong thing, or we start discipline too late in life, or we discipline inconsistently. All of these things “exasperb”—exasperate children, almost as much as it exasperates me to try and use the right word sometimes. All of these things exasperate children.

When we are inconsistent and we say it's OK to jump all over the furniture at home, but not at Grandma's house, or not at the neighbor's house. It's OK to get up and run around the table during the meal at home, but in a restaurant, that's unacceptable. When you go over to somebody else's house, that's unacceptable. Your four-year-old or your five-year-old does not understand that at all. It's OK to scream when you don't get the cereal you want at home, but not OK in the cereal aisle at Walmart. They don't understand that. So all of these inconsistencies in discipline, all of the harshness, the leniency, these are the things that exasperate. These are the things that frustrate children and make life difficult for them, make them angry at parents and frustrate the entire home life.

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We don't always do what we know to be best. Furthermore, we don't always even know what is best. Such is not the case with God, by the way. He knows perfectly and flawlessly exactly what you need and when you need it, flawlessly.

Second, it's possible that this phrase “as seemed best to them” could be describing parents who discipline with the wrong motives. And this is how the RSV translates it: “they disciplined . . . at their pleasure,” or we might say, for their good, as seemed best to them. In other words, they're disciplining *us* for *their* best interests. This is another thing that sometimes parents do. We discipline for our good because we want the chaos to stop. We want the child who has done this thing to never, ever do this again, because this will upset our idol, or it will disrupt our peace, or it will frustrate us, or it will embarrass us or give us a bad reputation. Those are polluted and sinful motives out of which to discipline.

And I wish it were true that as parents, in the moment, we could just sit down and, in a split second, decide what is the best motivation. Where is my motivation in this? What is a pure and holy approach to discipline? And what is the best thing to bring to bear on this situation, to correct it, to train them, and to remedy this situation? I wish we could do that, but oftentimes we can't.

We sometimes go into a discipline situation and we don't even know what our motive is in that moment. And we might be able to sense that, yeah, there's something sinful going on here in my own heart, but I've got to deal with this right now. And because I have to deal with this right now, I don't have time to deal with what's going on in my own heart. So I'll discipline them. Then I'll deal with my corrupt motives later on. And guess what never happens? Dealing with my corrupt motives later on. Because we think, OK, we've done what the Lord called us to do. I've disciplined them. Therefore I can just sort of calm down, and maybe next time I'll take the time to analyze my own motives in it. But then Karyn and Shembley go at it again, and in the heat of the moment, you've got to come up with a whole new discipline plan.

Our earthly parents disciplined us as seemed best to or for them sometimes. It's in their best interest to do this. And we fail as parents when we do not consider what is in the best interests of the soul of my child. Right? That's the question that needs to be asked in the heat of the moment.

God suffers from none of these frailties. He lacks no wisdom. He knows perfectly what we need. He knows perfectly how to accomplish what we need. He knows how to

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sanctify us and make us holy. He knows our weaknesses and our strengths. He knows our blind spots. He notices the things that escape our notice in our lives. And He does it for our good, not according to appearances, not as if to satisfy something in Him, but He disciplines us for our good. This is verse 10: “He disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness.”

Whereas, as earthly parents, we sometimes discipline according to a lack of knowledge, God never does. Whereas, as earthly parents, we sometimes discipline for our own good, God never does. God is not in any way improved by disciplining us. You realize that? We don't add to His holiness. His glory is not made any more. He is not morally improved. He doesn't become greater than He was before. God doesn't discipline us to satisfy anything in Himself. He gets nothing from it because He needs nothing. He needs nothing that our discipline provides. And He is not satisfied of some want that He has by bringing us affliction and suffering and teaching and training us. His aim is our ultimate good. This is His purpose, and this is His pleasure.

Now, does God accomplish all His good pleasure? Yes, He does. Scripture says that. Does He do so—accomplishing all of His good pleasure—does He do so infallibly (that means perfectly)? He cannot err and He cannot fail. That is what Scripture says. And if that is true, then He is working out for you, through discipline, your highest good and your greatest joy, because that is what He has purposed to do. What is that? It's at the end of verse 10: so that you may share His holiness. That you may share His holiness.

Friends, the fact that that is even possible is stunningly profound. And I don't want this to be lost on any of us, what it means to share in His holiness. You and I are children of dust, fallen in Adam, once rebels to His will, haters of God, at war with Him. We had in us no capacity for proper affections, no ability to be holy, no hunger for holiness or thirst for righteousness. We had none of that. In fact, we were alienated from God, estranged from Him, enemies of God in our minds through wicked works, at war with Him and hostile against Him, unable and unwilling to submit ourselves to the law of God or to His righteousness, unwilling and unable to bow before His holiness. And we were under the just wrath of God, a holy God, because of our sin, and our crimes were more than we can count. Our guilt was more than we could fathom. And the wrath that was due to us was more than we could ever bear. Our penalty was more than we could ever pay.

That was the condition in which we once were. And now God, by His grace, took those who had no ability or desire for holiness whatsoever and caused us to be born again

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through the redeeming and regenerating work of the Holy Spirit. He regenerates us and creates within us holy affections, holy desires, and capacities that we never had before. And then He fills us with His Holy Spirit and gives us the ability to long for and taste and love holiness. And then He shares His holiness with those creatures who were once rebels to His will and under His just wrath. That is a profound reality that you and I should not just breeze over quickly, that He would share with us His holiness.

What is holiness? It is a separateness, an otherness, a set-apartness. That's what holiness is. I will describe to you what God's holiness is here in just a moment so you can kind of get some idea of what it is that He shares with us. The word *holy* or *holiness* comes from a family of words that describes things set apart. It's sometimes translated as "saint" or "sanctified" or "sanctification." It describes that which is holy or made holy or separate.

In their book *Biblical Doctrine*, John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue describe holiness this way: "God's holiness is His inherent and absolute greatness in which He is perfectly distinct above everything outside Himself and absolutely morally separate from sin. God is inherently great and resists all compromises of His character and therefore is transcendentally distinct from all His creatures in infinite majesty. He is majestically unique."

Those are four very lovely words: He is majestically unique. That is His holiness. Nobody is more other than God is other. You think that He is like you in what capacity? None. He is like nothing in the created realm. He's not like water. He's not like a three-leaf clover. He's not like an egg. His nature is not in any of those things. There is nothing to which we can liken God. "To whom [to what] will you liken Me?" (Isa. 46:5). There's nothing. He is completely other, completely distinct, completely set apart, not just from His creation, transcendentally existing above that, but morally, in all of His perfections and His righteousness and His purity. He does not compromise His character. He is morally distinct and holy above all things. He is majestically unique. That is His holiness. There is this moral separation that God has from His creatures. It is a separate purity, a separate distinctness that we get to taste and love and enjoy here in this world, and we will for all of eternity.

Now, holiness is inherent. That's the word that was used twice, I think, in that definition. Holiness is inherently a characteristic of God because of who He is. He is majestically unique in a way that nothing else is unique. Everything else outside of God is created. That means none of us are unique in that sense. God is uncreated, which means He has

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capacities, He has characteristics that nothing created shares. He is majestically unique. And holiness is an inherent quality that God has, because none other is more other than God is other, infinite in all of His perfections.

Isaiah 6, verse 3. Do you remember what the angels cry out around the throne? “Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory.” Right? The One who was and who is and who is to come. Uncreated He was; He exists, He is the I Am; and He always will be. He is majestically unique. He is holy.

Everything else that is holy is a derived holiness. So when God said to Moses, “Take off your shoes, for the ground on which you walk is holy ground,” He didn't mean that there is this little patch out in the Arabian Peninsula that was somehow set apart and unique and it was just a special place of creation. No, it was *made* holy because God met with Moses there. So that ground, then, becomes set apart, sanctified. It becomes holy in the sense that it is unique and separate for Moses and for that encounter in a way that no other piece of ground on the planet is. It becomes holy or set apart or sanctified because it derives its holiness, its uniqueness, from the God who gives it that uniqueness.

So when we become holy and we pursue holiness, or God creates holiness in us, it is not that we add our holiness to Him. He is majestically unique. But rather He shares that distinctness with us and communicates that moral separateness to those creatures with whom He shares holiness. God communicates His holiness to us, as He has set us apart in Christ from before the foundation of the world—that is a positional sanctification—and as He continues to conform us to the image of Christ in time, and that is progressive sanctification. So we are made holy in two senses. And I will cover these quickly. Two senses.

First, we're made holy in that God has made us positionally holy. And if you're in Christ, you will never be more positionally holy than you are right now. You can't grow in positional holiness. He has taken you out of the kingdom of darkness and put you into the kingdom of light. He has taken you out of the family of Satan and placed you in the kingdom and the family of God. He has taken one who was alienated from Him and has made you His child and adopted you into His family. You who were under His wrath are now only under His grace. He has taken you from the position and condition in which you once were, and He has brought you near to Him. So He has redeemed you as His own possession. That's sanctification. That's positional sanctification. He has made you His own. That will never change. You will never be less positionally His or more

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positionally His. You are positionally as sanctified as you will ever be and you can ever be. You'll never be more or less in the kingdom of darkness, more or less His child.

Practical sanctification, on the other hand, now, that's a whole different story, isn't it? Because practical sanctification is the way in which you and I live out and pursue and express holiness in our own personal lives. That's the practical side of it. That is the progressive sanctification that is described in Scripture. We are progressing toward ultimate holiness. We'll never reach it in this life, because we will always be shackled to these bodies of death. Our flesh has a memory, and it will always put those things in our minds and cause our bodies to desire things that are inappropriate and illicit. And so we will always struggle and battle against those things.

But we can have confidence. As Paul says in Philippians 2, verse 13, "For it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure." God is continuing to accomplish His sanctifying and holy-making purposes in you, and He will do so until the day of Christ Jesus, Philippians 1:6 says. And God's goal in this life is to sanctify you, to make you more holy through the discipline. So 1 Peter chapter 1, verse 15 says, "Like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves. . . ." Be holy, set apart, separate from sin, sanctified, practicing holiness in your life. The moral purity and the righteousness that characterizes God, He communicates that to you and I by giving us the capacity to live holy lives here.

Colossians 1:22: "Yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach." That's the goal. We will stand before Him and we will be as He is when we see Him as He is.

Ephesians 1, verse 4 says God chose us in Christ "before the foundation of the world, that we would be [what?] holy and blameless before Him." That's the goal of your election. That is why God chose you in Christ, to make you holy. That is why God sanctifies you and saves you in this life, to make you holy. That is why God left you here instead of taking you to glory, so that you would grow in holiness while you are here. That is the point of your life here, to grow in sanctification.

"Those whom He [God] foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son. . . ." (Rom. 8:29). So God is shaping and molding you into the image of Christ.

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Jude says, “Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless . . .” (Jude 1:24). That's the goal. That is what God is pushing you toward.

First Peter 2, verse 5 says we are a holy priesthood. First Peter 2, verse 9 says we are a holy nation. Second Peter 1, verse 4 says, “By these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature. . . .” You and I partake of the divine nature. How does that happen? It happens when we are born again by the Holy Spirit and indwelt by the Holy Spirit and there is made new, created within us, a capacity that is not there before regeneration, namely a capacity to partake and enjoy of God's holiness and His righteousness and to commune with Him.

And then He begins to sanctify us by His truth, as the truth is read and memorized and practiced and preached. We are all sitting under the sanctifying influence of the Word of God, so that that ends up creating in us holiness and righteousness.

God then sends discipline into our lives that creates within us a longing for Heaven, a desire to be free from sin and suffering. He removes from us our taste for this world, teaches us to rely upon Him and not upon our flesh. It causes us to seek God in prayer for relief and strength and endurance. He gives us a taste for holiness. He draws us near to Himself. He casts us upon His mercy, makes us mindful of His sovereign purposes. He teaches us about Himself, our sin, and His goodness. And He brings the Word of God to bear upon our lives, whereby we learn His Word and cherish His Word. And then He, in the midst of all of the afflictions, reminds us afresh of His promises and His purposes, so that discipline ends up making us fix our eyes on Jesus, who's the author and perfecter of our faith. The hostility that we face in this world makes us consider Him who endured such hostility against Himself by sinners, so that we do not grow weary and lose heart. And so that, when we look with the eyes and the heart of faith in the face of Christ, Paul says we are “beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, [and we] are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit” (2 Cor. 3:18). The Spirit of God begins to shape us and mold us. And we go from one degree of conformity to the image and likeness of Christ to the next. And there is a slow, progressive progress in sanctification, in holiness, through the course of our entire Christian life, and discipline does that work.

So what are you and I to do? Look at verse 14 of our passage. We'll get to it in several weeks. “Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see

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the Lord” (Heb. 12:14). Holiness. You and I are to mortify sin, to put it to death, to put off the old man, and to put on the new man which is created and renewed in Christ Jesus. And as we do that and we pursue holiness, you and I can have the confidence that God has created us to pursue holiness. He has caused us to pursue holiness. He has given us the capacity to pursue holiness. And when we pursue that, because He is using discipline to teach us those things, we pursue the end for which God is driving us, teaching us, disciplining us—the end for which He has saved us. How confident do you think it is that you will enjoy that holiness? Pretty confident.

Now, you may say, Jim, I can't do that. I can't pursue holiness. I don't have a taste for it. I don't think I have the capacity for it. The only way that is true of you is if you are not in Jesus Christ. If you are a believer, then let me remind you, you are chosen for holiness. He has destined you to holiness, set you apart for that purpose positionally. He gives you the capacity for it. He has caused you to be born again by the Holy Spirit, and then sealed you with the Holy Spirit, and then caused you to be indwelt by the Holy Spirit, and He commands you to be holy. He's given you the capacity to be holy. He's shown you what holiness looks like in His Word. He has called you to it. He will strengthen you for it. He is working it in you. He is disciplining you for this purpose: to make you holy. He has given you His holy Word, and He uses it, by the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit, to produce holiness in His holy people.

So if you are a believer, you are chosen to this, destined to it, and God is doing this in your life the whole time in between. And therefore, having commanded you to be holy and commanded you to pursue holiness and separateness, you can pursue that with the confidence that you will taste and share and enjoy His holiness.

F. F. Bruce says this: “The goal for which God is preparing His people is their entire sanctification, which consummated in their manifestation with glory in Christ.” That is the purpose that God is preparing you for. He's preparing you for ultimate holiness, happiness, and joy, And He commands you in this world to pursue it.

See, there is no discipline in Heaven. You realize that? There's no discipline in Heaven. In fact, there's no discipline in Heaven or in Hell. There's no discipline in Hell because God is not interested in the moral improvement of sinners in Hell. He is not in any way pursuing their good. He does not in any way intend to create in them holiness, to make them more into the image of Christ. So He is not disciplining them in Hell. He's punishing them in Hell. But punishment and discipline are different. Remember, we covered that. Punishment is there, not discipline. God doesn't discipline sinners in Hell. He's not

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interested in their moral improvement or sharing His holiness with them. That is not His intention.

And there's no discipline in Heaven because it's not needed. There's no discipline in Hell because there's no point. There's no discipline in Heaven because it's not needed. When we're in Heaven, we will be fully holy. And when we see Him, we will be made just like Him. There will be no moral improvement in Heaven. There will be no ability to grow in our holiness in Heaven, because we will be perfected in it. There will be nothing to improve, and there will be nothing to resist of my sinful nature. There will be no self there to say no to. There will be no wicked thoughts to mortify, to put to death. There will be no desires that I need to deny. There will be no self that I need to crucify. There'll be none of that. So there is no discipline in Hell and there is no discipline in Heaven.

But while we are here, His every dealing with us flows from His love, His every motive is our good, His every stroke is necessary, His every reproof is profitable, and His ultimate goal is that we may share His holiness. So pursue it, because that is your ultimate happiness.

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