



## Dear Phil

### WHAT WILL PLEASE MY FATHER THE MOST?

*“You all don’t own televisions, do you?” —a seminary professor*

Sitting across the table from me was Dr. Bruce Compton of Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary and an older seminary professor (whose name slips my mind). I was in Michigan, attending the 2005 Bible Faculty Leadership Summit for fundamental Bible college and seminary professors. We were taking a break after one of the papers, and I had introduced myself to Dr. Compton. He saw my name tag—“God’s Bible School and College.” The school’s name invariably raises eyebrows, and I always take the opportunity to tell the story behind the name. I like to tell the “rest of the story” because it illustrates the spiritual passion for God that brought GBS into being and that was fueling the growth of the Holiness Movement at the turn of the last century.

Most of my fundamental Baptist and Presbyterian colleagues know very little about the Holiness Movement, much less the Conservative Holiness Movement of which I am a part. As I gave a brief history and description of the doctrinal and practical distinctives of the connection of churches to which I belong, Bible Methodism, the older seminary professor asked with a half frown, half smile, “You all don’t own televisions, do you?”

How would you have responded to that question? Give a quick embarrassed affirmative? Stiffen and offer a “Bless God!” sermon on the innumerable evils of television? I didn’t do either. Actually, I was glad he asked. It gave me an opportunity to share with my Baptist brothers a crucial principle that was at the heart of the Evangelical Revival under John Wesley—a principle that Wesley’s heirs, conservative or otherwise, have largely abandoned or forgotten.

I responded, “No, we don’t own televisions. It’s not because we are technophobes, or because we think that there is something inherently sinful in watching images on a screen, or because we don’t care about what’s going on in the world. Part of pursuing holiness in the Methodist tradition is laying aside things that do not promote holiness of heart and life.

“When John Wesley formed his Methodist societies in England, people had to share two basic commitments to join: they had to be fleeing from the wrath to come and pursuing the holiness without which no man shall see the Lord. We’re trying to be passionate pursuers of God and godliness. We choose not to own televisions because we find

that television-viewing does not promote and foster growth in Christlike holiness.” That’s about all I said, and that’s all it took. Both of my colleagues were nodding their heads in apparent understanding of the rationale I offered.

To love God is to commit ourselves self-sacrificially to delight in Him, to rejoice in serving Him, to desire continually to please Him, to seek our happiness in Him, and to thirst day and night for a fuller enjoyment of Him. Love for God inevitably bears the fruit of a genuine hunger to move beyond the question, “Is there anything wrong with it?” to a different set of questions: “What will please my Father the most?” (Col. 1:10); “What will help me and those around me become more like Jesus?” (1 Cor. 10:23-24); “Will this glorify my Father whom I love?” (1 Cor. 10:31); “Will this help or hinder my pursuit of holiness?” (Heb. 12:14; 2 Tim. 3:12).

When we live by such God-loving, holiness-pursuing questions, we realize with Paul that many of the “all things” that are “lawful” are not truly profitable or edifying (1 Cor. 6:12; 10:23). Living by these questions frees us from legalistically parsing our church manuals and searching the letter of the Law to make sure we are camped just inside its lifestyle boundaries. At the same time, living by these questions guards us from the blithe use of “Christian liberty” as a cover for self-pleasing choices.

When God is uppermost in our affections, we delight to pursue holiness in all our choices. What questions guide your entertainment, news media, and recreational choices?

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