

Study Guide

for

Desiring God

Meditations of a Christian Hedonist

with answers

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Published by
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Questions
Only

Introduction

How I Became a Christian Hedonist

1. What does the author say is the aim of this book?
2. What text of Scripture does the author cite to prove that the issue of glorifying God relates to every area of life, including how you drink your orange juice at breakfast?
3. Evidently the author does not think that the Biblical meaning of “glorifying God” is obvious to everyone, since he writes a whole book about it. What do you think the word “glorify” might be taken to mean that the author would think is unbiblical? Hint: What if you took “glorify” in the same sense as “beautify” or “fortify” or “purify”?
4. The author thinks that by enjoying God we glorify him. To get on the author’s wave length you might try to think of some examples in your life where you “glorify” something or someone or some activity by enjoying it.
5. As the author describes the emerging of Christian Hedonism in his college days, two things seemed in conflict in his experience. One was an inherited moral principle and the other was an inescapable reality of the heart. What was this principle and this reality?
6. Pascal’s quote says that even people who commit suicide do it because they are driven by a longing for happiness. Can you state that fact in a way that overcomes the objection that it can’t be true because some people commit suicide without any knowledge of what lies beyond death?
7. In the quote from C. S. Lewis, where does he think the notion has come from that it is a bad thing to desire our own good and to earnestly hope for the enjoyment of it?
8. What evidence does Lewis cite that the human problem is not that we are all seeking pleasure but that we are seeking it in a half-hearted way?
9. How is the point which the author learned from Lewis an advance on the first point learned from Pascal?
10. What was the third insight the author gained in his emerging Christian Hedonism?
11. From the quote by Lewis what is the relationship between delight in the countryside and praise of the countryside?

12. In view of the preceding answer explain why Lewis' early idea about God was wrong -- the idea that when God commanded praise from his people in the Psalms he was like a "like a vain woman wanting compliments". In other words, if God is not vain to demand our praise, what is he in view of the preceding answer?
13. Would it be virtuous for you to imitate God and seek praise for yourself the way God seeks it for himself?
14. The author refers to "the most liberating discovery" he ever made. What was the discovery and why do you think the author calls it "liberating"?
15. Are we actually commanded to pursue our pleasure? Where?
16. The author distances himself from the health, wealth and prosperity gospel. How?
17. Why doesn't Christian Hedonism make a God out of pleasure?
18. If I am living for pleasure, why am I not putting pleasure above God?
19. The author is eager not to have his book seen as "another spin-off from modern man's enslavement to the centrality of himself". From what we have seen so far, why shouldn't it be?
20. What point in the definition of Christian Hedonism on pages 27-8 has not been touched on in the introduction?
21. What is the source that the author claims for his insight?

1

The Happiness of God **Foundation for Christian Hedonism** **(With Appendix One)**

- 1.1. The ultimate ground or basis of Christian Hedonism is the fact that God is uppermost in his own affections. Can you take the words, “God is uppermost in his own affections,” and say that in another way? Try several other statements that mean the same thing.
- 1.2. We will discuss below why it is that God’s happiness in himself (rooted in his sovereignty) is indispensable for our pursuit of joy, that is, why God’s happiness in himself is the foundation of Christian Hedonism. (See questions 7, 10, 11.) But at this point we need to establish two things: one is that God is indeed uppermost in his own affections (questions 2-13), and the other is that he is indeed sovereign (questions 14-20).

Based upon John Piper’s effort to get at a definition of God’s glory. Write out in your own words how you would try to communicate the glory of God to someone who knows nothing about the Bible.

- 1.3. Appendix 1 gives the Biblical basis for the claim that God delights in his glory above all things, in other words, that he is uppermost in his own affections. From this appendix, what other Biblical phrase means virtually the same as God’s doing something “for his glory”?
- 1.4. Explain how God’s creating man and woman in his own image was the same as creating them for his glory.
- 1.5. At the tower of Babel people said they aimed to “make a name for ourselves” (Genesis 11:4). God was very displeased with this. But when God called Abram he said, “I will make your name great” (Genesis 12:2). Basing your answer on God’s pursuit of his own glory, explain why God is displeased with the people at the tower of Babel having a great name, but he was not displeased with Abram having a great name.
- 1.6. Exodus 20:5 says that God is jealous. a) Define legitimate, healthy jealousy in ordinary human relationships. b) Then explain how God’s jealousy relates to his glory and his people.
- 1.7. Explain how it is that God’s all-surpassing passion for his own glory is the foundation of the gospel -- that God has mercy on sinners who look to him for mercy. The key to this explanation is found in texts like Ezekiel 20:5-9; Psalm 106:6-8; 1 Samuel 12:19-23; Isaiah 48:9-11; Ezekiel 36:22-33; Psalm 25:11. See question # 1.10 for a similar issue.
- 1.8. One important text not included concerning the reason Jesus came and died, is Romans 15:8-9. After reading this text, a) state the three reasons that Jesus came and b) put in your own words what it is that unites these three reasons.

- 1.9. After reading Appendix 1 what then is the goal of all God does in history?
- 1.10 A big question that rises after we decide that God is pursuing his own glory in all that he does is this: Is this a loving thing for God to do? Paul said in 1 Corinthians 13:5 that “love seeks not its own.” Yet it appears that God seeks “his own” praise in all that he does. Why is it loving for God to exalt himself in this way, but not for us to exalt ourselves like this?
- 1.11 A very closely related question is, Why is God’s happiness in himself (his glory) indispensable for our pursuit of joy? Or, why is God’s happiness in himself the foundation of Christian Hedonism?
- 1.12 Another way to get at this same point is to recognize that you can’t delight fully in an unrighteous God, and then to recognize that God would indeed be unrighteous if he were unhappy. Why would God be unrighteous if he were not fully happy in his own glory?
- 1.13 The author maintains that God can delight in his people and his works without contradicting the full delight that he has in himself, that is, in his own glory. State briefly why this is so.
- 1.14 Saying that God is uppermost in his own affections means that God’s happiness is based on himself. His own glory is what makes God glad. But for God to be infinitely happy in himself and what he does, something must be true about God’s ability. a) What is that? b) And why is this necessary for God’s happiness?
- 1.15 If we are expected to “rejoice always,” (1 Thessalonians 5:16; Philippians 4:4) even though we are not sovereign, why must God be sovereign in order to always be happy? (This question is not explicitly answered in the book. Think about it.)
- 1.16 Now we must return to the Biblical foundation of God’s sovereignty. We have spoken about the necessity of God’s sovereignty as the basis of his happiness. But we must now look at the Biblical basis of the doctrine of God’s sovereignty. Some texts are cited on pp. 33-7. The theological problem is also addressed.

What text from the Bible do you think shows most plainly that even in the sinful acts of men God’s plan is not thwarted but is fulfilled?

- 1.17 But surely Satan must be reckoned with as a significant cause in the evil and pain of the world. Using Satan’s involvement with Job in Job 1 and 2 describe how the will of God and the will of Satan inter-relate in bringing about misery like Job’s.
- 1.18 If God’s sovereignty means that in some sense he wills all things, then it seems as though he wills things that he disapproves of. This creates a major problem that we need to try to solve. One way to state the problem is to say God seems to be inconsistent, willing something that in Scripture he says he does not will. Another way to say it is that it seems to make God the author of sin. What is one way to solve this problem of God’s apparent inconsistency in seeming to will some things which he says he does not will?
- 1.19 This kind of problem inevitably raises the problem of why God saw fit to permit or ordain the existence of sin and evil. It is not adequate to say that all evil is owing to “free will”. If God knew what was going to happen and still chose to allow men to choose sin, then we must answer why. Some solve this problem today by saying that God did not know what was going to happen when he created man with a will. The author regards this “solution” as very wide of the Biblical mark. Others have said that God was willing to allow all the sin and misery in the world because there was no other way that he could make men free; and he values the freely chosen love of

people so much that it was worth the sin and misery of the world to get it. That may be part of the answer, if “freely chosen” does not mean “chosen without God’s decisive enabling grace.” But it is not the whole answer.

We have seen that God created all things and does all things for his glory. Therefore somehow the existence of sin and misery has to relate to this great overarching goal of God. Reflect for a moment on how the existence of sin and misery might serve to glorify aspects of God’s nature that otherwise could not have been displayed. What attributes of God might shine forth with greater glory because sin and misery exist?

- 1.20 As we become more and more confident that God sovereignly controls all things, we need to become more and more confident of two or three other attributes of God in order to maintain joy and peace. What would these other attributes be and why must we be sure of them?

2

Conversion

Creation of a Christian Hedonist

- 2.1. If you put Jeremiah 32:40-41 beside Romans 8:28 what emerges as the answer to this question: Who are the people in Jeremiah 32:40-41 whom God is going to do good to with all his heart? Or, to ask the question another way, how can you know that you are one of those whom God is rejoicing over to do them good? What would be the answer if, instead of Romans 8:28, you use Psalm 147:11 or Isaiah 64:4 or 2 Chronicles 16:9?
- 2.2. What are the two reasons the author gives for using the new terminology of Christian Hedonism in relation to conversion instead of simply saying the Biblical sentence, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved” (Acts 16:31)?
- 2.3. The first answer to question #2.2 is based on an unstated assumption. What is it? It has to do with the relationship between faith and works. When you think you know what the assumption is, list some Bible verses that might support it.
- 2.4. On pages 55-64 the author unfolds one way of summing up the need for conversion and the way of conversion in six steps. Most Christians agree that in order to put saving faith in Jesus a person has to admit that he is a sinner and in need of forgiveness and change. But that means people need to have some understanding of what sin is. Sin is discussed in step 3. What is the essence of sin that makes steps 1 and 2 so important to make plain first? Or: how do steps 1 and 2 help get people ready to grasp what sin really is?
- 2.5. One popular notion about how the gospel should be presented is that most people today already feel so bad about themselves and about life that you don’t need to tell them the bad news that they are sinners as part of a gospel presentation. All you need to do is present Jesus as the solution to the misery they already feel. In view of the answer to #2.4 why is this mistaken?
- 2.6. Turning now to step 4, the consequences of sin must be addressed. It is not a loving thing to keep silent about impending calamity if a person can escape it. The calamity impending for sinners is hell (according to the texts gathered on these pages). Two objections to the historic view of hell as eternal punishment are raised. Let’s ponder them one at a time. One is this: it cannot be just to punish eternally a sin or series of sins that took only 70 years to commit. Hell is an unjust over-reaction to finite evil. In your own words what answer is given to this?
- 2.7. The other objection to hell is found in note 3 on page 59. It is given by the popular novelist of the 19th century, George McDonald. He says that God is bound by his justice to destroy sin in his creation -- that is, get rid of it, not just punish it. In fact ongoing punishment of sin gives a home in the universe to “victorious evil.” “God is triumphantly defeated” if there is a hell. What is the problem with this?

- 2.8. The foundation of the gospel is found in Romans 3:25-26. Answer the following questions on this text. a) What had happened that made it necessary for God's righteousness to be demonstrated? b) Taking your cue from the nearby verse 23, state the answer to "a" in terms of the glory of God. c) In view of your answer to "b" how would you define God's righteousness so as to make clear why it needed to be vindicated? d) Why does the blood (i.e. death) of Christ vindicate the righteousness of God? (For a hint see John 17:4; 12:27f. Keep thinking in the terms of Romans 3:23.) e) Why does your own hope depend on God's vindicating his righteousness?
- 2.9. After we see all that God has done to accomplish redemption through the death and resurrection of Jesus we have to ask: What must we do to benefit from what Jesus did? The answer is that we must be "converted". What is the author's argument that true conversion involves faith and repentance?
- 2.10. What is true of about us as human beings that requires the event of conversion to be brought about by a miracle of divine grace rather than human achievement?
- 2.11. Cite some texts that show that conversion (repentance and faith) is a gift of God.
- 2.12. "Regeneration" is a technical word for being born again. Does the author think that we are born again (regenerated) by faith or that we are enabled to have faith by being born again? What verses would he use to show this?
- 2.13. The author believes that regeneration is the same thing as God's "effectual calling" or what some call "irresistible grace". What passage of Scripture would he use to argue that there is an internal and effectual call of God that is different from the general call that all people hear when a preacher preaches the gospel? What would he mean that this call or this work of grace is irresistible since the Bible says very plainly that we can quench (1 Thess. 5:19) or grieve (Eph. 4:30) or resist (Acts 7:51) the Holy Spirit?
- 2.14. What are two reasons mentioned in 1 Corinthians 1:26-31 why God would call people in this sovereign way?
- 2.15. In pages 67ff. the author tries to show that what really happens in regeneration or in effectual calling (by irresistible grace) is the "creation of a Christian Hedonist". In other words, behind and before the act of saving faith and repentance something happens to the human heart by the grace of God that gives it the inclination to embrace Christ as all-sufficient for my needs and my longings. Where once there was no sense at all that Christ is beautiful and desirable, suddenly there is a sense that he is all of that and true. This change is the creation of a Christian Hedonist -- a person who now finds joy and peace in the beauty of Christ's perfections. Use Hebrews 11:6 and John 3:18-20 and argue in your own words that a new taste for Christ must be created before there can be saving faith.

3

Worship

The Feast of Christian Hedonism

- 3.1. The introduction to this chapter is a kind of exposition of John 4:1-38, the story of "the woman at the well." Jesus had been alone with the Samaritan woman while his disciples are in the town getting food. After they return they offer him something to eat (v. 31) and he responds, "I have food to eat of which you do not know." a) What is the food that Jesus was eating while they were away? (v. 34) b) More specifically, what is God's purpose (stated earlier in this chapter) that Jesus has been up to while the disciples were away?
- 3.2. Jesus offers the Samaritan woman a kind of water that enables a person never to thirst again! And even more amazing, he says this water actually becomes a spring of water welling up to eternal life (v. 14)! Evidently this is the sort of "bait" you use when you are hunting worshipers for the living God (v. 23). If so, what would be one of the simplest definitions of worship?
- 3.3. What is the water that Jesus gives? The author suggests two possibilities from other passages in the Bible and then shows that these two possibilities really fit together to give one answer. a) What are the two possible things that "water" is? And b) How do these fit together to give a full answer to what the "water" is?
- 3.4. In view of what you have just answered in 3.3b what kind of worship does the Father want in John 4:23 when it says, "True worshipers will worship Him *in spirit and truth*, for such the Father seeks to worship him"? That is, what does worship in "spirit and truth" mean?
- 3.5. Changing the metaphor, The author suggests that we can get a picture of worship with the following images. Put the reality beside the image.

The fuel of worship	=
The fire of worship	=
The furnace of worship	=
The heat of worship	=
- 3.6. Why does the author say that worship is "*gladly* reflecting back to God the radiance of his worth." Why not just say it is a reflecting back to God the radiance of his worth? Why add "gladly"?
- 3.7. But if worship can include the emotions of contrition and brokenness, how can we include "gladly" as a necessary part of the definition of true worship?
- 3.8. List the sequence of emotions that are included in worship and give at least one verse to illustrate each one.

- 3.9. The author argues that worship is "an end in itself." Strictly he means that worship cannot be performed as a means to anything else. Like fund-raising or missions or education or church growth. a) Does the author mean that worship will not have good effects in these areas? b) What does he mean? Illustrate from your experience.
- 3.10. Why does insisting that the emotions of worship are ends in themselves guard the God-centeredness of worship?
- 3.11. a) How does the author show the inadequacy of duty as a motive for true worship and b) how does he recover duty as a noble and helpful Christian concept?
- 3.12. It appears then that the pursuit of joy is an essential part of the duty to worship God. Or to put it another way, to the degree that we strive against our passion for happiness we will hinder our capacity for genuine worship. If the pursuit of my happiness is at the heart of worship, how can this be thought of as humble?
- 3.13. What are the "three stages of worship" and why do they all honor God?
- 3.14. What is the "moral enemy of worship"?
- 3.15. Define evil from Jeremiah 2:11-13.
- 3.16. A great danger of stressing the emotional essence of worship as the author has is that it might lead some people to try to manufacture the emotion in artificial ways (e.g. with music or lighting or incense or other rituals). What counsel from Jonathan Edwards will guard us from this mistake?
- 3.17. What two things are the "forms" of worship supposed to do in relation to the true emotional experience of worship?

4

Love

The Labor of Christian Hedonism

- 4.1. The author distinguishes between “vertical” Christian Hedonism and “horizontal” Christian Hedonism. What is vertical Christian Hedonism?
- 4.2. What is the thesis of this chapter?
- 4.3. What is one common view of how genuine love (or morality) and the pursuit of happiness relate to each other -- the view that the author is striving against?
- 4.4. Pages 90-93 deal with some passages of Scripture that seem to contradict the thesis of this chapter. For example 1 Corinthians 13:5; 10:24,33; Romans 15:1-3. Take 1 Corinthians 13:5 (“Love seeks not its own.”) and point out two clues in the nearer context that show Paul does NOT mean it is wrong to pursue joy in the obedience of love. Do you see any other clues besides the ones the author found?
- 4.5. Look at the last sentence (in parentheses) in the quote by atheist Ayn Rand on page 101. Now find the sentence on pages 115-6 that says almost exactly the same thing. It is a tragedy that Ayn Rand rejected Christianity, thinking that the view of morality she was attacking was truly Christian. What should we have said to Ayn Rand from what you have seen so far in this chapter? Another way to ask the question would be to say, What would Jonathan Edwards have said to Ayn Rand about the distortion of 1 Corinthians 13:5 that she was scorning?
- 4.6. What text would you cite to show that God not only does acts of love but that he loves to do acts of love? Should we try to be like him in this way?
- 4.7. If Jesus said, “Greater love has no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friends,” (John 15:13), how can Paul say that it is possible to “give your life to be burned and have not love” (1 Corinthians 13:3)?
- 4.8. It is amazingly common to hear people say, “Love is not a feeling. Love is an act of will. Love is a deed of helpfulness.” The author concedes that there are at least two good intentions behind these statements. What are they?
- 4.9. But the author thinks it is misleading and inaccurate to talk this way, as though love does not have to have any component of feeling. What are some evidences in the context of 1 Corinthians 13 itself that love does involve feelings, including some and excluding others?

- 4.10. How feelings relate to love can be seen if we look at a living example of genuine love described by Paul in 2 Corinthians 8:1-8. According to this example of love in the lives of the Macedonian Christians, a) What is the ultimate source of genuine love? b) How does this produce love? c) What does love look like practically? d) What definition of love emerges from this text?
- 4.11. The definition of love on page 119 is not quite satisfying to explain the impulse of love. Something is missing. But that “something” is implied two paragraphs later when it says, Love “is first a deeply satisfying experience of the fullness of God’s grace, and then a *doubly satisfying experience of sharing* that grace with another person.” What impulse is implied in these words that is not explicit in calling love an “overflow”?
- 4.12. How does 2 Corinthians 9:7 confirm the point that mere acts of helpfulness are not necessarily genuine love?
- 4.13. Can you state in a few sentences now why the thesis of this chapter included the statement that if you forsake the pursuit of your joy you cannot love people or please God?
- 4.14. Another text that gives a real life example of love is 2 Corinthians 1:23-2:4. Show from these verses that when love is abounding between two people each is not merely seeking the joy of the other but, more than that, is seeking *his own joy* in the joy of the other.
- 4.15. What does the author mean when he says that if love is the LABOR of Christian Hedonism, it must also be the LEISURE of Christian Hedonism? What passage of Scripture illustrates each of these?
- 4.16. If love is the overflow of JOY that seeks to expand itself in the joy of others, how can there be weeping and “anguish of heart” in the life of a consistently loving person?
- 4.17. Compare the second full paragraph page 114 and the fifth paragraph on page 125. What words in 1 Corinthians 13:3 and Acts 20:35 make it very hard to accept the common notion that reward is a good *result* of love but a bad *motive*?
- 4.18. Explain from 1 Peter 5:1-2 and Hebrews 13:17 why it is unloving for a pastor to abandon the pursuit of his joy in the ministry.
- 4.19. What radical element of Christian Hedonism does Luke 12:33 make explicit?
- 4.20. In each of the three texts from Hebrews what is the key power of love? If we today want to be as radically loving as were the early Christians and Moses and Jesus, what must we labor to cultivate in our hearts?
- 4.21. How does the author show in his letter to Ronn that Jesus’ pursuit of joy in the cross was not mercenary but was in fact infinitely caring of us?
- 4.22. Is there joy in the conquests of mountain climbing that cost you to lose toes and fingers to frost bite? What might be the counterpart to this strange experience in the moral life? A fuller explanation of this powerful impulse to see our weaknesses overcome is given on p. 139. Use this to describe the real dynamic of how love is driven the way a mountain climber is driven.

- 4.23. One way of making the imaginary dialogue on page 136 real in your own life is to ask, “Do you feel more loved when you are visited in the hospital by someone who comes cheerfully (because they anticipate joy in your encouragement and healing) or by someone who comes dutifully (because it is part of their pastoral job and God’s expectation)?
- 4.24. What does the author mean that the nature of a loving act and the hoped for reward must be “organically related”? How is this illustrated in the reward we hope for in Romans 8:29 and Luke 6:35?