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Includes a study guide for individual and small-group use.

JOHN PIPER is pastor for preaching at Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis, Minnesota. He has written more than forty books, including *Desiring God*, *A Godward Life*, *Don't Waste Your Life*, and *The Pleasures of God*. John and his wife, Noel, have five children and an increasing number of grandchildren. Learn more about his ministry at DesiringGod.org.

COVER DESIGN: KRISTOPHER K. ORR
COVER PHOTOGRAPHY: GEORGE KAVANAUGH

Multnomah

CHRISTIAN LIVING/SPIRITUAL GROWTH

US \$14.99 / \$16.99 CAN

ISBN 978-1-60142-310-8



5 1 4 9 9



DESIRING GOD



PIPER



JOHN PIPER

DESIRING GOD

Meditations of a Christian Hedonist

Revised Edition

Study Guide

LOVE

The Labor of Christian Hedonism

*In some sense the most benevolent, generous person in the world
seeks his own happiness in doing good to others,
because he places his happiness in their good.
His mind is so enlarged as to take them, as it were, into himself.
Thus when they are happy, he feels it;
he partakes with them, and is happy in their happiness.
This is so far from being inconsistent with the freeness of beneficence,
that, on the contrary, free benevolence and kindness consists in it.*

JONATHAN EDWARDS

God loves a cheerful giver.

THE APOSTLE PAUL

So far I have argued that disinterested benevolence toward God is evil. C. S. Lewis puts it well: “It would be a bold and silly creature that came before its Creator with the boast, ‘I’m no beggar. I love you disinterestedly.’”¹ If you come to God dutifully offering Him the reward of your fellowship instead of thirsting after the reward of His fellowship, then you exalt yourself above God as His benefactor and belittle Him as a needy beneficiary—and that is evil.

The only way to glorify the all-sufficiency of God in worship is to come to Him because “in [His] presence there is fullness of joy; at [His] right hand are pleasures forevermore” (Psalm 16:11). This has been the main point so far, and we could call it *vertical Christian Hedonism*. Between man and God, on the vertical axis of life, the pursuit of pleasure is not just tolerable; it is mandatory: “Delight yourself in the LORD”! (Psalm 37:4). The chief end of man is to glorify God by enjoying Him forever.

But now what about *horizontal Christian Hedonism*? What about our relationship with other people? Is disinterested benevolence the ideal among men? Or is the pursuit of pleasure proper and indeed mandatory for every kind of human love that pleases God?

1. C. S. Lewis, *The Four Loves* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1960), 12.

This chapter's answer is that the pursuit of pleasure is an essential motive for every good deed. Or, to put it another way: If you aim to abandon the pursuit of full and lasting pleasure, you cannot love people or please God.

DOES LOVE SEEK ITS OWN?

This will take some explaining and defending! I plead your patience and openness. I am swimming against the current of a revered river in this chapter. When I preached on this once, a philosophy professor wrote a letter to me with the following criticism:

Is it not the contention of morality that we should do the good because it is the good?... We should do the good and perform virtuously, I suggest, because it is good and virtuous; that God will bless it and cause us to be happy is a consequence of it, but not the motive for doing it.

Another popular writer says:

For the Christian happiness is never a goal to be pursued. It is always the unexpected surprise of a life of service.

I regard these quotes as contrary to Scripture and contrary to love and, in the end (though unintentionally), dishonoring to God.

No doubt, biblical passages come to mind that seem to say exactly the opposite of what I am saying. For example, in the great love chapter, the apostle Paul says that love "does not seek its own" (1 Corinthians 13:5, NASB). Earlier in the same book, he admonished the church, "*Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor.... I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, that they may be saved*" (10:24, 33). In Romans 15:1–3 he says, "We who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak, and *not to please ourselves*. Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to build him up. For *Christ did not please himself.*"

An isolated and unreflective focus on texts like these gives the impression that the essence of Christian morality is to free ourselves of all self-interest when it comes to doing good deeds for other people. But there is good reason to think that this impression is wrong. It does not take all of the context into account, and it certainly cannot account for many other teachings in the New Testament.

Take the context of 1 Corinthians 13, for example. Verse 5 says love seeks not its own. But is this meant so absolutely that it would be wrong to enjoy being loving? First consider the wider biblical context.

SHOULD WE DELIGHT IN BEING MERCIFUL?

According to the prophet Micah, God has commanded us not simply to be merciful, but to "love kindness": "He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" (6:8). In other words, the command is not just to do acts of mercy, but *to delight* to be merciful or *to want* to be merciful. If you love being merciful, how can you keep from satisfying your own desire in doing acts of mercy? How can you keep from seeking your own joy in acts of love when your joy consists in being loving? Does obedience to the command to "love kindness" mean you must disobey the teaching of 1 Corinthians 13:5 that love should "seek not its own"?

No. The more immediate context gives several clues that the point of 1 Corinthians 13:5 is not to forbid the pursuit of the joy of loving. Jonathan Edwards gives the true sense:

[The error 1 Corinthians 13:5 opposes is not] the degree in which [a person] loves his own happiness, but in his placing his happiness where he ought not, and in limiting and confining his love. Some, although they love their own happiness, do not place that happiness in their own confined good, or in that good which is limited to themselves, but more in the common good—in that which is the good of others, or in the good to be enjoyed in and by others.... And when it

is said that Charity seeketh not her own, we are to understand it of her own private good—good limited to herself.²

DOES PAUL ASSUME WE WILL WANT TO GAIN NOTHING?

One clue that this is in fact what Paul means is the way he tries to motivate genuine love in verse 3. He says, “If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, *I gain nothing*.” If genuine love dare not set its sights on its own gain, isn’t it strange that Paul warns us that not having love will rob us of “gain”? But this is in fact what he says: “If you don’t have real love, you won’t have real gain.”

Someone, no doubt, will say that the gain is a sure result of genuine love, but if it is the motive of love, then love is not really love. In other words, it is good for God to reward acts of love, but it is not good for us to be drawn into love by the promise of reward. But if this is true, then why did Paul tell us in verse 3 that we would lose our reward if we were not really loving? If longing for the “gain” of loving ruins the moral value of love, it is very bad pedagogy to tell someone to be loving lest he lose his “gain.”

Giving Paul the benefit of the doubt, should we not rather say there is a kind of gain that is wrong to be motivated by (hence, “Love seeks not its own”), as well as a kind of gain that is right to be motivated by (hence, “If I do not have love, I gain nothing”)? Edwards says the proper gain to be motivated by is the happiness one gets in the act of love itself or in the good achieved by it.

CAN DISINTERESTED LOVE REJOICE IN THE TRUTH?

The second clue that Edwards is on the right track is verse 6: “[Love] does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth.” Love is not a bare choice or mere act. It involves the affections. It does not just *do* the truth. Nor does it just

choose the right. It *rejoices* in the way of truth. So Micah 6:8 is not a strained parallel at all: We must “love kindness”!

But if love rejoices in the choices it makes, it cannot be disinterested. It cannot be indifferent to its own joy! To rejoice in an act is to get joy from it. And this joy is “gain.” It may be that there is much more gain than this, or that this joy is in fact the firstfruits of an indestructible and eternal joy. At this point, though, the least we can say is that Paul does not think the moral value of an act of love is ruined when we are motivated to do it by the anticipation of our own joy in it and from it. If it were, then a bad man who hated the prospect of loving could engage in pure love, since he would take no joy in it; while a good man who delighted in the prospect of loving could not love, since he would “gain” joy from it and thus ruin it.

Therefore, 1 Corinthians 13:5 (“Love seeks not its own”) does not stand in the way of the thesis that *the pursuit of pleasure is an essential motive for every good deed*. In fact, surprisingly, the context supports it by saying that “love *rejoices* with the truth” and by implying that one should be vigilant in love so as not to lose one’s “gain”—the gain of joy that comes in being a loving person, both now and forever.

If this is Paul’s intention in 1 Corinthians 13:5, the same thing can be said of 10:24 and 33. These are simply specific instances of the basic principle laid down in 13:5: “Love seeks not its own.” When Paul says we should not seek our own advantage, but that of our neighbors so that they may be saved, he does not mean we should not *delight* in the salvation of our neighbors.

In fact, Paul said of his converts, “You are our glory and *joy*” (1 Thessalonians 2:20). In another place he said, “My heart’s *desire* and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved” (Romans 10:1).

This is not the voice of disinterested benevolence. The salvation of others was the joy and passion of his life! When he denied himself comforts for this, he was a Christian Hedonist, not a dutiful stoic. So the point of 1 Corinthians 10:24 and 33 is that we should not count any private comfort a greater joy than the joy of seeing our labor lead to another’s salvation.

This is also the point of Romans 15:1–3, where Paul says we should not

2. Jonathan Edwards, *Charity and Its Fruits* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1969, orig. 1852), 164.

please ourselves, but instead should please our neighbor for his good, to edify him. This too is an application of the principle "Love seeks not its own." He does not mean we shouldn't seek the joy of edifying others, but that we should let *this* joy free us from bondage to private pleasures that make us indifferent to the good of others. Love does not seek its own *private, limited* joy, but instead seeks its own joy in the good—the salvation and edification—of others.³

In this way, we begin to love the way God loves. He loves because He delights to love. He does not seek to hide from Himself the reward of love lest His act be ruined by the anticipated joy that comes from it.

"I am the LORD who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. *For in these things I delight*," declares the LORD. (Jeremiah 9:24)

LOVE IS MORE THAN DEEDS

We turn now from defense to offense. There are texts that seem to be a problem, but many others point positively to the truth of Christian Hedonism. We can take 1 Corinthians 13:3 as a starting point: "If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing." This is a startling text. For Jesus Himself said, "Greater love has no one than this, that someone lays down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). How can Paul say that laying down your life may in fact be a loveless act?

One thing is for sure: Love cannot be equated with sacrificial action! It cannot be equated with *any* action! This is a powerful antidote to the common teaching that love is not what you feel, but what you do. The good in this popular teaching is the twofold intention to show (1) that mere warm feelings can never replace actual deeds of love (James 2:16; 1 John 3:18) and (2) that efforts of love must be made even in the absence of the joy that one might wish were present. But it is careless and inaccurate to support these two truths by saying

3. This passage in Romans includes the sentence "For Christ did not please himself, but, as it is written, 'The reproaches of those who reproached you fell on me'" (15:3). Concerning this, see the discussion of Hebrews 12:1–2 under the heading "Love Suffers for Joy" later in this chapter.

that love is simply what you do, and not what you feel.⁴ (See Epilogue, Reason Four, for a further discussion of how to obey when you don't feel like it.)

The very definition of love in 1 Corinthians refutes this narrow conception of love. For example, Paul says love is not *jealous* and not easily *provoked* and that it *rejoices* in the truth and *hopes* all things (13:4–7). All these are *feelings*! If you feel things like unholy jealousy and irritation, you are not loving. And if you do not feel things like joy in the truth and hope, you are not loving. In other words, *yes*, love is more than feelings; but, *no*, love is not less than feelings.

This may help account for the startling statement that it is possible to give your body to be burned and yet not have love. Evidently, an act does not qualify as love unless it involves right motives. But isn't the willingness to die a sign of good motives? You would think so if the essence of love were disinterestedness. But someone might say that what ruined the self-sacrificing act of apparent love was the intention to inherit reward after death or to leave a noble memory on earth.

That may be part of the answer. But it is not complete. It does not distinguish what sort of reward after death might be appropriate to aim at in an act of love (if any!). Nor does it describe what feelings, if any, must accompany an outward "act" of love for it to be truly loving.

In answering these questions, we need to ask another: What does love to man have to do with our love for God and His grace toward us? Could it be that the reason a person could give his body to be burned and not have love is that his act had no connection to a genuine love for God? Could it be that Paul's conception of horizontal love between people is such that it is authentic only when it is the extension of a vertical love for God? It would be strange indeed if the apostle who said "Whatever does not proceed from faith is sin" (Romans 14:23) could define genuine love without reference to God.

4. For example, one popular book says, "Love isn't something you necessarily feel; it's something you do. Good feelings may accompany loving deeds, but we are commanded to love whether we feel like it or not. Jesus didn't feel like giving His life to redeem humankind (Matthew 26:38–39)." Josh McDowell and Norman Geisler, *Love Is Always Right: A Defense of the One Moral Absolute* (Dallas: Word, 1996), 73. It is an oversimplification to say that Jesus did not feel like giving His life to redeem mankind. Yes, He knew it would be excruciating, and, yes, He shrank back from the pain. But Hebrews 12:2 says it was "for the joy set before" Him that He endured the cross. The joy of the future flowed back into the present in Gethsemane, and the taste of it sustained Him. Yes, there are acts of love that are more pleasant than others. But that does not mean that there is no painful joy in the hard ones.

LOVE IS THE OVERFLOW OF JOY IN GOD

Second Corinthians 8:1–4, 8 shows that Paul thinks of genuine love only in relation to God:

Now, brethren, we wish to make known to you the grace of God which has been given in the churches of Macedonia, that in a great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality. For I testify that according to their ability, and beyond their ability, they gave of their own accord, begging us with much urging for the favor of participation in the support of the saints.... I am not speaking this as a command, but as proving through the earnestness of others the sincerity of your love also. (NASB)

The reason Paul wants the Corinthians to know about this remarkable work of grace among the Macedonians is that he hopes the same will prove true among them. He is traveling among the churches collecting funds for the poor saints in Jerusalem (Romans 15:26; 1 Corinthians 16:1–4). He writes 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 to motivate the Corinthians to be generous. For our purpose, the crucial thing to notice is that in 8:8 he says this is a test of their *love*: “I say this not as a command, but to prove by the earnestness of others that your *love also* is genuine.”

The clear implication of 8:8 (especially the word *also*) is that the Macedonians’ generosity is a model of love that the Corinthians “also” should copy. By recounting the earnest love of the Macedonians, Paul aims to stir up the Corinthians *also* to genuine love. So here we have a test case to see just what the love of 1 Corinthians 13 looks like in real life. The Macedonians have given away their possessions, just as 1 Corinthians 13:3 says (“If I give away all I have”). But *here* it is real love, while *there* it was not love at all. What makes the Macedonian generosity a genuine act of love?

The nature of genuine love can be seen in four things.

First, it is a work of divine *grace*: “We want you to know, brothers, about the *grace* of God that has been given among the churches of

Macedonia” (2 Corinthians 8:1). The generosity of the Macedonians was not of human origin. Even though verse 3 says they gave “of their own accord,” the willingness was a gift of God—a work of grace.

You can see this same combination of God’s sovereign grace resulting in man’s willingness in verses 16–17:

Thanks be to *God, who put into the heart of Titus the same earnest care I have for you*. For he...is going to you of his own accord.

God put it in his heart. So he goes of his *own* accord. The willingness is a gift—a work of divine grace.

Second, this experience of God’s grace filled the Macedonians with joy: “In a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity” (v. 2). Note that their joy was not owing to the fact that God had prospered them financially. He hadn’t! In “extreme poverty” they had joy. Therefore, the joy was a joy in God—in the experience of His grace.

Third, their joy in God’s grace *overflowed* in generosity to meet the needs of others: “Their abundance of joy...*overflowed* in a wealth of generosity” (v. 2). Therefore, the generosity expressed horizontally toward men was an overflow of joy in God’s grace.

Fourth, the Macedonians begged for the opportunity to sacrifice their meager possessions for the saints in Jerusalem: “Beyond their ability, they gave of their own accord, *begging us with much urging for the favor of participation in the support of the saints*” (8:3–4, NASB). In other words, the way their joy in God overflowed was in the joy of giving. They *wanted* to give. It was their joy!

Now we can give a definition of love that takes God into account and also includes the feelings that should accompany the outward acts of love: *Love is the overflow of joy in God that gladly meets the needs of others*.

Paul does not set up the Macedonians as a model of love just because they sacrificed in order to meet the needs of others. What he stresses is how they *loved* doing this (remember Micah 6:8!). It was the overflow of *joy*! They

“begged earnestly” to give. They found their pleasure in channeling the grace of God through their poverty to the poverty in Jerusalem. It is simply astonishing!

This is why a person can give his body to be burned and not have love. Love is the overflow of joy—in God! It is not duty for duty’s sake or right for right’s sake. It is not a resolute abandoning of one’s own good with a view solely to the good of the other person. It 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.

When poverty-stricken Macedonians beg Paul for the privilege of giving money to other poor saints, we may assume that this is not just what they ought to do or have to do, but what they really long to do. It is their joy—an extension of their joy in God. To be sure, they are “denying themselves” whatever pleasures or comforts they could have from the money they give away, but the joy of extending God’s grace to others is a far better reward than anything money could buy. The Macedonians have discovered the labor of Christian Hedonism: love! It is the overflow of joy in God that gladly meets the needs of others.

GOD LOVES A CHEERFUL GIVER

In 2 Corinthians 9:6–7 we get a confirmation that we are on the right track. Paul continues to motivate the Corinthians to be generous. He says:

Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must give as he has made up his mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for *God loves a cheerful giver*.

I take this to mean that God is not pleased when people act benevolently but don’t do it gladly. When people don’t find pleasure (Paul’s word is *cheer*) in their acts of service, God doesn’t find pleasure in them. He loves cheerful givers, cheerful servants. What sort of cheer? Surely the safest way to answer

that question is to remember what sort of cheer moved the Macedonians to be generous. It was the overflow of joy in the grace of God. Therefore, the giver God loves is the one whose joy in Him overflows “cheerfully” in generosity to others.

Perhaps it is becoming clear why part of the thesis of this chapter is that if you try to abandon the pursuit of your full and lasting joy, you cannot love people or please God. If love is the overflow of joy in God that gladly meets the needs of others, then to abandon the pursuit of *this* joy is to abandon the pursuit of love. And if God is pleased by cheerful givers, then to abandon the pursuit of *this* cheerfulness sets you on a course in which God takes no delight. If we are indifferent to whether we do a good deed cheerfully, we are indifferent to what pleases God. For God loves a cheerful giver.

Therefore, it is essential that we be Christian Hedonists on the horizontal level in our relationships with other people, and not just on the vertical axis in our relationship with God. If love is the overflow of joy in God that gladly meets the needs of other people, and if God loves such joyful givers, then this joy in giving is a Christian duty, and the effort not to pursue it is sin.

LOVE REJOICES IN THE JOY OF THE BELOVED

Before we leave 2 Corinthians, consider one more passage that brims with implications about the nature of love. In 1:23–2:4, Paul writes about a visit he didn’t make and a painful letter he had to send. He explains the inner workings of his heart in all this:

But I call God to witness against me—it was to spare you that I refrained from coming again to Corinth. Not that we lord it over your faith, but we work with you *for your joy*, for you stand firm in your faith. For I made up my mind not to make another painful visit to you. For if I cause you pain, *who is there to make me glad* but the one whom I have pained? And I wrote as I did, so that when I came *I might not suffer pain* from those who should have *made me rejoice*, for I felt sure of all of you, that *my joy would be the joy of you all*. For I wrote to you out of much

affliction and anguish of heart and with many tears, not to cause you pain but to let you know *the abundant love that I have for you*.

Notice how Paul's pursuit of their joy and his own joy relates to love. In verse 2 he gives the reason he did not make another painful visit to Corinth: "For if I cause you pain, who is there to *make me glad* but the one whom I have pained?" In other words, Paul's motive here is to preserve his own joy. He says in effect: "If I destroy your joy, then my joy goes, too." Why? Because their joy is precisely what gives him joy!

It is clear from 1:24 that the joy in view is the joy of faith. It is the joy of knowing and resting in God's grace—the same joy that moved the Macedonians to be generous (8:1–3). When *this* joy abounds in his converts, Paul feels great joy himself, and he unashamedly tells them that the reason he does not want to rob them of their joy is that this would rob him of *his* joy. This is the way a Christian Hedonist talks.

In 2:3 he gives the reason he sent them a painful letter: "I wrote as I did, so that when I came I might not suffer pain from those who should have made me rejoice, for I felt sure of all of you, that *my joy would be the joy of you all*." Here his motive is the same, up to a point. He says he did not want to be pained. He wants joy, not pain. He is a Christian Hedonist! But he goes a step further here than in verse 2. He says the reason he wants joy, not pain, is that he is confident that his joy is also their joy: "For I felt sure of all of you, that my joy would be the joy of you all."

So verse 3 is the converse of verse 2. In verse 2 the point is that *their* joy is his joy; that is, when they are glad, he feels glad in their gladness. And the point of verse 3 is that *his* joy is their joy; that is, when he is glad, they feel glad in his gladness.

Then verse 4 makes the connection with love explicit. He says the reason he had written them was "to let you know the abundant *love* that I have for you." So what is love? Love abounds between us when your joy is mine and my joy is yours. I am not loving just because I seek your joy, but because I seek it as *mine*.

Suppose I tell one of my sons, "Be nice to your brother; help him clean up the room; try to make him happy, not miserable." What if he does help his brother clean up the room, but pouts the whole time and generally exudes unhappiness? Is there virtue in his effort? Not much. What's wrong is that his brother's happiness is not his own happiness. When he helps his brother, he does not pursue his joy in his brother's happiness. He is not acting like a Christian Hedonist. His labor is not the labor of love. It is the labor of legalism—he acts out of mere duty to escape punishment.

LOVE DELIGHTS TO CAUSE AND CONTEMPLATE JOY IN OTHERS

Now consider the relationship between the images of love in 2 Corinthians 8 and 2. In chapter 8, love is the overflow of joy in God that gladly meets the needs of others. It is the impulse of a fountain to overflow. It originates in the grace of God, which overflows freely because it delights to fill the empty. Love shares the nature of that grace because it too delights to overflow freely to meet the needs of others.

In chapter 2, love is what exists between people when they find their joy in each other's joy. Is this in contradiction to the love of chapter 8, where joy comes from God and overflows to others? It sounds in chapter 2 like joy is coming from the joy of other people, not from God. How do these two ways of talking about love relate to each other?

I think the answer is that love not only delights to cause joy in those who are empty (2 Corinthians 8), but also delights to contemplate joy in those who are full (2 Corinthians 2). And these two delights are not at all in contradiction. The grace of God delights to grant repentance (2 Timothy 2:25), *and* it rejoices over one sinner who repents (Luke 15:7). Therefore, when our hearts are filled with joy in the grace of God, we want not only to cause the joy of others, but also to contemplate it when it exists in others.

So it is not inconsistent to say that love is the overflow of joy in God that gladly meets the needs of others *and* to say that love is finding your joy in the joy of another. If love is the *labor* of Christian Hedonism, which delights to

beget its joy in others, then it is also the *leisure* of Christian Hedonism, which delights to behold this joy begotten in others.⁵

LOVE WEEPS

But Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 2 raise another question. In verse 4 he says he wrote "out of much affliction and anguish of heart and with many tears." Is this a heart of love? I have stressed so heavily that love is the overflow of joy that someone might think there is no place for grief or anguish in the heart of love and no place for tears on its face. That would be very wrong.

The contentment of a Christian Hedonist is not a Buddha-like serenity, unmoved by the hurts of others. It is a profoundly *dissatisfied contentment*. It is constantly hungry for more of the feast of God's grace. And even the measure of contentment that God grants contains an insatiable impulse to expand itself to others (2 Corinthians 8:4; 1 John 1:4). Christian joy reveals itself as dissatisfied contentment whenever it perceives human need. It starts to expand in love to fill that need and bring about the joy of faith in the heart of the other person. But since there is often a time lapse between our perception of a person's need and

5. Historically, ethicists have tended to distinguish these two forms of love as agape and eros, or benevolence and complacency. Not only is there no linguistic basis for such a distinction, but conceptually both resolve into one kind of love at the root.

God's agape does not "transcend" His eros, but expresses it. God's redeeming, sacrificial love for His sinful people is described by Hosea in the most erotic terms: "How can I give you up, O Ephraim? How can I hand you over, O Israel?... My heart recoils within me; my compassion grows warm and tender. I will not execute my burning anger... for I am God and not a man" (11:8-9). Concerning His exiled people who had sinned so grievously, God says later through Jeremiah, "I will rejoice in doing them good, and I will plant them in this land in faithfulness, with all my heart and all my soul" (32:41).

The divine motive of self-satisfying joy is seen also in Jesus' own ministry. When He was called to give an account of why He lowered Himself to eat with tax collectors and sinners (Luke 15:1-2), His answer was "There will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance" (v. 7). Finally, we are told in Hebrews 12:2 by what power Jesus endured suffering: "For the joy that was set before him [He] endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God." Should we not infer that in the painful work of redeeming love, God is very interested in the satisfaction that comes from His efforts and that He does demand the pleasure of a great return on His sacrifice?

While there is a sense in which God has no need for creation at all (Acts 17:25) and is profoundly fulfilled and happy in the eternal fellowship of the Trinity, yet there is in joy an urge to increase, by expanding itself to others who, if necessary, must first be created and redeemed. This divine urge is God's desire for the compounded joy that comes from having others share the very joy He has in Himself.

It becomes evident therefore that one should not ask, "Does God seek His own happiness as a means to the happiness of His people, or does He seek their happiness as a means to His own?" For there is no either-or. They are one. This is what distinguishes a holy, divine eros from a fallen, human one: God's eros longs for and delights in the eternal and holy joy of His people.

our eventual rejoicing in the person's restored joy, there is a place for weeping in that interval. The weeping of compassion is the weeping of joy impeded in the extension of itself to another.

LOVE KEEPS THE REWARD OF LOVE IN MIND

Another tearful experience comes when Paul uncovers his commitment to Christian Hedonism. In Acts 20 he gathers for the last time with elders of the church of Ephesus. There are many tears and much embracing as Paul finishes his farewell address (20:37). But these tears only accent the poignancy of affection the elders have for one who taught them the joy of ministry.

In verse 35, Paul says, "In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and *remember* the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'" The last thing Paul left ringing in their ears on the beach at Miletus was the ministerial charge of Christian Hedonism: "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

Most people do not feel the hedonistic force of these words because they do not meditate on the meaning of the word *remember*. Literally, Paul says, "In all things I have shown you that, so laboring, it is necessary to help the weak and to *remember* the words of the Lord Jesus, that he himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"

In other words, Paul says that two things are *necessary*: (1) to help the weak and (2) to remember that Jesus said it is more blessed to give than to receive. Why are both of these things necessary? Why not just help the weak? Why must one also remember that giving brings blessing?

Most Christians today think that while it is true that giving brings blessing, it is not true that one should "remember" this. Popular Christian wisdom says that blessing will come *as a result* of giving, but that if you keep this fact before you as a motive, it will ruin the moral value of your giving and turn you into a mercenary. The word *remember* in Acts 20:35 is a great obstacle to this popular wisdom. Why would Paul tell church elders to *keep in mind* the benefits of ministry, if in fact their doing so would turn ministers into mercenaries?

Christian Hedonism's answer is that it is necessary to keep in mind the *true*

rewards of ministry so we will *not* become mercenaries. C. S. Lewis sees this clearly:

We must not be troubled by unbelievers when they say that this promise of reward makes the Christian life a mercenary affair. There are different kinds of reward. There is the reward which has no natural connection with the thing you do to earn⁶ it, and is quite foreign to the desires that ought to accompany those things. Money is not the natural reward of love; that is why we call a man mercenary if he married a woman for the sake of her money. But marriage is the proper reward for a real lover, and he is not mercenary for desiring it. A general who fights well in order to get a peerage is mercenary; a general who fights for victory is not, victory being the proper reward of battle as marriage is the proper reward of love. The proper rewards are not simply tacked on to the activity for which they are given, but are the activity itself in consummation.⁷

I do not see how anyone can honor the word *remember* in Acts 20:35 and still think it is wrong to pursue the reward of joy in the ministry. On the contrary, Paul thinks it is necessary to keep the joy set firmly before us. This is the last and perhaps most important thing he has to say to the Ephesian elders before he departs. "*Remember!* It is more blessed to give than to receive."

LOVE ENJOYS MINISTRY

Nor is Paul the only apostle who counseled elders to remember and pursue the blessedness of ministry. In 1 Peter 5:1–2, Peter writes:

I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder...shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion,

6. I would never use the word *earn* for the way Christians come to enjoy the rewards of love. *Earn* implies the exchange of value from one to another that obligates the other to pay because of the value he has received. But in truth, everything Christians "give" to God is simply a rebound of God's gift to them. All our service is done "in the strength that God supplies" (1 Peter 4:11), so that it is in fact God who "earns" the reward for us and through us. But this does not diminish the helpfulness of Lewis's comment on the nature of rewards.

7. C. S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1965), 2.

but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly.

In other words, "God loves a cheerful pastor." Notice how hedonistic these admonitions are. Peter does not admonish pastors to simply do their work, come what may. Perseverance through the hard times is good. It is essential! But it is not all that is commanded of pastors. We are commanded to enjoy our work!

Peter condemns two motives. One is "compulsion." Don't do your work under constraint. This means the impulse should come gladly from within, not oppressively from without. Parental pressure, congregational expectations, fear of failure or divine censure—these are not good motives for staying in the pastoral ministry. There should be an inner willingness. We should *want* to do the ministry. It should be our joy. Joy in ministry is a duty—a light burden and an easy yoke.

The other motive Peter condemns is the desire for money ("not for shameful gain, but eagerly"). If money is the motive, your joy comes not from the ministry, but from the stuff you can buy with your salary. This is what Lewis calls mercenary. The "eagerness" of ministry should not come from the extrinsic reward of money, but from the intrinsic reward of seeing God's grace flow through you to others.

John gives a good example of this joy in 3 John 1:4: "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth." When this kind of reward creates joyful eagerness in ministry, *Christ* is honored (since He is the "truth" that our people follow) and *the people* are loved (since they can receive no greater benefit than the grace to follow Christ).

So the command of the apostle Peter is to pursue joy in the ministry. It is not optional. It is not a mere unexpected result. It is a duty! To say that you are indifferent to what the apostle commands you to experience is to be indifferent to the will of God. And that is sin.

Phillips Brooks, an Episcopalian pastor in Boston a hundred years ago, caught the spirit of Peter's counsel to pastors:

I think, again, that it is essential to the preacher's success that he should thoroughly enjoy his work. I mean in the actual doing of it, and not only in its idea. No man to whom the details of his task are repulsive can do his task well constantly, however full he may be of its spirit. He may make one bold dash at it and carry it over all his disgusts, but he cannot work on at it year after year, day after day. Therefore, count it not merely a perfectly legitimate pleasure, count it an essential element of your power, if you can feel a simple delight in what you have to do as a minister, in the fervor of writing, in the glow of speaking, in standing before men and moving them, in contact with the young. The more thoroughly you enjoy it, the better you will do it all.

This is all true of preaching. Its highest joy is in the great ambition that is set before it, the glorifying of the Lord and saving of the souls of men. No other joy on earth compares with that. The ministry that does not feel that joy is dead. But in behind that highest joy, beating in humble unison with it, as the healthy body thrills in sympathy with the deep thoughts and pure desires of the mind and soul, the best ministers have always been conscious of another pleasure which belonged to the very doing of the work itself. As we read the lives of all the most effective preachers of the past, or as we meet the men who are powerful preachers of the Word today, we feel how certainly and how deeply the very exercise of their ministry delights them.⁸

LOVE IS NOT EASILY PLEASED

Can we not then say that the hindrance to loving other people, whether through the pastoral ministry or any other avenue of life, is the same as the hindrance to worship we discovered in chapter 3? The obstacle that keeps us from obeying the first (vertical) commandment is the same obstacle that keeps us from obeying the second (horizontal) commandment. It is *not* that we are all trying to

please ourselves, but that we are all far too easily pleased. We do not believe Jesus when He says there is more blessedness, more joy, more lasting pleasure in a life devoted to helping others than there is in a life devoted to our material comfort. And therefore, the very longing for contentment that ought to drive us to simplicity of life and labors of love contents itself instead with the broken cisterns of prosperity and comfort.

The message that needs to be shouted from the houses of high finance is this: Secular man, you are not nearly hedonistic enough!

"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal." (Matthew 6:19-20)

Quit being satisfied with the little 5 percent yields of pleasure that get eaten up by the moths of inflation and the rust of death. Invest in the blue-chip, high-yield, divinely insured security of heaven. Devoting a life to material comforts and thrills is like throwing money down a rat hole. But investing a life in the labor of love yields dividends of joy unsurpassed and unending:

"Sell your possessions, and give to the needy. [And *thus*] provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail." (Luke 12:33)

This message is very good news: Come to Christ, in whose presence are fullness of joy and pleasures forevermore. Join us in the labor of Christian Hedonism. For the Lord has spoken: It is more blessed to love than to live in luxury!

LOVE SUFFERS FOR JOY

Love is costly. It always involves some kind of self-denial. It often demands suffering. But Christian Hedonism insists that the gain outweighs the pain. It affirms that there are rare and wonderful species of joy that flourish only in the

8. Phillips Brooks, *Lectures on Preaching* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1969, orig. 1907), 53-4, 82-3.

rainy atmosphere of suffering. "The soul would have no rainbow if the eye had no tears."⁹

The costly joy of love is illustrated repeatedly in Hebrews 10–12. Consider three examples.

Hebrews 10:32–35

But recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction, and sometimes being partners with those so treated. For you had compassion on those in prison, and you *joyfully* accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one. Therefore do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward.

Based on my limited experience with suffering, I would have no right in myself to say such a thing is possible—to accept *joyfully* the plundering of my property. But the authority of Christian Hedonism is not in me; it is in the Bible. I have no right in myself to say, "Rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings" (1 Peter 4:13). But Peter does because he and the other apostles were beaten for the gospel and "left the presence of the council, *rejoicing* that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name" (Acts 5:41).

And the Christians in Hebrews 10:32–35 have earned the right to teach us about costly love. The situation appears to be this: In the early days of their conversion, some of them were imprisoned for the faith. The others were confronted with a difficult choice: Shall we go underground and stay "safe," or shall we visit our brothers and sisters in prison and risk our lives and property? They chose the way of love and accepted the cost. "For you had compassion on those in prison, and you *joyfully* accepted the plundering of your property."

But were they losers? No. They lost property and gained *joy*! They joyfully

9. A Minquass proverb. See Guy A. Zona, ed., *The Soul Would Have No Rainbow If the Eye Had No Tears: And Other Native American Proverbs* (New York: TouchStone, 1994).

accepted the loss. In one sense they denied themselves. But in another they did not. They chose the way of joy. Evidently, these Christians were motivated for prison ministry the same way the Macedonians (of 2 Corinthians 8:1–9) were motivated to relieve the poor. Their joy in God overflowed in love for others.

They looked at their own lives and said, "The steadfast love of the Lord is better than life" (see Psalm 63:3). They looked at all their possessions and said, "We have a possession in heaven that is better and lasts longer than any of this" (Hebrews 10:34). Then they looked at each other and said:

Let goods and kindred go,
This mortal life also;
The body they may kill;
God's truth abideth still,
His kingdom is forever.

Martin Luther

With *joy* they "renounced all they had" (Luke 14:33) and followed Christ into the prison to visit their brothers and sisters. Love is the overflow of joy in God that meets the needs of others.

Hebrews 11:24–26

To drive the point home, the author of Hebrews gives Moses as an example of this sort of Christian Hedonism. Notice how similar his motivation is to that of the early Christians in chapter 10:

By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he [looked] to the reward.

In 10:34 the author said that the desire of the Christians for a better and lasting possession overflowed in joyful love, which cost them their property.

Here in chapter 11, Moses is a hero for the church because his delight in the promised reward overflowed in such joy that he counted the pleasures of Egypt rubbish by comparison and was bound forever to God's people in love.

There is nothing here about ultimate self-denial. He was given eyes to see that the pleasures of Egypt were "fleeting," not eternal. He was granted to see that suffering for the cause of the Messiah was "greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt." As he considered these things, he was constrained to give himself to the labor of Christian Hedonism—love. And he spent the rest of his days channeling the grace of God to the people of Israel. His joy in God overflowed in a lifetime of service to a recalcitrant and needy people. He chose the way of maximum joy, not the way of "fleeting pleasures."

Hebrews 12:1–2

We raised the question earlier whether the example of Jesus contradicts the principle of Christian Hedonism; namely, that love is the way of joy and that one should choose it for that very reason, lest one be found begrudging obedience to the Almighty or chafing under the privilege of being a channel of grace or belittling the promised reward. Hebrews 12:2 seems to say fairly clearly that Jesus did not contradict this principle:

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who *for the joy that was set before him* endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

The greatest labor of love that ever happened was possible because Jesus pursued the greatest imaginable joy, namely, the joy of being exalted to God's right hand in the assembly of a redeemed people: "For the joy that was set before him [He] endured the cross!"

Back in December of 1978, I was trying to explain some of these things to a college class. As usual, I found some of them quite skeptical. One of the more thoughtful wrote me a letter to express his disagreement. Since this is one of the most serious objections raised against Christian Hedonism, I think it will be helpful to others if I print Ronn's letter here and my response.

Dr. Piper:

I disagree with your position that love seeks or is motivated by its own pleasure. I suggest that all of your examples are true: You have cited many cases in which personal joy is increased and *may even* be the motivation for a person to love God or another human.

But you cannot establish a doctrine on the fact that some evidence supports it unless you can show that no evidence contradicts it.

Two examples of the second type:

Picture yourself in Gethsemane with Christ. He is about to perform the supreme act of love in all of history. Walking up to him, you decide to test your position on Christian Hedonism. Should not this supreme love bring great pleasure, abundant joy? Yet what is this you see? Christ is sweating terribly, in anguish, crying. Joy is nowhere to be found. Christ is praying. You hear him ask God if there is any way out. He tells God the upcoming act will be so hard, so painful. Can't there be a fun way?

Thank God that Christ chose the hard way.

My second example is not biblical, though there are many more of them. Are you familiar with Dorothy Day? She is a very old woman who has devoted her life to loving others, especially the poor, displaced, downtrodden. Her experience of loving when there was no joy has led her to say: "Love in action is a harsh and dreadful thing."

I could not agree more with her than I do.

I would like to know your response to these thoughts. In truth, I do feel this presentation is too simplistic. But it is sincere.

Ronn

I responded to Ronn the same week. Since then, Dorothy Day has died, but I will leave the references as they were back then. Incidentally, to this day I count Ronn a friend and a sharp thinker about the Christian worldview.

Ronn,

Thanks very much for your concern to have a fully biblical stance on this matter of Christian Hedonism—a stance which honors all the evidence. This is my concern, too. So I must ask whether your two examples (Christ in Gethsemane and Dorothy Day in painful service of love) contradict or confirm my position.

(1) Take Gethsemane first. For my thesis to stand I need to be able to show that in spite of the horror of the cross, Jesus' decision to accept it was motivated by his conviction that this way would bring him more joy than the way of disobedience. Hebrews 12:2 says, "For the joy that was set before him Christ endured the cross, despising the shame." In saying this, the writer means to give Jesus as another example, along with the saints of Hebrews 11, of those who are so eager for, and confident in, the joy God offers that they reject the "fleeting pleasures of sin" (11:25) and choose ill-treatment in order to be aligned with God's will. It is not unbiblical, therefore, to say that what sustained Christ in the dark hours of Gethsemane was the hope of joy beyond the cross.

This does not diminish the reality and greatness of his love for us, because the joy in which he hoped was the joy of leading many sons to glory (Hebrews 2:10). His joy is in *our* redemption, which redounds to *God's* glory. To abandon the cross and thus to abandon us and the Father's will was a prospect so horrible in Christ's mind that he repulsed it and embraced death.

But my essay on "Dissatisfied Contentment" [this is what Ronn was responding to; its content has been incorporated into this chapter] suggests even more: namely, that in some profound sense there must be joy in the very act of love, if it is to be pleasing to God.

You have shown clearly that if this is true in the case of Jesus' death, there must be a radical difference between joy and "fun." But we all know that there is.

It is not fair when you shift from saying there is no "fun way" in Gethsemane, to saying "Joy is nowhere to be found." I know that at those times in my life when I have chosen to do the most costly good deeds, I have (with and under the hurts) felt a very deep joy at doing good.

I think that when Jesus rose from his final prayer in Gethsemane with the resolve to die, there flowed through his soul a glorious sense of triumph over the night's temptation. Did he not say, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work" (John 4:34)? Jesus cherished his Father's will like we cherish food. To finish his Father's work was what he fed upon; to abandon it would be to choose starvation. I think there was joy in Gethsemane as Jesus was led away—not fun, not sensual pleasure, not laughter, in fact not anything that this world can offer. *But there was a good feeling deep in Jesus' heart that his action was pleasing to his Father, and that the reward to come would outweigh all the pain.* This profoundly good feeling is the joy that enabled Jesus to do for us what he did.

(2) You say of Dorothy Day: "Her experience of loving [the poor, displaced, downtrodden] when there was no joy has led her to say this: 'Love in action is a harsh and dreadful thing.'" I will try to respond in two ways.

First, don't jump to the conclusion that there is no joy in things that are "harsh and dreadful." There are mountain climbers who have spent sleepless nights on the faces of cliffs, have lost fingers and toes in sub-zero temperatures, and have gone through horrible misery to reach a peak. They say, "It was harsh and dreadful." But if you ask them why they do it, the answer will come back in various forms: "There is an exhilaration in the soul that feels so good it is worth all the pain."

If this is how it is with mountain climbing, cannot the same be

true of love? Is it not rather an indictment of our own worldliness that we are more inclined to sense exhilaration at mountain climbing than at conquering the precipices of un-love in our own lives and in society? Yes, love is often a "harsh and dreadful" thing, but I do not see how a person who cherishes what is good and admires Jesus can help but sense a joyful exhilaration when (by grace) he is able to love another person.

Now let me approach Dorothy Day's situation in another way. Let's pretend that I am one of the poor that she is trying to help at great cost to herself. I think a conversation might go like this:

Piper: Why are you doing this for me, Miss Day?

Day: Because I love you.

Piper: What do you mean, you love me? I don't have anything to offer. I'm not worth loving.

Day: Perhaps. But there are no application forms for my love. I learned that from Jesus. What I mean is, I want to *help* you because Jesus has helped me so much.

Piper: So you are trying to satisfy your "wants"?

Day: I suppose so, if you want to put it like that. One of my deepest wants is to make you a happy and purposeful person.

Piper: Does it upset you that I *am* happier and that I feel more purposeful since you've come?

Day: Heavens, no! What could make me happier?

Piper: So you really spend all those sleepless nights here for what makes you happy, don't you?

Day: If I say yes, someone might misunderstand me. They might think I don't care for *you* at all, but only for myself.

Piper: But won't you say it at least for me?

Day: Yes, I'll say it for you: I work for what brings me the greatest joy: your joy.

Piper: Thank you. Now I know that you love me.

LOVE'S DEED AND REWARD ARE ORGANICALLY RELATED

One thing touched on briefly in this letter that might need some elaboration is the question concerning the relationship between the joy that comes in the actual deed of love and the joy that comes from the reward promised in the more distant future. The reason I think this question is important is that the motivation of receiving a future reward could turn love into a mercenary affair (as we have seen) if the hoped-for reward were not somehow organically related to the act one is doing to get the reward.

If the nature of the deed did not partake of the nature of the reward, you could do things you thought were stupid or evil to get the reward you considered wise or good. But it would be stretching the word *love* beyond biblical limits to say that one is loving when he does a thing he thinks is stupid or evil. A loving act (even if very painful) must be approved by our conscience.

So to say that it is right and good to be motivated by the hope of reward (as Moses and the early Christians and Jesus were, according to Hebrews 11:26 and 10:34 and 12:2) does not mean that this view to the future nullifies the need to choose acts that in their nature are organically related to the hoped-for reward.

What I mean by "organically related" is this: Any act of love we choose for the sake of a holy reward must compel us because we see in that act the moral traits of that promised reward. Or to put it the other way around, the only fitting reward for an act of love is the experience of divine glory whose moral dimension is what made the chosen act attractive.

The reward to which we look as Christian Hedonists for all the good we are commanded to do is distilled for us in Romans 8:29: "Those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers." There are two goals of our predestination mentioned here: one highlighting *our* glory and one highlighting *Christ's*.

The first goal of our predestination is to be like Christ. This includes new resurrection bodies of glory like His (Philippians 3:21; 1 Corinthians 15:49).

But most importantly, it includes spiritual and moral qualities and capacities like Christ's (1 John 3:2-3).

The second and more ultimate goal of our predestination is "that Christ might be the firstborn among many brothers." In other words, God aims to surround His Son with living images of Himself so that the preeminent excellency of the original will shine the more brightly in His images. The goals of predestination are (1) our delight in becoming holy as He is holy and (2) His delight in being exalted as preeminent over all in the midst of a transformed, joyful people.

But if the reward we long for is to behold and be like the preeminent Christ, then it would be a contradiction if the actions we choose were not morally consistent with the character of Christ. If we really are being attracted by the reward of being made holy as He is holy, then we will be attracted to those acts that partake of His holiness. If we delight in the prospect of knowing Christ even as we are known, we will delight in the sorts of acts and attitudes that reflect His moral character.

So in true Christian Hedonism there is an organic relationship between the love Christ commands and the reward He promises. It is never a mercenary affair in which we do what we despise to get what we enjoy. Jesus illustrates this connection between act and reward in Luke 6:35:

"Love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, *and your reward will be great*, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil."

Even though we should not care about human reward ("expecting nothing in return"), the Lord Himself gives us an incentive to love by promising His reward, namely, that we will be sons of the Most High. This sonship implies likeness ("for he is kind to the ungrateful"). So the command and the reward are one piece of fabric. The command is to love. The reward is to become like one who loves.

So it is important to emphasize, on the one hand, that the reward a Christian Hedonist pursues is the incomparable delight of being like God and

loving what He loves with an intensity approaching His own (John 17:26). And it is important to emphasize, on the other hand, that the acts of love a Christian Hedonist performs are themselves therefore delightful in measure because they have about them the aroma of this final reward. This, as we saw, was also C. S. Lewis's point when he spoke of an activity's "proper rewards," which "are the activity in itself in consummation."

LOVE LONGS FOR THE POWER OF GRACE

One last question belongs to this chapter. I have defined love as the overflow of joy in God that meets the needs of others. It will be practically helpful in conclusion to ask how this actually works in experience. What is the psychological process that moves us from joy in God to the actual deed of love?

We start with a miracle; namely, that I, a sinner, should delight in God! Not just in His material rewards, but in Him, in all His manifold excellencies! This conversion experience, as we saw, is the "creation" of a Christian Hedonist. Now how does practical love emerge from this heart of joy in God?

When the object of our delight is moral beauty, the longing to *behold* is inseparable from the longing to *be*. When the Holy Spirit awakens the heart of a person to delight in the holiness of God, an insatiable desire is born not only to *behold* that holiness, but also to *be* holy as God is holy. Our joy is incomplete if we can only stand outside beholding the glory of God, but are not allowed to share it. It is one thing for a little boy to cheer in the grandstands at a football game. But his joy is complete if he can go home and get a team together and actually play the game.

We don't want to just *see* the grace of God in all its beauty, saving sinners and sanctifying saints. We want to share the power of that grace. We want to feel it saving.

We want to feel it conquer temptation in *our* lives. We want to feel it using *us* to save others. But why? Because our joy in God is insatiably hungry. The more we have, the more we want. The more we see, the more we want to see. The more we feel, the more we want to feel.

This means that the holy hunger for joy in God that wants to see and feel

more and more manifestations of His glory will push a person into love. My desire to feel the power of God's grace conquering the pride and selfishness in my life inclines me to behavior that demonstrates the victory of grace, namely, love. Genuine love is so contrary to human nature that its presence bears witness to an extraordinary power. The Christian Hedonist pursues love because he is addicted to the experience of that power. He wants to feel more and more of the grace of God reigning in his life.

CONQUERING THE INTERNAL MOUNTAIN OF PRIDE

There is an analogy here to a powerful motive that exists in unbelieving hearts as well. Virtually all people outside Christ are possessed by the desire to find happiness by overcoming some limitation in their lives and having the sensation of power. Heinrich Harrer, a member of the first team to climb the north wall of the Eiger in the Swiss Alps, confessed that his reason for attempting such a climb was to overcome a sense of insecurity. "Self-confidence," he said, "is the most valuable gift a man can possess...but to possess this true confidence it is necessary to have learned to know oneself at moments when one was standing at the very frontier of things.... On the 'Spider' in the Eiger's North Face, I experienced such borderline situations, while the avalanches were roaring down over us, endlessly."¹⁰

The all-important difference between the non-Christian and the Christian Hedonist in this pursuit of joy is that the Christian Hedonist has discovered that self-confidence will never satisfy the longing of his heart to overcome finitude.

He has learned that what we are really made for is not the thrill of feeling our own power increase, but the thrill of feeling God's power increase, conquering the precipices of un-love in our sinful hearts.

As I said in the letter to my friend Ronn, it is an indictment of our own worldliness that we feel more exhilaration when we conquer an external mountain of granite in our own strength than when we conquer the internal mountain of pride in God's strength. The miracle of Christian Hedonism is that over-

coming obstacles to love by the grace of God has become more enticing than every form of self-confidence. The joy of experiencing the power of God's grace defeating selfishness is an insatiable addiction.

JOY DOUBLED IN THE JOY OF ANOTHER

But there is another way of describing the psychological process that leads from delight in God to labors of love. When a person delights in the display of the glorious grace of God, that person will want to see as many displays of it as possible in other people. If I can be God's means of another person's miraculous conversion, I will count it all joy, because what would I rather see than another display of the beauty of God's grace in the joy of another person? My joy is doubled in his.

When the Christian Hedonist sees a person without hope or joy, that person's need becomes like a low-pressure zone approaching the high-pressure zone of joy in God's grace. In this spiritual atmosphere, a draft is created from the Christian Hedonist's high-pressure zone of joy to the low-pressure zone of need, as joy tends to expand to fill the need. That draft is called love.

Love is the overflow of joy in God that meets the needs of others. The overflow is experienced consciously as the pursuit of our joy in the joy of another. We double our delight in God as we expand it in the lives of others. If our ultimate goal were anything less than joy in God, we would be idolaters and no eternal help to anyone. Therefore, the pursuit of pleasure is an essential motive for every good deed. And if you aim to abandon the pursuit of full and lasting pleasure, you cannot love people or please God.

10. Quoted in Daniel P. Fuller, *Hermeneutics* (Pasadena, Calif.: Fuller Theological Seminary, 1969), 7:4-5.