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JOHN PIPER

DESIRING GOD



PIPER

DESIRING GOD

Meditations of a Christian Hedonist

Revised Edition



WORSHIP

The Feast of Christian Hedonism

"The hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth."

JOHN 4:23-24

SOUL HUNTER

Sometimes spiritual sleepers need to be shocked. If you want them to hear what you have to say, you might even need to scandalize them. Jesus is especially good at this. When He wants to teach us something about worship, He uses a whore!

"Go call your husband," he says to the Samaritan woman.

"I don't have a husband," she answers.

"That's right," Jesus says. "But you've had five, and the man you sleep with now is not your husband."

She is shocked. We're shocked! But Jesus simply sits there on the edge of the well with His hands folded, looking at the woman with razors in His eyes, ready to teach us about worship.

The first thing we learn is that worship has to do with real life. It is not a mythical interlude in a week of reality. Worship has to do with adultery and hunger and racial conflict.

Jesus is bone weary from the journey. He is hot and thirsty. He decides: "Yes, even now, just now, I will seek someone to worship the Father—a Samaritan adulteress. I will show My disciples how My Father seeks worship in the midst of real life from the least likely. She is a Samaritan. She is a woman.

She is a harlot. Yes, I will even show them a thing or two about how to make true worshipers out of the white harvest of harlots in Samaria."

LIFTING THE LEVEL OF AMAZEMENT

Let's back up to the beginning of the story. Jesus "had to pass through Samaria" on His way to Galilee. "So he came to a town of Samaria called Sychar.... Jacob's well was there; so Jesus, wearied as he was from his journey, was sitting beside the well. It was about the sixth hour" (John 4:4-6).

The Samaritans were leftovers from the northern Jewish kingdom who had intermarried with foreigners after the chiefs and nobles were taken into exile in 722 B.C. They had once built a separate worship place on their own Mount Gerizim. They rejected all of the Old Testament except their own version of the first five books of Moses. Their animosity toward Jews (such as Jesus) was centuries old.

Jesus walks right into this hostility, sits down, and asks for a drink. The woman is stunned that Jesus would even speak to her: "How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?" (v. 9).

Instead of answering her directly, Jesus shifts the focus of her amazement up a level. He says, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water" (v. 10). The really amazing thing is not that He asked her for a drink, but that she didn't ask Him! He has "living water," and He calls it the "gift of God."

But the woman doesn't rise very high. She simply says, "How can you give me water when you don't have a bucket?" She is not on Jesus' wavelength yet.

So Jesus again lifts the level of amazement. "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty forever. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life" (vv. 13-14). The amazing thing is not that He can give her water without a bucket, but that His water satisfies forever. Even more: When you drink it, your soul becomes a spring. It is miracle water:

It buries itself in a sandy soul and bubbles up a spring of life.

What does this mean?

THE WATER THAT BECOMES A WELL

"The teaching of the wise is a fountain of life," says Proverbs 13:14. Perhaps, then, Jesus means that His teaching is a fountain of life. When thirsty people drink it, they revive and then give it to others. Did He not say, "The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life" (John 6:63)?

But the closest parallel to the image of a soul becoming a spring is in John 7:37-39: "Jesus stood up and cried out, 'If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, "Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water."'" Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive."

So the water Jesus gives is the Holy Spirit. The presence of God's Spirit in your life takes away the frustrated soul-thirst and turns you into a fountain where others can find life.

But probably both these meanings are true. Both the teaching of Jesus and the Holy Spirit satisfy the longing of our souls and make us into fountains for others. Jesus held the Word and the Spirit together.

For example, in John 14:26 He said, "The Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said." The work of the Spirit of Christ is to make the Word of Christ clear and satisfying to the soul.

The water offered to the Samaritan adulteress was the Word of truth and the power of the Spirit. When we come to Christ to drink, what we drink is truth—not dry, lifeless, powerless truth, but truth soaked with the life-giving Spirit of God! The Word of promise and the power of the Spirit are the living water held out to the Samaritan harlot.

TO THE HEART THROUGH A WOUND

But again the woman misses the point. She cannot rise above her five senses. "Sir, give me this water, so that I will not be thirsty or have to come here to

draw water" (John 4:15). Beware of giving up on people too soon, though. Jesus has set His saving sights on this woman. He aims to create a worshiper of God "in spirit and truth."

So now He touches the most sensitive and vulnerable spot in her life: "Go, call your husband" (v. 16). The quickest way to the heart is through a wound.

Why does Jesus strip open the woman's inner life like this? Because He had said in John 3:20, "Everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed." Concealed sin keeps us from seeing the light of Christ.

Sin is like spiritual leprosy. It deadens your spiritual senses so that you rip your soul to shreds and don't even feel it. But Christ lays bare her spiritual leprosy: "You have had five husbands, and the man you are sleeping with now is not your husband."

A TRAPPED ANIMAL WILL CHEW OFF ITS LEG

Now watch the universal reflex of a person trying to avoid conviction. She has to admit that He has extraordinary insight: "Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet" (John 4:19). But instead of going the direction He pointed, she tries to switch to an academic controversy: "Our fathers worshiped on this mountain; but you Jews say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship. What's your position on this issue?"

A trapped animal will chew off its own leg to escape. A trapped sinner will mangle her own mind and rip up the rules of logic. "Why, yes, as long as we are talking about my adultery, what is Your stance on the issue of where people should worship?" This is standard evasive double-talk for trapped sinners.

But the great Soul Hunter is not so easily eluded. He does not insist that she stay on His path. He will follow her into the bush. Or could it be that He has circled around and is waiting there for her as she brings up the subject of worship? He never goes back to the issue of adultery. It was a thrust against the sealed door of her heart. But now His foot is in, and He is willing to deal with the issue of worship.

THE HOW AND WHOM OF WORSHIP

The woman raised the issue of *where* people ought to worship. Jesus responds by saying, "That controversy can't compare in importance with the issue of *how* and *whom* you worship."

First, He draws her attention to the *how*: "Jesus said to her, 'Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father'" (John 4:21). In other words, don't get bogged down in unessential controversies. It is possible to worship God in vain both in your place and in ours! Did not God say, "This people...honor me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me" (Isaiah 29:13)? The issue is not *where*, but *how*.

Then He rivets her attention on *whom*: "You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews" (v. 22). These are harsh words. But when life and death are at stake, there comes a point when you put the matter bluntly—like telling a person with lung disease to stop smoking.

The Samaritans rejected all the Old Testament except their own version of the first five books. Their knowledge of God was deficient. Therefore, Jesus tells the woman that Samaritan worship is deficient. It matters whether you know the One you worship!

How and *whom* are crucial, not *where*. Worship must be vital and real in the heart, and worship must rest on a true perception of God. There must be spirit and there must be truth. So Jesus says, "The hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth." The two words *spirit* and *truth* correspond to the *how* and *whom* of worship.

Worshiping in spirit is the opposite of worshiping in merely external ways. It is the opposite of empty formalism and traditionalism. Worshiping in truth is the opposite of worship based on an inadequate view of God. Worship must have heart and head. Worship must engage emotions and thought.

Truth without emotion produces dead orthodoxy and a church full (or half-full) of artificial admirers (like people who write generic anniversary cards for a living). On the other hand, emotion without truth produces empty frenzy and cultivates shallow people who refuse the discipline of rigorous thought. But true

worship comes from people who are deeply emotional and who love deep and sound doctrine. Strong affections for God rooted in truth are the bone and marrow of biblical worship.

FUEL, FURNACE, AND HEAT

Perhaps we can tie things together with this picture: The fuel of worship is the truth of God; the furnace of worship is the spirit of man; and the heat of worship is the vital affections of reverence, contrition, trust, gratitude, and joy.

But there is something missing from this picture. There is furnace, fuel, and heat, but no *fire*. The fuel of truth in the furnace of our spirit does not automatically produce the heat of worship. There must be ignition and fire. This is the Holy Spirit.

When Jesus says, "True worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth," some interpreters take this to refer to the Holy Spirit. I have taken it to mean our spirit. But maybe these two interpretations are not far apart in Jesus' mind. In John 3:6, Jesus connects God's Spirit and our spirit in a remarkable way.

He says, "That which is born of the Spirit is spirit." In other words, until the Holy Spirit quickens our spirit with the flame of life, our spirit is so dead and unresponsive it does not even qualify as spirit. Only that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. So when Jesus says that true worshipers worship the Father "in spirit," He must mean that true worship comes only from spirits made alive and sensitive by the quickening of the Spirit of God.

Now we can complete our picture. The fuel of worship is a true vision of the greatness of God; the fire that makes the fuel burn white hot is the quickening of the Holy Spirit; the furnace made alive and warm by the flame of truth is our renewed spirit; and the resulting heat of our affections is powerful worship, pushing its way out in confessions, longings, acclamations, tears, songs, shouts, bowed heads, lifted hands, and obedient lives.

FROM MATTERS OF FOOD TO MATTERS OF FAITH

Now back to Samaria for a moment. The disciples have gone into town for food. Jesus has been alone with the woman by the well. When the disciples

return, they offer Jesus lunch. But He does the same thing with them that He had done with the woman—He jumps from matters of food to matters of faith: "I have food to eat that you do not know about" (John 4:32). Jesus has been eating the whole time they were gone. But what? "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work" (v. 34). And what is the work of the Father? The Father is seeking people to worship Him in spirit and truth.

The whole interchange between Jesus and the Samaritan adulteress is the work of God to make a genuine worshiper. Then Jesus applies the episode to the disciples—and to us! "Do you not say, 'There are yet four months, then comes the harvest'? Look, I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see that the fields are white for harvest" (v. 35). He is saying, "There is a white harvest of harlots in Samaria. I have just made one into a worshiper of God. That is why the Father sent me—so send I you. God seeks people to worship Him in spirit and truth. Here comes the city of Sychar white unto harvest. If you love the glory of God, make ready to reap."

Christ has set a course for us in the rest of this chapter on worship. What does it really mean to worship "in spirit and truth"? What is the response of the Spirit-quickened spirit of man? What is the relationship of truth to this experience? That's our plan: to ponder the nature of worship as an affair of the heart, and then as an affair of the mind. Then at the end we will briefly consider the external form of worship.¹

AN AFFAIR OF THE HEART

Almost everyone would agree that biblical worship involves some kind of outward act. The very word in Hebrew means to bow down. Worship is bowing, lifting hands, praying, singing, reciting, preaching, performing rites of eating, cleansing, ordaining, and so on.

But the startling fact is that all these things can be done in vain. They can be pointless and useless and empty. This is the warning of Jesus in Matthew 15:8–9 when He devastates the Pharisees with God's word from Isaiah 29:13:

1. To make it crystal clear, when I speak of worship, I do not limit what I mean to corporate events where Christians sing. That is one expression of worship. But you can sing and read the Scriptures and pray and *not* be worshiping, because worship is first and most essentially an act of the heart. It is a being satisfied with all that God is for us in Jesus. That satisfaction can be expressed in song or in visiting a prisoner.

"This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me."

First, notice that the parallel between the phrases "honor me" and "worship me" shows that worship is essentially a way of honoring God. Of course, that doesn't mean making Him honorable or increasing His honor. It means recognizing His honor and feeling the worth of it and ascribing it to Him in all the ways appropriate to His character.

Splendor and majesty are before him; strength and beauty are in his sanctuary. Ascribe to the LORD, O families of the peoples, ascribe to the LORD glory and strength! Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name. (Psalm 96:6-8)

So the first thing to see in Jesus' words is that worship is a way of gladly reflecting back to God the radiance of His worth.

The reason for saying *gladly* is that even mountains and trees reflect back to God the radiance of His worth: "Praise the LORD from the earth...mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars!" (Psalm 148:7, 9). Yet this reflection of God's glory in nature is not conscious. The mountains and hills do not willingly worship. In all the earth, only humans have this unique capacity.

If we do not gladly reflect God's glory in worship, we will nevertheless reflect the glory of His justice in our own condemnation: "Surely the wrath of man shall praise you" (Psalm 76:10). But this unwilling reflection of God's worth is *not* worship. Therefore, it is necessary to define worship not simply as a way of reflecting back to God the radiance of His worth, but, more precisely, as a way of doing it *gladly*.

The word *gladly* is liable to misunderstanding because (as we will see in a moment) worship at times involves contrition and brokenness, which we do not usually associate with gladness. But I keep the word because if we say only, for example, that worship is a "willing" reflection back to God of His worth, then we are on the brink of a worse misunderstanding; namely, that worship can be

willed when the heart has no real desire, or as Jesus says, when the heart is "far from God." Moreover, I think we will see that in genuine biblical contrition there is at least a seed of gladness that comes from the awakening hope that God will "revive the heart of the contrite" (Isaiah 57:15).

HOW TO WORSHIP GOD IN VAIN

This leads to the second thing to see in Matthew 15:8, namely, that we can "worship" God in vain: "This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me." An act of worship is vain and futile when it does not come from the heart. This was implied in the words of Jesus to the Samaritan adulteress: "True worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is

2. As I use them in this book, the words *feeling* and *emotion* and *affection* do not generally carry different meanings. If something distinct is intended in any given case, I will give some indication in the context. In general, I use the words synonymously and intend by them what Jonathan Edwards did in his great *Treatise Concerning the Religious Affections*, in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1974), 237.

Edwards defined the affections as "the more vigorous and sensible exercises of the inclination and will of the soul." To understand this we need to sum up briefly his view of the human soul or mind:

God has endued the soul with two principal faculties: The one, that by which it is capable of perception and speculation, or by which it discerns and judges of things; which is called the *understanding*. The other, that by which the soul is some way inclined with respect to the things it views or considers: or it is the faculty by which the soul beholds things—not as an indifferent unaffected spectator, but—either liking or disliking, pleased or displeased, approving or rejecting. This faculty is called by various names; it is sometimes called the *inclination*; and, as it respects the actions determined and governed by it, the *will*; and the *mind*, with regard to the exercises of this faculty, is often called the *heart*...

The will, and the affections of the soul, are not two faculties: the affections are not essentially distinct from the will, nor do they differ from the mere actings of the will and inclination, but only in the liveliness and sensibility of exercise...

As examples of the affections, Edwards mentions (among others) love, hatred, desire, joy, delight, grief, sorrow, fear, and hope. These are "the more vigorous and sensible [i.e., sensed or felt] exercises of the will." Edwards is aware that there is a profound and complex relationship between the body and the mind at this point:

Such seems to be our nature, and such the laws of the union of soul and body, that there never is in any case whatsoever, any lively and vigorous exercise of the inclination, without some effect upon the body.... But yet, it is not the body, but the mind only, that is the proper seat of the affections. The body of man is no more capable of being really the subject of love or hatred, joy or sorrow, fear or hope, than the body of a tree, or than the same body of man is capable of thinking and understanding. As it is the soul only that has ideas, so it is the soul only that is pleased or displeased with its ideas. As it is the soul only that thinks, so it is the soul only that loves or hates, rejoices or is grieved at, what it thinks of.

The biblical evidence for this is the fact that God, who has no body, nevertheless has many affections. Also Philippians 1:23 and 2 Corinthians 5:8 teach that after a Christian's death, and before the resurrection of the body, the Christian will be with the Lord and capable of joys "far better" than what we have known here.

seeking such people to worship him" (John 4:23). Now what is this experience of the spirit? What goes on in the heart when worship is *not* in vain?

Worship is more than an act of mere willpower. All the outward acts of worship are performed by acts of will. But that does not make them authentic. The will can be present (for all kinds of reasons) while the heart is not truly engaged (or, as Jesus says, is "far way"). The engagement of the heart in worship is the coming alive of the feelings and emotions and affections of the heart.² Where feelings for God are dead, worship is dead.

THE AFFECTIONS THAT MAKE WORSHIP AUTHENTIC

Now let's be specific. What are these feelings or affections that make the outward acts of worship authentic? For an answer, we turn to the inspired psalms and hymns of the Old Testament. An array of different and intertwined affections may grip the heart at any time. So the extent and order of the following list is not intended to limit the possibilities of pleasure in anyone's heart.

Perhaps the first response of the heart at seeing the majestic holiness of God is stunned silence: "Be still, and know that I am God" (Psalm 46:10). "The LORD is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him" (Habakkuk 2:20).

In the silence rises a sense of awe and reverence and wonder at the sheer magnitude of God: "Let all the earth fear the LORD; let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him!" (Psalm 33:8).

And because we are all sinners, there is in our reverence a holy dread of God's righteous power. "The LORD of hosts, him you shall regard as holy. Let him be your fear, and let him be your dread" (Isaiah 8:13). "I will bow down toward your holy temple in the fear of you" (Psalm 5:7).

But this dread is not a paralyzing fright full of resentment against God's absolute authority. It finds release in brokenness and contrition and grief for our ungodliness: "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise" (Psalm 51:17). "Thus says the One who is high and lifted up, who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: 'I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly, and to revive the heart of the contrite'" (Isaiah 57:15).

Mingled with the feeling of genuine brokenness and contrition, there arises a longing for God: "As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God" (Psalm 42:1-2). "Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever" (Psalm 73:25-26). "O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water" (Psalm 63:1).

God is not unresponsive to the contrite longing of the soul. He comes and lifts the load of sin and fills our heart with gladness and gratitude. "You have turned for me my mourning into dancing; you have loosed my sackcloth and clothed me with gladness, that my glory may sing your praise and not be silent. O LORD my God, I will give thanks to you forever!" (Psalm 30:11-12).

But our joy does not just rise from the backward glance in gratitude. It also rises from the forward glance in hope: "Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God" (Psalm 42:5-6). "I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, and in his word I hope" (Psalm 130:5).

In the end the heart longs not for any of God's good gifts, but for God Himself. To see Him and know Him and be in His presence is the soul's final feast. Beyond this there is no quest. Words fail. We call it pleasure, joy, delight. But these are weak pointers to the unspeakable experience: "One thing have I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to inquire in his temple" (Psalm 27:4). "In your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore" (Psalm 16:11). "Delight yourself in the LORD" (Psalm 37:4).

These are some of the affections of the heart that keep worship from being "in vain." Worship is a way of gladly reflecting back to God the radiance of His worth. It is not a mere act of willpower by which we perform outward acts. Without the engagement of the heart, we do not really worship. The engagement of the heart in worship is the coming alive of the feelings and emotions

and affections of the heart. *Where feelings for God are dead, worship is dead.*

True worship must include inward feelings that reflect the worth of God's glory. If this were not so, the word *hypocrite* would have no meaning. But there is such a thing as hypocrisy—going through outward motions (like singing, praying, giving, reciting) that signify affections of the heart that are not there. “This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me.”

TESTING A COMMON SLOGAN: “FACT! FAITH! FEELING!”

The virtue of slogans is brevity. Their vice is ambiguity. So they are risky ways of communicating. They are powerful and perilous. So we should exploit the power and explain the peril. I would like to venture a corrective explanation to the slogan “Fact! Faith! Feeling!”

It's an old and common evangelical slogan. F. B. Meyer, A. T. Pearson, and L. E. Maxwell all preached sermons by this title. Today a Campus Crusade booklet uses it powerfully. The point of the slogan is the order. First, the facts about Christ. Second, the response of faith. Third, the feelings that may or may not follow.

So what's the ambiguity? There are two: Changed “feelings” may be essential to true Christian conversion, not incidental; and “faith” may not be completely distinct from feeling.

In one well-known booklet the slogan appears as a train: The locomotive is “fact.” The coal car is “faith.” The caboose is “feeling.” The explanation reads: “The train will run with or without the caboose. However, it would be futile to attempt to pull the train by the caboose.” But what are the “feelings” the train of Christian living can run without? Do “feelings” refer merely to physical experiences like sweaty palms, knocking knees, racing heart, trembling lips, tearful eyes? If so, the slogan is clear and accurate.

But most people don't think of feelings that way. Feelings include things like gratitude, hope, joy, contentment, peacefulness, desire, compassion, fear, hate, anger, grief. None of these is merely physical. Angels, demons, and departed saints without bodies can have these “feelings.”

I think that apart from the Bible, Jonathan Edwards has written the most important book on feelings in the Christian life. It's called *The Religious Affections*. The definition of these “affections” (or what most people today mean by feelings) is: “the more vigorous and sensible exercises of the inclination and will of the soul.” In other words, the feelings that really matter are not mere physical sensations. They are the stirring up of the soul with some perceived treasure or threat.

There is a connection between the feelings of the soul and the sensations of the body. This is owing, Edwards says, to “the laws of union which the Creator has fixed between the soul and the body.”³ In other words, heartfelt gratitude can make you cry. Fear of God can make you tremble. The crying and the trembling are in themselves spiritually insignificant. The train can run without them. That's the truth in the slogan. But the gratitude and the fear are not optional in the Christian life. Yet these are what most people call feelings. That is the peril of the slogan. It seems to make optional what the Bible makes essential.

Minimizing the importance of transformed feelings makes Christian conversion less supernatural and less radical. It is humanly manageable to make decisions of the will for Christ. No supernatural power is required to pray prayers, sign cards, walk aisles, or even stop sleeping around. Those are good. They just don't prove that anything spiritual has happened. Christian conversion, on the other hand, is a supernatural, radical thing. The heart is changed. And the evidence of it is not just new decisions, but new affections, new feelings.

Negatively, the apostle Paul says that those who go on in the same old way of “hostility,” “jealousy,” “rage,” and “envy” “will not inherit the kingdom of God” (see Galatians 5:20–21). These are all feelings. They must change. The train won't get to heaven unless they do. Positively, Christians are commanded to have God-honoring feelings. We are commanded to feel joy (Philippians 4:4), hope (Psalm 42:5), fear (Luke 12:5), peace (Colossians 3:15), zeal (Romans 12:11), grief (Romans 12:15), desire (1 Peter 2:2), tenderheartedness (Ephesians 4:32), and brokenness and contrition (James 4:9).

3. Jonathan Edwards, *Religious Affections*, in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 2, ed. John E. Smith (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), 96.

Moreover, faith itself has in it something that most people would call feeling. Saving faith means "receiving Christ": "To all who did *receive* him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God" (John 1:12). But receive as what? We usually say, "as Lord and Savior." That's right. But something more needs to be said. Saving faith also receives Christ as our *Treasure*. A non-treasured Christ is a nonsaving Christ. Faith has in it this element of valuing, embracing, prizing, relishing Christ. It is like a man who finds a treasure hidden in a field and "from joy" sells all his treasures to have that field (Matthew 13:44).

Therefore, let us affirm the slogan when it means that physical sensations are not essential. But let us also make clear that the locomotive of fact is not headed for heaven if it is not followed by a faith that *treasures* Christ and if it is not pulling a caboose-load of new, though imperfect, affections.

WORSHIP AS AN END IN ITSELF

Now what does this imply about the feast of worship? Surprisingly, it implies that worship is an end in itself. We do not eat the feast of worship as a means to anything else. Happiness in God is the end of all our seeking. Nothing beyond it can be sought as a higher goal. John Calvin put it like this: "If God contains the fullness of all good things in himself like an inexhaustible fountain, nothing beyond him is to be sought by those who strike after the highest good and all the elements of happiness."⁴

If what transforms outward ritual into authentic worship is the quickening of the heart's affections, then true worship cannot be performed as a means to some other experience. Feelings are not like that. Genuine feelings of the heart cannot be manufactured as stepping stones to something else.

For example: My brother-in-law called me long-distance in 1974 to tell me my mother had just been killed. I recall his breaking voice as I took the phone from my wife: "Johnny, this is Bob, good buddy. I've got bad news... Your mother and dad were in a serious bus accident. Your mom didn't make it, and your dad is hurt bad."

4. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 3.25.10.

One thing is for sure: When I hear news like that, I do not sit down and say, "Now to what end shall I feel grief?" As I pull my baby son off my leg and hand him to my wife and walk to the bedroom to be alone, I do not say, "What good end can I accomplish if I cry for the next half-hour?" The feeling of grief is an end in itself, as far as my conscious motivation is concerned.

It is there spontaneously. It is not performed as a means to anything else. It is not consciously willed. It is not decided upon. It comes from deep within, from a place beneath the conscious will. It will no doubt have many by-products—most of them good. But that is utterly beside the point as I kneel by my bed and weep. The feeling is there, bursting out of my heart. And it is an end in itself.

Grief is not the only example. If you have been floating on a raft without water for three days after a shipwreck on the ocean and a speck of land appears on the horizon, you do not say, "Now to what end shall I feel desire for that land? What good end should now prompt me to decide to feel hope?" Even though the longing in your heart may give you the renewed strength to get to land, you do *not* perform the act of desire and hope and longing in order to get there.

The longing erupts from deep in your heart because of the tremendous value of water (and life!) on that land. It is not planned and performed (like the purchase of a plane ticket) as a means to getting what you desire. It rises spontaneously in the heart. It is not a decision made in order to...anything! As a genuine feeling of the heart, it is an end in itself.

Or consider fear. If you are camping in the Boundary Waters of Minnesota and waken in the night to the sound of snorting outside and see in the moonlight the silhouette of a huge bear coming toward your tent, you do not say, "Now to what end shall I feel fear?" You do not calculate the good results that might come from the adrenaline that fear produces, and then decide that fear would be an appropriate and helpful emotion to have. It is just there!

When you stand at the edge of the Grand Canyon for the first time and watch the setting sun send the darkness down through the geological layers of time, you do not say, "Now to what end shall I feel awe and wonder before this beauty?"

When a little child on Christmas morning opens his first gift and finds his "most favoritest" rocket, which he has wanted for months, he does not think,

Now to what end shall I feel happy and thankful? We call a person an ingrate when words of gratitude are dutifully forced instead of coming spontaneously from the heart.

When a five-year-old enters kindergarten and starts getting picked on by some second-graders and his big fourth-grade brother comes over and takes his side, he does not "decide" to feel confidence and love welling up in his little heart. He just does.

All genuine emotion is an end in itself. It is not consciously caused as a means to something else. This does not mean we cannot or should not seek to have certain feelings. We should and we can. We can put ourselves in situations where the feeling may more readily be kindled. We may indeed prize some of the results of these feelings as well as the feelings themselves. But in the moment of authentic emotion, the calculation vanishes. We are transported (perhaps only for seconds) above the reasoning work of the mind, and we experience feeling without reference to logical or practical implications.

This is what keeps worship from being "in vain." Worship is authentic when affections for God arise in the heart as an end in themselves. In worship, God is the dreaded voice on the phone. God is the island on the horizon. God is the bear and the setting sun and the "most favoritest" rocket and the mother who gave it and the big, strong fourth-grade brother.

If God's reality is displayed to us in His Word or His world and we do not then feel in our heart any grief or longing or hope or fear or awe or joy or gratitude or confidence, then we may dutifully sing and pray and recite and gesture as much as we like, but it will not be real worship. We cannot honor God if our "heart is far from him."

Worship is a way of gladly reflecting back to God the radiance of His worth. This cannot be done by mere acts of duty. It can be done only when spontaneous affections arise in the heart. And these affections for God are an end in themselves. They are the essence of eternal worship. Augustine said it like this: The highest good is "that which will leave us nothing further to seek in order to be happy, if only we make all our actions refer to it, and seek it not for the sake of something else, but for its own sake."⁵

YOU MUST KISS ME, BUT NOT THAT KIND OF MUST

Consider the analogy of a wedding anniversary. Mine is on December 21. Suppose on this day I bring home a dozen long-stemmed roses for Noël. When she meets me at the door, I hold out the roses, and she says, "O Johnny, they're beautiful; thank you" and gives me a big hug. Then suppose I hold up my hand and say matter-of-factly, "Don't mention it; it's my duty."

What happens? Is not the exercise of duty a noble thing? Do not we honor those we dutifully serve? Not much. Not if there's no heart in it. Dutiful roses are a contradiction in terms. If I am not moved by a spontaneous affection for her as a person, the roses do not honor her. In fact, they belittle her. They are a very thin covering for the fact that she does not have the worth or beauty in my eyes to kindle affection. All I can muster is a calculated expression of marital duty.

Here is the way Edward John Carnell puts it:

Suppose a husband asks his wife if he must kiss her good night. Her answer is, "You must, but not that kind of a must." What she means is this: "Unless a spontaneous affection for my person motivates you, your overtures are stripped of all moral value."⁶

5. Augustine, *The City of God*, trans. Marcus Dods (New York: Modern Library, 1950), 8.8.

6. E. J. Carnell, *Christian Commitment* (New York: Macmillan, 1967), 160–1. Carnell's whole book resounds with this emphasis (pp. 162, 176, 196, 206, 213, 222, 289, 301). Consider this insightful section from p. 222:

The more we make rectitude a calculated object of striving, the further we recede from moral fulfillment; for moral fulfillment is spontaneous, affectionate fulfillment. Love carries its own sense of compulsion. It is borne on the wings of the law of the spirit of life. When we must be motivated by either rational or legal necessity, love gives way to forecast, interest, and calculation. Suppose a mother rushes to help her terrified child. She acts out of spontaneous love. She would be offended by even the suggestion that she must help her child from a legal sense of duty....

Moral striving is paradoxical because we shall never love God unless we make a conscious effort; and yet because we must strive for legal righteousness, we prove that we shall never be righteous. If our affections were a fruit of the moral and spiritual environment, we should fulfill the law with the same unconscious necessity with which we breathe.

The paradox can perhaps be illustrated by a painter who deliberately tries to become great. Unless he strives, he will never be an artist at all, let alone a great artist. But since he makes genius a deliberate goal of striving, he proves that he is not, and never will be, a genius. A master artist is great without trying to be great. His abilities unfold like the petals of a rose before the sun. Genius is a gift of God. It is a fruit, not a work.

So is worship!

The fact is, many of us have failed to see that duty toward God can never be restricted to outward action. Yes, we must worship Him. "But not that kind of must." What kind then? The kind C. S. Lewis described to Sheldon Vanauken: "It is a Christian duty, as you know, for everyone to be as happy as he can."⁷

The real duty of worship is not the outward duty to say or do the liturgy. It is the inward duty, the command: "Delight yourself in the LORD" (Psalm 37:4). "Be glad in the LORD, and rejoice!" (Psalm 32:11).

The reason this is the real duty of worship is that it honors God, while the empty performance of ritual does not. If I take my wife out for the evening on our anniversary and she asks me, "Why do you do this?" the answer that honors her most is "Because nothing makes me happier tonight than to be with you."

"It's my duty" is a dishonor to her.

"It's my joy" is an honor.

There it is! The feast of Christian Hedonism. How shall we honor God in worship? By saying, "It's my duty"? Or by saying, "It's my joy"?

Worship is a way of reflecting back to God the radiance of His worth. Now we see that the mirror that catches the rays of His radiance and reflects them back in worship is the joyful heart. Another way of saying this is to say

The chief end of man is to glorify God

by

enjoying Him forever.

BEWARE OF GIVING TO GOD

Now it becomes clear why it is significant that worship is an end in itself. Worship is an end in itself because it is the final end for which we were created.

It also becomes clear why it is not idolatrous and man-centered to say that our emotions are ends in themselves. It is not man-centered because the emo-

7. From a letter to Sheldon Vanauken in Vanauken's book *A Severe Mercy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), 189.

tions of our worship are centered on *God*. We look away from ourselves to Him, and only then do the manifold emotions of our heart erupt in worship.⁸

Nor is it idolatrous to say our affections in worship are ends in themselves, because our affections for God glorify God, not us. Whoever thought he was glorifying himself and not the Grand Canyon when he stood at its edge for hours in silent awe? Whoever would accuse me of glorifying myself and not my wife when I tell her, "I delight to spend this evening with you"? Who would accuse a little child of self-centeredness on Christmas morning if he runs away from his new rocket to hug his mother and say thank you because he is bursting with joyful gratitude?

Someone might object that in making the joy of worship an end in itself, we make God a means to our end rather than our being a means to His end. Thus, we seem to elevate ourselves above God. But consider this question: Which glorifies God more—that is, which reflects back to God more clearly the greatness of His glory—(1) a worship experience that comes to climax with joy in the wonder of God? Or (2) an experience that comes to climax in a noble attempt to free itself from rapture in order to make a contribution to the goal of God?

This is a subtle thing. We strive against God's all-sufficient glory if we think we can become a means to *His* end without making joy in Him *our* end. Christian Hedonism does not put us above God when it makes the joy of worship its goal. It is precisely in confessing our frustrated, hopeless condition without Him that we honor Him. A patient is not greater than his doctor because he longs to be made well. A child is not greater than his father when he wants the fun of playing with him.

On the contrary, the one who actually sets himself above God is the person who presumes to come to God to give rather than get. With a pretense of self-denial, he positions himself as God's benefactor—as if the world and all it contains were not already God's (Psalm 50:12)!

No, the hedonistic approach to God in worship is the only humble

8. Christian Hedonism is aware that self-consciousness kills joy and therefore kills worship. As soon as you turn your eyes in on yourself and become conscious of experiencing joy, it's gone. The Christian Hedonist knows that the secret of joy is self-forgetfulness. Yes, we go to the art museum for the joy of seeing the paintings. But the counsel of Christian Hedonism is: Set your whole attention on the paintings, and not on your emotions, or you will ruin the whole experience. Therefore, in worship there must be a radical orientation on God, not ourselves.

approach because it is the only one that comes with empty hands. Christian Hedonism pays God the respect of acknowledging (and really feeling!) that He alone can satisfy the heart's longing to be happy. Worship is an end in itself because we glorify God *by* enjoying Him forever.

THREE STAGES OF WORSHIP

But this is liable to be misunderstood. It might give the impression that we cannot come to God in real worship unless we are overflowing with the affections of delight and joy and hope and gratitude and wonder and awe and reverence. I do not believe this is necessarily implied in what I have said.

I see three stages of movement toward the ideal experience of worship. We may experience all three in one hour, and God is pleased with all three—if indeed they are stages on the way to full joy in Him. I will mention them in reverse order.

1. There is a final stage in which we feel an unencumbered joy in the manifold perfection of God—the joy of gratitude, wonder, hope, admiration: “My soul will be satisfied as with fat and rich food, and my mouth will praise you with joyful lips” (Psalm 63:5). In this stage we are satisfied with the excellency of God, and we overflow with the joy of His fellowship. This is the feast of Christian Hedonism.

2. In a prior stage that we often taste, we do not feel fullness, but rather longing and desire. Having tasted the feast before, we recall the goodness of the Lord—but it seems far off. We preach to our souls not to be downcast, because we are sure we shall again praise the Lord (Psalm 42:5). Yet, for now, our hearts are not very fervent.

Even though this falls short of the ideal of vigorous, heartfelt adoration and hope, yet it is a great honor to God. We honor the water from a mountain spring not only by the satisfied “ahhh” after drinking our fill, but also by the unquenched longing to be satisfied while still climbing to it.

In fact, these two stages are not really separable in the true saint, because all satisfaction in this life is still shot through with longing and all genuine longing has tasted the satisfying water of life. David Brainerd expressed the paradox:

Of late God has been pleased to keep my soul hungry almost continually, so that I have been filled with a kind of pleasing pain. When I really enjoy God, I feel my desires of Him the more insatiable and my thirstings after holiness more unquenchable.⁹

3. The lowest stage of worship—where all genuine worship starts, and where it often returns for a dark season—is the barrenness of soul that scarcely feels any longing, and yet is still granted the grace of repentant sorrow for having so little love: “When my soul was embittered, when I was pricked in heart, I was brutish and ignorant; I was like a beast toward you” (Psalm 73:21–22).

E. J. Carnell points toward these same stages when he says,

Rectitude, we know, is met in one of two ways: either by a spontaneous expression of the good or by spontaneous sorrow for having failed. The one is a direct fulfillment; the other is indirect fulfillment.¹⁰

Worship is a way of gladly reflecting back to God the radiance of His worth. This is the ideal. For God surely is more glorified when we delight in His magnificence than when we are so unmoved by it that we scarcely feel anything and only wish we could. Yet He is also glorified by the spark of anticipated gladness that gives rise to the sorrow we feel when our hearts are lukewarm. Even in the miserable guilt we feel over our beastlike insensitivity, the glory of God shines. If God were not gloriously desirable, why would we feel sorrowful for not feasting fully on His beauty?

Yet even this sorrow, to honor God, must in one sense be an end in itself—not that it shouldn't lead on to something better, but that it must be real and spontaneous. The glory from which we fall short cannot be reflected in a calculated sorrow. As Carnell says, “Indirect fulfillment is stripped of virtue whenever it is made a goal of conscious striving. Whoever deliberately tries to be sorry will never be sorry. Sorrow cannot be induced by human effort.”¹¹

9. Quoted in E. M. Bounds, *The Weapon of Prayer* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1975), 136.

10. Carnell, *Christian Commitment*, 213.

11. *Ibid.*, 213–4.

THE MORAL ENEMY OF WORSHIP

I conclude from this meditation on the nature of worship that the revolt against hedonism has killed the spirit of worship in many churches and many hearts. The widespread notion that high moral acts must be free from self-interest is a great enemy of true worship. Worship is the highest moral act a human can perform, so the only basis and motivation for it that many people can conceive is the notion of morality as the disinterested performance of duty. But when worship is reduced to disinterested duty, it ceases to be worship. For worship is a feast.

Neither God nor my wife is honored when I celebrate the high days of our relationship out of a sense of duty. They are honored when I delight in them! Therefore, to honor God in worship, we must not seek Him disinterestedly for fear of gaining some joy in worship and so ruining the moral value of the act. Instead we must seek Him hedonistically, the way a thirsty deer seeks the stream—precisely for the joy of seeing and knowing Him! Worship is nothing less than obedience to the command of God: “Delight yourself in the LORD”!

Misguided virtue smothers the spirit of worship. The person who has the vague notion that it is virtue to overcome self-interest, and that it is vice to seek pleasure, will scarcely be able to worship. For worship is the most hedonistic affair of life and must not be ruined with the least thought of disinterestedness. The great hindrance to worship is not that we are a pleasure-seeking people, but that we are willing to settle for such pitiful pleasures.

The prophet Jeremiah put it like this:

“My people have changed their glory for that which does not profit. Be appalled, O heavens, at this; be shocked, be utterly desolate, declares the LORD, for my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water.” (Jeremiah 2:11–13)

The heavens are appalled and shocked when people give up soon on their quest for pleasure and settle for broken cisterns.

WE ARE FAR TOO EASILY PLEASED

One of the most important things I ever read on my pilgrimage toward Christian Hedonism was from a sermon preached by C. S. Lewis in 1941. He said:

If there lurks in most modern minds the notion that to desire our own good and earnestly to hope for the enjoyment of it is a bad thing, I submit that this notion has crept in from Kant and the Stoics and is no part of the Christian faith. Indeed, if we consider the unblushing promises of reward and the staggering nature of the rewards promised in the Gospels, it would seem that our Lord finds our desires, not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.¹²

That's it! The enemy of worship is not that our desire for pleasure is too strong, but too weak! We have settled for a home, a family, a few friends, a job, a television, a microwave oven, an occasional night out, a yearly vacation, and perhaps a new laptop. We have accustomed ourselves to such meager, short-lived pleasures that our capacity for joy has shriveled. And so our worship has shriveled. Many can scarcely imagine what is meant by “a holiday at the sea”—worshiping the living God!

THE SHRIVELING OF DARWIN'S SOUL

Through long drinking at the broken cistern of mud-pie pleasures, many have lost almost all capacity for delighting in God—not unlike what happened to Charles Darwin. Near the end of his life he wrote an autobiography for his children in which he expressed one regret:

12. C. S. Lewis, “The Weight of Glory,” in *The Weight of Glory and other Essays* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1965), 1–2.

Up to the age of 30 or beyond it, poetry of many kinds...gave me great pleasure, and even as a schoolboy I took intense delight in Shakespeare.... Formerly pictures gave me considerable, and music very great, delight. But now for many years I cannot endure to read a line of poetry: I have tried to read Shakespeare, and found it so intolerably dull that it nauseated me. I have also almost lost any taste for pictures or music.... I retain some taste for fine scenery, but it does not cause me the exquisite delight which it formerly did.... My mind seems to have become a kind of machine for grinding general laws out of large collections of facts, but why this should have caused the atrophy of that part of the brain alone, on which the higher tastes depend, I cannot conceive.... The loss of these tastes is a loss of happiness, and may possibly be injurious to the intellect, and more probably to the moral character, by enfeebling the emotional part of our nature.¹³

Worship services across the land bear the scars of this process. For many, Christianity has become the grinding out of general doctrinal laws from collections of biblical facts. But childlike wonder and awe have died. The scenery and poetry and music of the majesty of God have dried up like a forgotten peach at the back of the refrigerator.

And the irony is that we have aided and abetted the desiccation by telling people they ought not seek their own pleasure, especially in worship.¹⁴ We have implied in a thousand ways that the virtue of an act diminishes to the degree you enjoy doing it and that doing something because it yields happiness is bad. The notion hangs like a gas in the Christian atmosphere.

13. Cited in Virginia Stem Owens, "Seeing Christianity in Red and Green as Well as Black and White," *Christianity Today* 27, no. 13 (2 September 1983): 38.

14. For example, Carl Zylstra wrote: "The question is whether worship really is supposed to be a time for self-fulfillment and enjoyment or whether it should be, first of all, a time of service and honor to God, a sacrifice of praise" ("Just Dial the Lord," *The Reformed Journal* [October 1984], 6). When the question is put like this, it cannot be answered truthfully. It is very misleading. Of course worship is a time to honor God. But we kill that possibility by warning people not to pursue their own enjoyment. We should be telling them again and again to pursue their own enjoyment—in God! If Zylstra means to warn us against seeking fulfillment by looking to ourselves or merely from the experience of music or fellowship, then his warning is well taken.

IMMANUEL KANT AND HEBREWS 11:6 IN COMBAT

C. S. Lewis thought Immanuel Kant (who died in 1804) was a culprit in this confusion. So did the atheist Ayn Rand. Her striking description of Kant's ethics, if not historically precise, is at least a good description of the paralyzing effects it seems to have had in the church:

An action is moral, said Kant, only if one has no desire to perform it, but performs it out of a sense of duty and derives no benefit from it of any sort, neither material nor spiritual. A benefit destroys the moral value of an action. (Thus if one has no desire to be evil, one cannot be good; if one has, one can.)¹⁵

Ayn Rand equated this notion of virtue with Christianity and rejected the whole thing out of hand. But this is not Christianity! It was tragic for her, and it is tragic for the church, that this notion—that the pursuit of joy is submoral, if not immoral—pervades the air of Christendom.

Would that Ayn Rand had understood her Christian contemporary Flannery O'Connor:

I don't assume that renunciation goes with submission or even that renunciation is good in itself. Always you renounce a lesser good for a greater; the opposite is what sin is.... The struggle to submit...is not a struggle to submit but a struggle to accept and with passion. I mean, possibly, with joy. Picture me with my ground teeth stalking joy—fully armed too as it's a highly dangerous quest.¹⁶

Amen!

Every Sunday morning at 11 A.M., Hebrews 11:6 enters combat with

15. Ayn Rand, *For the Intellectual* (New York: Signet, 1961), 32.

16. Flannery O'Connor, *The Habit of Being*, ed. Sally Fitzgerald (New York: Farrar, Straus, & Giroux, 1979), 126.

Immanuel Kant. "Without faith it is impossible to please [God], for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that *he rewards those who seek him*." You cannot please God if you do not come to Him for reward! Therefore, worship that pleases God is the hedonistic pursuit of God. He is our exceeding great reward! In His presence is fullness of joy, and at His right hand are *pleasures* forevermore. Worship is the feast of Christian Hedonism.

AN AFFAIR OF THE MIND

God seeks people to worship Him "in spirit and truth" (John 4:23). I put tremendous emphasis on the "spirit" of worship in the previous section. Now I must balance the scales and reassert that true worship always combines heart and head, emotion and thought, affection and reflection, doxology and theology.

"True worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth." True worship does not come from people whose feelings are like air ferns with no root in the solid ground of biblical doctrine. The only affections that honor God are those rooted in the rock of biblical truth.

Else what meaning have the words of the apostle: "They have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge" (Romans 10:2)? And did not the Lord pray, "Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth" (John 17:17)? And did He not say, "You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:32)? Holy freedom in worship is the fruit of truth. Religious feelings that do not come from a true apprehension of God are neither holy nor truly free, no matter how intense.

The pastoral testimony of Jonathan Edwards has therefore always seemed to me inescapably biblical. He was the foremost defender of the Great Awakening in New England in the early 1740s. It had come under severe criticism because of apparent emotional excesses.

Charles Chauncy, pastor of the old First Church in Boston, opposed the revival strenuously. He pointed out all of its excesses like the "swooning away and falling to the ground...bitter shriekings and screamings; convulsion-like tremblings and agitations, strugglings and tumblings."¹⁷

17. Cited in C. H. Faust and T. H. Johnson, eds., *Jonathan Edwards: Selections* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1962), xviii.

Edwards did not defend the excesses, but he earnestly defended the deep and genuine engagement of the affections based on truth. He argued with these carefully chosen words:

I should think myself in the way of my duty, to raise the affections of my hearers as high as I possibly can, provided they are affected with nothing but truth, and with affections that are not disagreeable to the nature of what they are affected with.¹⁸

Edwards was utterly convinced of the crucial importance of powerful affections in worship:

The things of religion are so great, that there can be no suitableness in the exercises of our hearts, to their nature and importance, unless they be lively and powerful. In nothing is vigor in the actings of our inclinations so requisite, as in religion; and in nothing is lukewarmness so odious.¹⁹

Yes, the only heat he valued in worship was the heat that comes with light. In 1744 he preached an ordination sermon from the text about John the Baptist, "He was a burning and a shining light" (John 5:35, KJV). There must be heat in the heart and light in the mind—and no more heat than justified by the light!

If a minister has light without heat, and entertains his [hearers] with learned discourses, without a savour of the power of godliness, or any appearance of fervency of spirit, and zeal for God and the good of souls, he may gratify itching ears, and fill the heads of his people with empty notions; but it will not be very likely to reach their souls. And if, on the other hand, he be driven on with a fierce and intemperate zeal, and vehement heat, without light, he will be likely to kindle the like

18. Jonathan Edwards, *Some Thoughts Concerning the Revival in the Great Awakening*, ed. C. C. Goen (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), 387.

19. Edwards, *Religious Affections*, 238.

unhallowed flame in his people, and to fire their corrupt passions and affections; but will make them never the better, nor lead them a step towards heaven, but drive them apace the other way.²⁰

Strong affections for God, rooted in and shaped by the truth of Scripture—this is the bone and marrow of biblical worship.

Therefore Christian Hedonism is passionately opposed to all attempts to drive a wedge between deep thought and deep feeling. It rejects the common notion that profound reflection dries up fervent affection. It resists the assumption that intense emotion thrives only in the absence of coherent doctrine.

On the contrary, Christian Hedonists are persuaded with Edwards that the only affections that magnify God's value are those that come from true apprehensions of His glory. If the feast of worship is rare in the land, it is because there is a famine of the Word of God (Amos 8:11–12).

THE FORM OF WORSHIP

It follows that forms of worship should provide two things: channels for the mind to apprehend the truth of God's reality and channels for the heart to respond to the beauty of that truth—that is, forms to ignite the affections with biblical truth and forms to express the affections with biblical passion.

Of course, good forms do both. Good sermons and hymns and prayers express and inspire worship. And they do it best when they are unabashedly hedonistic and therefore God-centered.

Take preaching, for example. John Broadus was on target when he wrote a hundred years ago:

The minister may lawfully appeal to the desire for happiness and its negative counterpart, the dread of unhappiness. Those philosophers [Kant?] who insist that we ought always to do right simply and only because it is right are not philosophers at all, for they are either grossly

20. Edwards, "The True Excellency of a Gospel Minister," in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, 2:958.

ignorant of human nature [and I would add: Scripture] or else indulging in mere fanciful speculations.²¹

Or take hymns! How unabashedly hedonistic they are! Hymns are the voices of the church's lovers, and lovers are the least duty-oriented and most God-besotted people in the world.

Jesus, Thou joy of loving hearts
Thou fount of life, Thou light of men
From the best bliss that earth imparts
We turn unfilled to Thee again.

Bernard of Clairvaux

Jesus, priceless treasure
Source of purest pleasure,
Truest friend to me:
Long my heart hath panted,
'Til it well-nigh fainted,
Thirsting after Thee.
Thine I am,
O spotless Lamb,
I will suffer nought to hide Thee,
Ask for nought beside Thee.

Johann Franck

Jesus, I am resting, resting
In the joy of what Thou art;
I am finding out the greatness
Of Thy loving heart.
Thou hast bid me gaze upon Thee,

21. John Broadus, *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, 4th ed., rev. Vernon Stanfield (New York: Harper & Row, 1979), 117.

And Thy beauty fills my soul,
For by Thy transforming power,
Thou hast made me whole.

Jean Sophia Pigott

Knowing You, Jesus,
knowing You,
there is no greater thing,
You're my all,
You're the best,
You're my joy, my righteousness,
and I love You, Lord.

Graham Kendrick

And for the prayers of the church, what could suffice better than the inspired (hedonistic!) prayers of the psalmists?

You have put more joy in my heart than they have when their grain and wine abound. (Psalm 4:7)

Let all who take refuge in you rejoice; let them ever sing for joy, and spread your protection over them, that those who love your name may exult in you. (5:11)

I will be glad and exult in you; I will sing praise to your name, O Most High. (9:2)

As for me, I shall behold your face in righteousness; when I awake, I shall be satisfied with your likeness. (17:15)

"I delight to do Your will, O my God; Your Law is within my heart."
(40:8, NASB)

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.... Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit. (51:10, 12)

O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water. So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary, beholding your power and glory. Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you. (63:1-3)

Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. (73:25-26)

When the people of God—and especially the lead worshipers—begin to pray in this hedonistically God-centered way, then the form will both express and inspire authentic worship.

But in the end, the form is not the issue. The issue is whether the excellency of Christ is seen. Worship will happen when the God who said "Let light shine out of darkness" shines in our hearts to give us "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Corinthians 4:6).

We must see and feel the incomparable excellency of the Son of God. Incomparable because in Him meet infinite glory and lowest humility, infinite majesty and transcendent meekness, deepest reverence toward God and equality with God, infinite worthiness of good and greatest patience to suffer evil, supreme dominion and exceeding obedience, divine self-sufficiency and child-like trust.²²

The irony of our human condition is that God has put us within sight of the Himalayas of His glory in Jesus Christ, but we have chosen to pull down the

22. These pairs are from a sermon by Jonathan Edwards entitled "The Excellency of Christ." In it, Edwards meditates on the image of Christ in Revelation 5:5-6 as both the Lion of the tribe of Judah and the Lamb that was slain. The sermon is in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, 1:680-9. For my meditations on these diverse excellencies of Christ, see *Seeing and Savoring Jesus Christ* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2004).

shades of our chalet and show slides of Buck Hill—even in church. We are content to go on making mud pies in the slums because we cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea.

AN EXHORTATION AND AN EXPERIENCE

I close this chapter with an exhortation and an experience. Don't let your worship decline to the performance of mere duty. Don't let the childlike awe and wonder be choked out by unbiblical views of virtue. Don't let the scenery and poetry and music of your relationship with God shrivel up and die. You have capacities for joy that you can scarcely imagine. They were made for the enjoyment of God. He can awaken them no matter how long they have lain asleep. Pray for His quickening power. Open your eyes to His glory. It is all around you: "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork" (Psalm 19:1).

I was flying at night from Chicago to Minneapolis, almost alone on the plane. The pilot announced that there was a thunderstorm over Lake Michigan and into Wisconsin. He would skirt it to the west to avoid turbulence. As I sat there staring out into the total blackness, suddenly the whole sky was brilliant with light, and a cavern of white clouds fell away four miles beneath the plane and then vanished. A second later, a mammoth white tunnel of light exploded from north to south across the horizon, and again vanished into blackness. Soon the lightning was almost constant, and volcanoes of light burst up out of cloud ravines and from behind distant white mountains. I sat there shaking my head almost in unbelief. *O Lord, if these are but the sparks from the sharpening of Your sword, what will be the day of Your appearing!* And I remembered the words of Christ:

As the lightning flashes and lights up the sky
from one side to the other,
so will the Son of Man be in his day.

(LUKE 17:24)

Even now as I recollect that sight, the word *glory* is full of feeling for me. I thank God that again and again He has awakened my heart to desire Him, to see Him, and to sit down to the feast of Christian Hedonism and worship the King of Glory. The banquet hall is very large.

The Spirit and the Bride say,
"Come." ... Let the one who is thirsty come;
let the one who desires take the water of life without price.

(REVELATION 22:17)