

September 1st, 2019

The Christian Hedonism of an Experimental Christian

Psalm 119:57-64

What is an experimental Christianity?

We began this series introducing the term experimental Christianity. Experimental Christianity is simply experiential Christianity. Christianity is not *merely* a creed that we subscribe to. It's not *less* than that, but it's so much more. Christianity is not merely about being forgiven of sins or gaining eternal life. It's not *less* than that, but is so much more. Christianity is comprehensively experiential touching every part of our lives—our Monday through Saturday—as well as Sunday. Christianity is comprehensively holistic touching every part of our souls—not just our minds—but also our hearts, our affections, our choices, and our dreams. In other words, Christianity is meant to be experimental—it tests us and teaches us, it examines us and exposes us, it corrects us and comforts us. Becoming a Christian means that everything in our lives has now come underneath the loving Lordship of Jesus Christ. Paul says it like this “For none of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself. For if we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord. So then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord’s” (**Romans 14:7-8**) That's experimental Christianity.

Jonathan Edwards & Christian Hedonism

This morning we come to the subject of what has been called Christian Hedonism.¹ I want to introduce it via Jonathan Edwards. This is what he said:

¹ John Piper, *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist*, (Colorado Springs, CO.,: Multnomah Books, 2003)

“God himself is the great good which [the saints] are brought to the possession and enjoyment of *by redemption*. He is the highest good, and the sum of all that good which Christ purchased. God is the inheritance of the saints; he is the portion of their souls. God is their wealth and treasure, their food, their life, their dwelling-place, their ornament and [crown], and their everlasting honor and glory. They have none in heaven but God; he is the great good with the redeemed are received to at death, and which they are to rise to at the end of the world. The Lord God is the light of the heavenly Jerusalem; and is the “river of the water of life” that runs, and “the tree of life that grows, in the midst of the paradise of God.” The glorious excellencies and beauty of God will be what will for ever entertain the minds of the saints, and the love of God will be their everlasting feast.

The redeemed will indeed enjoy other things; they will enjoy the angels, and will enjoy one another: *but* that which they shall enjoy in the angels, or each other, or in anything else whatsoever that will yield them delight and happiness, will be what shall be seen *of God* in them.”²

The essence of Christian Hedonism

That is what the Psalmist *means* in **v.57** when he says “The LORD is my portion.” And that is the very essence of Christian Hedonism: that our greatest pleasure, our greatest joy, our greatest happiness is God Himself.

But please don’t misunderstand me. I’m not saying this *subjectively*. As if I’m saying *merely*, that to the Christian, God *happens* to be *our* favorite thing. You like vanilla ice cream, I like chocolate, to each his own. No. I’m saying that objectively, for all peoples, for all times, there is no greater good, no greater joy, no greater beauty, that can be conceived or imagined than God Himself. And everything *outside of God* is only ruin, misery and utter despair. That’s what Jesus said, **Luke 13:28** “In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth...”

² Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards Vol. 2*, (Carlisle, PA.,: The Banner of Truth Trust, Reprint 2009), pg. 5

But to gain God, to be predestined by His grace, redeemed by His blood, sealed with His Spirit is the very essence of everlasting and ever-increasing happiness. “You made know to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore” (Psalm 16:11). When the Psalmist tells us “The LORD is my portion” he is saying the most profound thing that could ever be said about a human being.

The Big Idea...

The Christian’s only portion — his wealth, his food, his dwelling place, his very life, all his hopes, all his happiness — is in God alone

- ☆ The Portion of Christian Hedonism
- ☆ The Practice of Christian Hedonism
- ☆ The Person of Christian Hedonism

I. The Portion of Christian Hedonism

The demonic either/or

So let’s first define our terms. What is Christian Hedonism? This is a term that John Piper coined. What does it mean? Plain old hedonism is both pagan and evil. It’s the philosophy of life that says “pleasure (however you define it) is the highest good.”³ Christianity says “No, God is the highest good.” And so there is this incredible incurable tension between Christianity and Hedonism. It *seems* that I either have to choose happiness and pleasure, *or* I have to choose God. But I can’t choose *both*. This was the very first lie the devil ever spoke: ‘Eve, taste these pleasures, pursue your own happiness, because if you follow

³ Source: <http://phrontistery.info/isms.html> Accessed August 31, 2019

God, you must give it all up. You must choose: God or pleasure.⁴ This is why for some of you, your Christianity has become so miserable, because you've traded your pleasure for God. And now you carry this burden of a joyless Christianity. You're not alone. Some of my earliest memories as a child pit pleasure against God. 'Yea I want to go to Heaven' I would think, 'as long as when I get done worshipping God, I could do what I *really* wanted to do." And of course this is so deeply engraved in our cultural psyche that country singer Kenny Chesney put it to a tune.

Everybody want to go to heaven
But nobody want to go now⁵

So there, it *seems*, are our only two choices. You can either be a Christian—one who worships God. Or you can be a hedonist—one who pursues pleasure. But you can't be both. You can't worship God and pursue pleasure.

What does Christian Hedonism say?

But that's not what Christian Hedonism says. Christian Hedonism says pursuing God *is* pursuing pleasure. Not because God will lead you to pleasure. Not because God will strike a bargain with you: that *if* you just worship Him, *then* He will give you pleasure. No. God is pleasure *Himself*.

God told Abraham in **Genesis 15:1** as he was threatened with the lost of all things—threatened with losing all earthly pleasure: “Do not be afraid, Abram. I am...your exceedingly great reward.”⁶

⁴ paraphrase of Genesis 3:5

⁵ Source: <https://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/kennychesney/everybodywantstogotoheaven.html> Accessed August 31, 2019

⁶ KJV

When Absalom chased David out of Jerusalem and into the wilderness—when all seemed to be ruined—David worshipped “Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you” (**Psalm 63:3**).

When Paul sat rotting in a Roman prison, unsure whether he would be released, executed, or left to spend the rest of his days in darkness he said “For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (**Phil 1:20**).

The LORD is my portion

That’s what the Psalmist is saying in our passage. Please look with me at v.57 “The Lord is my portion.” A portion, Biblically speaking, is what a person is given to live on, like the portion that each tribe received when they entered the promised land (**Joshua 13-21**), or the portion a child receives in his inheritance.⁷ A man’s portion was to provide for his entire well-being, for his security, significance and satisfaction.

When the Psalmist says “The LORD is my portion” he’s saying “As a man lives upon his earthly portion, so I *live* upon the LORD.” **Psalm 142:5** “I cry to you, O Lord; I say, ‘You are my refuge, my *portion* in the land of the living.’”

The prerequisites of a portion

So let’s ask: what is required in a portion? If a portion is what a man lives on, what *must* be true about it? If my son wanted to go to the movies and I gave him a dollar as his portion, he wouldn’t have enough to get in, he would be left outside. Likewise we need a portion that will provide everything we need to live on. This portion must have at least four qualities to it.

1. This portion must be certain.

Meaning, I must actually possess it. I must be able to lay a claim to this portion which can never be taken away. The Psalmist says “The LORD is *my* portion.” ‘I possess Him, He belongs to me. Last week we stressed God’s

⁷ Luke 15:12

ownership over *us*—“That I with body and soul, both in life and death, am not my own, but *belong* unto my faithful Savior Jesus Christ.” But dear congregation, not only do we belong to God, God *belongs* to us.

Zechariah 13:9 “They will call upon my name, and I will answer them. I will say, ‘They are my people’; and they will say, ‘The Lord is *my* God.’”⁸

This is the greatest promise in the covenant of grace. “...you shall be my people, and I will be *your* God.” (**Jeremiah 30:22**).⁹ Because God belongs to you, your portion is as certain as His own existence.

2. This portion must be all-sufficient

Meaning, all our needs must be met by this portion. But if God belongs to us by covenant, then everything that belongs to Him, *belongs to us*. This is how Biblical covenants work. In **1 Kings 22:4**, when King Jehoshaphat made a covenant with the king of Israel, he said “I am as you are, my people as your people, my horses as your horses.”¹⁰ You see, in covenanting with us, God has signed all His riches over to us. And He has made it more certain by sealing this covenant in the blood of His own Son.

Romans 8:32 “He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?”

⁸ **Genesis 17:8** “I will give to you and to your offspring after you...an everlasting possession, and I will be *their* God.” **Revelation 21:3** “And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as *their* God.”

⁹ This is an exclusively Biblical promise. In Mormonism the promise is not delight and ownership in God Himself but rather that you become your own god. In Islam, the you do not come to possess and prize God Himself but rather 70 virgins.

¹⁰ Or think of wedding vows, a husband is to consider his wife as his own flesh—bone of his own bones, flesh of his own flesh—and therefore all her riches are his, all her poverty is his, all her happiness is his, all her sicknesses are his.

1 Corinthians 3:22-23 "...all are yours, [because]¹¹ you are Christ's, and Christ is God's."

Now if you say to that: 'Wait, I'm a Christian, God hasn't provided for all of my needs, my health is shot, I'm going bankrupt, my relationships are falling apart, how can you say that God is all-sufficient for *my needs*?' I would answer the way the Bible answers: God has given you all things that you need to glorify and honor and love Him.¹² Whether you are facing plenty or are in need, God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus (**Phil. 4:19**). He is an all-sufficient portion.¹³

3. This portion must be everlasting

Meaning, this portion must never run out. The ultimate test of a man's portion is death. Death shows all have valuable their portion is. Think of the rich fool in who built larger barns in order to store all his goods. He said to himself "'Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.' But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?'" (**Luke 12:19-20**)

But death will never separate the Christian from his portion. **Psalm 73:26** "My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my *portion forever*." Dear congregation, ponder what that means to have God as your eternal portion. The Puritan Stephen Charnock says it like this:

When we enjoy God, we enjoy him in his eternity...without the passing away of pleasures that may be wished to return, or expectation of future joys which

¹¹ The translation reads "and." I inserted "because" for it gives the ground of why all things are ours.

¹² "Give us this day our daily bread" (Matthew 6:11) SO THAT You name would be hallowed (Matthew 6:9)

¹³ "And that is the reason of the apostle's riddle, 2 Cor. 6:10 , 'As having nothing, yet possessing all things;' that is, all things in God, when they have nothing in the creature. Many times they are kept bare and low, but God carries the purse for them; all thing are at his dispose; and we are kept more bare and low that we may be sensible of the strange supplies of his providence. Alas! without him in the midst of our sufficiencies we may be in straits." Thomas Manton, *The Complete Works of Thomas Manton Vol. 7*, (Miami, FL.,: Hardpress Publishing), pg. 112

might be desired to hasten. Time is fluid but eternity is stable; and after many ages, the joys will be as savory and satisfying as if they had been but that moment first tasted by our hungry appetites.”¹⁴

Our portion will endure as long as God Himself endures.

4. **This portion must be ever-increasing**

The most miserable thing about finite pleasures is that they are never enough. Pick the greatest pleasure that you can think of in this life. Dig to the bottom of it, and what do you find? You find sadness. You find sorrow. Why? Because every finite pleasure has limits.

But the one who has Lord as His portion, finds no bottom when he digs, he finds no limit, no boundary. Even when we enter into glory, when God conforms us to His beloved Son, we will still be digging. As finite creatures, we can will never take in the infinite nature of God. Which means that we will never stop learning about who God is. Which means we never stop making new discoveries about God. Which means that we never stop being thrilled at what we discover. And that will be on repeat for all eternity. Jonathan Edwards says it like this:

“Therefore, [our]¹⁵ knowledge will increase to eternity; and if [our] knowledge, doubtless [our] holiness. For as [we] increase in the knowledge of God and of the works of God, the more [we] will see of his excellency; and the more [we] see of his excellency . . . the more will [we] love him; and the more [we] love God, the more delight and happiness . . . will [we] have in him.”¹⁶

¹⁴ “When the glory of the Lord shall rise upon you, it shall be so far from ever setting, that after millions of years are expired, as numerous as the sands on the sea-shore, the sun, in the the light of whose countenance you shall live, shall be as bright as at the first appearance.” Stephen Charnock *The Existence and Attributes of God Vol. 1* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, Reprint 1979) pg. 298-299

¹⁵ All the pronouns I have changed from “their” to “our”; and from “they” to “we” respectively

¹⁶ Source: <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/joys-eternal-increase-edwards-on-the-beauty-of-heaven> Accessed August 31, 2019

Summary

Dear congregation that is what the Psalmist means when He says “The *LORD* is my portion.” Because the Christian has the LORD as his portion, it is certain, it is all-sufficient, it is everlasting, and it is ever-increasing. That’s our **first point**.

II. The Practice of Christian Hedonism

The other half of Christian Hedonism

I’ve only really unpacked *half* of the definition of Christian Hedonism so far. What I’ve said is that you don’t have to choose between pursuing pleasure and worshipping God. God’s glory and our joy are not opposed to each other. I’ve argued that God *is* our joy, and the only joy that will stand the test of time. But there’s more. Christian Hedonism is not *merely* the truth that God is pleasure itself.

Christian Hedonism says that God *demand*s that we find pleasure *in Him*.¹⁷ In other words, it is the Christian’s highest duty to delight in the LORD.

Psalm 37:4 “*Delight yourself in the Lord*, and he will give you the desires of your heart.”

Philippians 4:4 “*Rejoice in the Lord* always; again I will say, rejoice.”

¹⁷ Some of the objections to Christian Hedonism include the following:

1. God doesn’t want us to be happy
2. God’s glory and our happiness are at odds
3. To be seeking after joy is selfish and man-centered
4. We should not seek after reward
5. This is a novel doctrine

Piper addresses these in his book.

Conversely, God threatens terrible things to those who will not take pleasure in Him. He told Israel of old in **Deuteronomy 28:47-48** “Because you did not serve the Lord your God *with joyfulness and gladness of heart*, because of the abundance of all things, therefore you shall serve your enemies whom the Lord will send against you,”

The connection between joy and worship

The connection between joy and worship are inseparable. John Piper says it like this:

“God is not worshiped where He is not treasured and enjoyed. Praise is not an alternative to joy, but the expression of joy. Not to enjoy God is to dishonor Him. To say to Him that *something else satisfies you more* is the opposite of worship. It is sacrilege.”¹⁸

You see, the truth is, whatever you take most pleasure in *just is* your god. Whatever you treasure most, will rule on the throne of your life.¹⁹

How does a Christian Hedonist live his life?

That’s the connection between **v.57** and the rest of the verses in our passage. Because the LORD is his portion (**v.57**) therefore he orders his life to experience more of Him, to delight more in Him, to be satisfied more in Him. So let’s look take a brief overview of these verses.

1. The person who has God as his portion is led to prayer and confession

He says in **v.58** “I entreat *your favor* with all my heart; *be gracious* to me according to your promise.” The Psalmist is not displaying his pride here, he’s

¹⁸ John Piper, *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist*, (Colorado Springs, CO.,: Multnomah Books, 2003), pg. 22

¹⁹ If we do not find pleasure in God Himself, then we are using Him for some other pleasure. There are really only two gospels: the gospel of Christian Hedonism or the prosperity gospel. (cf. #2 in “Thoughts for Personal/Family Worship” on 2 Kings 17 in the Reformation Heritage Study Bible)

displaying his infinite neediness. Prayer is not the exercise of proud men. The Pharisee in Luke 18 didn't pray, he put his credentials on display: "God, I thank you that I am not like other men..." (**Luke 18:11**). No, it was the tax collector who truly prayed. He said "God be merciful to me, a sinner!" (**Luke 18:13**) That's what the Psalmist is doing here. This is a true mark of a Christian: a felt, desperate need for God. That's what prayer is—it's desperation vocalized, it's neediness breathed out, it's asking for mercy when you deserve none.

2. The person who has God as his portion is led to obedience

He says in v.59 "When I think on my ways, I turn my feet to your testimonies." When a person has been born again, it is the first time in their lives that they have a serious thought about their lives.²⁰ 'Who am I? What have I done?' Being arrested by the power of saving grace changes the whole course of your life. Paul said to the Thessalonians believers "your faith in God has gone forth everywhere, so that we need not saying anything. For they themselves report concerning you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God." (**1 Thessalonians 1:8-9**). The person who possesses God desires to obey Him and please Him. Why? Because that is the path of true pleasure. Puritan Thomas Manton says here "Holiness is a means of maintaining communion between us and God, and keeping...him as our only happiness."²¹

3. The person who has God as his portion is armed against temptation

He says in v.60 "I hasten and do not delay to keep your commandments." The emphasis I want you to see here is the fact that he *hastens* and does not *delay*. Now this is vital in the fight against temptation. We often lose the battle of sin because we delay. Men think especially about those moments when you are tempted to lust, or women when you are tempted to gossip. And the Spirit brings those early convictions prior to you committing sin. The only way to

²⁰ Charles Bridges', *Psalm 119: An Exposition*, (Carlisle, PA.,: The Banner of Truth Trust, Reprint 2002), pg. 146

²¹ Thomas Manton, *The Complete Works of Thomas Manton Vol. 7*, (Miami, FL.,: Hardpress Publishing), pg. 117

continue into sin is to suppress his voice—that’s what the Scripture calls quenching the Spirit (1 Thess. 5:19). But here is the path to overcome the sin—*hasten and do not delay*. Do like Joseph when he was tempted by Potiphar’s wife —“he left his garment in her hand and fled and got out of the house” (Genesis 39:12). This power to flee, doesn’t come from a sense of duty. The power to flee come from a sense of delight “How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?”(Genesis 39:9). ‘He is my portion, my and my true delight.’

4. The person who has God as his portion knows how to respond to enemies

He says in v.61 “Though the cords of the wicked ensnare me, I do not forget your law.” Few of us, if any, here in the West have truly had this experience, yet. The imagery is of being trapped like a bird by those who hunt your soul. David was caught like this one time. Some Amalekites had raided his camp while he and his men were away. They burned everything and took their wives and their sons and daughters as captives. All seemed lost. The men were so distraught that they “wept until they had no more strength to weep”²² and all “the people spoke of stoning David because they were bitter in soul.”²³ David was ensnared by his enemies. What did he do? 1 Samuel 30:6 says “But David strengthened himself in the LORD his God.” Dear congregation, if you have the LORD as your portion, you will be able to bear up all the hell this world will be able to throw at you. “The Christian’s darkest hour is ten thousand times brighter than the the brightest day of the ungodly.”²⁴

5. The person who has God as his portion praises God on his bed

He says in v.62 At midnight I rise to praise you, because of your righteous rules.” What is this verse saying? Is he saying that he literally gets up at midnight to praise God? Certainly that is what happened in Paul and Silas’ case

²² 1 Samuel 30:4

²³ 1 Samuel 30:6

²⁴ Charles Bridges’, *Psalm 119: An Exposition*, (Carlisle, PA.,: The Banner of Truth Trust, Reprint 2002), pg. 152

after they were put in prison. **Acts 16:25** says “About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God.” But I think it’s something more fundamental than that. I believe that person who still dead in their sins, still alienated from God, does not sleep soundly. How could they?²⁵ Scripture says that their conscience accuses them (**Romans 2:15**). Scripture says that “the wicked flee when no one pursues” (**Proverbs 28:1**). “There is no peace for the wicked...they are like the tossing of the sea, and they cannot be quiet’ (**Isaiah 57:20-21**). No the wicked do no sleep well. How can you sleep well with God as your adversary.

But the man who has the LORD as his portion is entirely different. Yes Christians have affections and anxieties and cancer and persecution. But “our hearts [have been] sprinkled clean from an evil conscience (**Hebrews 10:22**).” We have a Great High Priest who ever lives to intercede for us (**Hebrews 7:25**). Therefore we can lay on our pillows at night and say “The LORD is my portion.” And that leads to praise.

6. The person who has God as his portion praises God in creation

He says in v.64 “The earth, O Lord, is full of your steadfast love; teach me your statutes!” The Christians sees creation entirely differently than the non-Christian. The Christian sees creation as a constant display of God’s love and kindness and patience and goodness. Paul said in **Acts 14:17** that God “...did not leave himself without witness, for he did good by giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness.” Through the sweetness of creation, God’s aim is to draw us to delight in Him. There is both a beauty and a brokenness in creation. The beauty is there to draw us to God, but the brokenness is there to prevent us from setting our hearts on it instead of Him.²⁶ Creation is about God’s steadfast love, not about

²⁵ The wicked has all of his portion in this life (Psalm 17:14).

²⁶ Thomas Manton, *The Complete Works of Thomas Manton Vol. 7*, (Miami, FL.,: Hardpress Publishing), pg. 108

creation itself. The person who has God has his portion delights in creation, because He sees everything as a gift of His steadfast love.

Experimental Christianity

This is the practice of a Christian hedonist. Ask yourself, what is the foundational attitude behind all these practices of the Psalmist? Do you get the sense that he is discontent and disappointed that this is the life that he has to live. ‘God commanded it, so I must do it’ No not at all. His attitude is one of pure pleasure and joy and satisfaction. Is that what your Christian life looks like? Is your pursuit of pleasure and your pursuit of God the same pursuit? If are practices are not done with joyfulness and gladness of heart then are practices are not Christian. God doesn’t want your duty, He wants your heart. He wants us to take pleasure in Him. That’s our **second point**.

III. The Person of Christian Hedonism

Every command is a command to be happy in God

Every single command in the Bible *ultimately* is a command to take pleasure in God—to be happy in Him. Come up with any command, and what you will find that every one is aimed at us being pleased with Him. And if you say, “No, that’s not true. God gives us commands so that we would glorify Him.” I would say that the only way you can glorify God is to take pleasure in Him. You cannot glorify God if you are not pleased with Him.

Nobody wants to take pleasure in God

But that is precisely the problem isn’t it? Nobody wants to take pleasure in God.²⁷ This is the universal human condition of sin: “...people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil” (**John 3:19**). This

²⁷ This is the very essence of sin—the core of it.

is *the* crisis of humanity. We don't take pleasure in God. The Scripture says that from our very youth we don't take pleasure in God. **Genesis 8:21** "...the intention of man's heart is evil from his youth." So then shall we be saved?

The consummate Christian Hedonist

We are saved because Someone else took pleasure in God. We are saved because this Someone loved pleasing God, loved obeying God, loved delighting in God more than anything else in this world. This Person said "I delight to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart."²⁸ This Person said so delighted in pursuing God, that He called it His very food. "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work."²⁹ This Person delighted in God more than His own life "For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life."³⁰

This Person is the Lord Jesus Christ.

This Jesus was declared to be the Son of God.

It was this Jesus whom the Father sent into the world as His only begotten Son, to live, and die, and to rise again.

"For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures" (1 **Cor. 15:3-4**).

The Origin of a Christian Hedonist

You don't become a Christian Hedonist *in order* to be saved. No, Jesus saved you so that you would become a Christian Hedonist. We love Him

²⁸ Psalm 40:8

²⁹ John 4:34

³⁰ John 10:17

because He first loved us. “In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins” (1 **John 4:10**). We take take pleasure in Him because He first took pleasure in us. “In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ” (**Eph. 1:5**). We pursue Him only because He first pursued us. “You did not choose me, but I chose you...” (**John 15:16**).

That’s how Christian Hedonists are created—by the gospel.

Application

1. What kind of a world do we live in?

We live in a world that will never satisfy you. Man was made body and soul. Your body needs physical things—food, drink, clothing, shelter. But what are the needs of your soul? The Puritan Thomas Manton said “The soul is like a sponge, always thirsting, [always] seeking something from without to be filled.”³¹ The soul needs those things that are proper for a soul to have. Everything must have those things that are suitable for it’s design. Fish must have water. Birds must have air. Your soul must have those things that are suitable for souls to have. What will satisfy your soul? Will a sandwich satisfy your soul? What will calm your guilty conscience? A coca-cola? What will give you peace, and fill you will love, and joy? A new car? Listen to how the LORD reasons with you: “Why do you spend your money [and] your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen diligently to me...incline your ear, and come to me; hear, that your soul may live” (**Isaiah 55:2-3**).³²

Dear friend if you have not yet made the Lord your portion, if you have not taken ahold of Jesus Christ, then you are in a most miserable state. Will you

³¹ Thomas Manton, *The Complete Works of Thomas Manton Vol. 7*, (Miami, FL.: Hardpress Publishing), pg. 115

³² True pleasure is born when your appetite of desire meets the object of your desire. Your soul can only find true pleasure if it finds what is suitable for it.

wait for death to undeceive you? All your attempts to find happiness outside of God are hopeless. C.S. Lewis says it like this:

“God made us: invented us as a man invents an engine. A car is made to run on petrol and it would not run properly on anything else. Now God designed the human machine to run on Himself. He Himself is the fuel our spirits were designed to burn, or the food our spirits were designed to feed on. There is no other. That is why it is just no good asking God to makes us happy in our own way without bothering about religion. God cannot give us a happiness and peace apart from Himself, because it is not there. There is no such thing.”³³

Dear friend, Jesus Christ is all the happiness that you could ever want. He doesn't lead you to happiness, He is happiness itself, and outside of Him is only misery. “Whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life...but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God” (**John 3:16, 18**).

2. What kind of a Word has God given us?

God has given us a Word that stokes the fire of Christian Hedonism. I would encourage you to check out a video on YouTube entitled “Chinese Christians Get Their First Bible.”³⁴ It's only a minute long, but it is simply remarkable. Someone caught the exact moment when suitcases full of Bibles were opened by the underground church for the first time. At that moment everyone in the room rushed the suitcases like starving and malnourished prisoners rush for a pallet of food. There were shouts of joy, everyone was talking at the same time, and they each grabbed their Bibles and they were literally kissing them, like a parent would kiss their child. They were crying, they were smiling, it was like all their hopes and dreams had culminated at this

³³ C.S. Lewis, *The Complete C.S. Lewis Signature Classics*, (New York, NY.,: HarperCollins, 2002), pg. 35

³⁴ Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HvgfCNIKp0A> Accessed August 31, 2019

exact moment in time. And then a woman stood up and said in front of them all “This is what we needed the most.” And then the room went dead silent and the only thing you could hear were the flipping of pages. These precious believers exemplified Moses’ words in **Deuteronomy 32:46** “For [this] is no empty word for you, but your very life.”

God’s Word is the very fuel of Christian Hedonism. Why do fires stop burning? Because they run out of fuel. The Word is the fuel of a Christian Hedonist. Look at **v.57** again. The Psalmist says “The LORD is my portion; [therefore] I promise to *keep* your words.” *Keep*, meaning *retain* or *treasure up*. ‘I will store up your word like treasure LORD.’ Why? Because that is the *only* fuel that will keep my passion burning. Dear saints, if you go without the fuel of the Word, your pleasure in God will smolder. If that is you, stoke your fire, throw the Word on that ash heap, and watch the living and active Word of God breath passion and pleasure back into your spirit.

3. What kind of a church should we want?

Please look at **v.63** “I am a companion of all who fear you, of those who keep your precepts.” The idea of a companion here is being knit together, like how **1 Samuel 18:1** says that “the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul.” That’s the relationship that all Christians *objectively* have. Because we have been united to Christ, we are in fact united to each other.

The difficulty is maintaining that unity and companionship. The reason why is because we tend to buy into the world’s definition of friendship. Well we must have a common set shared experiences, or we must be the same age, or in the same life state, we must both be married or single, or the same ethnicity, or we must like the same hobbies. Now none of those things are wrong in themselves. But if we try to build our church life around those things, our community will be shallow. Shared experiences cannot be the foundation of true companionship. God and His gospel must be. That’s why the Psalmist says “I am a companion *of all who fear you.*” Remember this maxim: **Whatever gathers**

us together gets the glory. So if the one-armed kayaking club is the place where you have all your true companions then one-armed kayaking gets the glory. But here's the thing: that doesn't display the supernatural work of the gospel. Communities that are built around one-armed kayakers, or mothers of preschoolers, or bearded-beer-drinking calvinists only display that natural proclivities that we all have.³⁵ But communities that are built around "all who fear you" display the supernatural work of God. Because the world sees this and can't understand. How is that the Spanish community can come in here and integrate into our community? What do we have in common with them? Christ! How is it that we can have blue collar and white collar people in community together? Christ! Listen to how this old Puritan said it "If then we are not ashamed to confess ourselves Christians, let us not shrink [back] from walking in fellowship with Christians. Even if they should exhibit some repulsive features of character, [for] they bear the image of *Him*, whom we profess to love inexpressibly and incomparable above all. They will be our companions in our eternal home; they ought therefore to be our brothers now."³⁶

4. What kind of Savior do we need?³⁷

We need the kind of Savior who will remain our portion when all other portions in this life disappear. The longer you live in this life, the more earthly portions you will lose. There was a story that broke this week of a Wycliff translator named Angus Fung who was living in Cameroon with his wife Eveline. They were working on translations of the Scripture for the natives. Last Sunday morning August 25, some Muslim herdsman, broke into their house, on the Lord's day. They pulled them out of their home and used their machetes. They hacked Angus to death and dismembered his body. His wife

³⁵ Our friendships always display some type of gospel. Community isn't the point, Christ is. If you aim at pleasure in Christ, then community will happen. If you aim at community, your pleasure will be paper thin.

³⁶ Charles Bridges', *Psalm 119: An Exposition*, (Carlisle, PA.,: The Banner of Truth Trust, Reprint 2002), pg. 157

³⁷ With the exception of the first question, the last three are from Christopher Ash, *Job: The Wisdom of the Cross, Preaching the Word Series*, (Wheaton, IL.,: Crossway, 2014), pg. 17-23

Eveline had her arm cut off, but managed to escape. Angus lost his life. Eveline lost her husband and her arm. They lost every portion in this life. But neither one of them lost their true portion. Jesus promised “Behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” That is the kind of Savior we have.

The longer you live, the more portions you will lose in this life. Someday my children will lose their father and mother. Someday I will lose the ability to be a pastor. My wife will lose me, or me her. For those of you who are married, someday you will be a widow or a widower. Someday you will be replaced at your job. Someday you will get too sick or too old to do any of the things that you love to do in this life. All your earthly portions will be taken away. But there is one portion that is everlasting. The LORD Jesus Christ. As the prophet Habakkuk once said: “Though the fig tree should not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines, the produce of the olive fail and the fields yield no food, the flock be cut off from the fold and there be no herd in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord; I will take joy in the God of my salvation” (**Habakkuk 3:17-18**).