

Foreword

If there is an evangelical Christian alive today who has thought and written more biblically, more deeply, more creatively, or more practically about the proper enjoyment of creation and culture, I don't know who it is. When I say "biblically," I mean that Joe thinks and writes under the authority of God's Word and with a view to answering all serious objections that arise from the Bible. I also mean that he writes as a persuaded Christian Hedonist—that is, with the pervasive conviction that God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him.

But like all good students, he is not merely swallowing the teachings of Christian Hedonism; he is digesting them so that they turn into energies and insights beyond his teacher's. The fact that he asked me to write this foreword, and that I agreed to do it, is a sign that those insights are not contradictory, but complementary, to the teacher's efforts.

Joe has discerned that a strength of Christian Hedonism can also turn into a weakness. The strength is that Christian Hedonism, as I have tried to develop it, has a strong ascetic tendency (as the Bible does!). For example, I often add these words: "God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him, *especially in those times when we embrace suffering for his sake with joy.*" Joy in affliction is a clearer witness that we treasure Christ more than comfort, than joy in comfortable, sunny days.

I also stress that it is more blessed to give than to receive and that giving is often painful. I have tried to make the tone of my ministry "sorrowful, yet always rejoicing" (2 Cor. 6:10). The very heart of Christian Hedonism, textually, is found in Philippians 1:19–23, where Christ is most magnified in our dying, because we treasure Christ so supremely that we call dying *gain*—because in it we get more of Christ. And we treasure Christ in our living by counting everything as loss because of

the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus our Lord (Phil. 3:8). The saltiness of the Christian life is tasted most keenly when, in the midst of being reviled and persecuted, we rejoice and are glad because our reward in heaven is great (Matt. 5:11–13).

The weakness of this emphasis is that little space is devoted to magnifying Christ in the right enjoyment of creation and culture. Little emphasis is given to Paul's words: "God created [foods] to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving" (1 Tim. 4:3–4). Or his words that God "richly provides us with everything to enjoy" (1 Tim. 6:17).

The trees of biblical wisdom in regard to savoring God in the savoring of his creation are not full-grown in what I have written about Christian Hedonism. I sowed some seeds, but I never circled back to tend those saplings, let alone grow them into a book. That's what Joe Rigney has done. And I am so pleased with what he has written that I feel no need to write that book. It needed to be written, and he has done it.

We are all shaped and motivated by our personal experiences. I have seen a side of biblical truth, and written about it the way I have, in large measure because of my experience of life and what I see as the needs around me in the church, in America, and in the world. I will probably keep my focus and my emphasis as long as I live. It's the way I see the Bible and the world at this time.

But my emphasis is not the whole truth. Joe has lived a different life and has faced different challenges and has felt the force of different needs in people's lives. This has given him a sensitivity to other dimensions of biblical truth and has enabled him to see them and write about them with depth, creativity, and intensely practical application.

This book has been very helpful to me. I mean that personally. I think I will be a better father and husband and friend and leader because of it. One reason is that Joe is undaunted by possible objections to what he emphasizes from the Bible. Does this emphasis fit with the biblical teaching on self-denial? Will it help when the child dies? Will it help us complete the Great Commission? Will it help us say, "Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you"

(Ps. 73:25)? There are good answers to these questions—biblical answers. Joe is so devoted to Scripture that he is unafraid to face whatever it says without rejecting it in favor of his system or twisting it to make it fit. This is the kind of writer that gives me great help.

We are both aware that what we have written can be distorted and misused. But that puts us in good company, since all Christian heresies and sects distort and misuse the Bible. God evidently thought that the gift of the Bible was worth the distortions people would make of it. Joe has written a book that should have been written. It is a gift to the church and the world, not because it *is* the Bible but because it is pervaded by a passion to be *faithful* to the Bible. It is worth the distortions people will make of it. May they be few. He has not been careless.

My prayer for this book is the same as Joe's:

May the Father of Lights, who knows how to give good gifts to his children, teach you the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need, being brought low or being raised up. May he grant you the grace to do all good things, receive all good things, lose all good things, and endure all hard things through Christ who gives you strength. Amen.

John Piper