

# A CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF JOHN PIPER'S "CHRISTIAN HEDONISM" (2)

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## Legalism and Charismatic Phariseeism

In the chapter entitled "Worship: The Feast of Christian Hedonism," Piper addresses the question, What makes worship "authentic"? He begins, correctly, by stating that worship must come from the heart, for which he quotes Matthew 15:8: "This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me."

A knowledgeable reader of Piper will already be dreading what Piper understands by worship that comes from the "heart," especially considering his neglect to quote the next verse. The answer follows shortly after: "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."<sup>1</sup>

Things get worse: "Now let's be specific. What are these feelings or affections that make the outward acts of worship authentic?"

The answer, for which he quotes extensively from the Psalms (e.g., 46:10; 33:8; 5:7; 51:17; 42:1-2), is the following list, which "is not intended to limit the possibilities": "stunned silence" at "seeing the majestic holiness of God"; "a sense of awe and reverence and wonder at the sheer magnitude of God"; "a holy dread of God's righteous power"; "brokenness and contrition and grief for our ungodliness"; a "longing for God"; "gladness and gratitude."<sup>2</sup>

Words cannot adequately express the deep horror and disgust that all the godly saints must have at hearing this teaching that promotes itself as true piety. *Of course*, we ought to have the right feelings when we worship God. But has Piper forgotten what the very beginning of godliness is? Has he lost all sense of the majesty of a holy God who demands *perfection*? Has he become

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<sup>1</sup> *Desiring God*, p. 86.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 88-89.

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blind to our *total* depravity? This is a mortal strike at the heart of the gospel: the cross of Jesus Christ!

What is Piper thinking? Has he forgotten that what is required for any of our acts to be accepted before God is to "love the Lord thy God with *all thy heart*, with *all thy soul*, and with *all thy mind*" and to "love thy neighbour as thyself" (Matt. 22:37, 39)? Has he forgotten that "whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all" (James 2:10)? Has he forgotten that even if we managed not to sin once, we are still guilty in Adam (Rom. 5:14ff.)? The Almighty Creator of heaven and earth, the Perfect One whose eyes cannot behold sin, in whom there is no shadow of turning, is not satisfied with mere *emotions* and *feelings*, be they ever so "spiritual"! God requires—demands—*perfection!*

This is the whole reason that Christ Jesus became flesh:

For what the law [i.e., anything we do] could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit (Rom. 8:3-4).

That we have nothing to offer to God, that we are totally depraved with no good in us, is why we are *Christians!* For it is *Christ* who fulfilled the law in our stead (Rom 8:3-4)—He has become our righteousness (II Cor. 5:21)!

It is in Him, and *only* in Him, that we are accepted before God—we do not *ever* keep the law in order to be accepted before God. That is legalism, works righteousness, filthy heresy, Romanism and the end of all true religion.

Of course not one of Piper's "prooftexts" states that our worship can be made "authentic" or acceptable before God by us having certain "spiritual feelings." Indeed, if they did, they would contradict the remainder of Scripture. If our worship was rendered "authentic" before God by our "spiritual feelings" or "emotions" or anything else done by us, we would have "whereof to glory" (Rom. 4:2).

Our worship can only ever be acceptable before God if it is done out of faith in Jesus Christ, this faith resting in Christ *alone* as the fulfilment of the law and trusting in Him and Him *alone* to satisfy God's justice.

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Surely Christians should have the correct emotions in worship, *but our worship is not acceptable before God on account of these emotions*. Our worship is acceptable only because and insofar as it is covered by the blood of Jesus Christ our Substitute, which occurs *by faith alone*.

This teaching is nothing but legalism, whereby acceptance (of our acts of worship) is earned and secured by emotions. It necessarily leads to charismatic phariseeism, whereby people judge themselves and each other by their emotions and “spiritual pleasures” and “tastes.”

This can be seen in his neglect to quote Matthew 15:9 when quoting verse 8:

[8] This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me.

[9] But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.

What is the sign of people’s hearts being far from God? Their lack of tears during the worship service? Their neutral face during the singing? No. It is that they teach “for doctrines the commandments of men.” They teach and believe the lie. And to this we may add the leading of an immoral life (I John 2:10).

The practical results of Piper’s view of authentic worship for the child of God are very clear. The believer will endlessly be examining his own emotions and doubting whether he really reached a sufficient standard to render his worship “authentic.” Worse, he will be strongly tempted into an outward pharisaic show of “emotions” in order to “show” his “love” for God and to prove it to others.

Yes, the Christian ought daily to repent of cold-heartedness in worship and half-hearted love for God. But the Christian must never think that anything he does can make him or his acts acceptable before God.

The Christian’s only hope is Christ.

### **Gratitude, Conditions and Rome**

In conjunction with his assertion that “the goal of Christian Hedonism is to find pleasure” which, fortunately for this god, is found in him only, and in conjunction with his attack on assurance, Piper must of course deny or at least minimise the place of gratitude as the motivation for obedience. And this he

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does in his book *Future Grace*: "The Bible rarely, if ever, motivates Christian living with gratitude."<sup>3</sup>

What? When did Piper last read God's Word without wearing the spectacles of "Christian Hedonism"?

It certainly needs no proof that we ought to give thanks to God for so great salvation, since all over Scripture we are exhorted to do so. And how do we give thanks? By words only? No, also by worship and by obedience. And what are we giving thanks for? For salvation, for all that God has done for us.

This is obedience motivated by thanksgiving—this is obedience that *is* thanksgiving. This is gratitude as the motivation for obedience.

In short, every time Scripture commands us to give thanks, it is making gratitude the motivation for obedience.

A few more examples. In both accounts, the Ten Commandments are prefaced by "I am the LORD thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage" (Ex. 20:2; cf. Deut. 5:6)—that is, "Because I have redeemed you, follow these commandments." Similarly, Christ declares to the woman caught in adultery, "neither do I condemn thee [read: 'therefore ...']: go, and sin no more" (John 8:11). The apostle Paul commands all believers, "For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord [read: 'therefore ...']: walk as children of light" (Eph. 5:8). The Psalms are filled with obedience springing out of gratitude: "What shall I render unto the LORD for all his benefits toward me? I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the LORD. I will pay my vows unto the LORD now in the presence of all his people" (Ps. 116:12-14; cf. v. 2; 105:1).

As if knowing the folly of what he has just said, Piper writes later in the same paragraph: "You will search the Bible in vain for *explicit* connections between gratitude and obedience ... gratitude was never designed as the primary motivation for radical Christian obedience."<sup>4</sup>

Notice how, in a single paragraph, Piper moves from "rarely if ever" to "explicit" examples to "primary motivation." And even if it were true that there

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<sup>3</sup> *Future Grace*, p. 11.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11; italics Piper's. Note especially Piper's statement that "gratitude was never designed as the *primary* motivation ..."

are no *explicit* connections, surely God's commands are authoritative whether they are implicit or explicit. One could equally argue the there is no *explicit* statement in Scripture that God is Three-in-One.<sup>5</sup>

Piper explicitly states that it is wrong to say to God, "Because you have done something good for me, I feel indebted to do something good for you."<sup>6</sup> He then claims that this necessarily leads toward a refusal to receive salvation merely as a gift in that we now try to "pay God back," thereby denying that it is by grace alone.

This is, however, completely wrong. It is exactly *because* salvation is a gift, *because* we were elected unconditionally and *because* salvation is all a gracious work of God without the will and work of the sinner, that we do feel so grateful and eternally indebted to Him and live lives of thankfulness.

Rejecting gratitude, simply because it can lead to the thinking that we actually *can* pay God back, is ludicrous. One might equally argue (as Paul's opponents in Romans 6 did) that salvation cannot be by grace alone because then we would all just keep sinning. Of course, because of our sinful natures sometimes we *do* tell ourselves we can just keep sinning—but that doesn't mean we should reject *sola gratia*!

Piper even goes so far as to suggest that gratitude as the "primary motivation for radical Christian obedience ... perhaps is one reason so many efforts at holiness abort."<sup>7</sup> He devotes an entire chapter entitled "When Gratitude Malfunctions" to this.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> This devaluing of implicit commands seems to be a common feature with Baptists and Anabaptists, as can be seen most especially in that pet question of theirs, "Where in Scripture are we *explicitly* commanded to baptise the infants of believers?" To which Calvin answers, "I reply that nowhere at all do we ever read that [the apostles] administered the Lord's Supper to a single woman. Therefore why does the one problem cause them more difficulty than the other? They dare not say that women are incapable of receiving the Lord's Supper. Nevertheless, we do not read that they ever received it from the hands of the apostles. On what basis then can we hold with certainty that women receive it? By considering the institution, nature, and substance of the sacrament! For in so doing, we see that it is as fitting for them as it is for men" (*Treatises against the Anabaptists and Against the Libertines*, trans. Benjamin W. Farley [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1982], p. 55).

<sup>6</sup> *Future Grace*, p. 32.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 41-49.

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Accordingly, Piper claims that "when it comes to ... Christian obedience ... the Bible does not say that it comes from the backward gaze of gratitude, but that it comes from the forward gaze of faith."<sup>9</sup> That is, the daily faith of obedience is not primarily a looking back upon the finished work of Christ at Calvary, but a "looking forward" to "future grace."

This is the major contention of the book *Future Grace*. Thence, its complete title: *The Purifying Power of Living by Faith in ... Future Grace*.

Accordingly, in both *Future Grace* and *Desiring God*, the substitutionary atonement of Jesus Christ, the justice of God, the imputation of righteousness, etc., receive very sparse treatment and drop into the background—and these books supposedly set forth an outline of the daily Christian life in the former and "what the Universe is all about" in the latter!

John W. Robbins, in a review of this book, says, in opposition to Piper,

The focus of saving faith is not what God has promised to do for us in the future, but what God has already done for us in Christ. Christians preach and trust only Christ crucified, the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. Christ crucified is the sole focus of Biblical, saving, faith; it is the focus of Baptism and the Lord's Supper, by which we remember the Lord's death; and it is the focus of worship in Heaven (see Revelation 5), with endless future ages before it. Piper wants to change that focus, from Christ crucified to something else.<sup>10</sup>

And what is this "future grace"? What is it with which Piper replaces gratitude as the main motivation for obedience? We have already hinted at it: "unmerited, *conditional* grace."<sup>11</sup>

That is, we should obey God because only by "meeting" certain "conditions" will we "go on enjoying the blessings of future grace."<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 43.

<sup>10</sup> John W. Robbins, "Pied Piper," *The Trinity Review* (June/July 2002), p. 5 ([www.trinityfoundation.org/PDF/197a-PiedPiper.pdf](http://www.trinityfoundation.org/PDF/197a-PiedPiper.pdf)).

<sup>11</sup> *Future Grace*, p. 11.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 254.

Maybe he should add the doctrine of purgatory to give Christians more of a motive to “meet conditions” for “future grace.” Or, from the “Christian Hedonism” perspective, Christians ought to obey God primarily in order to get the “pleasure” that is found in him.

However, a full treatment of Piper’s “conditional grace” is outside the bounds of this essay. Therefore, we will restrict ourselves to making four simple points in regards to all “conditional grace” theology.

First, it is at the very heart of the gospel that *all* conditions for *all* grace for the believer, past, present and future, have been met by Christ our mediator through His perfect life, death and resurrection (Rom. 8:3-4; Acts 13:39; Gal. 3:21; Eph. 1:3). This is our hope; this is our *only* hope. If even a single sigh of sorrow over sin were required of us as a condition for grace, we would be eternally lost. Not only this, but this “grace” would no then longer be grace (Rom. 4:4; 11:6).

Second, the promise of the gospel that “whosoever believes shall be saved” is not a “conditional” promise made to everyone head-for-head who hears the gospel or is baptized, but is an unconditional promise made only to those who believe. That is, God promises salvation only to those who believe—not to everyone on the condition that they do something (such as the work of believing). Faith, therefore, is not a condition of salvation that we must meet, but a *necessary means* by which God saves the elect and assures them of their salvation (Eph. 2:8).<sup>13</sup>

Third, this idea of conditionality is the basis of, and logically develops into, the heresies of the Federal Vision (FV) and New Perspective on Paul (NPP) movements, which explicitly teach justification by faith and works. For if grace depends on something *we do*, then surely our justification must equally depend on a work of ours.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Some have used the term “condition” to describe faith, by which they meant the orthodox truth that faith is a necessary means of salvation. However, as such usage of the word “condition” is very confusing and can easily be misunderstood, we would encourage the cessation of such terminology, especially in these days when the word “condition” is used to smuggle in justification by works.

<sup>14</sup> For a general review of conditional grace, including its connection to the FV and the NPP, the reader is referred to Engelsma’s pamphlet “The Unconditional Covenant in Contemporary

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Though Piper has written a book against N. T. Wright,<sup>15</sup> one of the leading proponents of the NPP in evangelical circles, Piper has publicly stated that Wright does *not* preach a false gospel.<sup>16</sup> Even worse, he has publicly defended, as orthodox, Douglas Wilson, a leading proponent of the FV in Reformed circles, and invited him to speak at one of his recent conferences.<sup>17</sup> And possibly most haunting is Piper’s admission that his book *Future Grace* is based on the teachings of Daniel Fuller,<sup>18</sup> another NPP proponent and Piper’s “most influential ‘dead’ teacher.”<sup>19</sup>

It seems that Piper’s “conditional grace” is the reason he cannot see these people for what they are—heretics. As a result, he is inviting wolves in sheep’s clothing to come and teach the flock which he ought to protect.

By denying gratitude as the main motive for obedience and replacing it with a desire to “meet conditions” for “future grace,” Piper has set himself against the *Heidelberg Catechism* and the whole Reformed faith—which posit good works in the realm of thankfulness—and aligned himself with the Romish Church—which posits good works as being done primarily in order to meet conditions for receiving “grace.”

Let it be clear: any church which tolerates or even promotes the “conditional” theology of John Piper has begun the journey back to Rome and will soon join with the likes of Wright, Wilson and Fuller to be embraced by the Pope himself.

### The Right Conception of Obedience and Rewards

All theology must begin and end with God. Everything is defined in relation to Him—He is the “I am that I am”—He cannot be explained in relation to

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Debate” ([www.cprf.co.uk/pamphlets/unconditionalcovenantcontemporarydebate.htm](http://www.cprf.co.uk/pamphlets/unconditionalcovenantcontemporarydebate.htm)). For a more detailed examination, see David J. Engelsma, *The Covenant of God and the Children of Believers* (Grand Rapids, MI: RFP, 2005). For a critical examination of Piper’s conditional grace in particular, see Robbins, “Pied Piper.”

<sup>15</sup> John Piper, *The Future of Justification: A Response to N. T. Wright* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Publishing, 2007).

<sup>16</sup> [www.youtube.com/watch?v=b2X078\\_VDjc](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b2X078_VDjc)

<sup>17</sup> [www.desiringgod.org/Blog/1878\\_Why\\_Doug\\_Wilson\\_Is\\_Speaking\\_at\\_DGs\\_Fall\\_Conference/](http://www.desiringgod.org/Blog/1878_Why_Doug_Wilson_Is_Speaking_at_DGs_Fall_Conference/)

<sup>18</sup> *Future Grace*, p. 7.

<sup>19</sup> [www.desiringgod.org/AboutUs/JohnPiper/ExtendedBiography/](http://www.desiringgod.org/AboutUs/JohnPiper/ExtendedBiography/)

anything else. He is God and there is no other. In the beginning God *is*. He was forever and will be forever. There is no one good but God. All goodness in created things is merely a reflection of His goodness (Matt. 19:17).

Says Hoeksema,

Everywhere this truth is emphasised in Holy Writ. God is goodness. He is a light. Perfection is His very Being. Goodness is the divine Essence. Of the creature it may be said that he possesses goodness as a reflection of the perfections of God. But of the creature it can never be said that it is perfection or goodness. Even as,—to use a figure,—it might be said of the sun that it is a light, seeing that it has light in itself, in comparison with other heavenly bodies, but that the moon merely bears or possesses light as it reflects the light of the sun, so it must be said of God that He is goodness in His very Essence, while the creature can never have any perfection in himself.<sup>20</sup>

Therefore, God in His entire being is devoted to Himself—because He is the only good.

*For my name's sake* will I defer mine anger, and *for my praise* will I refrain for thee, that I cut thee not off. Behold, I have refined thee, but not with silver; I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction. *For mine own sake, even for mine own sake*, will I do it: *for how should my name be polluted? and I will not give my glory unto another* (Isa. 48:9-11).

Considering that only God is truly good and that all goodness is found only in Him as the sole source of goodness, what ought everything else in the universe be devoted to? What ought all created things to seek after first?

Our own pleasure?!?

No. We and all creatures ought to seek first and foremost God Himself and His glory.

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<sup>20</sup> Herman Hoeksema, *The Triple Knowledge* (Grand Rapids, MI: RPPA, 1972), vol. 3, pp. 200-201.

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Hoeksema writes,

As God is the sole good, it follows that He is consecrated to Himself. He loves Himself. He seeks Himself and His own glory. He seeks and loves Himself, but also in all creation. That is God's holiness. With us it is our highest calling to love and seek and be consecrated to the Lord our God. To love and seek self is sin. With God, however, it is exactly the reverse. He seeks Himself, and will give His glory to none other. And the reason for both lies in the fact that God is good, and that He is the sole good, that there is no goodness apart from God. He is the Holy One of Israel. Glory be to His holy name!<sup>21</sup>

And that precisely is where sin comes in. Sin is seeking something else first. It is turning away from God as the only good to something else—self. Sin *is* the seeking of anything above God. Eve turned away from seeking after God to seek after her own pleasure because she saw that “the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes” (Gen. 3:6). God then punished her and she truly died, being immediately separated from that sweet fellowship with God which is life (John 17:3). The fruit that she ate for pleasure became the instrument of her death. So it is with all the pleasures that are sought for before God—they become the poisons of death, empty, vile, and non-satisfying, the just punishment of God.

Christian Hedonists, who seek first the “pleasure that is found in God,” will find ultimately that this idol will not satisfy. They have turned away from seeking first the glory of God, and turned instead to what *they* can get from God. But the Lord of heaven and earth is not mocked. He will not let Himself be used as a mere tool to satisfy man (whether it be man's physical or spiritual cravings). He will not be pacified by being told that this way He “gets the most glory.” He will turn this pleasure into a dry pit of sand. He is *God!*

We ought to obey God first and foremost because this is our highest duty. We owe God perfect, heartfelt, complete obedience. This is the greatest commandment: “Master, which is the great commandment in the law? Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind” (Matt. 22:36-37).

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 202.

The Almighty, Eternal, Independent One, the Creator and Sustainer of all things, the eternally blissful One, the Holy Trinity, must be worshiped for the simple reason that *He is God!* Worship is primarily *owed* to the Creator by the creature; God *requires* worship and obedience of us. His very being, His essence, demands it of all created things.

A son honoureth his father, and a servant his master: if then I be a father, where is mine honour? and if I be a master, where is my fear? saith the LORD of hosts unto you, O priests, that despise my name. And ye say, Wherein have we despised thy name? (Mal. 1:6)

Even were God not to reward obedience, we still ought to obey—because He alone is good: “So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do” (Luke 17:10).

So we can immediately conclude that it is not wrong to seek rewards *as long as the glory of God is more important to us than the obtaining of rewards, and everything we do, including the seeking of rewards, is subjected to that end.*<sup>22</sup>

Nevertheless, why does Scripture speak so much of rewards? And why does God at times motivate us by telling us that only in the way of obedience will we be eternally happy?

The first and primary answer will come easily if we consider the nature of any true good that we do. As has been discussed, God is the only good, and any good that we have is simply a reflection of His goodness. As such, any deed that is truly good in the sight of God is one worked by God Himself in and through the creature (Eph. 2:10; Phil. 2:13).

Is God pleased with His own works? Of course! And how does He show this? By rewarding these good things that *He* works in us.

And what would we think if He did *not* reward truly good deeds? That these deeds were not good after all? That He was *not* overflowing with grace and goodness?

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<sup>22</sup> Of course, these rewards are “not of merit, but of grace” (*Heidelberg Catechism*, Q. & A. 63).

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Therefore, the promised rewards display to us the infinite goodness and richness of the Triune God, and that the rewarded works are good because they accord with His good nature, and that therefore also they were "wrought in God" (John 3:21).

Furthermore, God has inseparably joined the good of His beloved children to His glory. This is what is indicated by the first answer of the *Westminster Shorter Catechism*. God has chosen to reveal the covenant life that He has within Himself, between Father, Son and Holy Ghost, to us so that we become "partakers of the divine nature" (II Peter 1:4), so that He is our God and we are His people (Gen. 17:7; Heb. 8:10).

As such, we ought to seek our satisfaction in our fellowship with Him and not in anything else. We must die to self in order to live. As Piper says, it is indeed idolatry to find pleasure in anything apart from God. But that does not mean we ought to seek our own pleasure, whether in God or not, first!

Imagine God coming to Adam in the state of perfection with the command not to eat of the fruit of the tree of life, and *before* immediately resolving in his heart to obey God, Adam thinks to himself, "What will I get out of it if I obey God?" This very thought is impious and sinful! It is an insult to the majesty and inherent value of the Triune God that any creature would consider his own benefit which would result from his obedience *before* resolving to obey God.

Rather, in the new man we pursue even our own joy and satisfaction in God as a *means* to glorifying Him in body and soul. Just as God does not pursue our good for our sake but for His own, so we pursue our good not for our own sake but for *His*. This is the God-centred life.

How amazing that God would thus bind our good to His glory! How thankful we ought to be! And how dare anybody twist this to justify seeking our own pleasure first!

Secondly, God promises rewards for true obedience because, since He is holy, His blessings can only be enjoyed *in the way of holiness* (Ps. 77:13a). A child of God who walks in disobedience grieves the Holy Spirit such that he loses the comforting assurance of salvation and the blessings of conscious fellowship with God. Conversely—and this is the meaning of passages such as I Peter 5:6—it is in the way of faith, humility and obedience that we receive the

blessings of salvation which Christ merited for us—and in this way only. The way God causes us to enjoy the blessings of Christ’s salvation is by making us walk in faith and obedience (Eze. 36:26ff.).

The third reason for which God so frequently and abundantly promises the reward of His fellowship and its blessings for obedience comes from the nature of the obedience that God requires. God demands obedience that comes from a heart filled with love and joy towards Him. In this sense, He is *not* pleased with the forced and unwilling obedience of Satan and his minions, nor with the obedience of the nations today under His rule of providence, nor with the obedience of all the wicked on the day of judgment when they will be forced to bend their knees to Christ and worship Him.

This perfect obedience with which God is pleased was perfectly displayed by the life of Jesus Christ. Our Saviour’s heart was filled with love for God all the days of His earthly life. He obeyed God because this was His *desire*. There was nothing Christ desired more than to glorify His Father in heaven. Therefore, the witness came from heaven: “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Matt. 3:17).

We, as sinners in this body of death, can never bring forth this perfect obedience. And even were this possible, we would still be guilty in Adam, and our obedience would not be accepted before the throne of the Almighty. Therefore, our imperfect obedience wrought in us by the Spirit is only accepted by being covered with the blood of Christ.

However, out of gratitude we *do* want our obedience to approach perfection. We desire to be conformed to the image of Christ ultimately for God’s glory. Yet often we are cold-hearted in our obedience. As such, when we meet with the abundant blessings that God graciously adds to His commands, we are pricked in our hearts over our lack of zeal and, by the Spirit, are awakened to a deeper love and desire to obey.

This is the third purpose of the promised rewards. They are God in His mercy helping us in our weakness to bring forth good fruit.

This understanding of the obedience that God requires (perfect and from the heart) brings us to the right view of faith itself, and with this we close.

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### Justification by Faith Alone: The Only Source of True Joy and Obedience

How can a sinner who is not assured of God's love for him, who thinks it very possible he will spend eternity under the wrath of God in the eternal lake of fire, who therefore is filled with terror and fear and sorrow—how can such a sinner ever give God the obedience of love and joy?

He cannot. It is impossible. This is the fate of all those who believe Piper's (and the Puritan) view of assurance. The forced, terrified obedience of doubt (and therefore of unbelief) is not pleasing to God. Those who believe they ought to see joy in God in themselves *before* being assured that all God's promises of grace are for them can never have true assurance.

Christian Hedonism produces either false, manufactured joy (for a sinner's joy that is not founded upon the assurance of the forgiveness of his sins and God's love for him is not true joy) or a lifetime of doubt. Thus, it destroys all true obedience, not only by making true joy unattainable, but by robbing the child of God of assurance and thereby tempting that child of God, who does not believe he is forgiven, to attempt obtaining salvation by works.

Opposed to this, the promise of the gospel is simple: All those who believe will be saved! Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness will be satisfied! The weary and heavy laden will find rest in Christ!

Let us believe these promises. Let us not doubt them. Can God lie?

Let us, who hunger and thirst for Christ's righteousness, believe it is ours.

Believing we are saved, let us rejoice with joy unspeakable (I Peter 1:8).

And rejoicing in so great salvation, may we live lives of thankfulness, offering up sacrifices of thanksgiving, devoting our bodies and souls to the service of our heavenly, loving, gracious Father.

And let us diligently attend the means of grace in a true church in which the gospel is preached purely so that our faith and assurance may grow.

Christian Hedonism takes our eyes off Christ crucified and places them on our own performance. It makes us hope in our own obedience, instead of the obedience of Christ for us, and thereby robs us of all true joy and comfort.

Justification by faith alone, which includes assurance, is the only source of

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true joy. True faith looks only to Christ for assurance and there lies its only hope. The obedience that flows from true assurance is the only obedience by sinners with which God is pleased—for the sake of Christ alone.

This is the Christ-centred life.

To the glory of the Triune God.