

I'm a Christian because...

I'm a hedonist

Where is satisfaction? Where is pleasure? Where is joy?

Who is he that seeks these things? Who is he finds them?

He is called a hedonist – one whose life aim, in sum, is to find the most pleasure possible. This hedonist may pursue it by various means: eating (oh the bliss!), sleeping (what a thing!), laughing (a wonderful mystery!), etc, and he will pursue them till the end of his days. No hedonist is satisfied with a pleasure once, or twice. He wants it as much as he can get it, and he's willing to work hard or wait long for it.

I am that hedonist seeking the ultimate satisfaction. I am a Christian because I'm hedonist. To some it may sound paradoxical. The Christian way has never been portrayed as a life of seeking self-satisfying pleasure. To many it seems to come with a bunch of rules that actually *limit* Christians from doing things that are very pleasurable: No drunkenness, no sex before marriage, no taking a simple break from being so nice all the time... it seems like a never ending list depending on whom you talk to. And maybe you think you've got me figured out, and you expect me to say, "Living a life of good deeds and moral uprightness is the real ultimate pleasure. Become a Christian!" That's not it. For many, the Christian Bible is a book of bad news but to understand the overall message is to understand the joy that is found in it. Now that I have found it, I am a Christian: I have found an everlasting joy in an everlasting love for Jesus.

Speaking of a savior that would come, God speaks by the prophet Isaiah: "Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights" (Isaiah 42:1*). This is the same God whose voice spoke out when Jesus was baptized: "This is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:16,17). The God of the Bible, a God who loves and a God who seeks to glorify himself in Jesus his son, is a God who takes pleasure in being God. And he takes pleasure in giving man to share of this joy, or Jesus would not have said, "These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full." What are "these things" he is talking about? Just before this, Jesus said, "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love" (John 15:9-11). Loving Jesus is the joy. Following Jesus is the result of that joy.

A Christian who loves Jesus and who lives for Jesus has the same love that God has. I share in God's pleasure. Not only that, a Christian who lives for Jesus has the promise that he will live *with* Jesus for all of eternity. David the Psalmist writes of God, "In your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore" (Psalm 16:11). When God gives us his own hedonism, so to speak - whose joy is so great and whose pleasures are so long-lasting - the temporal and short-lived pleasures that surround us are insignificant next to the joy that is right within reach. Chocolate sprinkles, a good perfume, family picnics, marriage... even these pleasures are vastly outshadowed by the happiness found in living with Jesus every day.

Jesus gave a parable in Matthew 13:44: "The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field." This sacrifice demonstrates the proper response for a true hedonist when he finds a joy unspeakable. The best part about the treasure the Christian gets is that it's all for the low, low price of everything! Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Goodness... the list goes on and God's practically giving it away! You can't buy that value! And when God gives the goods, he gives without reserve.

Nehemiah tells the people of Israel to revel in the blessings of God saying, 'Go your way. Eat the fat and drink sweet wine and send portions to anyone who has nothing ready, for this day is holy to our Lord. And do not be grieved, for the joy of the Lord is your strength.' "... And all the people went their way to eat and drink and to send portions and to make great rejoicing, because they had understood the words that were declared to them" (Nehemiah 8:9-12).

Those words declared to them were the words of the covenant that God made with his people. They were his promises and they were reminders of his goodness. May those who seek the ultimate satisfaction – the ultimate joy – understand the words of the covenant:

"This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws on their hearts, and write them on their minds," then he adds, "I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more."

(Heb 10:16-17)

There is a lasting and real pleasure in having a personal relationship with the God of the universe. I know this God. He has shared with me his joy. He has shared with me his son.

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*All Bible references are taken from the English Standard Version (ESV)

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