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The Things Of Earth: Treasuring God By Enjoying His Gifts



Synopsis

The world is full of good things. Ice-cold lemonade. The laughter of children. College football. Scrambled eggs and crispy bacon. But what happens to these earthly pleasures when Jesus shows up? Do the things of earth grow strangely dim? Or does he shine in all that? It's fair? In this book, Joe Rigney offers a breath of fresh air to Christians who are burdened by false standards, impossible expectations, and misguided notions of holiness. Steering a middle course between idolatry on the one hand and ingratitude on the other, this much-needed book reminds us that every good gift comes from the Father's hand, that God's blessings should drive us to worship and generosity, and that a passion for God's glory is as wide as the world.

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Customer Reviews

"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 . . . 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."

—John Piper, Founder, desiringGod.org; Chancellor, Bethlehem College and

Seminary
"We are probably familiar with the proverb about the overly pious fellow, the one who is so heavenly minded he is no earthly good. And we have seen the opposite so many times that we don't even need a proverb for it—the carnal thinker who is so earthly minded he is no heavenly good. And no earthly good either, as it turns out. The hardest thing to

achieve on this subject is balance, but it is a difficult feat that Rigney has accomplished. Buy this book. Make it one of your earthly possessions. Read it to find out what that is supposed to mean.

•Douglas Wilson, A Senior Fellow of Theology, New St. Andrews College; Pastor, Christ Church, Moscow, Idaho

“Reading this will be a sweet moment of profound liberation for many. With wisdom and verve, Rigney shows how we can worship our creator through the enjoyment of his creation. This is going to make a lot of Christians happier in Christ and more attractively Christlike.

•Michael Reeves, A Director of Union and Senior Lecturer, Wales Evangelical School of Theology; author, A Delighting in the Trinity, A The Unquenchable Flame A and A Rejoicing in Christ

“This book makes me want to watch the Olympics while eating a pumpkin crunch cake, rejoicing in the God who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. But part of me is a little wary of the indulgent pecan crunchiness and astonishing athletic feats. What if my heart gets lost in these things? If you’re familiar with that hesitation, this book is for you. We were made to take in all the fullness of the intergalactic glory of the triune God. This book is a trustworthy guide to help your gaze follow along the scattered beams up to the sun.

•Gloria Furman, A Pastor’s wife, Redeemer Church of Dubai; mother of four; author, A Glimpses of Grace A and A Treasuring Christ When Your Hands Are Full A

“I am always amazed at how God reveals his character to his children. This book has radically changed the way I view the Giver of every good and perfect gift. What’s more, it has helped me to really enjoy A him A through the many blessings he has lavished on me.

•Shane Everett, A singer/songwriter, Shane and Shane

“It is not easy to understand how I can love God with all my heart, but also love the world he has made. God’s Word encourages us to love the creation (Psalm 19), but also to love not the world (1 John 2:15-17). Rigney is really helpful to those wrestling with this kind of question, and he helps us with a lively and engaging style. This book clarifies and builds upon John Piper’s Christian Hedonism. I heartily recommend it.

•John M. Frame, A J. D. Trimble Chair of Systematic Theology and Philosophy, Reformed Theological Seminary, Orlando --This text refers to the Audio CD edition.

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This is an extremely helpful book for thinking through the questions concerning how Christians should relate to the culture at large. Rigney weaves together the works of Lewis, Wilson, Edwards, and Augustine to present a fresh approach to living in the fulness of God's good creation and

enjoying every bit of it. I "amen'd" at the end of every chapter. So buy it and come be liberated from the false guilt that says you cannot enjoy the good things that God has given to us like art and food and reading and movies. I heartily recommend this fantastic book!

Makes me want to sing with all my senses the prayer of this book with gratefulness to our triune God: "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."

Great read for one desiring to understand truth.

Such a great book! Every Christian should read this! It's a game changer! You will be both challenged and encouraged! Finding joy in all this STUFF we are surrounded by and being grateful to the Giver of said gifts is such a sweet blessing.

Madness in MethodThe premise of *The Things on Earth* concerns the Christian's ability to enjoy the good gifts of God, specifically the material gifts of the here and now. Frankly, I am somewhat surprised that a full length treatment of this concept is necessary as Scripture is quite clear on this subject. Scripture does speak of spiritual gifts and the superiority of the higher gifts of God and Christ over those which are material and temporary. In the wake of The Fall, man's enjoyment of material blessings given through common grace has become sinful and defiled. Likewise, our capacity to recognize and properly enjoy the higher things is nearly impossible without the special grace given through the Holy Spirit. While the latter are clearly higher than the former, enjoyment of the material was never intended to be so devalued as to lead to the asceticism initiated by Origen. For the Christian living in the now-but-not yet dialectic of inaugurated eschatology there is a tension between our fallen capacity to flawlessly and completely love God supremely and enjoying material things directed at the "self." There are many approaches to dealing with this tension. One is to try to solve it in our lives and the other is to recognize that we live with this tension that will not be resolved until the final consummation. Joe Rigney attempts the former and in doing so builds an argument based upon flawed doctrine, scripture exegesis and logical flow. While admirable in intent, seeing a need to help Christians navigate these waters, it is a forced endeavor that becomes

heavily reliant upon select reading from works of men and not good reformed orthodox thinking. The madness in the method does not translate into a method in the madness, leaving the conclusions suspect and creating a paradigm that rests on rice paper. Rigney's solution harmonizing these competing tensions is along the lines of Piper's Christian Hedonism. If in some way we can learn to enjoy the material gifts properly (thankfully, prayerfully and God-centered) then we experience their true joy, honor God, somehow participate in the sanctification of creation and have no reason for guilt. However, the theological and exegetical basis behind this conclusion is weak. Furthermore, it opens the door to a semi-Pelagian approach that places the burden upon us to somehow muster up the faith and right spiritual attitude. While this was not the author's intent it is a logical potential outcome which can result in more guilt and disappointment. I wish to outline several problem areas:

- 1) The Premise and Religious Affections
- 2) Analogy of Being over the Analogy of Faith
- 3) Trinitarian Theology
- 4) Scriptural Exegesis
- 5) Cross-centeredness

As we go through these keep in mind Paul's message to the Philippians from prison: "Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content." (4:11).

1) The Premise: In the introduction, the author gives some examples of Christians who desire to spend more time in Christian duty but find that they are drawn away either by the understandable demands of life or by the desire to enjoy other things. Someone may feel guilty because they chose to go to a movie rather than study their Bible. Frankly, this is not the big problem facing the church. Indeed, it is quite the opposite. We live in one of the most Scripturally illiterate and theologically uneducated periods of the Church. Our young people are inundated by false secular teaching, have lost the capacity to reason and think logically and Biblically and their ignorance of Scripture and truth impairs seriously their ability to discern truth from error. This forms the fertile ground for the decline of the true Church and the rise of apostate churches and false teaching from the pulpit. If there were a pressing need in the Church, it is for people to be MORE dedicated to Scripture study. I would argue that if someone properly understood God's Word they would not have the "struggle" illustrated by these examples. This has me wonder if this treatise is really aimed at the true student of Scripture or those who have this false notion of "being sold out for Christ." Perhaps it is the very foundation of what they are being taught is incorrect. The author is a student of Jonathan Edwards yet he fails to address this fundamental problem using Edward's important work "Religious Affections." Edwards wrote this treatise during the first Great Awakening in response to what he saw as emotional reactions to dynamic preaching that led

to little true fruit. The treatise was written for personal self-examination and not judgement of others. In this treatise one finds true religious affects derive from a heart changed by God giving rise to new person who naturally and progressively desires the things of God. Rather, I am left with the impression that this book will appeal to those who truly do not desire the things of God as Edwards describes true religious affections, but to those who are looking for a loophole to somehow justify their worldly affections guised as Christian Hedonism.2) Analogy of Being. The fundamental flaw of the author's approach is his placing the analogia entis (analogy of Being) above the analogia fidei (analogy of faith). This will distort his Trinitarian discussions in the analogia relationis (analogy of relations). The author draws mainly from creation and as we shall see in the final section this creates a distorted view of the problem and solution akin to the error of the Catholic Church. Karl Barth and his contemporaries worked out the dogmatic implications and reasonably made the analogia entis and analogia relationis subservient to the analogia fidei. As applicable here, Christ's life and work on the cross must be a supreme basis upon which we approach and understand these issues. Grounding the work mainly in creation can lead to an imbalance.3) Trinitarian Relations: The author does a fine job of describing the nature of the Trinity as one of

perichoresis (mutual indwelling). The same concept can be used with regards to the attributes of God. The author errs, however, when he extends this model to God's relationship with man. This is a major error. The idea of perichoresis was developed as a technical term to help people understand the concept of God's simplicity. How can a pure simple being seem so complex and difficult to grasp? How can there be three persons in one Being? How can a simple Being have so many attributes that seem to be in conflict yet perfectly harmonize in God? Another way of putting it is "unity in diversity and diversity in unity" calling upon the philosophical concepts of "difference" and "distinction." Truth is that we cannot truly fathom this and are forced to create technical terms and models. Where this author errs is his claim that in Christ we somehow enter into this "perichoretic Trinitarian union" and the term can be applied to us. Again, Barth explored these concepts as did our Presbyterian Theologians. The concept of perichoresis is useful when we are dealing with a simple Being that has three persons. The problem with conceiving of the Christian as being somehow incorporated into this essence involves the simple fact that God and man remain 2 different and distinct beings and persons at all times. God is three persons in one being and Christ

two beings in one person. The Christian can be neither of these. Barth pondered on the mystery of how we participate in the Trinitarian life of God in and through Christ but never went so far as to say we become incorporated into the very essence of God. The concept of mysterious union in Christ respects these important points. This error leads to the false assertion by the author that we can somehow enjoy the things of earth guilt free in a perichoresis. This sounds like the influence of naturalism and pantheism and undermines the author's thesis.⁴) Exegesis: I am also troubled by the author's exegesis. On page 71 he engages in an analysis of Pr. 24:13-14: My son, eat honey, for it is good, and the drippings of the honeycomb are sweet to your taste.¹⁴ Know that wisdom is such to your soul; if you find it, there will be a future, and your hope will not be cut off. The author then writes, "Why did God make honey so tasty and sweet? So that we would have some idea what wisdom is like (at least, that's one reason). This text does not permit one to draw such a conclusion concerning God's purpose in creating honey. The author is clearly practicing eisegesis (reading his own ideas into the text). The proverb is set in Hebraic parallelism wherein verse 14 amplifies and builds upon verse 13. It is poetic in nature and uses metaphor and analogy to make a point about the sweetness of wisdom. It draws upon the common experience to teach about something more abstract and higher. Eisegesis is an error committed when one tries to force their paradigm upon the text in search of further support. This harks back to the author's emphasis on the analogia entis and creation as the main basis of supporting his paradigm. Unfortunately, such practice renders suspect the conclusions and the utility of the pastoral advice.⁵) What is notable missing from much of the argument is the Cross. The author understands about the effect of sin on our relationship with God and on our relationship with nature. He understands the consequences of the Fall on nature. He also understands how men are saved (Sola Gratia; Sola Fide; Solus Christus; and Soli Deo Gloria) (Grace Alone; Faith Alone; Christ Alone; and To God Alone Be Glory). However, he does not properly apply the implications of this salvation to the problem at hand. The cross is the solution to the problem and should be the grand center of this discourse. Christ did not give his life on the Cross so that we could somehow muster up enough faith and proper understanding and attitude to be saved and to sanctified. He did not do this so we could avoid committing sin. He died to cover our sins. His substitutionary atonement means that all our sins, past, present and future, are paid for. We are supposed to rest in that great gift but also stand in awe of its great cost: the life of the Son. How does this apply to our enjoying the things of the earth? In objection to Rigney I would

contend that it is impossible for any Christian living in the Church age to perfectly obey any of the commandments especially the first. Martin Luther clearly understood this and he was 100% correct. What Luther did not understand. What led him to futile asceticism and extreme

“monkery” was that we are not saved by keeping the commandments but in spite of our inability to keep them. The author is correct when he points out that the strict concept of loving God with all our heart, mind and strength, excludes almost every other direction of our affections. Simply eating a meal, the savor of the taste or even the satisfaction of the basic needs of hunger and thirst, naturally detract from our ability to obey the first commandment. The author will go on to solve this apparent paradox by setting up a paradigm wherein our “hedonism” properly done is, in fact, fulfilling the first commandment. It is not. It is the same error in logic that led the Rabbis in Jamnia (Yavneh) to reconstruct Judaism in such a manner that good works and study replace temple sacrifice. While we can live worshipful and thankfully we cannot live perfectly so. And Luther understood that given the nature of God nothing less than perfection, a goal impossible for us, is required by God. We need grace, we need forgiveness, we need Christ. The solution is not found in somehow merging and harmonizing from the order of creation a new paradigm or program to follow by which if we do this, that and with such and such attitude we need not have guilt nor worry about neglecting our Christian duty. I worry about this teaching and the adverse effect it will have. Who is it appealing to? Christ has already paid for our sins including the sins of failing to love God supremely, neighbor as our self, failure to do our Christian duty, missing Church, failing to pray as we ought and, yes, even failing to enjoy God’s good material gifts fully to his Glory! That is the point. The solution lay NOT IN US but IN WHAT CHRIST DID FOR US. The response of people in the Church to this unspeakable gift has ranged from the extreme asceticism of people who believe they must deny themselves to honor Christ to antinomians who live anyway they wish without regard for the great cost of their liberty. Both are wrong. I would advise that enjoying the things of the earth will always exist in the tension of the inaugurated eschatology of the Church age. We have to work out these things for ourselves “with fear and trembling.” We cannot solve it or resolve it. But we must live in awe of what Christ did, rejoice that our sins that we still commit often and daily are covered, and make our choices in both the light and Glory of the Cross and in the shadow of the cost. This tension will not go away until salvation is fully consummated at the end time and we are perfected, glorified in heaven. Until then the tension is a pedagogue. The Spirit is our comforter and guide. The tension is essential in our making real choices as true moral agents as we live our lives and conform to the image of Christ and made meet for heaven.

Don't try to resolve or solve it. It is not for you to do. For an excellent book on this matter I suggest "The rare Jewel of Christian Contentment" by Jeremiah Burroughs. It is mighty and beautiful exposition on Philippians 4:11 and will help those of us who live in a safe, affluent place understand true Christian joy and contentment. We are blessed.

Great read! Very insightful...gave me new eyes in which to treasure God with. How do you glorify God? By enjoying and delighting in Him and His creation which is a reflection of His goodness, beauty, wisdom, etc. Again, great read!

A great read exploring the idea of Christian liberty. Rigney does a great job explaining a right attitude toward enjoyment of creation. His treatment of the doctrine of the Trinity and sovereignty are also helpful.

Amazing book that compliments "Desiring God" by John Piper. If you struggle with guilt for enjoying the things of earth and feel all you should do is read your Bible and pray, this book is for you.

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