

The Positive Lifestyle

To the average man on the street Christianity is a negative. He interprets the Christian religion as a killjoy, ready to rob people of all the pleasures of life and replace them with a drab, grey existence. This is a sad state of affairs and, I fear, we Christians have generally or greatly contributed to this frame of mind.

How, you ask? Well, primarily by the things we say to nonbelievers. We tell them what we do not do because we are a Christian. It is so much easier to condemn an action of an unbeliever instead of identifying with him as a person. To inform a non-believer with a lecture about what “we do not do” is not witnessing to Christ. Instead, we must present the facts and the claims of Jesus Christ and the true fulfillment of life that he brings to those who believe in him.

Also, we convey a negativism by our own expressed attitudes that come from faulty teaching. To a large extent we have believed the devil's lies that Christians should not enjoy anything in life! In fact, he tells us that to do so would be worldly. Some feel so guilty that they equate all pleasure with sin. How tragic!

Certainly, there is a place for the negative emphasis. Whenever you have a positive, a negative is necessarily implied and vice versa- a negative implies a positive duty - our enjoyment. Actually, the scriptural emphasis is on the positive lifestyle that results from the work of God in our lives. We Christians need to accent the positive! When we do, so we enhance the meaning of our faith in God and bear a positive witness through the grace of God that is in Jesus Christ.

To illustrate what I'm talking about let's look at some of the 10 commandments. God says, “you shall not kill, you shall not steal, you shall not lie.” Where is the positive? The prohibition implies the kind of life we are to live. As believers in God, we are to value human life and seek to enhance it, we are to respect the right of private property and develop a true stewardship of our possessions. Also, we are to be men and women of truth and honesty.

Jesus himself taught us that we never truly obey the prohibition unless we do the good that God intended. This is why the scriptures summarize the law of God in two great commandments. “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart,

with all your soul, and with all your mind and with all your strength. This is the first and great commandment. The second is like it, you shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Mark 12:30-31). As Paul writes in Romans 13:10, Love is the fulfillment of the law. As Jesus inferred in his teachings, we have not truly obeyed a prohibition unless we do the good God intended. James writes, so it is sin to know the good and yet not do it. (James 4:17) Love is the fulfillment of the law.

Biblical love is not inward only, but in deed and action. To truly love God we will worship him, reverence his name, and give him prime time in our lives. To truly love our neighbor, we will seek his welfare and try to enrich his life because we've experienced that kind of love and acceptance from God ourselves.

A big word in the Bible is “holiness,” which implies among other things wholeness of life. And it means the integration of our total being around the person of God our Father. Jesus came not to place his people under a law curse but to set them free from it. We have been made free from the penalty and the guilt of sin. Christ wants us to also be free from its power and he has made ample provision for such liberty. It is found in the Holy Spirit who indwells believers and causes them to desire the things of God and seek to walk in conformity to his will.

In fact, the practice of ascetism – that is, self-denial of legitimate good things and pleasures in life in an effort to strive after holiness or appear pious in the eyes of others – the practice of ascetism is condemned by the Apostle Paul. He says in Colossians 2:18 & 23, “Let no one disqualify you, insisting on asceticism...” which has “an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh.”

He also writes in 1 Thessalonians 4:3-5, condemning those “...who forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. ⁴For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, ⁵for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer.”

When God had created the heavens and the earth and all that is in it, including man and woman, we read in Genesis 1:31 “And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good.” God’s creation is good; it demonstrates his wisdom and beauty and goodness. The problem is humanity’s sin which brought

corruption and death into the created order. Yet much of God's creation remains available for our enjoyment and delight. It is, in fact, a revelation of God and we should give thanks for all these things as we use and enjoy them in honoring God and praising him for his generous provision.

Here is the positive affirmation of Christianity. Man, humanity, was made for God. To truly be human and to enjoy the fullest potential of human life requires a right relationship with God the creator through Jesus Christ the Redeemer. When a person has come to know God and has the blessing of the life of God imparted to him, he can live. He can truly live for the glory of God, enjoying God and all the gifts of God to their fullest. Jesus said, "I am come that they might have life and that they might have it abundantly." What a Savior! What a life!

"Father, help us to enter into the great life you have given to us. We want to be effective witness bearers of Christ's work. To this end we ask you to aid us. May we stress not what we can't do but what we can do because of the liberty of love for God and others that you have imparted to us by your Holy Spirit. Amen.

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