

The Christian and Leisure

People in our generation have more free time than any previous generation. More people work less hours for more money than ever before. There is an affluence of time in which people may choose activities that are not directly related to their subsistence. We've gone from the 70-hour workweek to the 40 to 35 hour work week. As a result, the masses have more free time. In the past people built their schedules around their work but more and more in our society they build around their leisure time.

This state of affairs demands that Christians as responsible citizens of the Kingdom of God should develop a biblical ethic for leisure. Leisure time can be defined as "optional time in which a person can make his own choices of things to do." In other words, this is time left over after our obligations are met.

Evidently people don't know how to use their leisure time and it has become a curse as well as a blessing. Largely we have been unprepared for the leisure time we have and as a result people fill up the time with trivial activities and busyness. This has resulted in an obvious boredom that plagues modern people. Too many people, Christian and non-Christian alike, spend their leisure time as a busy activity time!

There are at least two common misconceptions among Christians regarding leisure time. **One is idea that we must always be busy producing and working.** It is true that the Bible condemns idleness. As an example Paul wrote in 2 Thessalonians 3:10-11, *For even when we were with you, we would give you this command: If anyone is not willing to work, let him not*

eat. ¹¹ For we hear that some among you walk in idleness, not busy at work, but busybodies.

Nevertheless, this exhortation does not call for constant busyness. Even God rested after the six days of creation. Genesis 1:31, "God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day." **2:1-2** Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. ² And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done." His was the rest of contemplation and enjoyment of what his hands had made. In other words, it was a rest of leisure for his enjoyment of what he had accomplished.

A second misconception is that pleasure is wrong. Now this is often the reason believers become victims for busy work in their spare time. But very often the activity is neither restful nor recreative. Someone has rightly said Christians "know how to work and to worship but do not know how to play". Again Paul writes to Timothy (6:17) regarding the rich, "... charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy." Here is the point: God richly provides us with everything to enjoy the creation and all of his common blessings, including relationships and the wonders of the natural world. C S Lewis in his book *Screwtape Letters* imagines a senior demon advising a junior demon on how to successfully tempt a Christian regarding pleasure. *"Never forget that when we are dealing with any pleasure in its healthy and normal and satisfying form, we are, in a sense, on the enemy's ground. I know we have won many a soul through pleasure. All the same, it is his invention, not ours. He made the pleasures: All our research so far has not enabled us to produce one. All we can do is to encourage the humans to take the pleasures which our enemy has produced, at times, or in ways, or in degrees, which he has forbidden.. Hence, we always try to work*

away from the natural condition of any pleasure to that in which it is least natural, least suggestive of its Maker, and least pleasurable.

I think Lewis has expressed a truth. This can free us from false guilt. After all, those united to Christ Jesus by faith are destined for eternal pleasures. The psalmist writes, "You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore (Psalm 16:11)."

What then is the answer to these common misconceptions?

It is important that Christians develop a leisure ethic based on biblical principles. We must guard against a legalistic attitude toward leisure time. Here are some principles to help guide us.

The first principle is that Christ is Lord of all of our time. A Christian is never off duty from God. Our faith touches every aspect of our lives. Therefore, whatever the Christian chooses to do in his leisure time it must be done to the glory of God. Paul writes, *Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him* (Colossians 3:17).

A second principle is that the Christian's time as well as his money and his abilities is part of his stewardship. Although we have free time from the demands of work, we're not free from responsibility. Accordingly, we must look upon our leisure time as a new resource for us to subject to the Lord of life and the Lord of beauty. He expects us to enjoy life and the beauty of his handiwork.

Thirdly, believers need to learn to play again without feelings of guilt from the spontaneity and the pleasures of recreation. This is part of

God's way of rebuilding our personal batteries of life. A break from the routines contributes to mental health.

In summary, God is the creator of beauty and of enjoyment. He has given us all things as Christians to enjoy. *For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, ⁵ for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer.* (1 Timothy 4:4-5)

God himself derives pleasure from our proper use and enjoyment of his creation. Solomon counsels us, *There is nothing better for a man than that he should eat and drink and that he should make his soul enjoy good in his labor. This also I saw was from the hand of God.* Ecclesiastes 2:24. Paul describes God as he who richly provides us with everything for *our enjoyment!* (1 Timothy 6:17b).

Certainly, our Christian sense of stewardship means that we will be active redeeming the time, in the sense of making good use of our leisure hours and resources. We must learn how to build ourselves up constructively and to listen to the Lord of time as he directs our paths besides the quiet or the still waters. Listen to the call of Jesus Matthew 11:28 *Come to me all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest.*

Here are some words of the hymn by Edward Caswell:

*When morning gilds the sky,
our hearts awaking cry:
May Jesus Christ be praised!
in all our work and prayer
we ask his loving care:
May Jesus Christ be praised!*

Let us modify the words for a minute and sing, "...alike at work and play,
may Jesus Christ be praised!"

May the Lord Jesus receive glory as we learn to enjoy our leisure time and
employ it profitably for our restoration and his kingdom's advance.

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