

BIBLICAL INSIGHTS #94: CAN A CHRISTIAN HAVE FUN?

By John Temples

Can Christians have fun? Many think not. They might say:

“Christianity is serious and sacred business.” Yes, and some things should never be joked about or trivialized. But Ecclesiastes 3:4 says “...there is a time to LAUGH.”

“Having fun is wasteful and frivolous.” That is certainly true of some forms of fun, but not all forms. God made our bodies and minds to need recreation¹ and diversion. Even Jesus went to the desert or the mountains to rest and pray. He also hosted a cookout for His disciples at the seashore (John 21:1-14).

“The Bible condemns idle words.” Yes, it does, in Matthew 12:36. But what are “idle words”? H. Leo Boles wrote, “—“[Idle words] does not mean careless, innocent talk on subjects secular and social, and opposed to serious conversation. Rather it signifies wicked, malicious, injurious, slandering, impious words....This does not mean that a Christian cannot engage in innocent jesting and levity....A genial and pleasant gracefulness of conversation in social relations helps to adorn a Christian.” And Burton Coffman says, “Idle words are not necessarily those casual and insignificant sayings indulged in the course of social fellowship, nor such words as may be calculated to bring a smile to care-worn faces; but rather, they are the words that betray a bias of the soul against God and expose the evil heart of the sinner.”

“Jesus never laughed.” It is never recorded that He laughed; but if He never did, how come He was such a welcome guest at weddings and other social gatherings? And when you think about it, Jesus did and said some funny things:

- He sent two dignified disciples to fetch a donkey.
- He called James and John “sons of thunder.”

¹ As long as it is “RE-creation,” not “WRECK-creation.”

- He spoke of pompous Pharisees “straining out gnats and swallowing camels.”

The truth is, Christians don't have to always act like they were weaned on dill pickles and born in the provocative case and the kickative mood. We will have gloomy days, and sorrow will come into our lives; but the norm for a Christian is happiness and optimism. Peter said, “He who would **love life and see good days**...” (1 Peter 3:10). The word “joy” occurs 61 times in the New Testament; the word “rejoice” 47 times.

I am convinced that even God has a sense of humor. He created aardvarks and ducks, didn't He? And once in the Bible, God is said to laugh: “The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and against His anointed, saying, Let us break their bonds in pieces and cast away their cords from us. **He who sits in the heavens shall laugh**; the Lord will hold them in derision” (Psalms 2:2-4). I admit, though, that in this reference God is not laughing a laugh of levity; rather, He is laughing in amusement at the feeble attempts of men to rebel against Him.

And remember the parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15? A young man leaves home and falls into sin; then one day he returns home and begs forgiveness. What does the father do? He calls his servants and tells them, “Bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet. And bring the fatted calf here and kill it, and **let us eat and be merry**; for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found. And they began to make merry” (Luke 15:22-24). Who is the father in the parable who presides over the joyous feast? We all admit that he represents God!

God's own word teaches that innocent, clean fun is a good thing. Proverbs 17:22--“A merry heart does good, like medicine; but a broken spirit dries the bones.” And Ecclesiastes 11:9 says, “Rejoice, O young man, in your youth, and let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth.”

So yes, I believe it is good for Christians to engage in innocent levity and fun.

But as usual, people go to two extremes on this issue:

- All fun is wrong; or
- All wrong is fun.

As is often the case, the truth is in the middle. Yes, some activities are wrong for Christians to engage in, even though many of their worldly friends see no wrong in them. How do we know? Let me give you some Biblical guidelines--some questions to ask about any proposed or contemplated recreational activity:

Guideline #1: Does this activity violate any direct statement, command, or principle of Scripture? If so, that settles it. Galatians 5:19-21 is an important reference in this regard. It says, "Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, licentiousness, idolatry, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God." Notice that this list contains several things people have absolutely no problem with doing today:

- Adultery and fornication. The Greek word for fornication is *porneia*, which certainly points to pornography as well as all illicit sexual activity.
- Drunkenness.
- Licentiousness. The Greek word, *aselgeia*, means "Unbridled lust, excess, shamelessness; wanton acts or manners; filthy words, indecent bodily movements [dancing], unchaste handling of males and females" (Thayer's Greek Dictionary).
- Sorcery. The Greek is *pharmakeia*, a reference to the use of drugs, incantations, astrology, necromancy, witchcraft, and other practices of the occult.
- Revelries. Meaning carousings, feasts and drinking parties with sensual dancing (Greek *komois*).
- "And such like." This is the only "et cetera" in the Bible! So just because a particular activity is not specifically named in this list doesn't mean it's innocent or okay for Christians to do. There are two lists in Galatians 5--some works of the flesh and some fruit of the Spirit. Any recreational

activity you might think about engaging in should fall under the purview of one or the other of those lists. Just use common sense and see which one.

To repeat rule #1: If an activity violates a direct statement or principle of Scripture, then it cannot be on your list of fun things to do.

Guideline #2: Does this activity cause me to violate my conscience? Do I hesitate or have doubts about doing it? Romans 14:23 is the operative Scripture here. It reads (speaking of eating certain foods, but establishing a general principle), “But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because he does not eat from faith; for whatever is not from faith is sin.” Here is that text in the New Living Translation: “But if people have doubts about whether they should eat something, they shouldn’t eat it. They would be condemned for not acting in faith before God. **If you do anything you believe is not right, you are sinning.**”

Guideline #3: Does this activity harm my body or mind? 1 Corinthians 6:9 says your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. And verse 20 commands, “Therefore glorify God in your body.” So we should not imbibe any substance or do anything that numbs our judgment or harms our physical bodies.

Guideline #4: Is this activity addictive? Does it bring me under its power? Read 1 Corinthians 6:12--“All things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any.” And don’t go away saying, “Paul said everything is lawful for me.” The context shows clearly that he is speaking of eating certain foods. The general principle, though, comes forth clearly: anything that is addictive or has power over me is off limits.

Guideline #5: Does this activity necessitate or involve wearing immodest clothing? Paul says in 1 Timothy 2:8-10, “I desire then that in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarreling; likewise also that women² should adorn themselves in respectable apparel, with modesty and self-control, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly attire, but with what is proper for women who profess godliness—with good works.” That’s the English Standard

² And men, just because this passage singles out women, don’t think we are exempt from the need to appear modest. Everybody knows that in this age of Speedos and ultra-casual/sloppy attire, it’s possible for men to violate God’s standards of dress just as it is with women.

Version. The New Living Translations renders it, "In every place of worship, I want men to pray with holy hands lifted up to God, free from anger and controversy. And I want women to be modest in their appearance. They should wear decent and appropriate clothing and not draw attention to themselves by the way they fix their hair or by wearing gold or pearls or expensive clothes. For women who claim to be devoted to God should make themselves attractive by the good things they do."

Ever since man sinned in the garden of Eden, nakedness has been associated with shame in the sacred record. Someone said that he didn't know what Adam and Eve ate that led them to be ashamed to be naked, but he wished we could buy it in the grocery store today!

Guideline #6: If I participate in this activity, will it compromise my Christian influence? "Let us...resolve this, not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in our brother's way" (Romans 14:13). You will not convert sinners by participating in their sins with them. The father in the prodigal son parable loved his son and yearned for his return, but he never went down and wallowed in the hog pen with him.

Guideline #7: Does this activity take precedence over church attendance? We are commanded not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together (Hebrews 10:25). I realize that some scheduling conflicts are unavoidable (such as work). But others are purely our own choices. A "Christian" mother once told the preacher that her daughter was taking ballet lessons on Wednesday nights so she could learn to be more graceful. The preacher said, "I'd rather see her stumble and waddle into heaven like a duck than to dance gracefully into hell!"

You might be saying by now, "What is left that is fun to do?" Have you ever tried doing *nothing*? Meditation, contemplation, and relaxation are food for the body, mind, and spirit. Doing good works and kind deeds for Christ are very enjoyable activities. Rediscover good books! Have fellowship with other Christians. Go on picnics and walks. Play pingpong. Enjoy good music. Do crosswords. Take rides in the country. Watch wholesome entertainment.

Can a Christian have fun? I submit to you that Christians--those who enjoy God's world in wholesome and guilt-free activities--are the only people who have any **real** fun. --John Temples