

The Attitude of Christ Toward Pleasures

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WHAT do we mean by the term "pleasures"? Consulting the dictionary, it refers to all gratification of the senses and mind. Consulting the New Testament, and especially the gospels, we find spiritual joy and rejoicing stand out prominently, as for example: "Rejoice of great joy" (Luke 2:10), "Rejoice, because your names are written in heaven" (Luke 10:20), "That my joy might remain in you and that your joy might be full" (John 15:11), "Enter into the joy of the Lord" (Matt. 25:21), "Rejoice in that day and leap for joy for behold your reward is great in heaven" (Luke 6:23). This spiritual happiness stands out as the keynote of the Christianity as revealed in the gospel.

In our present treatment we use the term as it applies especially to our amusements, games, recreation, habits of pastime, and methods of entertaining our friends. These are questions which we have allowed to become of vital concern to us to-day. They have caused much and heated discussion, and about them we are receiving many enquiries on the part of our young people.

The attitude of Christ toward these is our subject. Not His teachings, for He gave us no specific teachings on these matters; nor His doctrines, for He pronounced none, and we doubt if He gave any serious thought as to what amusements His followers might indulge in. He was concerned about principles which possessed the heart and controlled the soul, and left details to look out for themselves. He said, "Seek first the Kingdom of God" (Matt. 6:33), and pleasures will not go far astray, and "Ye shall know the truth" (John 8:32). Freedom follows.

But He did recognize and give approval to the social and pleasure side of human nature.

First. By answering, with His presence, an invitation to a marriage feast, and joining in celebrating this happiest event in human life.

Second. By His references to festive occasions, and illustrating the Kingdom of God thereby, as in Luke 14:16-24.

He also recognized the dangers in connection with this side of human life, as we see from His parable of the sower (Luke 8:14), where He shows that some lives become fruitless on account of the "pleasures of this life" choking out the word which they had received.

From the above references as to His attitude in these matters, and especially from His presence and miracle at the marriage feast, we feel that it is safe to base our conduct in the pleasure side of our life on a satisfactory answer to the following questions:

First. Are they consistent with the presence of Christ?

Some years ago one of our young Leaguers went from her home in a country town to visit her married sister in an American city. The sister, who was also a professing Christian, took her to a place of amusement to which she had been in the habit of going. The play that night was a little more extreme and questionable than usual. The young girl became agitated, and at length whispered to the other the startling question, "What if Jesus should walk in now?" The answer was quick and imperative: "Shut up! Do not mention such a thing!" but the girl persisted, and the older sister honestly faced the question and saw how unwelcome a visitor her Saviour would be at that moment, in that place. The result was that they both left before the play was ended and the desire to return was gone.

Second. Are they consistent with health—physical, mental, moral and spiritual?

We cannot think of Christ as supplying anything but the purest, most wholesome and life-giving wine in His miracle at Cana. And what He would supply of pleasure for the mind and soul would be of the same standard. Mrs. Wesley's advice to her son John puts the matter in a nutshell: "Would you judge of the lawfulness or unlawfulness of pleasure, take this rule: Whatever weakens your reason, impairs the tenderness of your conscience, obscures your sense of God, or takes off the relish of spiritual things

embarrassment of the host and to supply the need of the guests. Pleasures that are for our own enjoyment only are usually without joy when they are over, and pleasures that deprive others of pleasure cannot leave joy in our own lives.

(2) Is the example good?

This is a phase of the question that should not be passed over lightly. Many a young man or woman has engaged in questionable amusements, which have afterwards lead to actual sin, simply because they followed the example of some older person who saw "no particular harm" in the thing which they allowed. Many a young person has lost faith in that older one whom they saw doing the things which were doubtful.

Paul's rule applied in a different connection is a good one here: "If meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no meat while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend" (1 Cor. 8:13).

We repeat again that the first and essential thing is a right relationship to Christ, and full acceptance of His great principles; then the details of life will all tend in the right direction.

We have stood on the lake shore and watched the sail-boats crossing the sheet of water, some going one way and some the opposite. What caused the difference?

"One ship drives east and the other drives west."

By the selfsame wind that blows;

'Tis the set of the sails and not of the gales
That tells which way it goes."

So it is with the pleasure side of our lives. It is "set of the soul" that decides whether we shall follow the things that strengthen and help and have permanent

blessing, or those which weaken and are followed by disappointment and regret.



WEST GALLERY, METROPOLITAN CHURCH, TORONTO.

—in short, whatever increases the strength and authority of your body over your mind, that thing is a sin to you, however innocent it may be in itself.

Third. Are they consistent with their cost in time and money?

Perhaps there is no question that pleasure seeking Christians should face more seriously than this one. A recent writer calls for the "Simplification of life." He thinks that our fashions and fads, our feasts and functions all need simplifying. When the demands of God's Kingdom for the salvation of the world are so urgent on every hand, it surely is not consistent that the followers of Christ should spend large sums of money on a dinner or precious time in cultivating new desires for pleasure and inventing new ways of gratifying them.

Fourth. How do they affect others?

This question has two sides to it:

(1) Are they selfish?

Christ's part in adding to the enjoyment of the feast was to relieve the

Tommy had been quiet for fully five minutes. He seemed to be engaged with some deep problem.

"Papa," he said.

"Well?"

"Do unto others as you would have others do unto you,—that's the Golden Rule, isn't it, papa?"

"Yes, my son."

"And it's puffykly right to follow the Golden Rule, isn't it, papa?"

"Yes, indeed."

Tommy rose went to the cupboard, and returned with a large apple pie. The latter he placed before his astonished sire with great solemnity.

"Eat it, papa!" he said.

The Golden Rule