

Amusements

by J.R. Miller

A Christian's life should be characterized by a balance between seriousness and joy, and they should seek to provide true and holy pleasures for themselves and others.

Scripture: Psalm 16:11, Proverbs 17:22, Ecclesiastes 3:12-13, Matthew 11:28, John 10:10, Romans 14:17, 1 Corinthians 10:31, Galatians 5:22-23, Ephesians 5:16, Colossians 3:17

Topics: "Joy in Christianity", "Balance of Amusement and Responsibility"

Description

J.R. Miller emphasizes the importance of amusement in the Christian life, arguing against the notion that all forms of pleasure are sinful. He highlights that true Christian joy reflects the character of Christ, who, despite his sorrows, embodied joy and did not frown upon innocent pleasures. Miller asserts that while Christians should engage in proper amusements that rejuvenate and uplift, they must also be discerning, ensuring that their choices align with their spiritual growth and moral standards. He encourages believers to create and participate in wholesome activities that foster joy and community, rather than condemning all forms of amusement. Ultimately, Miller calls for a balanced approach to life that integrates joy with responsibility, reflecting the true essence of Christian living.

Transcript

"So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do--do it all for the glory of God." 1 Corinthians 10:31

"And whatever you do, whether in word or deed--do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him." Colossians 3:17

"Redeeming the time, because the days are evil." Ephesians 5:16

Any man is a cynic--who condemns all amusements as evil and inconsistent with the truest Christian life. Such teaching might have been accepted in the days of 'monkish' sternness and rigor, when piety meant contempt for all the joys and pleasures of life, when devotees attempted to merit salvation by macerating their flesh, by breaking the chords of natural affection, and by spurning every happy experience as sinful. To them, holiness--was moroseness; and self-inflicted pain--was a sweet savor to God; and pleasure--was sin. There are also phases of undoubted piety in these days, in which similar abnormal developments of Christian life have appeared either as the result of devotion to some stern doctrine--or produced by the sore stress and strain of existence, under which gladness died away and life became hard and colorless, in its very intensity.

In many lives, misconceptions of the true ideal of Christian character have tended to harsh views regarding 'pleasure'. The loyal and earnest Christian, seeks ever to imitate Christ. Our conceptions of his character and life reproduce themselves, therefore, in our ethics and living. A somber Christ--makes a somber religion! A joyous and joy-approving Christ--produces a sunny religion!

It has been said from time immemorial, that Jesus never smiled. The prevalent misconception of him has been of a man clothed in deep sorrow, grief-laden, tearful, on whose face--no ripple of gladness ever played. Wherever this misconception has prevailed, it has colored the lives of all who sought closely to follow Christ. The result has often been a gloomy religious spirit which sought to repress its natural joy. Mirth has seemed irreverent, and all amusements have been regarded as incompatible with sincere piety.

But as men have read more deeply into the heart and spirit of the gospel, this view of Christ has been found to be superficial. Amid all his sorrows, under all the deep shadows that hung over his life, Christ ever carried a heart of joy. Exteriorly, his life was hard and full of grief--but the hardness did not crush his spirit. He did not carry his griefs in his face. His heart was like one of those fresh-water springs that burst up in the midst of the sea--ever sweet under all the salt bitterness.

Wherever he moved there were joy and gladness. Not one harsh or cynical word ever fell from his lips. He did not frown upon the children's plays, upon the marriage festivities, or upon the sweet pleasures of home. A gracious joyfulness plays over nearly every chapter of his blessed life.

The true conception of Christ's character, is of a deeply serious man, earnest, thoughtful, living an intense life--but never somber, gloomy or cynical. The deep earnestness of his character, shined through to his life--with a quiet joy, and the calm steady light of a holy peace. Wherever this conception prevails--it gives its lovely color, its sunny brightness, to the lives of those who love and worship Christ. It unbinds the iron fetters of 'ascetic' piety. It does not make men boisterous. It tames wild nature. It represses excessive levity. It makes life earnest and serious, charging it with a deep consciousness of responsibility. But it does not restrain the innocent play of nature. It does not put out the light of joy.

There is no inconsistency between holiness--and sincere laughter. It is no sin--to smile. Indeed, a somber religion is unnatural. Gloom is morbidity. Our lives should be sunny and songful. The Christian religion of the New Testament, is joyous even amid sorrows. There is not a tinge of ascetic severity or misanthropic hardness in any of the saints whose pictures are preserved. We hear songs in the night.

There is a flower that is most fragrant when the sun has set--and in the darkness pours its richest aroma on the air. Just so does true religion grow in sweetness--as shadows deepen.

He misrepresents Christianity and the likeness of the Master--whose piety is cold, rigid, colorless, joyless--or who frowns upon innocent gladness and pure pleasure.

True Christlike piety does not, therefore, condemn all amusements. It does not look with disapproval upon the sports of the children or call youth's glad-heartedness sinful. There are proper amusements, in which the truest Christian may indulge, without grieving Christ--even enjoying his gracious blessing and conscious of his presence! It is not my intention to designate specifically, what amusements are proper for a Christian. I will only attempt to lay down certain general principles relating to the subject. This is all that the Scriptures do, leaving the responsibility of discrimination, upon the individual conscience.

The NECESSITY for amusement and recreation, is written in our nature. No man or woman can endure the incessant strain of hard and intense life, day after day, month after month--without some relaxation. God ordained sleep, the Sabbath, and home--as quiet resting-places in which we may pause and build up--what toil and care and struggle have torn down. And we need, not rest only--but pleasure also--to unbind for a little the stiff harness of duty, to relax the strain of responsibility, and to lubricate the joints of life. All work and no play--makes older people; as well as 'Jack', dull. One who reads Luther's private and home life, and sees how he could laugh and how he played with his children even when carrying the greatest burdens, learns where he found much of the inspiration for his gigantic toils, and stern and herculean tasks.

It is necessary for all earnest and busy people--to have seasons of relaxation and diversion. But to what extent may we indulge? Life has its duties and responsibilities, and these we must never neglect. If we must give account for every idle word we speak--must we not also for every idle moment--and for every wasted moment?

How far, then, are we at liberty to spend time in amusement or relaxation? Clearly, only so far as it is needed to give us required rest--and to fit us for the most efficient work. It is right to sleep; but when we give more time to sleep than is necessary to restore tired Nature, to "knit up the raveled sleeve of care," and to fit us for duty--we become squanderers of precious time!

The same principle must be applied to time spent in any kind of relaxing pleasure, however innocent. Life--is not play! Life--is very serious. It has its responsibilities and duties, which press at every point, and fill every day and hour. He who would succeed in the exciting life of today, cannot afford to lose a moment. Every hour must be made to count. And he who would fill up the measure of responsibility implied in consecration to God--must redeem the time--every moment! Amusements are lawful, therefore, only so far as they are necessary to reinvigorate life's wasted energies; or to put fresh buoyancy and elasticity into powers, which are wearied or worn by the strain of physical or mental toil.

Amusement is not an end--but a means. It is not life's object--but a help along the way. It is not the goal--but the cool bower, or the bubbling spring--on the stiff, steep mountain-side. This distinction is vital--and must not be overlooked by those who would so live as to please God.

Then, as to the KIND of amusements in which we may lawfully engage, there are several equally clear principles to be observed. At the very outset, whatever is in itself sinful--carries its own condemnation on its face!

A Christian is never to indulge in sin. No necessity of relaxation can ever give license to anything that conflicts with the pure morals of the gospel. A Christian is never off duty; he is never to do anything inconsistent with the purity of Christian living. No combination of circumstances can make him blameless, in violating the principles and precepts of Christianity. These are just as binding on Tuesday or Thursday evening--as on Sunday. Amusements, as well as books, speech, business and all conduct--must be brought to the bar of the highest Christian morality.

True religion and common life are not two different and distinct things. We may not cut our existence in two parts and say, "Over this Christ shall rule--but over that He shall have no control." True religion knows no difference between Sunday and Monday, so far as the ethics of life are concerned. Each day brings its own specific duties--but there are not moral precepts for the one--which are suspended when its sun sets--that for six days a mitigated or less holy law may prevail. Holiness is to be the Christian's dress all

the week through--in every hour's conduct. All pleasures and amusements must be tested by the unvarying rule of right. The standard of perfect purity--cannot be lowered!

It is the fashion to laugh at criticisms upon certain forms of amusements, made on moral grounds. But for a Christian, there is nothing which must not be tested by the severest rules of purity. All immodest exhibitions, all improprieties of attitude which would in ordinary associations be condemned, all forms of pleasure in which lurks even the suggestion of impurity--must by this principle be excluded from the class of amusements which are proper for one who would closely follow Christ.

A further test which seems just and reasonable--is a reference to the spirit of Christ's own life. This is to be the Christian's guidance in all things. The earthly life of Christ--is the copy set for us. It is a safe and true thing to test every separate act, and to ascertain our duty in every uncertain moment--by asking, "What would Jesus do--if He were in our place?" All Christian living--is but following Him. Where He will not lead us--we must not go! As we have seen, He does not frown upon pure and innocent pleasures. He went Himself, when He was on the earth, to places of enjoyment and festivity. He attended a marriage-feast and contributed to the gladness of the guests. He accepted invitations to family feasts. There is not a trace of asceticism in all the story of His life. And He would do the same--if He were here now! Pleasures that are pure, innocent and helpful, or that contribute to the joy and good of others--He would enjoy. And what He would do if He were in our place--we, as His followers, may do!

But there are amusements in which we may be sure that He would not indulge. A tender spiritual instinct will readily discriminate between those in which He would--and those in which He would not engage. This seems a reasonable and legitimate test for us, His followers.

Then there is another test. The one great business of Christian living--is godly character-building. The aspiration of every earnest Christian, is to grow every day in holiness and spirituality. This motive is to rule all life. Our business, our associations, our friendships, are all to be chosen--with reference to this one object. Anything that tarnishes the luster of our spirituality, or hinders the development of our Christian graces, or breaks the inner peace of our hearts, or interferes with our communion with God--is harmful and must be excluded from among the circumstances of our lives!

The question as to which amusements are proper--and which are improper for us--each one must answer for himself. Questions continually asked of pastors and recognized Christian guides, are such as these, "Is it right for a Christian to dance? Or may he attend the theater or opera or circus, or play cards?" The true way to answer such questions, is by an honest appeal to experience. What is the influence of such amusements, on our spiritual life and character? Is prayer as sweet, as welcome, as helpful--after we have partaken in the specific amusement? Do we return to prayer, from the hours passed in such pleasures--with the same eagerness, the same desire, as before? Do we find our communion with God as sweet, as restful, as uplifting? Do we retain the warmth and glow of heart, that we felt before the amusement? Or do our amusements mar our peace, and interrupt our enjoyment of the divine presence? Do they unfit us for devotion? Do we find our hearts made cold and distracted by them? Do they chill our ardor in Christian work? At what times in our life do we care most--for such pleasures? Is it when our piety is at its best, when love is most fervent, and zeal most earnest? Does the young Christian, in the warmth and glow of his first love--care for these things? Do they, in our experience, promote our spirituality, and fit us for higher spiritual usefulness?

This is the experimental test. All the circumstances about us, are educating influences, and whatever is injurious to piety, whatever lowers godly character--is not proper or right, as a means of enjoyment or amusement.

True and rational amusements are a great force in educating and building character. All pure joy is helpful. All pure art leaves its touch of beauty. Pure music sings itself into our hearts, and becomes thenceforward and forever--a new element of power in our life. Pure laughter makes life sunnier. It sweeps the clouds from the sky, shakes off many a care, smooths out many a wrinkle--and dries many a tear. Pure pleasure sweetens many a bitter heart--fountain, drives away many a gloomy thought and many a hobgoblin shape of imagined terror, and saves many a darkened spirit from despair.

"A cheerful heart is good medicine; but a crushed spirit dries up the bones." Proverbs 17:22. Not the least highly-gifted men--are those to whom God has imparted the talent of pure humor--that they may make others laugh. Sanctified wit has a blessed mission. Life is so hard, so stern, with so many burdens and struggles, that there is need for all the bright words we can speak.

The most wretched people in the world--are those who go about in 'sackcloth', carrying all their griefs in their faces--and casting shadows everywhere! Every Christian should be a happiness-maker. We need a thousand times more joy in our lives--than most of us get. We would be better men and women--if we were happier.

We need, most of us, to plan more pleasures, especially more home pleasures. Busy men need them; weary, worried women need them, glad-hearted children need them. There are amusements and relaxations, which do not tarnish the soul's purity--or chill the ardor of devotion--or break our fellowship with heaven--but which refine, exalt, purify, enlarge and enrich life!

Much harm has been done in the past, by the indiscriminate condemnation of all amusements; while nothing has been provided to take the place of those amusements which are harmful. The absolute necessity of relaxation of some kind--must be kept in mind. God has made us--needing mirth. Men will have amusements of some kind. And in this, as in all other reforms, the truest and wisest method is not to condemn and cut off all amusements, leaving nothing; but to provide true and holy pleasures--and let these win hearts away from the impure, and the hurtful amusements.

It was a maxim of Napoleon's, "To replace is to conquer." Let Christian parents and Christian people in a community, provide pure, healthful, and profitable entertainments for the young--and these will gradually and insensibly uproot and replace those which are pernicious and injurious. There is no other true and effective way! This is as much the duty of Christian leaders--as to preach sermons and conduct Sunday-schools. Otherwise, while one day's religious services bring help and purity to the lives of the people and the children--six days of worldly pleasures will more than undo all the good. Let Christian men and women quietly institute in every community, such means of enjoyment as shall combine pleasure and profit--and thus the harmful shall be replaced.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/jr-miller/amusements/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net