

The Heart of the Matter

Lesson 17: The Christian's Attitude Toward Leisure

1. The Age of Leisure

While most of the world must work long and strenuous hours to eke out a living, America's technological expertise has made life easier for us. Industrialization has largely freed us from the burdens of manual labor, and we have both the time and the energy to pursue other amusing and entertaining aspects of life.

2. The Need for "Downtime"

Actually, the Bible says very little specifically on the subject of recreation and leisure. To be honest, what is said often points out the evil side of self-indulgence and frivolity. Nevertheless, the need for rest and rejuvenation is acknowledged in the Scriptures:

After Jesus empowered and commissioned the twelve to travel about Galilee and preach the kingdom, they *"gathered to Jesus and told Him all things, both what they had done and what they had taught. And He said to them, 'Come aside by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while'"* (Mark 6:30-31).

The duties of life, whether secular, spiritual or domestic endeavors, are mentally, physically and emotionally taxing. It is self-evident that the human being needs periodic respite from outside demands, and those who cannot or will not pursue such often suffer from unrelieved stress. How one spends his leisure time is a matter of personal judgment, but some guiding principles need to be kept in mind.

3. Principles of All Non-specified Activities

The word of God does not attempt to specify each and every activity in which a

human being may be engaged. Such a list would be endless and would need continual updating as new activities are created by men. The Scriptures do, however, present various principles which must be applied to leisure or other activities not specifically covered.

1) Our leisure activities cannot violate principles of morality. Frequenting strip clubs and indulging in pornography would obviously violate principles of purity and decency.

2) Our leisure activities must be kept in perspective: *"... exercise yourself rather to godliness. For bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come"* (1 Tim. 4:7-8). Perhaps we need to evaluate how much time we spend on our physical body – toning, tanning, pedaling, lifting, etc. – in comparison with the exercise of our mind and spirit.

3) Our leisure or recreational activity, while innocent enough, must not be allowed to undermine our spiritual health. Competitiveness, especially in men, can be an enjoyment and stimulation. Many like to be challenged to do their best, to face opposition and overcome it through mental or physical expertise. This is the basis for most sports activities. But competitiveness can very easily get out of hand, leading to taunting, disparagement, profanity, and even grudges and hatred. We must be careful that winning and losing does not sinfully overwhelm the joy of competition itself. (How many college programs have been in trouble due to a "win at all cost" attitude?) If we cannot control our passions, any activity that threatens our eternal welfare should be abandoned.

4) Leisure activities must remain a moderate past time, not an idol that dominates our schedule and finances. Family obligations are sometimes neglected because dad spends too much time in the boat, tree stand or golf cart. Mom's favorite past time may be frivolous shopping, forcing dad to work overtime to pay for her prees.

5) It should go without saying, but say it we must: Leisure and recreational activities are **NOT** within the scope of congregational responsibility. It is not for the church to build gymnasiums, provide sports equipment, fund teams, etc. We must not corrupt the spiritual body of Christ with our personal amusements.

4. Enhancing Our Relationships

Rightly engaged in, our games, sports, banquets, travels and other leisure activities can be occasions which enhance our relationships and spirituality. We can enjoy meaningful discussion and reflection while sharing such times together.

On the other hand, great care must be taken that such times of casual enjoyment do not become occasions of unholy attraction. Leisure activities are not occasions to relax dress codes or engage in risqué or suggestive "doublespeak." We may naively deny it, but much heartache has come from Christians sharing too intimate and familiar surroundings. We must always be on our guard, especially when "letting our hair down" and having a good time.

Questions for Discussion

1. What figures does Paul use in 1 Cor. 9:24-27 to encourage self-control?
2. To what is our quest for eternal life likened in Heb. 12:1?
3. How would you answer this argument: "It is sinful for a Christian to play cards, for cards are used in gambling. Playing cards projects the appearance of evil."
4. Discuss the view that watching graphic violence in movies or video games is harmless.
5. To what degree do I as a spectator at a sporting event support the sponsoring companies (racing has its "Winston Cup" and "Busch Series," golf has its "Johnny Walker Classic," etc.)? Does my patronage automatically make me a partaker of evil?