

HARMFUL POPULAR AMUSEMENTS

THE question is often asked: "What can a Christian do for enjoyment and recreation?" The only way to answer this properly is to search the Scriptures and determine God's standard for Christian living.

All that we do should be gauged by the plumb line of God's Word. That Word is our divine authority, and to God's Word we are responsible.

There are many things a Bible Christian can enjoy that are not harmful — things that are recreational, refreshing and inspiring. Especially enjoyable are activities with those whose chief desire is to please and honor the Lord.

If you, as a Christian, have a question in your mind about participating in any particular entertainment or amusement, the safest thing is to refrain from that which is doubtful. If you truly love the Lord you will not want to dishonor Him by your conduct in any way.

Think on These Things

Before taking part in any type of amusement, one should ask himself: Will this in any measure weaken my Christian character or place a stumbling block in the way of others? If I took part in it, who would be my associates: God-fearing people or those who would dishonor the Lord? Would it edify my brother or weaken him?

Paul, the great soul-winner, said: "All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not" (I Corinthians 10:23).

The mother of John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, said: "Whatever weakens your reason, impairs the tenderness of your conscience, obscures your sense of God, increases the strength and authority of your body over your mind — that thing is wrong."

Love Not the World The Bible gives this admonition:

"Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him" (I John 2:15).

This is speaking of things in the world that would lead you farther from God, not closer to Him. You cannot be enthralled with worldly, sinful pleasures and at the same time please God.

The Christian's responsibility is to represent Christ. If Christ would not do a certain thing, should you do it? If Christ would not be found in certain places, should you be there?

The house of God is the choice place for Christians to find genuine happiness. But even some churches have the audacity to introduce Satan's tools of entertainment in their place of worship. These things are excused and tolerated by terming them educational. Such a church may fail to discern the evil effects and harm that can follow until it is too late to remedy the damage done to eternity-bound souls.

Thrills Demanded

The world today is demanding more and more thrills. People seek to be entertained continually whether they be in the home or the church. While many frequent the dance halls, taverns and theatres, others view TV programs that excite their emotions.

A career of sin and a life of crime is mapped out for youngsters on TV screens and at movies they attend. After viewing demoralizing scenes and criminal acts, those who have evil tendencies can more easily put into action what their eyes have seen and what their mind desires to take place. Thus the rate of crime, including robbery and murder, continues to increase — and beyond that which authorities are able to handle. Our penal institutions and correctional

homes are crowded with young offenders of the law, numbers of them having stolen their "needed" cash for indulgence in cigarettes, drinks or dope.

The stage and the TV actors and actresses become youngsters' idols, after whom they pattern their lives and their mode of dress, whether it be decent or not. Immorality is played up as modern morality.

Smoking

The Bible explicitly declares that the body is the temple of God, in which the Spirit of God is to dwell, and we are not to defile this temple with anything unclean. (See I Corinthians 3:16, 17). This would include smoking along with other harmful habits.

Smoking tobacco is a form of addiction just as any drug addiction.

The harmfulness of cigarette smoking has been proven time and again. It has been directly connected with various diseases: cancer, emphysema, chronic bronchitis, heart disease. Publications keep us up-to-date on the latest findings concerning this.

"Pleasure Trips"

A great percentage of our youth have to find out for themselves the "high" sensation of using a drug just once; but the so-called pleasure "trips" taken through use of hard narcotics end in something far remote to pleasure.

In a shadowy world, somewhere between life and death, is where the hopeless addicts live. It is described as a "living death."

Drugs bring about unpredictable results: distortion of space and perception, loss of coordination, illusions, impairment of judgment and memory, loss of ambition and drive. The use of drugs has caused suicidal fantasies, self-mutilation, anti-social behavior and confusion. All of this is basically a mind-altering hallucinogen. And about 90 percent of teenage "hard" narcotic addicts started first on marijuana. How tragic that marijuana can be had in high schools today and even in grade schools!

The best advice to follow is, never start using any drug. Never let temptation cause you to participate in anything unclean or habit-forming. Don't compromise with anyone who tempts you to take the first step downward. Don't yield to such enticements as attending the first "pot" party, smoking just one cigarette, or taking just one drink in order to be sociable.

Anything that defiles the body and character can go farther than that. Unless one turns from these things, repents and gains the victory, the soul likewise is defiled; and in the end, comes eternal destruction.

Drinking

There are multitudes tempted to think "drinking" will bring pleasure, especially at parties and places of amusement. Millions of Americans are excessive drinkers. Probably most of them started by drinking a "social beer" or two that they said "would not hurt anybody," and thought they "could stop" if they wanted to. But most of them apparently never wanted to stop, and very likely could not have stopped even if they wanted to.

Night clubs and cocktail lounges, with drinking and dancing, have become the degrading haunts of pleasure for young and old.

As a result of the great increase in an indulgence in liquor, alcoholism has become a menace to health and character and our society. It is estimated that half the fatal auto accidents are caused by drinking drivers: How dangerous is that one social drink taken for pleasure on the spur of the moment!

Skating Rinks

Skating, in itself an innocent recreation, is often carried on under influences that are so detrimental to morality that the skating rink can be classed on a par with the dance hall. Many skaters perform and dress most immodestly and entirely out of keeping with Christian standards.

No one ever came out of a skating rink feeling closer to God, whether he was watching professionals perform in Ice Follies or participating in these places of amusement.

Skating is good exercise when it can be done in open areas in a wholesome atmosphere, rather than in rinks where association is questionable and not edifying.

There are athletic sports that students enjoy but it is important that a Christian not participate in professional games where betting and a wrong influence is evident. A harmless game of ball takes on a different nature when in the professional field and people are possessed completely by sports — sports of any kind.

Card playing and Gambling Devices

Card playing in years past was associated with card rooms in saloons, taverns and other places where men gathered to gamble. Today card playing has become common in the home, at parties and even in some church circles. Though this form of amusement may appear harmless when carried on among many in the home, card playing can lead to gambling and a multitude of evils. It often leads to quarrels, arguments, fights, and has even broken up homes. It becomes a mania to some people who consider it more necessary to entertain themselves than to take care of their family.

Why start your children playing that which may be considered "no harm," but which would cause them later to be tempted to play games not so innocent? A habit is easier prevented than broken after once formed.

Gambling can start, not only from cards but from other forms of amusements. In the places of business often is found the punch-board, bingo games, slot machines and other forms of gambling devices. People play for "stakes" in games of chance. Lotteries are gambling. Anytime you have to pay something for a chance, you are gambling.

Devastating evils can occur from any form of gambling.

Billiards and Bowling

Pool playing is something from which a Christian is delivered when he becomes a child of God. No born-again Christians will be found in pool halls and neither will they lead their children into such things by placing a pool table in their recreation room. Bowling and pinball machines take hold of people, too.

Why mingle with non-Christians in trying to amuse ourselves? Let us seek rather to please God and set a good example before those who know not Christ.

The billiard table and the bowling alley have contributed to drinking and gambling. The associates and the language of those who spend most of their time and money at the billiard table and in the bowling alley are not likely to be uplifting to the soul. Men rescued from lives of depravity have testified that their former enslavement started in such places.

As said before, harmful amusements and their evil effects rise from a small beginning: one game of cards, one game of pool, one drink, one smoke — just to be sociable.

All of these and many other things are lures held out by Satan to ruin souls and send them to hell.

Let us as Christians walk prayerfully and carefully and not be ensnared by the tempter.

Dancing

Many go into dancing with the idea that it gives them grace and charm, that it will be an asset in company, will make one popular, and so on.

If charm will compensate one for having lost the grace of God, if the grace and glamour of the flesh mean more to one than the simplicity and serenity of Christian qualities, perhaps one can find fleeting satisfaction in the atmosphere and environment of the dance hall. Much of the delinquency of youth takes place after dancing or attending the movies.

Some will say, "I would not think of attending a public dance, but I see no harm in the home dance and the select crowd." And this brings us to the scrutiny of the dance in itself. The fact is that dancing gives permission to assume postures that ordinarily would not be considered proper. Even in the so-called select parties, dancing permits a familiarity which would not be allowed in society elsewhere. And today drinking and dancing go hand in hand in the home. Even schools are giving dancing much time in their curriculum.

And there is also a much darker picture that could be truthfully painted of the dance evil. Young people by the thousands have attributed their downfall to the dance. It has been the testimony of many in houses of correction that the dance was the beginning of their forsaking the path of virtuous living.

Avoid All Evil

The Bible warns against many evils of this world and pointedly defines the works of the flesh:

". . . Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness,

"Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditious, heresies,

"Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God" (Galatians 5:19-21).

Return to God Our Greatest Need

The former FBI Director, speaking of the appalling increase in juvenile delinquency, said: "What we need is a return to God." He told his hearers: "We must clean up democracy at home while watching for threats to it from abroad. If every home awakened to its responsibilities, overnight there would be a renaissance of that virile, indomitable spirit which is found in free, God-loving peoples."

We need to return to God, more specifically return to the practice of our Christian religion. Without doubt, America's greatest need is faith in God and obedience to His Word.

Through doing this, we will not seek to entertain ourselves with amusements of a harmful nature, but will find complete satisfaction in that which honors God and edifies one another.