

How Do We Choose Our Recreation? WHAT CAN WE DO?

by Ben H. Zickefoose

First let's see what recreation is. Webster defines it as "A recreation; refreshment of strength and spirits after toil; diversion or mode of diversion; play."

Recreation and exercise, or muscular activity, are not synonyms. The attitude or reason for an activity may determine whether or not that activity is work or recreation.

For instance, a postman may go hiking on his day off, the physical education teacher may enjoy playing softball at a picnic, the music teacher may listen to stereo, and the English teacher may read a good book for relaxation. In other words, these people choose the activity for leisure. They are not compelled by obligations to employers.

The problem the teenager faces then is not just to "find something to do" for recreational purposes, but to find suitable areas of recreation in which Christians may engage.

Several years ago, this writer compiled a list of recreational activities provided for students on a Christian college campus. There were about one hundred different offerings. They included active games and sports, social activities, music, arts and crafts, drama, nature and outing activities, mental and linguistic activities, collecting and service activities.

Mental recreation is a part of the well-balanced life. Mental health authorities tell us that the well-balanced life includes work, recreation, companionship and religion. Some time and energy should be devoted to each of these.

In many instances, the Bible is specific that one should positively do certain things and not do others. But in the realm of recreation, the Bible does not teach us specifically. There are many things in this twenty-first century which present themselves in a very inviting and enticing way. They may be right, or they may be wrong. Therefore, one has to make a decision according to his conviction which should be based upon Biblical teaching or principles.

The principles below can guide one in his everyday Christian living. They can also be used in choosing recreation.

1. DOES IT VIOLATE MY CONSCIENCE? (Romans 14:22, 23).

Faith comes by hearing the Word of God (Romans 10:17). If one offends his conscience because he does something without faith, it is sin to him. One should study his Bible to assure himself that what he does is in harmony with God's will.

2. WILL IT BE A STUMBLING BLOCK TO OTHERS? (Romans 14: I Corinthians 6:12, 8:1-13, 10:23-33).

Even though one may participate in a certain activity without offending his own conscience (strong faith), he must consider the conscience of another who does not have the same knowledge (weak faith).

This consideration must be given because the one who is weak in faith may justify himself to do this activity without faith (offend his conscience and sin) because he sees the one with faith do it. The brother who is strong in faith then becomes a stumbling block. The stronger brother thus sins against the weaker and against Christ.

3. CAN I GLORIFY GOD IN MY BODY? (I Corinthians 6:19, 20; Romans 12:1).

Man's purpose on earth is to glorify God. Everything one does in the course of a day's activities should be done for this purpose. This includes work, school, recreation, companionship and religion. All men do not know that their bodies belong to God. Christians do know this.

4. DOES IT PUT ME UNDER EVIL INFLUENCES? (I Thessalonians 5:21, 22; Romans 12:9; I Corinthians 6:14-18).

The young in Christ need to be on guard constantly so that they are not led into wrong practices by their friends. When one thinks he is strong, he needs to take heed lest he fall (I Corinthians 10:12).

5. DOES IT CONFLICT WITH MY DUTY? (Matthew 6:33 and Hebrews 10:25).

One should not be persuaded to do something wrong or questionable in order to obtain something which he thinks is good. Put God and His kingdom first.

6. WILL IT BRING REPROACH ON CHRIST OR THE CHURCH? (I Peter 4: 14-16).

Reproach may come upon one because he wears the name Christian well. But, he should not bring reproach upon Christ because he wears the name Christian hypocritically.

7. DOES IT DEFEAT MY EFFORTS AT SELF-CONTROL? (I Corinthians 9:27, 6:12; Galatians 5:22-24).

Self-control is a fruit of the Spirit which dwells within the Christian. The apostle Paul practiced self-control. Self-control can be learned. It needs to be practiced. If there are activities which cause one to lose his temper time after time, he should probably give these up until he learns to control himself. Self-discipline is not easily achieved by some people.

8. IS IT A WORK OF THE FLESH? (Galatians 5:19-21; Romans 13:14).

One should stay away from any activity which is a work of the flesh, or which might result in a work of the flesh. Eternal condemnation is the cost. One may know what is right, but yet in a moment of weakness, he may yield to temptation. The spirit may be willing, but the flesh is weak.

9. DOES IT AROUSE THE INDECENT IN ME? (Philippians 4:8).

Reading books and magazines or viewing television and movies which are indecent is contrary to Christianity. Paul said, "Whatsoever things are pure think on these things."

10. DOES IT WEAKEN MY INFLUENCE AS A CHRISTIAN? (I Corinthians 9:18, 10:33).

Many Christians need to have the attitude of the apostle Paul. He became all things to all men that he might win them to have the same hope which he had. This does not mean that one should violate his own conscience in order to please a sinful associate.

11. IS IT LEGAL AND HONORABLE? (Romans 12 and 13).

One should respect the rights of others and the law of the land. He should not try to overcome evil with evil. He should pray for and help his enemy. The civil laws and authorities are for the purpose of protecting and praising him who does good. In the realm of recreation, hunting out of season and taking more than the quota while hunting or fishing are examples of unlawful acts.

12. DOES IT VIOLATE MY PARENTS' WISHES? (Ephesians 6:1-4).

There are young people today who would have strong healthy bodies, and there are those who have died who would possibly be alive today had they only listened to parents whom they considered "square." Read Ephesians 6:1-4 closely and notice the two promises to those who obey their parents. It is considered recreation to some teenagers to play "chicken" with two cars loaded with kids. Can you imagine two chickens playing "teenager"? Sounds silly? Well, it is!

There are several valuable reasons for learning and utilizing the principles discussed above and others in the Bible.

First, teenagers often hear parents, Bible teachers, preachers and other adults condemn various forms of recreation without giving an explanation. One's understanding of these principles could help him know the reason for condemnation in many cases.

Second, utilizing God's principles in an effort to resist the devil will cause the devil to flee (James 4:7).

And last, one can achieve a better understanding of God's will and develop his own convictions relative to his Christian living. Make these principles a part of you, know what they mean and live by them. One has to want to be a Christian before he can be one.