

May 8, 2015

For much of church history we have wrestled with the idea that pleasure is sinful and consequently it has created a general picture of Christianity as being a “lemon juice” religion. We have worn black clothes, black looks, and spoken of doom, destruction and judgement; hardly the Good News of the Kingdom of God that Jesus talked about. Scripture clearly states; “In His presence is fullness of joy and at his right hand there are pleasures forevermore.” It is in His presence that fullness of joy is found but we pervert the most beautiful of life encounters when the end becomes the experience of pleasure alone. So what are we missing?

*We have failed to understand that the correct experience of pleasure is that it is the consequence of our actions, not the pursuit of it for its own sake.* Pleasure becomes our god when we desire it only for the “high” that it gives and what is worse is that it causes us to constantly seek satisfaction in a craving that is by definition insatiable.

*Every addiction, perversion and ambition has its root in making the experience of pleasure the reason for our actions rather than it being the fruit.* Whether it is the taste buds on our tongues, the thrill of sex, the “high” of drugs, all lead to the same end. The Rolling Stones described it best; “I can’t get no satisfaction!” Even the highest and noblest of desires are subject to the same end. When we Christians judge spiritual experiences from the pleasure we receive from them we pollute these too. *There can be a very subtle twisting of our motives when we describe the worship service as “awesome” if we base it on the degree of pleasure we enjoy, rather than the personal encounter with God.*

We were created for His pleasure. When we focus on bringing Him pleasure then our motives can be pure but as soon as we make our enjoyment level the focal point, we are in danger. The remarkable thing is that when we give pleasure we also receive pleasure and it is at this point that the opportunity comes to direct our focus on receiving rather than giving; now, how sneaky is that!

Some pleasures are enjoyed vicariously. Parents watch with delight as Johnny takes his first uncertain steps. God could not contain Himself when He loudly announced; “This is my beloved Son, with him I am well pleased!” In the movie Chariots of Fire, because his focus was on running in the Olympics for Britain, Eric Little is berated by his religious sister for not rushing off to China “to save souls.” His reply was; “When I run I feel His pleasure.” God takes pleasure even in the delight we take in our achievements. Eric did go to China, saved souls and died a martyr’s death. One time I sensed God laughing at me and when I asked why He was laughing His reply was, “I am not laughing AT you, I am laughing WITH you.”

There is also a dark side to pleasing that can never be satisfied. There are those who demand that we always please them and they use that reasoning as a basis for a relationship. This is not a foundation for healthy fellowship; it is control as well as a perversion and it is how Satan runs his kingdom.

Setting ourselves to please God is the most noble of pursuits, and as Paul states; “My only purpose in life is to please Him.” Can we say the same or do we seek the pleasure of worship rather than the One we worship? Pleasing God is not all sweet and light. It may well have a martyr’s future, just like Eric Little. And then there’s our Saviour; looking ahead to the joy set before Him, Jesus endured the cross despising the shame of it because it was His Father’s will and He wanted to please Him; when pleasing God is the motive, then irrespective of the pain in the process, “joy comes in the morning.”

Let us set our hearts to please Him at all times because He is worthy whether the “worship” we experience as awesome is judged by our degree of pleasure or not. The natural consequence of making God the centre of our

affection is the blessing of His presence flowing like water from a spring to all those around us; "first in Jerusalem, then Judea, then to the uttermost parts of the earth."

Shalom.

*Ron Harris*

