

Eat, Drink, and Be Merry

Several events during this past summer are unforgettable. One of these provided a very revealing look at the state of our culture today.

I had been given the opportunity to lead our church's youth group for the summer. We met in a park near the middle of town. This particular Wednesday evening, our group consisted of an eighth-grader named Eric, my brother (also an eighth-grader at the time), and myself. Things were going very well with our Bible study, and lots of different people were in the park enjoying themselves. As the evening proceeded, we noticed a crowd of teenagers in the park. They looked like the stereotypical rebellious kids, not caring one iota about authority. I didn't want to judge them, but Eric soon spoke up and confirmed my notion, "That's what you call the *bad* crowd." Surprisingly, they decided to come over to our table. Their first question was predictable: "What are you doing?" After they recovered from their initial shock that we were studying the Bible, they asked a question that was rather shocking to me: "Is it fun?" That simple question has stuck with me to this day.

A postmodern way of thinking has enveloped our society today. As Gene Veith has written, this worldview "rejects any notion of objective truth— whether religious, moral, or scientific" (4). As our children are brought up, America has tutored them into this way of thinking. Postmodernism is everywhere, writes Veith (4). There is no longer any way to determine what is truth, what is right, and what is wrong. No longer do absolute standards define morality, but standards are defined by everyone for themselves.

Postmodernism's obvious flaws create even more problems when teenag-

ers are involved. Adolescence is a time when humans begin to take on more responsibility for themselves and make their own decisions, according to Dr. Christopher Winship and Dr. Laurence Steinberg. Unfortunately, most teenagers have hardly gained enough experience in decision-making to realize the things that are important in life—physically, mentally, and spiritually. Without a moral standard defined by God Himself, young people generally choose the most pleasurable option: *fun*. This attitude is demonstrated by my encounter in the park, and I am convinced that it is quite widespread, judging by most young adults I meet.

What kind of effects result from this focus on “fun?” When having “fun” is the most important thing in life, how does it affect the American youth groups of today? I suggest that it produces a Christianity that is lukewarm, compromised, and ignorant of the life of discipleship that Christ called us to. (As Jesus stated in Luke 14:27, NIV, “And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.”)

The first consequence is that youth groups are changed until they begin to meet only to have “fun.” No, good, clean fun has never been and will never be a bad thing, and it is a great thing to have fun at youth group. But, when it becomes a requirement for a youth group to function, the youth group is in dire trouble. This is a direct consequence of teenagers whose primary goal is to have “fun.” They won’t attend youth group without “fun.” Soon, the single most important reason that youth group is a part of their lives is because of the “fun” that they can have there, with spiritual growth being placed far down the list. Eventually, the primary purpose of the youth group (despite the good intentions of the youth leader) becomes having “fun.”

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Second, the presentation of the Gospel is affected by this prevailing attitude of “fun.” We have such an urge to have people accept Christ that we are willing to water-down His words to gain converts. We present a “fun” Christian life. And, we gain converts. But they are the first to fall away when bad times come around. Jesus aptly described these people in Luke 8:13 (NIV), “Those on the rock are the ones who receive the word with joy when they hear it, but they have no root. They believe for a while, but in the time of testing they fall away.” We need to present the Gospel as Jesus did—a tremendous Good News, an awesome love from an incredible God, but can also be very, very difficult. (See John 16:33.)

Finally, the search for “fun” and “pleasure” contribute to the vast number of chronically frustrated and depressed Christians in this world. We search for fun, and we expect to find it in our faith. There is no doubt that the Christian life can be incredibly fun, but it can also be incredibly hard. We expect “fun” all of the time, and we become frustrated and disappointed in God and in ourselves when we do not have “fun.” We rarely see our error!

The effects of this postmodern addiction to “fun” can be seen throughout the church today. We, as Christians, need desperately to wake up and to live as Christ called us to live. We cannot ignore fun and pleasure—it is a human requirement, and it is a gift from God Himself—but it is not the most important thing in life. It is our job, our calling, our duty, to bring others the truth in Christ Jesus, and to show them that there is so much more to life than to simply have “fun.”

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