



QUEST LESSON F-8

CHURCH STANDARDS

The Problem: What does the Bible teach on such issues as personal adornment, dancing, entertainment, card playing, and gambling? The standards of the church on these matters reflect the principles laid down in Scripture. Since the Bible is the rule of our faith and practice, we turn to the divine source to discover what Christ would have us do in regard to these practical issues of life.

The Bible does not address directly every practice current in our world today, simply because many of these practices did not exist in the same form when the Bible was written. But the Bible does provide very adequate principles to guide us in every situation and to direct our decisions regarding dress, entertainment, money matters, etc. The faithful Christian looks for the basic principles given by the Lord to govern all his conduct. His question is not so much, "What is wrong with what I want to do?" but "What would the Lord have me do, and why?" The purpose of the Christian is to make ready for heaven. If that means forsaking some modes of behavior, some kinds of dress, and some kinds of "entertainment, the person who loves Christ does not hesitate for a moment, because His relationship with Christ is more important than anything else.

The fundamental concern of the true Christian believer is to think, act, and relate to others in such a way that His walk with the Lord will become more blessed. Whatever hinders that walk is eliminated from his life.

The Adventist church does not provide detailed rules regarding all matters of dress and conduct. It presents the basic principles of Scripture and asks church members to live by them. The details are left to individual conscience guided by the Holy Spirit. The Church Manual (1959 edition) reads: "The Christian is called unto sanctification, and his life should be characterized by carefulness in deportment and modesty and simplicity in dress." (p. 54). "In the Christian life there is complete separation from worldly practices, such as card playing, theater going, dancing, etc., which tend to deaden and destroy the spiritual life." (p. 55).

The reason for these standards is given very clearly in Scripture (2 Corinthians 6:15-18; 1 John 2:15-17; James 4:4 etc.). The Lord asks His followers to separate from the world and its evil practices. Jesus prayed: "I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world" (John 17:15-16). To follow Christ, allowing His Holy Spirit to reign in your heart involves separating from those worldly ways that are inconsistent with the humility and purity of our Lord. Christ is our great Example in all things. What He would do were He in our position, should be the guiding principle of our conduct.

Objectives

First, we ask, what does the Bible teach about personal adornment?

Second, is dancing right or wrong for the Christian?

Third, how do we know what entertainment is appropriate for the Christian?

Fourth, what about card playing and gambling?

Fifth, we shall note the Bible emphasis that the life of Jesus is our example.

I. What Does The Bible Teach About Personal Adornment?

The Bible principles are spelled out in a number of passages so that no one needs to be in doubt. The specific application of those principles must be made by the Spirit directed believer.

The Word

1. What is the basic principle that should govern a Christian's appearance and behavior? Romans 8:29; 2 Corinthians 3:18.
2. When a person receives Christ what happens to his nature? 2 Peter 1:4; Ephesians 4:22-24.
3. How will a Christian dress? What kinds of adornment will he avoid? 1 Timothy 2:9-10; 1 Peter 3:3-5.
4. What kind of extravagant adornment did the Lord rebuke through the prophet Isaiah? Isaiah 3:16-24.
5. How should the needs of others influence the amount of money we spend on ourselves? Proverbs 21:13; Galatians 2:10.

Explanation: God wants the character of each believer "to be conformed to the image of his Son" (Romans 8:29). The Holy Spirit brings the Christian progressively nearer to the image of Christ (2 Corinthians 3:18). The person who receives Christ is now a partaker of the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4). His old self has been replaced by the Holy Spirit, who makes him a new person in heart and manner of life (Romans 8:9-10; Ephesians 2:22-24). This new person, who reflects the love and purity of Christ, wishes to think, speak, and act like His Lord. If Christ is living out His life through the individual (Galatians 2:20), the pattern of dress and conduct that Christ respects will be followed.

What is that pattern? Although women are mentioned in Scripture when dress is being discussed, the counsel is equally applicable to men. First, let us list the modes of dress that the Bible condemns. The two significant passages are 1 Timothy 2:9-10; 1 Peter 3:3-5: (i) Braided hair; (ii) wearing of gold; (iii) wearing of pearls; (iv) costly attire. In context, it is obvious that Paul is referring to extravagant hairdos and clothes. Because of the mention of braided hair we would not think that it is wrong for a woman to have a permanent so that she can keep her hair neat and attractive. Nor would we imagine that plaiting hair for the purpose of keeping it tidy and under control is being condemned. Obviously wearing hair that is disorderly and unkept is just as likely to attract attention to oneself and so break the Bible principle.

The Apostles' inspired purpose is to encourage dressing in a manner that becomes a follower of Christ. The mode of dress will be: (i) respectable (Greek: kosmos); (ii) modest (Greek: aidos); (iii) moderate, showing good judgment and self-control (Greek: sophrosunes); (iv) such as reveals reverence for God (Greek: theosebeian); (v) such as demonstrates a pure, humble heart.

Now applying these principles will inevitably involve avoiding many kinds of dress that are not specifically listed in these verses of the Bible. Modest and respectable clothing rules out a great many modern ways of dressing, including the tendency at the beach to wear little or nothing. Moderate dressing, which shows good judgment

and self-control, will exclude extravagant hairstyles, as well as clothing that is designed to attract special attention to oneself. Dressing in a manner that reveals reverence for God, demonstrating purity and humility of heart, will obviously rule out extravagant use of make-up, the attempt to improve on the natural beauty of the skin's color and the natural attractiveness of one's fingernails. If we really have reverence for God, we will respect the beauty of the body that He gave us, without trying to paint it another color.

The condemnation of jewelry by the apostles rules out quite a number of customs that are in fashion today; wearing of rings, earrings, necklaces, etc.

The reasons given by the Bible writers as to why jewelry should not be worn are twofold: (i) It is unchristian to wear objects specifically designed to attract attention to oneself. To look attractive is required by Scripture, but to go beyond humble modesty by wearing adornment is specifically condemned. (ii) It is unchristian to spend large amounts of money for metal or stone ornaments (or extravagant clothing) to be worn on one's person. Our money belongs to God. He graciously gave us the ability to earn it, and He wants us to use it carefully and wisely.

Relevance: The specific application to your life of the Scriptural counsel should be made very prayerfully. Allow the Holy Spirit to convict you as to how you should dress. No one has a right to sit in judgment on others in this matter. We are presenting it here because the Bible itself provides very direct instruction.

II. Is Dancing Right Or Wrong For The Christian?

What are the principles at stake in a discussion of dancing? If the Bible principles are not broken then the activity is not wrong. If they are violated, the activity is not according to God's will.

The Word

6. Whose glory should be reflected in all that we do? 1 Corinthians 10:31-33.
7. What does the Bible teach about the relationship between a man and a woman who are not married? 1 Corinthians 7:1-2.
8. What effect did the dancing of Herodias' daughter have on Herod and his lords? Mark 6:22-23.
9. What did the Israelites do when they rebelled against God? Exodus 32:4, 6, 19.
10. What warning against immorality are we given in Scripture? 1 Thessalonians 4:1-7; Titus 2:4-8.
11. What will be the characteristics of those who are taken to heaven with Christ at his second advent? Revelation 19:8; compare Revelation 3:2-5.

Explanation: Since the Christian's supreme concern is to be taken to heaven with Christ at His second advent, He wishes to follow the Bible instruction by doing all things to the glory of God (1 Corinthians 10:31-33). Is the kind of dancing that is current today for the glory of God? God has told us clearly that physical proximity between the sexes leads to problems (1 Corinthians 7:1-5). Such physical contact is expected of married people, but contact with anyone to whom you are not married is clearly ruled out. This Bible principle excludes most kinds of dancing that are common in our world today. Everyone who has had anything to do with modern dancing knows that the danger of immorality developing is very great indeed. And the Bible warns us strenuously against immorality of all kinds.

When Israel rebelled against God, they danced promiscuously around the golden calf. Herod made a fool of himself when Herodias' daughter danced before him. Obviously his passions were stirred and he made a promise that he afterwards regretted.

Victory over all sin made possible by the infilling of the Holy Spirit is the goal of the Christian who intends to live with Christ for eternity. When the righteousness of Christ lives in the believer's heart, he will not want to engage in any kind of dancing that would take him away from the Lord.

Nor will he find entertainment by watching others do that which is ruled out by Bible principle.

Relevance: Are you willing to follow Christ's way in everything, even if that means giving up dancing? The blessings that you will receive as a follower of the Lord will far outweigh anything you give up!

III. How Do We Know What Entertainment Is Appropriate For A Christian?

The varieties of entertainment in our world today are multitudinous. Everyone is obliged to make choices between the numerous alternatives. The Christian will choose that which leads to Christ and not away from Him.

The Word

12. How important are our thoughts in God's sight? 2 Corinthians 10:4-5; Philippians 4:8.
13. What effect do our thoughts have on our words and actions? Proverbs 23:7; 24:8-9; (compare Psalm 64:67; Proverbs 15:26).
14. What will the believer do when he sees evil? What promise is given to such a person? Isaiah 33:15-17.

Explanation: It is not possible for the church to stipulate all that is right and wrong in regard to entertainment. But the Bible principles are very clear indeed:

1. All of the believer's thoughts are to be under the control of the Lord. A person who is filled with the Holy Spirit will not allow himself to retain thoughts that are evil. If the kind of entertainment that he enjoys encourages impure thoughts, he will turn away from it.
2. The words and actions of the believer will be in accord with the will of Christ. Impurity, crudity, violence, deceit, and levity will have no place in his life. Nor will he be entertained by these characteristics in others. Christians should have a good sense of humor, but one that does not violate the principles of good taste and pure speech that are outlined in Scripture.
3. The Christian is one who "stops his ears from hearing of bloodshed and shuts his eyes from looking upon evil" (Isaiah 33:15 RSV). This Bible principle is very important as we are faced with the choice of entertainment. There is much that we will exclude from our lives because we want to follow this Scriptural counsel.

We should ask ourselves if these three principles are followed in the kind of entertainment that we enjoy. Are the television programs that we watch consistent with these Bible principles? Do they contain evil? If so, they are not for the Christian. Movie and theater entertainment today is saturated with impurity and violence. Such entertainment does not belong on the Christian's agenda.

Relevance: If we are to live as Christ instructs, we will be entertained by that which is good, pure, and uplifting. We will reject anything else as unsatisfactory because it is out of harmony with our faith.

IV. What About Card Playing And Gambling?

There are principles presented in the Bible that adequately answer this question.

The Word

15. What is "the root of all evil" from which Christians are to flee? 1 Timothy 6:6-11.
16. What is the result of the hasty attempt to become rich? Proverbs 28:20; Jeremiah 17:11; (compare Proverbs 23:5; Matthew 19:23; Mark 4:19).
17. What instruction of Jesus does the gambler ignore? Matthew 6:19-24.
18. What does God expect of every healthy member of His church? 1 Thessalonians 4:11; 2 Thessalonians 3:8-12.
19. What were the evil results of Samson's gamble at his marriage feast? Judges 14:11-20.

Explanation: The Apostle Paul emphasizes very strongly that the love of money is "the root of all evil" (1 Timothy 6:10). The rich are confronted by numerous temptations that do not trouble the poor. The goal of existence, according to the great Apostle, is "righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness" (verse 11).

Gambling is based on the love of money, and the attempt to get rich quickly. The Bible warns that "he that maketh haste to be rich shall not be innocent" (Proverbs 28:20). Jesus stressed the difficulty that a rich person would have in entering heaven (Matthew 19:23); not because God cannot save him, but because he tends to depend on his own resources instead of the Lord.

The gambler ignores Jesus' counsel that we should not seek earthly riches, but His righteousness and His Kingdom (Matthew 6:19-24). God is well able to supply all our material needs if we follow the plan of life that He maps out for us.

The gambler also contradicts the Bible instruction that every able person should work for his living. The Christian is counseled to "work with your own hands" (1 Thessalonians 4:11). Paul urged "that if any would not work, neither should he eat" (2 Thessalonians 3:10).

The gambler may argue that he is doing it for fun, not specifically for money. He may be an otherwise hard-working person. But if he is thoroughly honest with himself, he will admit that the fun is in the unexpected making of money. Before long the desire for money takes precedence and he is way out of line with Bible principle. Samson learned that lesson at his wedding. His gamble with the Philistine young men resulted in deception, violence, and a broken marriage. Even though Samson was not entirely forsaken by God at this time, he was blessed in spite of his sin; certainly not because of it. Clearly the Lord was patient with him because he hoped he would repent and fulfill the divine purpose for his life.

Gambling involves risking valuable money that the Lord has enabled someone to earn, for the sake of rapidly making money that the gambler has not earned. Gambling violates the Bible principles: (i) that we should seek the Lord and His righteousness, not fleeting wealth; (ii) that the attempt to get rich quickly involves risk and guilt; (iii) that we should work for our living and not depend on highly risky and dubious investments.

The kind of card playing that is unhealthy for the Christian is that which stimulates the players toward gambling. The principle of getting something for nothing because chance happened to be on your side is the same principle that leads millions down the gamblers primrose path of dalance. It is a path that leads to spiritual and eternal ruin.

Relevance: Are you ready to put gambling and card playing out of your life for Christ's sake? If such things are a problem to you, He can give the victory. Jesus has the power waiting to bestow upon you, so that you can rise above all such worldly practice.

V. The Life Of Jesus Is Our Example

What was Jesus like? Does He expect us to become like Him?

The Word

20. Was there any personal pride or covetousness in Jesus? What kind of Person was He? Matthew 11:29; Philippians 2:5-8.
21. What was Jesus response when He was offered all the riches of the world? Matthew 4:8-10.
22. How successful was the devil in persuading Jesus to sin? John 14:30-31; 1 Peter 2:22.
23. Does Jesus expect us to be like Him? To what extent? Revelation 3:21.

Explanation: There was no pride, impurity, or covetousness in Jesus. Riches meant nothing to Him. Personal adornment, dancing, unholy entertainment, gambling, and card playing were totally excluded from His life. The devil could not overcome Him with these or any other temptations. Jesus was sinless. He was possessed by one all consuming purpose, the salvation of lost humanity. And He invites us to join Him in this great task.

Jesus promised: "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne" (Revelation 3:21). This passage proves quite conclusively that the Lord wants each of us to overcome as He did. His biddings are enablings! His commands are full of the promise of power. By entering into the blessings of the new birth experience every day, living by faith in Christ, we can overcome the world (1 John 5:4 "His commandments are not grievous" (verse 3). They are designed to bring happiness to those who obey them by faith in Christ.

Relevance: The joy of being a Christian results from Christ's living out His life through you. He cannot do that if you cling to habits and practices that are contrary to His divine will. Surrendering to Him is followed by the wealth and glory of heaven flowing into your heart. The jewelry, dancing, entertainment, and gambling that you give up are incidental by comparison. In fact, you are infinitely better without them, because you cannot have Christ and those things too!

Will you join us now in choosing Christ?

Review Questions

1. True or False
 - a. God wants your heart, but He is not interested in external modes of behavior.
 - b. Modern dancing glorifies God.
 - c. Gambling is wrong because it puts Christ and His righteousness in the background.
 - d. No form of entertainment is right that leads a person's thoughts away from Christ.
2. Discuss: List the steps that you as a Christian would take in deciding whether a particular activity or practice is right or wrong.