



Personal from...

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Abundant Living

WHY DO some religious people feel that their religious life must be one of giving up all the fun and enjoyment of living—that in order to please God, they must endure a life of morbid gloom?

For that matter why do some nonreligious people feel that to become a Christian would mean a life of living painful penance?

As a boy I was brought up in a respectable Protestant church of traditional Christianity. I never did know very much, as a boy, about what the church believed—but I did know that it regarded sin as violating their many don'ts—don't smoke, don't dance, don't play cards, don't go to the theater, don't drink a drop of wine, don't do this, don't do that!

A world-famous philosopher, editor and lecturer whom I knew said he had no desire to live a life of Christian repression. "I desire," he said, "to be radiant, cheerful, friendly—to meet people with a smile." He was a highly educated man—but he was a biblical illiterate!

Where do people get all these distorted ideas about the religion of Jesus Christ? Certainly not out of the Bible.

They know nothing of the Jesus of the Bible, who said, "I am come that they might have LIFE, and that they might have it more abundantly."

Somehow a lot of people have received a lot of weird and false ideas about Jesus Christ—I mean the Jesus of YOUR BIBLE. Actually, I think almost no one knows what the Bible says about him.

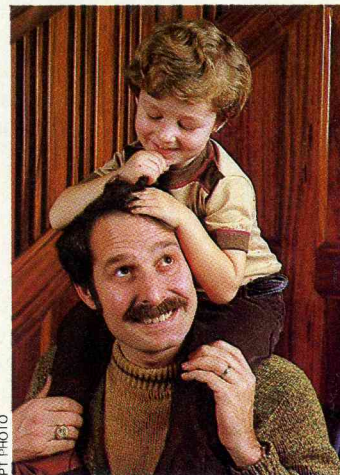
It seems most people think sin is the thing that is best for us, but which a stern, wrathful God denies us. Some years ago a little book was selling big on Hollywood newsstands. It was titled *How to Sin in Hollywood*.

Why don't people know that God our Creator has never forbidden us a single thing that is good for

us—never said "don't" about a single thing except that which is going to harm us to our own hurt. What God does command us not to do are the very things that bring on unhappiness, frustration, pain, suffering and a life of morbid gloom.

Let's get this matter straight. The real Jesus Christ said he came to bring us happiness and joy! Jesus said, "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly." And he came that we might enjoy full, abundant life ETERNALLY. God Almighty intended the real Christian life to be happy. Jesus said, "My joy I leave with you."

There is a way of life that causes peace, happiness and joy. God the great Creator set that way as an



"I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly"

(John 10:10).

inexorable law—an invisible spiritual law—to produce peace, happiness, joy, abundance! There is a cause for every effect. In this unhappy confused world we have discontentment, unhappiness, wretchedness, suffering. The world is full of that. It should be full of peace, happiness and joy. There's a cause. People don't like God's law. That law is the cause of peace and everything desirable and good. People want everything that is good and (Continued on page 40)

Personal from...

(Continued from page 1)

desirable. They just don't want to obey that which would cause it! They want to be right, but they don't want to do right.

Christ came to call people to repent. Repent of what? Repent of causing unhappiness, strife, war and pain—and then to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

And what kind of results will the Spirit of God produce in you?

I'll tell you first what it won't produce. It won't produce the morbid, unhappy, painful, gloomy life that many think is the Christian life. Let the Bible tell you what "fruit" it will produce in you. "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law" (Gal. 5:22-23).

Look at that more closely: "the fruit of the Spirit"—this is the Spirit of God. This is the Holy Spirit that God imparts only to those who have repented—that is, turned from that which has caused unhappiness, morbid gloom, discouragement, frustration, emptiness. On the contrary, that fruit of the Spirit is first of all LOVE. And the second fruit is JOY! Joy is happiness, brimful and running over. That doesn't sound like an unhappy, empty, gloomy life, does it? And God's Spirit is not static. It flows. It flows spontaneously from God into and through you, and out from you, making still others happy and joyful.

The very first result produced in your life by God's Spirit is love. Love is a righteous love of and for others. It will mean your face is beaming. It's an outgoing concern for the good and welfare of others. It will mean that you are really giving out—that you are radiant and happy. And love *results in joy*—that's the second of these fruits. The third is PEACE. Instead of an attitude of hostility, instead of going around quarreling, being resentful and bitter, angry, and arguing, you'll be in an attitude of peace—peace in your mind and with your neighbor and with your God.

Next comes *longsuffering*. That means patience. How much has

impatience made you unhappy? Probably impatience makes more people unhappy than almost anything else! If you can really come to have patience, you'll be acquiring one of the things that will allow you to be happy and make life worth living.

Then next is *gentleness*. That makes others happy and automatically adds to your happiness. And then *goodness* and *faith*! Faith is confidence—not self-confidence, but reliance on the supreme power. It means that the supreme power of God is working for you. It means reassurance. It means assured hope instead of doubt, fear, discouragement.

Now this is not to say that there are never troubles in the Christian life. Far from it. There will be persecutions. Jesus Christ was persecuted. He said, "If they have persecuted me, they will persecute you." That comes from without. But unhappiness is something that springs from within. Happiness is a state of mind; happiness is within. And the person who does have this inward peace—this joy, this patience and love, and absence of resentment and bitterness—isn't going to be anywhere near as disturbed and unhappy as when he didn't have them. You'll always face problems—but you'll have faith and God's help in solving them. But problems and tests of faith are good for us—the very building blocks of perfect spiritual character.

I know that the Bible says, "Many are the afflictions of the righteous," but the same scripture adds, "but the [Eternal] delivereth him out of them all" (Ps. 34:19).

It's true Jesus was "a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief." It's true he suffered—he knew what suffering is. But his suffering and grief were not caused by pain others inflicted on him—not from resentment, or being hurt by others—but by his love for others. He suffered because they were bringing so much suffering on themselves. But he also was a man of boundless joy, and he said, "My joy I leave with you."

Yes, he said, "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly" (John 10:10). □