

ETERNAL VALUES

Reorganized CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST
of Latter Day Saints
Berkeley, California

Sunday, Oct. 1, 1944
8:45 p.m. KRE, 1400 KC
Berkeley, Calif.

SCRIPTURE: Romans 12:1,2

I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world; but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God is.

1 John 2:15,17

Love not the world, neither the things that are of the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all in the world that is of the lusts of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof; but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever.

Again and again in working with young people, and sometimes with older ones too, I have met with a demand that I speak with authority, as a minister, and say point blank whether this, or that, or the other action is wrong. Usually the ones who so demand fall into one of two classes; either those who believe categorically that all "worldly pleasures" are wrong, and who fanatically condemn all such sins in other people; or those who indulge in the so called "worldly pleasures" and wish to justify themselves in that indulgence. It is difficult to decide which group is more irritating. Thank goodness, the great majority of people occupy a conservative and sensible middle ground.

In some things -- a very few things -- it might be possible to say out and out that they were one hundred per cent right or wrong. But in most things, right and wrong is a relative matter, governed by circumstances. It is wrong to kill, for example, but killing is justified by law when it is done in self-defense.

There have been persistent attempts, extending over a long period of years, to have the General Conference of the church I represent legislate some rules which would declare such things as dancing, theater-going, and card playing to be sinful, and grounds for church discipline and perhaps expulsion. Such rules have been in the discipline books of many Protestant denominations - usually un-enforced -- but no law has ever been placed on our statute books on any of these three subjects. We have passed some resolutions stating that the church looks with disfavor, that it discourages, that it disapproves of these things, but no member, to my knowledge, has ever been expelled from the church for dancing, card-playing, or theater-going. Many have LEFT the church because they went too far in these things, until they had time for little else, but none have been expelled.

It is the same way with our peculiar beliefs about the use of tobacco, hard liquor, and the milder stimulants such as tea and coffee. No minister of this church may hold his place if he is addicted to the use of liquor, drugs, or tobacco; but asside from this limited class from whom more is rightly demanded, there is no law which says that any member shall not partake. There is an abundance of good advice and persuasion and good example, but no compulsion.

I think it well that the church has refused to be too dogmatic in such things. It is well to recognize that our choice lies not always between positive good and positive evil. Far more often it lies between what is good, and what is better; or between that which is neutral and that which is good. It is no particular moral sin to eat pie and cake and candy and greasy gravy, if your physical system can utilize ^{them} without discomfort; but you can't ^{eat} those things and play on the school basketball or football team. It's no particular moral sin to stay up until 12 or 1 or 2 o'clock to attend a theater or a dance, but you can't do that very often and play on the team either. In the same way, it is no particular moral sin to dance, or to play cards, ~~or to go occasionally to the theater~~, but a great many people who have tried it have found that they can't do it and be a good player on the team of which Christ is the captain. A certain amount of pleasure and recreation is essential for everyone, for that reason, pleasure is good. Man is that he might have joy - not a joy which is gone the moment it is enjoyed, but joy which will be everlasting. ~~But~~ if we find that our pleasure is getting in the way of the thing which we are trying to do, which will bring us eternal joy and happiness -- worth far more than fleeting joys of this world, then common sense would demand that we shun the less important for the most important, and choose to substitute the best for the merely good or neutral.

I believe that churches have made two great mistakes in dealing with such problems as smoking, drinking, dancing, card-playing, and theater-going. The first mistake is in taking a narrow-minded attitude towards these things, declaring them all wrong, damning everyone who does them, and thanking God that we are saved because we don't do any of them. Our sins of omission, or intolerance, or harsh judgment may soon become far more serious than the sin of the one we so readily condemn. I would rather be an honest sinner than a pious hypocrite.

The other mistake the churches have made is in the adopting ^{of} the policy ~~of~~, "If ye can't lick 'em, jine 'em." Seeing that we fought a losing fight against the pleasures of the world on the old grounds, and with the old tactics, we have sometimes joined forces with those once "sinful" pleasures, and have brought dancing, card playing, and movies into the church, and sought thus to cloak them with a kind of moral sanctity which we feared they did not possess.

The first mistake alienated the young people of the church, who couldn't be expected to relish the hell-fire and brimstone which was always being poured upon their heads. The second mistake alienated the old stand-patters and die-hards, who saw nothing but evil in the pleasures of the world.

The solution of the problem lies somewhere between these two extremes. As Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "Behold, I show unto you a more excellent way." If we can show the youth of the church that the things which some of them love so well are keeping them from higher and better and more worth-while pleasures; and if we can show some of the older folksthat the things they condemn in the young are not the damnable sins which they have often been made out to be, perhaps we can work out the problem in a spirit of sanity and unity.

The "more excellent way" is going to require that we give up some good things for better; that we stop being merely neutral, or "not bad" and start being good. The "more excellent way" is going to demand ~~that~~ *NOT* just the remnants, but ALL of your physical, mental, and spiritual powers -~~that~~ all your time, all your money, be consecrated to the stewardship of establishing the kingdom of God. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with ALL thy heart, with all thy mind, with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and ~~him~~ him only shalt thou serve, lest you be a lover of pleasure more than a lover of God."