

## **There goes any chance at happiness**

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One common misconception that leads to unbelief is that *“if you commit your life to following Christ, you can take your freedom, your individuality, your sense of adventure, and any hopes you have for fulfillment in this life, and kiss them all goodbye”* (*Becoming A Contagious Christian*, Hybels, Mittelberg, 167). Yet that is not at all what the Bible teaches – the exact opposite is true. Those who refuse to believe and repent only remain locked in a mindless, sinful state. Sinners are slaves of the devil, captives (2 Timothy 2:26). A life of sin is one filled with vanity, drudgery, and misery. According to the writer of Ecclesiastes, life without God is *“Vanity of vanities!”* It is empty, lacking everything that makes life worth living. While the Bible does not teach the loss of individuality, it does require us to give up selfishness (Luke 9:23). It does require us to put God first in all things (Matthew 6:33), and always place the needs of others ahead of our own (Philippians 2:3-4). But this is not the end of happiness! This is not a life of sorrow, but one of great mirth and joy.

It is unfortunate that so many people have a distorted image of Christianity. Most commonly we hear the assertion that Christians do not have fun, that we do not know how to relax, that we set up such high moral standards that we leave no room for recreation, humor, sarcasm, romance, adventure, or spectacle. We are out of touch with modern styles, trends, and culture. And most especially, we abstain from everything in life that makes us even remotely happy. But the truth is far from that perception!

In reality, Christianity is for the person who *“means to love life and see good days”* (1 Peter 3:10). Abstinence from evil is the only true means of finding happiness! *“I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am”* (Philippians 4:11). Even in the Christian lifestyle, Paul was able to be very content – and that in spite of his prison bars! Jesus notes, *“Whoever to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it”* (Matthew 16:25). If we want to find the good life, then giving it up for the sake of Christ is the only way. When we totally devote ourselves to His cause, then we can truly come to know contentment in this world.

Besides, the real good life is found in selflessness, love, and service. The way Paul puts it in 1 Thessalonians 3:8 is appropriate, *“For now we really live if you stand firm in the Lord.”* Finding out that the church in Thessalonica was faithful to Christ was what made Paul’s life worth living. That was the real good life! And it is so amazing to think that the apostle probably had more happiness in his soul as a result of the faithfulness of those Christians than anybody has ever felt because of selfish pursuits.

To the person who does not believe because he thinks that the Christian lifestyle will take away anything good in life, just remember that God has already given up more for us than we can ever repay. Perhaps becoming a Christian will mean sacrificing alcohol, partying, filthy jokes, inappropriate media, unwholesome apparel or decoration, or an immoral sex life, but God was willing to give up His Son for us. We will never be able to sacrifice more for the Father than He has for us, so

the complaint that the Christian life is taking something away from us does not fly with Him! Jesus makes it very clear in John 10:10 that He did not come to destroy our lives and make us miserable, but to make our lives better; *“I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.”*