

CHRISTIAN RECREATION

Passage: 1 Corinthians 10:31 “Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.”

Biblical Theme: Everything Christians do should be done for the glory of God.

Personal Application: A Christian’s choice of recreational activities should be made with the certainty that God will be glorified in that activity.

Purpose Statement: Lead hearers to (1) see that recreation is essential to holistic health, (2) identify the difference between Christian recreation and worldly amusement, and (3) understand principles that should guide in the choice of recreational activities.

Introduction: Society has changed dramatically during the last century. The industrial revolution has provided people with more and more leisure time, but has also created a world with greater and greater stress and ever-increasing complexity. In this context, the topic of recreation for the Christian is a crucial one. *Is recreation appropriate? If so, what benefits does it afford? What kind of recreational activities harmonize with Christian principles? How does one go about evaluating?* Faithful stewardship demands that every Christian develop a well-considered recreational philosophy within the context of God’s ideal for His children.

Body:

I. Necessity of Recreation

- a. All people, regardless of occupation, need recreation.¹
- b. Our fast-paced schedules, computers, cars, deadlines, and all the turmoil and tension these things bring, demand that we set apart time for recreational activities.
- c. For those who have sedentary jobs, exercise in the open air is the ideal.²

¹ “I was shown that Sabbathkeepers as a people labor too hard without allowing themselves change or periods of rest. Recreation is needful to those who are engaged in physical labor and is still more essential for those whose labor is principally mental. It is not essential to our salvation, nor for the glory of God, to keep the mind laboring constantly and excessively, even upon religious themes.” *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 1, p. 514

² “On such occasions parents and children should feel free from care, labor, and perplexity. Parents should become children with their children, making everything as pleasant for them as possible. Let the whole day be given to recreation. Exercise in the open air for those whose employment has been within doors and sedentary will be beneficial to health. All who can should feel it a duty to pursue this course. Nothing will be lost, but much gained. They can return to their occupations with new life and new courage to engage in their labor with zeal, and they are better prepared to resist disease.” *The Adventist Home*, p. 502

II. Definition of Recreation

- a. Ellen White identified recreation with “change or periods of rest.”³
- b. In the opening paragraph of the chapter on “Recreation” in the book *Education*, Ellen White contrasts recreation and amusement.⁴
 - i. Recreation involves people being drawn “aside from our ordinary cares and occupations.”
 - ii. It “tends to strengthen and build up” those who involved.
 - iii. Recreation provides “refreshment for mind and body.”
 - iv. It results in people returning “with new vigor to the earnest work of life.”
 - v. In contrast, amusement involves pleasure seeking, “and is often carried to excess.”
 - vi. Amusement “absorbs the energies that are required for useful work.”
- c. To *recreate* means to “restore, refresh, create anew;...to put fresh life into; refresh or restore in body or mind.”

III. Guiding Principles in the Choice of Recreational Activities⁵

- a. Ellen White regarded time as a God-given talent for which Christians will have to give a strict account.⁶

“When the weather will permit, those who are engaged in sedentary occupations, should, if possible, walk out in the open air every day, summer and winter.” *Christian Temperance and Bible Hygiene*, pp. 100, 101

³ *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 1, p. 514

⁴ “There is a distinction between recreation and amusement. Recreation, when true to its name, re-creation, tends to strengthen and build up. Calling us aside from our ordinary cares and occupations, it affords refreshment for mind and body, and thus enables us to return with new vigor to the earnest work of life. Amusement, on the other hand, is sought for the sake of pleasure and is often carried to excess; it absorbs the energies that are required for useful work and thus proves a hindrance to life's true success.” *Education*, p. 207

⁵ “Christians have many sources of happiness at their command, and they may tell with unerring accuracy what pleasures are lawful and right. They may enjoy such recreations as will not dissipate the mind or debase the soul, such as will not disappoint and leave a sad after influence to destroy self-respect or bar the way to usefulness.” *Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students*, p. 342

⁶ “Our time belongs to God. Every moment is His, and we are under the most solemn obligation to improve it to His glory. Of no talent He has given will He require a more strict account than of our time.

The value of time is beyond computation. Christ regarded every moment as precious, and it is thus that we should regard it. Life is too short to be trifled away. We have but a few days of probation in which to prepare for eternity. We have no time to waste, no time to devote to selfish pleasure, no time for the indulgence of sin.” *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 342

- b. Ellen White warned against **a competitive approach** to recreational activities, which introduces “a spirit of strife and contention among” participants.⁷
 - i. The compulsion to win is often manifested in many games that have positive recreational potential.
 - ii. The desire to win is inherently connected to man’s fallen nature.
- c. She viewed in a very negative light **the spending of hard earned money** “on materials with which to play tennis and cricket.”⁸
- d. While not explicitly condemning the “simple exercise of ball playing,” Ellen White gave a young man reasons why they may be counterproductive for Christians.⁹
 - i. In Ellen White’s view, ball playing often “leads to **an outlay of means** that should be expended in bringing the light of truth to souls that are perishing out of Christ.”
 - ii. She warned that they consist in “self-pleasing” and lead “to **self-glorifying.**”
 - iii. They also “produce a love and passion for such things that is not favorable to the perfection of Christian character.”
- e. Speaking at the Australian Union Conference session in 1899, Ellen White alluded to **the absorbing and distracting nature** of certain amusements. She noted that “while men were playing the game of cricket, and others

⁷ “There were some who were striving for the mastery, each trying to excel the other in the swift running of their bicycles. There was a spirit of strife and contention among them as to which should be the greatest.” *Testimonies for the Church*, p. 52

⁸ “To spend money, which is so hard to obtain, on materials with which to play tennis and cricket is not in harmony with the testimonies which have been given to our school in Battle Creek. The danger of playing these games is pointed out, and those in the school discarded them.

It has been understood all through our ranks that these games are not the proper education to be given in any of our schools.” Manuscript Releases, vol. 8, p74

⁹ “I do not condemn the simple exercise of playing ball; but this, even in its simplicity, may be overdone. I shrink always from the almost sure result which follows in the wake of these amusements. It leads to an outlay of means that should be expended in bringing the light of truth to souls that are perishing out of Christ. The amusements and expenditures of means for self-pleasing, which lead on step by step to self-glorifying, and the educating in these games for pleasure, produce a love and passion for such things that is not favorable to the perfection of Christian character.” *The Adventists Home*, p. 499

were watching the game, Satan was playing the game of life for their souls.”¹⁰

- f. Ellen White contrasted the demoralizing effect of “boxing,” “football,” and other “animal exercises” with the benefits of physical labor.¹¹

IV. A Principle-Oriented Approach

- a. Ellen White contrasted the ideal of recreation found in useful labor with the limited but sometimes “useful” role that “gymnastic exercises” plays “in many schools.”¹²
- b. In early 1893, Ellen White warned Uriah Smith regarding “match games and football playing” at Battle Creek College, and of students becoming “absorbed” in such “amusements.”¹³

¹⁰ *Australian Union Conference Recorder*, July 26, 1899 par. 19

¹¹ “The Healdsburg College has been presented to me as being demoralized by disgraceful games. Games have been allowed such as God disapproves. It was to prevent this kind of thing that the Lord gave counsel to the effect that students should learn useful trades. . . .

Where were these watchmen when these unseemly games and athletic sports, these trials of animal strength and exhibition of physical skill were in progress? Students could have had this class of education at home. . . .

Labor should be connected with study, and through following a course of this kind an all-sided, well-balanced education will be the result. This is the rational method through which souls may be barricaded against evil influences. In this way the mind may be preserved in its soundness, and the nervous energies may be regulated. Combining manual labor with the study of the sciences will preserve the living machinery in excellent condition, and by taking proper exercise, the mind may be taxed and yet not sustain injury in any degree.

But do not substitute play, pugilistic boxing, football, matched games, and animal exercises, for manual training. All of this stripe and type should be vigilantly prohibited from the school grounds.” *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 11, pp. 160, 161

¹² “The question of suitable recreation for their pupils is one that teachers often find perplexing. Gymnastic exercises fill a useful place in many schools, but without careful supervision they are often carried to excess. In the gymnasium many youth, by their attempted feats of strength, have done themselves lifelong injury.

Exercise in a gymnasium, however well conducted, cannot supply the place of recreation in the open air, and for this our schools should offer better opportunity. Vigorous exercise the pupils must have. Few evils are more to be dreaded than indolence and aimlessness. Yet the tendency of most athletic sports is a subject of anxious thought to those who have at heart the well-being of the youth. Teachers are troubled as they consider the influence of these sports both on the student's progress in school and on his success in afterlife. The games that occupy so much of his time are diverting the mind from study. They are not helping to prepare the youth for practical, earnest work in life. Their influence does not tend toward refinement, generosity, or real manliness.” *Counsels on Health*, p. 189

¹³ “When the students at the school went into their match games and football playing, when they became absorbed in the amusement question, Satan saw it a good time to step in and make of none effect the Holy Spirit of God in molding and using the human subject. Had the teachers to a man done their duty, had they realized their accountability, had they stood in moral independence before God, had they used the ability which God had given them according to the sanctification of the spirit through the love of the truth, they would have had spiritual strength and divine enlightenment to press on and on and upward on the ladder of progress reaching heavenward. The fact is evident that they did not appreciate or walk in the light or follow the Light of the world.

It is an easy matter to idle away, talk and play away, the Holy Spirit's influence. To walk in the light is to keep moving onward in the direction of light. If the one blessed becomes negligent and inattentive and does not watch unto prayer, if he does not lift the cross and bear the yoke of Christ, if his love of amusements and strivings for the mastery absorb his

- i. In October of 1893, Ellen White wrote from New Zealand to a medical student in Michigan regarding the question of sports in Battle Creek College.
- ii. In response to this young man's inquiries regarding a number of issues, she wrote, among other things, that she did "not condemn the simple exercise of playing ball."
- iii. In her very next line, she specified what specifically concerned her when she wrote that "even in its simplicity, [ball playing] may be overdone."
- iv. Throughout her letter she sought to point this young man to God's ideal in true education, which consists in teaching students "to be useful."
- v. Ellen White did not condemn the "playing of ball," but pointed out that "the way that they have been conducted at the college does not bear the impress of heaven."¹⁴

Conclusion: Recreation that is truly Christian is not an escape from reality or useful activity, nor does it consist of aimless spare-time amusement. While Ellen White did not see anything inherently wrong in playing a game in which a ball is used, she did lay out perils associated with sports. She wrote of the expenditure of time and money that is out of proportion to the benefits derived from them. She seemed to convey the idea that as young people grow older, the ideal recreation could be found in some form of useful occupation.

power or ability, then God is not made the first and best and last in everything, and Satan comes in to act his part in playing the game of life for his soul. He can play much more earnestly than they can play, and make deep-laid plots for the ruin of the soul." *Selected Messages*, vol. 1, p. 131

¹⁴ "Educate men and women to bring up their children free from false, fashionable practices, to teach them to be useful... There are plenty of necessary, useful things to do in our world that would make the pleasure amusement exercise almost wholly unnecessary..."

I do not condemn the simple exercise of playing ball; but this, even in its simplicity, may be overdone. I shrink always from the almost sure result which follows in the wake of these amusements. It leads to an outlay of means that should be expended in bringing the light of truth to souls that are perishing out of Christ. The amusements and expenditures of means for self-pleasing, which lead on step by step to self-glorifying, and the educating in these games for pleasure, produce a love and passion for such things that is not favorable to the perfection of Christian character." *Selected Messages*, vol. 2, pp. 321, 322