

# The Christian and Entertainment

by Rev. Dale Kuiper

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In preparing this speech, I thought it would be helpful to check out in a concordance the words usually associated with our subject of entertainment. What do the Scriptures say? What is the scriptural emphasis? I believe this is the proper and safe way to proceed. And I want to share my findings with you at the outset.

The word entertainment is not found in the Bible at all. Once we read "entertain," in the sense of hospitality, but never the word entertainment. The word fun is never used in the Bible. The word games is never to be found. The word play is used a number of times: playing on musical instruments, playing the harlot, Israel sitting down to eat and drink and rising up to play (a reference to their naked dancing and worse), the boys and girls of Israel playing in the streets of Jerusalem after the return from captivity. The words vacation, retirement, and sports are not found in God's Word.

We may notice that there are words often used in the Bible that are practically the antonyms of the words we have just mentioned. We are admonished to work with our hands: "six days shalt thou labor and do all thy work." We have been placed on this earth to work! The words sober, sobriety, and being sober minded are often to be found. Watch and be sober. Let us who are of the day be sober. Officebearers are to be vigilant and sober. Aged men and young women are called to be sober. The words mourning, weeping, and tears are often used. Yes, Scripture also speaks of rejoicing. The child of God is to rejoice always. We are to rejoice in the Lord!

And finally I thought it would be profitable to check out the words glorying and boasting. When we get into the area of games and organized sports, boasting, bragging, and glorying are very much at point. Well, God tells us to glory in nothing, save the cross of Jesus Christ. God tells us that the wise man is not to glory in his wisdom neither the mighty man in his might, nor the rich man in his riches, "but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me" (Jer. 9:24 King James Version). He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord. The Lord does not take delight in the legs of a man, in physical strength



and skills. But the Lord delighteth in lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness. All other glory is vainglory.

Now, what does all this mean? What conclusions can we draw from the fact that such words as sports, vacations, playing, and retirement are not found in the Bible? It would be wrong, of course, to conclude that this means we may not be involved in such things at all. You could just as well say, Because the Bible does not mention pizza, we may not eat pizza. But this brief word study sends us in the right direction. It gives us the proper emphasis. And it shows us that the Christian life must always be a life of balance and moderation. We recognize that many things have changed since biblical days; in fact, life has greatly changed in the last one hundred years. Our society has gone from a rural, agricultural economy to a suburban, industrial one. The result of these many changes is that we have more disposable income (income that is not necessary for the basic needs on life) and more discretionary time (time not spent on the job but used in other ways). But we must also recognize that some things have not, and must not, change since biblical days. There are truths and principles that must still guide us in these last days.

### **Does Entertainment Have a Place?**

Is there a place for entertainment in the Reformed Christian's life? If not, why not? If so, what is that place, and how large is that place?

We believe that there is a legitimate place for entertainment in the life of the child of God. The Christian may relax, go on a vacation from time to time, have some fun, and enjoy the good gifts that God has bestowed upon him and his family. Paul writes to Timothy, "Every creature of God is good, and nothing is to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving: for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer" (1 Tim. 4:4, 5). That passage is important for the understanding of our subject, for it warns against legalism and a too strict view of the Christian life, and it tells us that we can use all things that God has made, keeping two things in mind: first, the Word of God instructs us how to use God's creatures and gifts, and secondly, by prayer in respect to this use, His gifts are sanctified unto us. Then we use this world, and not abuse it.

Another passage that comes to mind in respect to our use of God's gifts is 1 Corinthians 10:31: "Whether therefore ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God." This means, of course, that entertainment is not an end in itself. Entertainment may not be divorced from our calling as Christians to serve and glorify God at all times. Entertainment may not, and cannot, stand on its own feet as something good in itself. It is only a means, a means to a higher end and purpose. Recreation and exercise as a means unto better health? Fine. Vacations and sports as a means of relaxation in order to serve God the better? Fine. But as soon as entertainment goes beyond that, as soon as it becomes an end in itself, as soon as our sports and our hobbies consume us, then we abuse God's good gifts and our lives are not lives of balance and moderation but rather of excess and imbalance. All the emphasis in our society is on having a good time. Everyone has to have fun in some way every day. Forgotten is the truth that God has put man on earth to work. Man works as little as possible in order that he may play. He does not play a little, the better to work. Life is

viewed as a playground rather than a workplace or a battlefield. And this holds true today, not only for little children but for the adults as well. . . Paul writes in II Timothy 3, "Men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters," and so on. And, "They shall be lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God." The Christian is a lover of God! The unbeliever is a hater of God and a lover of pleasure! And as that love of pleasure develops into pleasure-madness all around us, that constitutes a peril for the church. These are perilous times for you and for me, and for our children. We stand in the midst of peril!

Our society, wealthy beyond compare, with free time almost beyond belief, is thoroughly hedonistic. A lover of pleasure is a hedonist. Hedonism is the moral philosophy that pleasure and happiness are the chief goal of human life. That is the religion according to which most people live to today. The rightness or wrongness of some activity is determined by whether it results in pleasure or in pain. If you get pleasure from something, do it; it's a good thing. If it causes you pain or discomfort, avoid it like the plague; it's bad or evil. Do you see the peril of being surrounded by people of that philosophy and outlook? Of living in the midst of such a perverse generation? I will leave it to you to discover how much of that thinking controls you in your world and life view.

What are the dangers for us and our children'? There are five areas of great concern. The matter of movies and television springs immediately to mind. That movie attendance and television viewing are out of bounds for the Christian, are incompatible with the godly walk of those who are called to be saints, is clear beyond any dispute. Is it not true that movies and television exalt that which is base and depraved, and debase that which is exalted and good? Is it not true that watching the entertainment of the world, its sexual presentations, its violence and bloodshed, its blasphemies against the holy God, makes a person guilty of the sin described in Romans 1:32, "Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them"? Psalm 101, which I encourage you to read right now, is a psalm of David, the man after God's own heart. He says, "I will walk within my house with a perfect heart. I will set no wicked thing before mine eyes: I hate the work of them that turn aside; it shall not cleave to me." And a little later in the psalm, "I will not know a wicked person." Although he may be tempted, were he alive today, David would not attend the movies nor watch television!

Secondly, we mention the sports craze, not only the March Madness of basketball tournaments, but the year-round sports activities of the world, the proliferation of professional sports teams. I am afraid that sports have a strangle-grip on many of us. I read in the Grand Rapids Press a few weeks ago a quote from a baseball fan: "opening day is a holy day for us who worship in baseball parks." Now we may shake our heads at the audacity of such a statement, but that is literally true for millions of people. Their churches, well attended on the Sabbath, are the stadiums, arenas, and ball parks of the land. Their gods are the ball players. And their offerings to these gods enable the players to have salaries of millions of dollars a year. Life without sports would be inconceivable to them. Life simply would not be worthwhile if they could not fanatically attach themselves to some team, and cheer their hearts out for their idols. Does it make sense that the Christian put his dollars in the pockets of these godless athletes? Does it please God that the

Christian yell himself hoarse at home run, a touchdown, or a three-pointer? Does it belong to the Christian witness that he blend his voice with the voices of ten thousand unbelievers, in the praise of man, man's abilities, man at his very worst'?

Professional sports, the NBA, the NFL, the NHL, MLB or any other letters you care to mention, all professional sports, are under the curse of God. And 99%, if not 100% of these athletes are under the curse of God as well. It is sad, then, that our children like to line up to shake hands with these so-called stars and get their autographs. It is sad, then, when our children know the names and statistics of these profane people better than the books of the Bible, and the names of the prophets, the kings, and the apostles. Can we say it with David, "I will not know a wicked person; him that hath an high look and a proud heart, I will not suffer"?

Thirdly, the music that is being produced and distributed by the most vile creatures on God's earth belongs to the perils that surround us, and constitute a peril for our young people especially. The night before this lecture was given, a rock group gave a "concert" in a downtown arena. It was reported the next day that, after ripping pages from the Bible and stomping upon them on the floor, these so-called musicians sang songs which encouraged young people to use dope, engage in promiscuous sex, and even to kill their parents or anyone they felt like killing. And today learned men and women discuss the question whether the entertainment industry in the United States has anything to do with violence in public schools! Parents, do you know what your children are listening to? Children, do you think you can listen to these perversions of God's good gift of music, and not be influenced?

Fourthly, we ought to be aware that the entertainment craze is having its effect in the worship services of many churches. Church members are viewed as consumers, and you have to give the consumer what he wants. What he wants is to be entertained! God must be presented as a consumer-friendly God. Do not talk about His holiness, His wrath, and His justice; talk exclusively of His love. Present God as a nice old man, who is always there to help you and make you happy. Much of today's worship is oriented to the idea of entertainment. The people must have a jolly good time or they will leave the church and go to one which has a better band, a funnier preacher, a bigger stage, and more brilliant lighting effects. Edward Farley, writing in Christianity Today, comments that "contemporary worship creates a tone that is casual, comfortable, chatty, busy, humorous, pleasant, and at times even cute." He goes on to say that "If the seraphim would adopt this Sunday morning mood, they would be addressing God not as 'holy, holy, holy' but as 'nice, nice, nice.'"

I know this to be true from personal experience. I was sent out to preach to a group that was showing an interest in our churches, and before I went on the pulpit I was told to tell a few jokes, for the people appreciated some humor mixed in with the message. Well, of course, I could only say that if he could show me some jokes in the Bible, I might be able to tell a joke or two. Can you imagine? Can you picture Isaiah telling the people some jokes before he went on to speak of the captivity. Or Jeremiah beginning his message with the words, "We're going to have a good time tonight"? In many circles, a successful,

effective worship service is measured by the extent to which the people have been entertained.

The fifth danger that I want to mention is the peril presented to us in regard to breaking the Sabbath Day with our vacation and travel plans. The desire to be entertained, and to be entertained in new and different ways, can easily lead us to break the Sabbath. We have all this surplus money. We have all this free time. Not just two or three weeks off per year to get away from the pressure of the shop or the office, but six, eight, ten weeks of vacation a year. And then there is retirement, and early retirement. What to do? The Fourth Commandment rings down through the corridors of time: "Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy." Commenting on the Fourth Commandment, the prophet Isaiah was inspired to write, "If thou turn away thy foot from the Sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day; and call the Sabbath a delight, and holy of the Lord, honorable; and shalt honor him, not doing thy own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, not speaking thine own words....," and then the prophet speaks God's words of blessing upon those who keep the Sabbath holy (Is. 58:13, 14). He speaks of a great contrast between our pleasure and God's pleasure; our ways and God's ways; our words and God's words. All in regard to the day of rest!

. . . Do not forget that old saying, "Where we walk, our children will run." When our children inherit our wealth, and add to that wealth themselves, when our children notice our example and must live in a generation more pleasure-crazed than our own, what do you expect they will do?

### **The Antithesis**

It is time to ask the question, Does the antithesis enter in here? What does the truth of the antithesis say to you and to me about entertainment and its proper place in our lives?

The antithesis is a truth that is dear to the Reformed believer because the antithesis spells his spiritual safety. That God's grace is particular, always saving, for the elect alone and never for the reprobate, is of extreme importance for the living out of this vital doctrine.

The antithesis is the absolute spiritual separation that God has established between the church and the world, between those who are in Christ and those who are outside of Christ, between the believer and the unbeliever. God has called us out of the darkness of unbelief, misery, and death, into His marvelous light. God has made between the church and the world a cleavage of such a nature that it can be bridged by nothing! Having made righteous discrimination between men in eternal predestination, God establishes this cleavage by the power of His grace down through the history of the human race. What a power that is, that God sets vast elements of the children of Adam at enmity with one another! This is not a physical separation, but a spiritual one - though, to be sure, it implies a certain measure of physical separation as well, in that the child of God is not found in all the places where the child of darkness is found.

The life of the antithesis does not call us to world flight. We are called to be in this world, but not of this world. As children of light we are called to be God's party in the midst of a

dark, perishing world. The only fleeing we engage in is the fleeing from sin and the very appearance of sin.

In Psalm 16:5-6 we read, "The Lord is the portion of mine inheritance and of my cup: Thou maintainest my lot. The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage." The child of God has a wonderful inheritance, and that inheritance is God Himself. God gives Himself to us in Jesus Christ, in all His majesty, power, riches, and splendor. And God has drawn lines for us in our lives. Those lines in the Old Testament were the property lines that defined the exact piece of ground that each Israelite inherited in Canaan. God forbade that those lines be changed or that property be sold. For us, those lines which have fallen to us in pleasant places are our children, our doctrines, our practices drawn out of those doctrines, our place in the church of Christ and in the congregations, and ultimately our place in the heavenly Canaan. God has drawn lines for us. They have been measured out unto us with gracious care! And this means that we must always be busy drawing lines in our lives and in the lives of our children, lines of very definite demarcation.

The question is, Where do we draw the lines? The question is not, Where does my church draw the lines? We know the answer to that question. The preaching we hear every Sabbath Day draws the lines of doctrine and life biblically and sharply. Besides, you can read all about these things in our magazines and pamphlets. But where do you, and where do I, draw the lines personally and daily in our lives and the lives of our families?

It goes almost without saying that we must draw the lines of demarcation sharply, indelibly, and without compromise exactly where God draws the lines in His revelation to us. And then we must stick to those lines, and make them stick, without removing the ancient landmarks. James writes (4:4) that the friendship of the world is enmity with God, and whosoever is the friend of the world is the enemy of God. Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 6:14-18 (the classic text for the antithesis) that we are not to be unequally yoked together with unbelievers, that we are to come out from among them and be separate, that we are not to touch the unclean thing. There you have it. God, Christ, the elect angels, and elect believers - all these stand on one side of the line of the antithesis as covenant friends! On the other side is the devil, fallen angels, unbelievers, all that love and make the lie.

Now, whom are you going to invite to cross over and stand with you? Who will be your friend? With whom will you have fellowship, communion, concord, part-- to use the words of the apostle. That is the great issue in dating, courtship, and marriage, is it not? But that is also the issue in this whole area of entertainment. Whom do you invite into your home to entertain you and your children electronically? "I will walk within my house with a perfect heart. I will set no wicked thing before mine eyes," says David. Whom are you always going to be talking about and admiring "Him that hath an high look and a proud heart will not I suffer. Mine eyes shall be upon the faithful of the land," says the man after God's own heart.

Our conclusion is that the enmity that God has placed between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent at the very beginning, the antithesis that God maintains between the

church and the world down through the ages, must be applied by the Christian in every area of life, and in these last days increasingly to the area of entertainment. The place of entertainment in the Christian life is really very small in that we are placed on earth to work. The problems that entertainment present us are really not so difficult if we remember that we are not citizens of this world, with worldly expectations, goals, and values; we are pilgrims and strangers on the earth as our fathers were. Our citizenship is in the kingdom of heaven. We declare plainly that we seek a better country, that is, a heavenly, and do not even expect to find any satisfaction in these desert wastes. And because God is not ashamed to be called our God (Heb. 11:16), we confess, "Whom have I in heaven but Thee? And there is none upon earth that I desire besides Thee!"

### **Biblical Guidelines**

As for biblical direction in the matter of entertainment, we offer for your consideration three broad guidelines. First of all, everyone recognizes that in regard to some of the things that have been mentioned (but not all of them) there is room for the exercise of Christian liberty. Members of the body of Christ differ as to wealth, abilities, and callings in life. With these differences come varying opportunities, and no one may make rules to force everyone into the same mold. The people of God are alike in two respects: everyone must confess the same truth and everyone must walk according to God's commandments. For the rest, there is abundant room for variation and liberty.

Two passages come to mind in this regard. Paul writes to the Galatians (5:1), "Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage." He is combating the legalism of some in the churches whereby they were trying to establish part of their righteousness before God by the works of the law, especially circumcision. But Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us; He has fulfilled all righteousness, and therefore we are called to walk in the glorious liberty of the children of God. On the other hand, there is the warning of Galatians 5:13, "For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another," and the warning of I Peter 2:16, "As free, and not using your liberty for a cloak of maliciousness, but as the servants of God."

In other words, Holy Scripture warns us against two great errors, legalism and antinomism. Legalism is the scrupulous keeping of law and precept with the idea of establishing one's own righteousness before God. And antinomism is total disregard for the law of God. The law of God must not be read in church or preached on according to the Catechism because Christ has fulfilled the law, and I am completely free from the law! Both positions are wrong, and both are wrong as guidelines in the areas of entertainment. But the great danger for the church and for the believer in this present time is not legalism. Do not ever think it. The great danger is antinomism. No law for the Christian! Lawlessness is the spirit of these last times, and that spirit must not infect the churches. We are not free from the law, but we are free under the law! That truth is so beautifully expressed in Psalm 119:45, "And I will walk at liberty, for I seek thy precepts." That is the first guideline. Walking at liberty with the law of God in our hearts as our faithful guide.

Secondly, because of the emphasis that Psalm 101 places upon the home and the sanctified character of the Christian home, somehow we must reclaim our homes and bring them more in line with the biblical example. Many of our homes have entertainment centers, a big cabinet or set of shelves, on which are placed a television set, a VCR, a tape deck, a CD player, and perhaps a computer with a pile of electronic games. Two things stand out here: first, the very presence of these centers suggests way too much emphasis on entertainment; and secondly, they encourage the wrong kind of entertainment. Also, the use of these things draws us away from each other and from having fellowship with each other. Television viewing and endless computer games are very individualistic. Interaction of parents with children, and children with the other children can be very severely damaged.

The table with the family gathered around it talking -that used to be the center of the home. The bookcase with good books and religious magazines - that used to be the place to which we turned when we had a few extra minutes. But more and more our children and young people are not reading and are not studying. They tend to view the home merely as the place to be if you do not have any place else to go. Home is the place of last resort. Being home is bad; being on the go, that is really living. Oh, no! God puts you in a home with your family. There He will give you joy and pleasure. So the second guideline in the matter of entertainment is having a strong Christian home and family where God is known, feared, and served.

Thirdly, something ought to be said about role models, since that is a word that keeps coming up in the media. Who will be the models after which we and our children pattern ourselves? To whom do we look up, and to whom do we point our children? God does not allow a professional athlete to be a role model for the Christian of any age. God does not allow an actor, actress, or worldly musician to fill this function for us either. We do need worthy examples to follow. We are to be followers (imitators) of God as dear children (Eph. 5:1). Christ has left us an example that we should follow His steps (I Pet. 2:21). We are to follow the apostle Paul and those who are like him (Phil. 3:17). Clearly, the role models we must follow are found in the church, not in the world. The elders, the deacons, the pastors, the saints! Closer to home, godly fathers by word and example show the boys and young men what the Christian life is all about. Mothers of meek and quiet spirit reveal to the girls and young women how they are to conduct themselves. "Mine eyes shall be upon the faithful of the land," says David. "They shall dwell with me."

Can the Christian have fun? Yes. Really, he is the only one who can enjoy life and see good days. God has put him on the right side of the antithesis, and God keeps him there. He has a good conscience as he experiences the liberty that is in Christ Jesus. He is a member of the kingdom of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit.

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