

Promoting Godly Relationships, Civility, and Healthy Living

*Opposing racism, vulgarity & obscenities, body & mind abuse
(smoking, alcohol and drugs, etc.)*

Introduction

While there isn't one "Christian" lifestyle, there are certain pathways a Christian should aspire towards in life. God asks this of us for His own glory and our own good. In this section, we will first discuss topics of daily life, such as our personal relationships and civility, looking to the Bible as our guide. Then, we will turn to characteristics of negative lifestyles, such as racist beliefs and behavior, vulgarity and obscenity, and body and mind abuse (smoking, alcohol, and drugs). We hope God will speak to you about His plan for your life and how that corresponds to living a healthy lifestyle as the Bible describes.

Godly Relationships

The way we interact with others is essential to a healthy lifestyle. The Bible offers insight into how we should conduct ourselves amongst our fellow believers and how our relationships should look. Through the story of Paul and the growing Church, God reveals His vision for community. Acts 4:32 states, "All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had." Christians are linked by a special bond, the life and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Therefore, we are charged to love one another in every sense of the word. By looking at Paul's ministry in Acts, we can see what this kind of fellowship looks like. Paul traveled all over the Middle East, spreading the Gospel and encouraging his brothers and sisters in foreign lands (Acts 20:1-2). By praying with each other and sharing struggles, they developed Godly relationships and a community of believers. Colossians 3:12-14 describes God's vision for relationships:

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

This should be our definitive rulebook for Godly relationships. We must treat each other kindly, show patience with one another's shortcomings, and forgive just as Jesus did. But we must also be brave enough to rebuke our brothers and sisters when they sin, only we must do it in love rather than anger (Luke 17:3-4). We must also bear each other's burdens. One of the greatest reasons for our existence is to serve one another as we serve Christ (Galatians 6:2). After all, Jesus carried our burdens. Through Godly relationships, our Father shows us more about Himself and continually sanctifies us as we become more like Him.

Civility

Civility is also essential to the Christian lifestyle, because we are representing Christianity through our daily behavior. Today, one of the biggest barriers between non-believers and a life of faith is hypocrisy in the Church. Too often, people see those they know to be Christians acting out of line. And it is true that Christians today do not show enough love and compassion. As followers of Jesus Christ, we should continually look to Him as our guide (Philippians 2:5).

Jesus was kind and loving. He was polite and pleasant and those who actually knew Him, enjoyed His company. But His "civility" came with a few exceptions, like the story chronicled in John, chapter two, when Jesus drives people out of the temple for blaspheming God. Here, Jesus was acting entirely out of righteousness. One might call it "righteous fury." His outrage was more than called for, because the people had sinned against God by converting the Temple into a market place for their own greed. Jesus also butted heads with the Pharisees on a daily basis, because their viewpoints were blasphemous to God. Jesus was a warrior for His Father. He was civil, certainly, but Jesus knew it was a sin to remain passive in the face of great sin. If we keep God in the forefront of our lives, in what we think, do, and say – civility will follow.

Racism in America

Even though the most blatant form of racial discrimination – slavery – was abolished at the end of the Civil War, racism in the United States is still a problem. In fact, racism and other forms of prejudice are most likely to remain problems, because the human race has been unable to defeat it over the course of thousands of years, but we must oppose it now, in our time, because it is in conflict with God’s will for humanity. God does not support one race over another. Rather, He loves people from all nations (Revelation 5:9). Acts 10:34-35 states, “Then Peter began to speak: “I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right.” Furthermore, the book of Revelation describes “a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the lamb” (Revelation 7:9).

Racism is very much alive in the United States. For example, “Disparities in sentencing and incarceration have grown to such an extent that African-American men comprise 50% of the US prison population despite representing just six percent of the US population as a whole.”¹ In addition, the media mainly showed black perpetrators during the 2001 Mardi Gras violence in Seattle, “even though Seattle police said that white perpetrators significantly outnumbered Black perpetrators.”² And in a 2001 incident, an African-American, Washington D.C. police officer was mistaken as a carjacker and beaten by white, D.C. officers.³ And what better to indicate the prevailing racist attitudes in America than the crude jokes circulating about Mexicans, Muslims, African-Americans, and the Jewish population. Since September 11, 2001, Muslims have taken a harsh beating by Americans. The derogatory term, “Towel Head” is so common, it might as well be included in the Dictionary. And with recent debates over immigration laws, many individuals crack jokes about illegal aliens. Also, over the past several years,

¹ “Racism in the United States.” Center for Concern.
<http://www.coc.org/index.fpl/1255.html?article=1535> (Accessed July 5, 2007).

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

Anti-Semitism has seen rampant growth in the film industry; Jews are a constant source of mockery and entertainment.

We must strongly resist the urge to think of ourselves as better than any other race, for God does not show favoritism to certain races of people. God did not author the Gospel for middle-class, white Republicans. Nor did He author it for Africans or Hispanics. He has given the Gospel to the *world*. Earth is under God's mighty hand. The people of the world are His to judge as He sees fit. Acts 10:28 states, "But God has shown me that I should not call any man impure or unclean," and so, we must leave the judging to our Father.

Vulgarity and Obscenity – A Reflection of Character

Both vulgarity and obscenity have close ties to the idea behind civility: what we do and say is a reflection of our character, and as Christians, we must be careful to speak and act as Jesus would. Ephesians 4:29 states, "Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen." Furthermore, the Bible says, "Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving" (Ephesians 5:4). As born again Christians, we no longer live in the flesh. We are no longer slaves to sin and worldly deeds. We have the Holy Spirit living within us, and the Holy Spirit, being God, is ultimately good. But good and evil cannot coexist. Therefore, we must refrain from using vulgar language that is sinful in the eyes of God. Our talk should be rooted in love and humility, not anger and sexual innuendo. Colossians 3:5 proclaims, "Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry." Several verses later, it continues, "Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator" (Colossians 3:9-10). We are created in the image of our Father, who beholds no vulgar language or obscenity. He is entirely good, and we must strive to be more like Him. For that reason, our talk should be wholesome and encouraging, rather than vile and slanderous.

Body & Mind Abuse – What’s the Big Deal?

Lastly, we must refrain from abusing our bodies, because God has made each one of us uniquely to serve as a dwelling place for the Holy Spirit. As it states in 1st Corinthians 3:16-17, “Don’t you know that you yourselves are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit lives in you? If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy him; for God’s temple is sacred, and you are that temple.” He lives inside us, so of course He doesn’t want us trashing up the place! Our bodies do not belong to us, but to God, who gave them to us. We have no right to defile them.

People typically defile their bodies by smoking, drinking alcohol, or using body-altering drugs, like marijuana or cocaine, just to name a couple. According to the American Council on Science and Health (ACSH), cigarette smoking is the leading cause of preventable death in the United States. Five hundred thousand Americans die each year because of their smoking habits, and “many more suffer from smoking-related illnesses caused by both direct smoking and exposure to secondhand smoke.”⁴ Already, the effects of smoking on one’s “temple” are obvious. Furthermore, when someone inhales tobacco smoke, approximately 4,000 toxins enter the bloodstream, and cigarette smoking, specifically, is the number one cause of lung cancer and pulmonary illness and death in the United States.⁵ Clearly, smoking does serious damage to our bodies, and self-abuse is not part of God’s plan for our lives.

Alcohol also poses a threat to our lives. Even tobacco smoke affects our brains, but alcohol has a much stronger effect. In his book, Alcohol: The World’s Favorite Drug, Griffith Edwards asserts, “...alcohol affects brain functioning by its capacity to interfere with the biological system of chemical messengers which is all the time regulating the balance between activity and inactivity in brain cells and brain circuitry.”⁶ Obviously, it is interfering with our normal brain functioning. This often leads to impairment of reaction time and judgment, coordination and balance, and sometimes results in

⁴ American Council on Science and Health, *Cigarettes: What the Warning Label Doesn’t Tell You* (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 1997), 1.

⁵ *Ibid*, 6.

⁶ Griffith Edwards, *Alcohol: The World’s Favorite Drug* (New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2000), 8.

depression, misery, nausea, and vomiting.⁷ But Edwards sums it up best when he writes, “What we are seeing here is the capacity of a simple molecule to interfere with, or in some way hijack, the functioning of very complex brain systems.”⁸ Indeed, our bodies are complex; God made them that way. When we alter our minds and the state of our sacred bodies, we cheapen God’s creation. We spit on his handiwork or draw graffiti all over it. The Bible clearly refutes drunkenness. Ephesians 5:17-18 says, “Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord’s will is. Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery.” The other major problem with alcohol is its highly addictive nature. Addiction is basically another word for idolatry, and God says to have no idols before Him. In Acts, Paul continually encourages people to turn away from their idols (Acts 14:15).

Drugs also have an addictive nature. Over time, people become dependent on drugs, but God has told us to lean on Him alone. Aside from the obvious fact that drug use severely alters our normal functioning, drug use is often used as an escape from reality. In “Illegal Drugs Should Remain Illegal,” James Inciardi and Duane McBride explain how many adult marijuana smokers believe it helps them function better, “improving their self-awareness and relationships with others.”⁹ But they go on to write, “In reality, however, marijuana [serves] as a “buffer,” so to speak, enabling users to tolerate problems rather than face them.”¹⁰ God has always encouraged us to face our problems with His aid. In his book, The Silence of Adam, Dr. Larry Crabb promotes true manhood, which he defines as accepting one’s fears and problems, but not running from them, rather, trusting God and moving forward in life.¹¹ And it’s pretty easy to identify this trait with Jesus, who was constantly moving forward. Even when He knew His death was imminent, He moved forward as planned. When we alter our mental states with drugs, we turn from God and rely on other means.

⁷ Ibid, 9.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ James A. Inciardi and Duane C. McBride, *The Legalization Debate* (Sage Publications, 1991), 144.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Dr. Larry Crabb, *The Silence of Adam* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 14.

Conclusion

God's plans for our lives are far better than our own. Therefore, we should continue to place our faith and hope in Him, instead of worldly idols. He has also given the Gospel to the world. We are all His children and must live together in harmony, extending and accepting love in all places. We are new creations, unlike people of the world in that the Holy Spirit lives inside us. We must live accordingly (1st Peter 2:1-3).