
MOVIES, BEER, AND ROCK N' ROLL

Can Christians party?

Q I have Christian friends who drink beer and wine, enjoy music and go to concerts, plays and movies. Much of this artistic expression, as well as lyrics to rock music, is so full of sex and drugs. Paul said not to conform to the ways of the world. I don't want to be self-righteous, but I question the salvation of such people.

A I may be a person somewhat like the ones you describe. I have a beer several times a month, and perhaps a glass of wine several times a week. Last time I checked, Jesus created wine, lots of it. The Bible does not condemn alcohol; it condemns its abuse. While alcohol can become addictive, there are no biblical prohibitions about its use, certainly not the way some churches imply. Consuming or not consuming alcohol, in moderation, is not the acid test of Christianity. Christians should not be under any pressure to imbibe or to refrain. They may have excellent reasons for doing either. Being an alcoholic is, of course, reason to completely refrain. There are also health reasons for refraining, and according to some reports there may be health reasons for tak-

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ing a little red wine on a regular basis. The Bible does have something to say about our insisting that others follow our specific lifestyles, and that unless they do, they are, at the very least, inferior Christians.

Rock music? No question. I enjoy it. I like U2, the Eagles, Fleetwood Mac, and many others. My freedom in Christ means that I can also enjoy Christian contemporary, classic Christian hymns, gospel, jazz, classical, country, reggae, blues and even polka (but only after I have had either beer or wine!). My personal taste does, of course, not define authentic Christianity, but you didn't ask about Christianity. You described Christians with whom you take exception.

Having said that, I have not addressed your issue about lyrics in rock music. It seems to many that contemporary music, alternative and rap, for example, have more sex, drugs and violence references than earlier eras. On the other hand, there are lyrics from the Roaring Twenties that were X-rated, along with jazz and blues that go back more than 100 years. Going beyond that, if one studies the history of literature, poetry, art—as well as music—there has always been a component of such artistic expression that was pagan and immoral.

We can throw it all out—all music, all dancing, all movies, all TV, all Internet (for it is filled with porn as well)—or we can carefully discriminate and wisely use art, artistic expression and technology in a Christ-centered way. The Bible is filled with poetry and lyrical expression. David, a man after God's heart, was a deeply gifted, artistically expressive man, and he was criticized for his dancing (I have been too, but for completely different reasons!).

It seems to me that we can draw a narrow circle around our family, our church, and ourselves in an attempt to keep the

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world out, or we can realize that “the world” is everywhere. We can never draw a tight enough circle to keep all the sin out, and therefore we should understand that our culture is not necessarily an enemy. It is a force to be reckoned with, used, monitored and even redeemed.

There are issues that we as Christians don’t tolerate. For example, there is no such thing as murder in moderation. There is no such thing as a little bit of stealing, lying, gossip, lust and pride being okay “as long as it doesn’t become excessive.” But there are other areas that demand some careful thought. There have been many eras and generations of Christians who effectively threw out, sealed, or allegorized away the meaning of the biblical book, *The Song of Solomon*. It is a song of married love and was simply too scandalous for some. Other passages in the Old Testament that are explicit in terms of sex and/or violence have been viewed in a similar way. Such biblical passages are not suitable for a first-grade Sunday school class, but they are written for our admonition and our example, for all Scripture is inspired. While some biblical passages would not be appropriate for six-year-olds, they might be for sixteen-year-olds and certainly are for adults.

I am a firm believer in God’s grace because of the particular religious swamp I was in for thirty-five years. When Jesus rescued me, I started to look around, and while I was dismayed at the stuff I had believed, practiced, and preached, I also found that there were many other forms of legalism that thrive in God’s name. Consequently, as a result of God’s grace, it is my belief that we often become, in our desire to do the right thing, far more restrictive, authoritarian, and controlling than Jesus.

When I speak of God’s grace, some dismiss me as a libertine, as someone who is trying to find ways to justify sinful

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behavior. I find that such a response is the only way that the human mind can deal with the lavish and extravagant grace of God, grace and love that is far beyond our wildest imagination. God loves us, that I know. God is not mad at us, that I know. God does not specialize in long laundry lists of do's and don'ts in the way that many religions do. God instead works within us, Jesus lives in us, so that the life we lead in this flesh is not the life we once led. Fear, oppression, and religious control do not characterize the authentic new life of our risen Lord.

Jesus is my Lord. I am free in Him (Galatians 5:1) from anyone who would attempt to impose extra-biblical teachings or traditions or requirements on me. And so are you. I pray that God will open your heart to the good news of the gospel, the gospel of Jesus Christ that has nothing to do with doing as we please, but has everything to do with Jesus doing as He pleases in our lives.