

Is Loving Life a Christian thing to do?

Till the end of time, Christians will celebrate and look forward to life (with God) beyond death. But God our Creator is changing the world, and the pace seems to be quickening. In the meantime, we are called to work with God in helping God to answer our prayer that his will may be done on earth as in heaven – and, in doing so, to love life.

‘Love life’ was the lifelong motto of the famous painter, David Hockney, who died recently. Can it be a Christian motto? I think it can be, understood in the light of the Bible and the Christian faith. For centuries we’ve thought of our faith as other-worldly, and we Christians can give the impression that it is. The Bible, however, teaches otherwise.

The Bible starts on a very world-affirming note: ‘God looked on all that he had made, and saw that it was good and beautiful. (The Hebrew word means both). Our arrival and ‘fall’ from grace has complicated God’s plans, (to put it mildly). But because God came in Jesus – *and came to stay*- that has changed everything. Jesus came ‘that we might have life in all its fulness’ (John 10.10).

So thanking God for everything – ‘all the blessings of this life, and, above all, for Jesus’ has always been central to our faith and our worship. Sunday by Sunday, we thank God for all we enjoy – and that surely includes life itself.

How can we love life if life is hell? The Christian answer isn’t easy, but it is simple. Hell itself wasn’t off limits to Jesus, (1 Peter 3:18-20, Acts 2:31), and so there is no experience, however hellish, in which he can’t find us.

Where does sharing the cross of Jesus, as we are called to do, fit into all this? There is a deep paradox – an apparent contradiction – which runs all through the New Testament. Think of the Beatitudes: ‘Happy are the poor, those who mourn, those who are persecuted, who are peacemakers... (Matthew 5:1-11).

‘Rejoice *always*’ says St Paul. We can’t force ourselves to rejoice, but joy will keep breaking through, as C.S. Lewis’ famous conversion and book tells us: ‘*Surprised by Joy*’.

This means that everything which happens to us, everywhere we go, the beauty of creation, every meeting with someone else can be a channel of God’s grace – i.e. God’s love and power – filling our lives.

And that includes ‘all the blessings of this life’ – all the lifegiving, life-affirming things we enjoy. Is anything good or wholesome excluded? I think not; ‘God ... richly provides all things for us to enjoy’, (1 Timothy 6:20). Although Methodists have rightly taken seriously the Bible’s warnings against drunkenness, and, until recently, recommended being teetotal, we should note the Psalmist’s thanks for wine ‘which gladdens human hearts’, (Psalm 104:15).

Love God, love other people, love life and all its blessings: that is the Christian way.

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