



"Before we set our hearts too much upon anything, let us examine how happy those are who already possess it."
—Francois de la Rochefoucauld

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Wisdom for the Young (Part Two)

Part of the problem that confronts young people today is that they—and frankly, all of society—have a devilish misconception of what is fun. It is no joke: What most people consider to be fun stems from a Satan-inspired viewpoint. Etymologically, *fun* derives from an older English word that means "to hoax, to play a trick on, to deceive." This original word once meant "to fool," and it was also used in the noun form, "a fool." When people play tricks on others, they think the reactions they get are funny. Thus, the modern concept of fun began with *deception* and *humiliation* resulting in amusement.

Fun did not come to mean "amusement," "gaiety," or "enjoyment" until the eighteenth century, suggesting that the prevalence of "having fun" is a fairly recent phenomena. In those tougher times—when child mortality was high, life spans were low, and life was hard and dangerous in general—people were more serious as a rule because life was so severe. In more modern times, having overcome many of these problems, society has elevated the concept of "fun" to its current levels. Now people want to have fun all the time and think they deserve it.

Each individual has a different idea of what is fun. Some people consider playing chess or backgammon to be fun. Others feel that playing video games is fun. Many think that actually playing a sport is fun. We all know someone who must believe talking is great fun. To others, their idea of fun is reading a book, watching television or movies, or enjoying a visit with family and friends. People have all kinds of different notions about fun.

Many of today's youth believe that fun must have an edge; it needs to be, not only be amusing, but also be risky, dangerous, even potentially lethal. It is astonishing to realize what some young people consider to be fun—activities that more mature people would consider to be wild, riotous, hazardous, and downright foolish. Their version of fun often *begins* with alcohol and illicit sex and gets worse—far worse—from there. It descends into dangerous "pranks," illegal activities, and perversions of all kinds. (See "The Century of the Child," in the November 1999 issue of [Forerunner](#), particularly the inset article, "America's Lost Children," for an example.)

Too many of today's young people end up as addicts, either to alcohol or to drugs. Far too many young women resort to abortion, and they sometimes undergo multiple abortions (around one million abortions are performed each year in the United States). A frighteningly high percentage of them wind up with a sexually transmitted disease or three (in America, more than 19 million new cases of sexual disease are reported each year, and half of these occur to young people). About five percent of them begin their adult years with criminal records. Yet, while they were doing all of these things, they thought that they were having fun.

For many teens in [the world](#), this is the current idea of fun. It is not a good and wholesome activity that is amusing or enjoyable, but behavior that is exciting and risky, often containing an edge of rebellion. Certainly, this is not everyone's idea of fun, but as Solomon says about mankind's insatiable desires for more, "The eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing" ([Ecclesiastes 1:8](#)). When one kind of fun loses its edge, a more extreme form takes its place.

Solomon also writes, "Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; the rod of correction will drive it far from him" ([Proverbs 22:15](#)). A child's tendency is toward foolish behavior because he does not have the [wisdom](#) or the

experience to know what is good and right for him to do. Thus, [God](#) instructs parents to correct their children, to drive this foolish behavior out of them, and to teach them wisdom, the right and proper way to live. If they are left to themselves, undisciplined, they will likely intensify their foolishness until it becomes extreme and dangerous.

[Proverbs 29:15](#) provides another warning: "The rod and rebuke give wisdom, but a child left to himself brings shame to his mother." Of course, it shames his father too, but it usually affects a child's mother more grievously.

Mothers tend to feel the disgrace of their children's dishonorable behavior acutely, whereas a father is more apt to react in anger. Foolish behavior that leads to trouble and shame is frequently what results when unruly young people conceptualize and enact what they in their immaturity think is fun.

Ministers use [Proverbs 29:18](#) in many situations, but it relates directly to the behavior of youth: "Where there is no revelation, the people cast off restraint; but happy is he who keeps the law." The first half of this verse could be paraphrased as, "When people do not have a godly vision to work toward, they run wild." This applies to everybody, of course, but it applies in spades to young people because they have not developed the internal restraints that the more mature have. Unrestraint surfaces more quickly in a child, especially if he does not have a set of rules to follow and a goal to work toward. His behavior is likely to be chaotic. It is the parents' job to place restraints on a youth's unruly nature and to guide him in the narrow way ([Matthew 7:13-14](#)), so that he grows into a happy, functioning adult in society—and, beyond that, into a well-loved and wise member of God's Family, the ultimate goal.

Notice, however, the last half of this verse: "Happy is he who keeps the law." Solomon shows us the most beneficial way to bring to pass true human happiness—true fun, real [joy](#): by getting our children to understand and keep the law. The word *happy* really means "blessed." As a result of keeping the law, we will be blessed. If children keep their parents' law as well as God's law, they will truly be happy.

However, most young people think that keeping the law—doing what is right—is "uncool," "square," "boring," and "nerdy." This is another of those devilish misconceptions. In this age, virtuous young people are paragons,

heroes! God certainly does not consider those who do well to be weird or strange. To the contrary, they are "the apple of His eye" because they please Him.

Unfortunately, a young person in this world is constantly beset by negative peer pressure, and one who worries about what his thrill-seeking peers think of him probably will not do what God says. He is too worried about "being cool" and fitting into his clique. Peer-pressure has always been difficult for the young people in God's church to face. Five days a week, many of them are in public school where they have "friends" that they want to impress—and his cool friends are the ones that urge him to go to the game on Friday night. His most popular friends push him to go to the party at a friend's house where the parents have gone away for the weekend. It always seems to be members of the in-crowd who drink and smoke.

Yet, God says, "You will be happy if you keep the law." Parents need to impress on their children that this world's notion of fun is misguided at the very least. Young people need to be taught from an early age that the first thing they should want is to please God, and that they can do this if they also please their parents ([Exodus 20:12](#)). In this way, they can learn a more godly idea of fun.

- Richard T. Ritenbaugh

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[Character Matters](#)

by Richard T. Ritenbaugh

In God's Kingdom, only those who have God's approval, those who have developed iron-clad character, will be qualified to rule. Americans unfortunately have separated legality and competence from morality and character. There is a direct correlation between the character of the leader and the morality of the people (having a deadly ripple effect to the entire population). In selection of leaders, whether king or elder, God has emphasized that character has to be at the core. A leader has to practice what

he preaches. We have been called to a process of character building, qualifying to rule in God's Kingdom.

From the Archives: Featured Article

[Is It a Sin to Drink Alcoholic Beverages?](#)

by Staff

It is true that some scriptures might, at first reading, seem to teach total abstinence from wine and other strong drink. However, many other passages show otherwise.

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