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CHRISTIAN BEHAVIOR

We are called to be a godly people who think, feel, and act in harmony with the principles of heaven. For the Spirit to recreate in us the character of our Lord we involve ourselves only in those things which will produce Christlike purity, health, and joy in our lives. This means that our amusement and entertainment should meet the highest standards of Christian taste and beauty. While recognizing cultural differences, our dress is to be simple, modest, and neat, befitting those whose true beauty does not consist of outward adornment but in the imperishable ornament of a gentle and quiet spirit. It also means that because our bodies are the temples of the Holy Spirit, we are to care for them intelligently. Along with adequate exercise and rest, we are to adopt the most healthful diet possible and abstain from the unclean foods identified in the Scriptures. Since alcoholic beverages, tobacco, and the irresponsible use of drugs and narcotics are harmful to our bodies, we are to abstain from them as well. Instead, we are to engage in whatever brings our thoughts and bodies into the discipline of Christ, who desires our wholesomeness, joy, and goodness.

Christian behavior—the lifestyle of a follower of God—arises as a grateful response to God's magnificent salvation through Christ. Paul appeals to all Christians: "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove which is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God" (Rom. 12:1,2). So Christians willingly protect and develop their mental, physical and spiritual faculties in order that they may honor their Creator and Redeemer.

Christ prayed, "I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world" (John 17:15,16). How can a Christian be both in the world and separate from it? How should the Christian lifestyle differ from that of the world?

Christians should adopt a different lifestyle, not for the sake of being different but because God has called them to live by principle. The lifestyle to which He has called them enables them to reach their full potential as His creation, making them efficient in His service. Being different also advances their mission: to serve the world—to be salt in it, light to it. Of what value would salt be without taste, or light that didn't differ from darkness?

Christ is our example. He lived so thoroughly in the world that people accused Him of being "a glutton and a drunkard" (Matt. 11:19, NIV), though He was not. He so consistently lived out God's principles that no one could prove Him guilty of sin (John 8:46, NIV).

Behavior and Salvation

In determining what is appropriate behavior, we should avoid two extremes. The first is accepting the rules and applications of principles to become as a means of salvation. Paul sums up this extreme with the words, "You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace" (Gal. 5:4, NIV).

The opposite extreme is believing that since works do not save, they are therefore unimportant—that what a person does really doesn't matter. Paul spoke to this extreme too:

"You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature" (Gal. 5:13, NIV). When each member follows his or her own conscience, "there is no mutual discipling of fellow Christians in keeping with Matthew 18 and Galatians 6:1,2. The church becomes not the body of Christ, within which there is mutual love and care, but a collection of atomistic individuals, each of whom goes his or her own way without taking any responsibility for one's fellows or accepting any concern for them."

While our behavior and our spirituality are closely related, we can never earn salvation by correct behavior. Rather, Christian behavior is a natural fruit of salvation and is grounded in what Christ has already accomplished for us at Calvary.

Temples of the Holy Spirit

Not only the church but the individual Christian is a temple for the indwelling of the Holy Spirit: "Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own?" (1 Cor. 6:19).

Christians, then, practice good health habits to protect the command center of their body temples, the mind, the dwelling place of the Spirit of Christ. For this reason Seventh-day Adventists—throughout the past 100 years—have stressed the importance of proper health habits. And this emphasis has been paying off: Recent research reveals that Adventists are less likely than the general population to develop almost any of the major diseases.

As Christians, we are concerned with both the spiritual and the physical aspects of people's lives. Jesus, our pattern, healed "every disease and sickness among the people" (Matt. 4:23, NIV).

The Bible views human beings as a unit. "The dichotomy between spiritual and material is foreign to the Bible." So God's call to holiness involves a call to physical as well as spiritual health. Susannah Wesley, mother of the founder of Methodism, aptly summarized this principle: "Whatever weakens your reason, impairs the tenderness of your conscience, obscures your sense of God, decreases the strength and authority of your mind over your body—that thing is wrong, however innocent it may be in itself."

God's laws, which include the laws of health, are not arbitrary but are designed by our Creator to enable us to enjoy life at its best. Satan, the enemy, wants to steal our health, our joy, our peace of mind, and ultimately to destroy us (see John 10:10).

God's Blessings for Total Health

Attaining this health depends upon practicing a few rather simple but effective God-given principles. Some of these are obvious and quite agreeable to most people. Others, such as proper diet, are more difficult to accept since they involve orientations and habits so basic to our lifestyles. For this reason, we will devote more space to those principles that are either misunderstood, debated, or rejected.

The Blessing of Exercise

Regular exercise is the simple formula for increased energy, a firm body, stress relief, healthier skin, more self-confidence, effective weight control, improved digestion and regularity, and reduced depression and the risk of heart disease and cancer. Exercise is not merely an option, it is essential to maintaining optimal health—both physical and mental.

Useful activity tends to prosperity; inactivity and laziness tend to adversity (Prov. 6:6-13; 14:23). God prescribed activity for the first man and woman—care for their garden home in the open air (Gen. 2:5,15; 3:19). Christ Himself set an example of physical activity. For most of His life He was engaged in manual labor as a carpenter, and during His ministry He walked the roads of Palestine.

The Blessing of Sunlight

Light is essential to life (Gen. 1:3). It powers the process that produces the nutrients that nourish and energize our bodies and that releases the oxygen we must have to live. Sunshine promotes health and healing.

The Blessing of Water

The human body is 75 percent water, but this vital fluid is continuously being lost through exhaled air, perspiration, and waste products. Drinking six to eight glasses of pure water a day would aid in maintaining efficient, happy well-being. Another important function of water is its use for cleanliness and the relaxation it affords.

The Blessing of Fresh Air

An environment of impure air, in or outside of the home, causes the blood to carry less oxygen than is required for the optimal function of every cell. This tends to make a person less alert and responsive. It is therefore important to do everything possible to secure a generous supply of fresh air daily.

The Blessing of Temperate, Drug-Free, Stimulant-Free Living

Drugs have saturated our society because they offer stimulation and release from stress and pain. The Christian is surrounded with seductive invitations to use drugs. Even many innocent-appearing, popular beverages contain drugs:

Coffee, tea, and colas contain caffeine, and fruit-flavored wine coolers contain alcohol. Research has shown that the milder gateway drugs tend to lead progressively to

stronger mind-altering drugs. The wise Christian will abstain from all that is harmful, using in moderation only that which is good.

1. Tobacco.

In any form tobacco is a slow poison that has a harmful effect on the physical, mental, and moral powers. At first its effects are hardly noticeable. It excites and then paralyzes the nerves, weakening and clouding the brain.

Those who use tobacco are slowly committing suicide, transgressing the sixth commandment: "Thou shalt not kill" (Ex. 20:13, KJV).

2. Alcoholic beverages.

Alcohol is one of the most widely used drugs on Planet Earth. It has devastated untold millions. Not only does it hurt those who use it, but it exacts its toll from society in general—through broken homes, accidental deaths, and poverty.

Since God communicates with us only through our minds, it is well to remember that alcohol adversely affects their every function. As the level of alcohol in the system rises, the drinker progresses through loss of coordination, confusion, disorientation, stupor, anesthesia, coma, and death. Drinking alcoholic beverages on a regular basis will eventually produce loss of memory, judgment, and learning ability.

Scriptural stories involving the use of alcoholic beverages may give the impression that God approved their use. However, Scripture also indicates that God's people participated in such social practices as divorce, polygamy, and slavery—practices that God certainly did not condone. In interpreting such Scriptural passages, it is helpful to keep in mind that God does not necessarily endorse all that He permits.

Jesus' answer to the query as to why Moses permitted divorce points to this principle of interpretation. He said, "Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, permitted you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so" (Matt. 19:8). Eden is the divine model to which the gospel would restore us. As is true of these other practices, the use of alcohol was not a part of God's original plan.

3. Other drugs and narcotics.

There are many other harmful drugs and narcotics through which Satan destroys human lives. True Christians beholding Christ will continually glorify God with their bodies, realizing that they are His prized possessions, bought with His precious blood.

The Blessing of Rest

Proper rest is essential for health of body and mind. Christ extends to us the compassionate directive He gave His weary disciples: "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest" (Mark 6:31, NIV). Periods of rest provide much needed quietness for communion with God: "Be still, and know that I am God" (Ps. 46:10). God stressed our need for rest by setting aside the seventh day of the week as the day of rest (Ex. 20:10).

Rest is more than sleeping or ceasing our regular work. It involves the way we spend our leisure time. Weariness is not always caused by stress or by working too hard or too

long: Our minds can be wearied by overstimulation through the media, sickness, or various personal problems.

Recreation is re-creation in the truest sense of the word. It strengthens, builds up, and refreshes the mind and body, thus preparing believers to go back to their vocations with new vigor. To live life at its best, Christians should pursue only those forms of recreation and entertainment that strengthen their bond with Christ and improve health.

Scripture lays down the following principle, which will help Christians select good recreation: "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world" (1 John 2:15,16).

1. Movies, television, radio, and videos.

These media can be great educational agencies. They have "changed the whole atmosphere of our modern world and have brought us within easy contact with the life, thought, and activities of the entire globe." The Christian will remember that television and videos make a greater impact on the life of an individual than does any other single activity.

Unfortunately, video and television, with its almost continuous theatrical performances, bring influences into the home that are neither wholesome nor uplifting. If we are not discriminating and decisive, "they will turn our homes into theaters and minstrel shows of a cheap and sordid kind." The committed Christian will turn away from unwholesome, violent, sensual movies and television programs.

Visual and audio media are not evil in themselves. The same channels that portray the depths of human wickedness convey the preaching of the gospel of salvation. And many other worthwhile programs are broadcast. But people can use even the good programs to avoid the responsibilities of life. Christians will not only desire to establish principles for determining what to watch but will also set time limits on their watching, so that social relationships and the responsibilities of life will not suffer. If we cannot discriminate or if we lack the power to control our media, it is much better to dispense with them altogether than to have them rule our lives either by polluting the mind or consuming excessive amounts of time (see Matt. 5:29,30).

Regarding our contemplation of Christ, an important Biblical principle states that "by beholding we are becoming transformed into His likeness with ever-increasing glory" (2 Cor. 3:18, NIV). Beholding brings change. But Christians must continually remember that this principle works on the negative side, too. Films graphically portraying the sins and crimes of humanity—murder, adultery, robbery, and other degrading acts—are contributing to the present breakdown of morality.

Paul's advice in Philippians 4:8 lays out a principle that helps to identify the forms of recreation that have value: "Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things."

2. Reading and music.

These same high standards apply to the Christian's reading and music. Music is a gift of God to inspire pure, noble, and elevated thoughts. Good music, then, enhances the finest qualities of character.

Debased music, on the other hand, "destroys the rhythm of the soul and breaks down morality." So Christ's followers will shun "any melody partaking of the nature of jazz, rock, or related hybrid forms, or any language expressing foolish or trivial sentiments." The Christian does not listen to music with suggestive lyrics or melodies (Rom. 13:11-14; 1 Peter 2:11).

Reading offers much that is valuable too. There is a wealth of good literature that cultivates and expands the mind. Yet there is also a "flood of evil literature, often in most attractive guise but damaging to mind and morals. The tales of wild adventure and of moral laxness, whether fact or fiction," are unfit for believers because they create a distaste for a noble, honest, and pure lifestyle and hinder the development of a union with Christ.

3. Unacceptable activities.

Adventists also teach that gambling, card playing, theater going, and dancing are to be avoided (1 John 2:15-17). They question spending time watching violent sporting events (Phil. 4:8). Any activity that weakens our relationship with our Lord and causes us to lose sight of eternal interests helps to bind Satan's chains about our souls. Christians will rather participate in those wholesome forms of leisure activities that will truly refresh their physical, mental, and spiritual natures.

The Blessing of Nutritious Food

To the first couple, the Creator gave the ideal diet: "I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food" (Gen. 1:29, NIV). After the Fall, God added to their diet "the plants of the fields" (Gen. 3:18, NIV).

Today's health problems tend to center on the degenerative type of diseases that are directly traceable to diet and lifestyle. The diet God planned, consisting of grains, fruits, nuts, and vegetables, offers the right nutritional ingredients to support optimum health.

1. The original diet.

The Bible does not condemn the eating of clean animals. But God's original diet for man did not include flesh foods because He did not envision the taking of any animal's life and because a balanced vegetarian diet is the best for health—a fact for which science offers mounting evidence. People consuming animal products that contain bacteria or viruses that cause disease may have their health impaired. It is estimated that every year, in the United States alone, millions suffer from poultry food poisoning because inspection fails to detect contamination by salmonella and other microorganisms. Several experts feel that "bacterial contamination poses a far greater risk than chemical additives and preservatives in food" and expect the incidence of the diseases caused by these bacteria to rise.

Furthermore, studies conducted in recent years indicate that increased meat consumption can cause an increase of atherosclerosis, cancer, kidney disorders, osteoporosis, and trichinosis, and can decrease the life expectancy.

The diet God ordained in the Garden of Eden—the vegetarian diet—is the ideal, but sometimes we cannot have the ideal. In those circumstances, in any given situation or locale, those who wish to stay in optimum health will eat the best food that they can obtain.

2. Clean and unclean flesh foods.

Only after the Flood did God introduce flesh as food. With all vegetation destroyed, God gave Noah and his family permission to eat flesh foods, stipulating that they were not to eat the blood in the meat (Gen. 9:3-5).

Another stipulation Scripture implies that God gave Noah was that he and his family were to eat only what God identified as clean animals. It was because Noah and his family needed the clean animals for food as well as for sacrifices (Gen. 8:20) that God instructed Noah to take seven pairs of each kind of clean animal, in contrast to only one pair of each kind of unclean, with him into the ark (Gen. 7:2,3). Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14 provide extensive expositions on clean and unclean foods.

By nature, unclean animals do not constitute the best food. Many are either scavengers or predators—from the lion and swine to the vulture and the bottom-dwelling, sucker-type fish. Because of their habits they are more apt to be carriers of disease.

Studies have revealed that "in addition to the moderate amounts of cholesterol found in both pork and shellfish, both foods contain a number of toxins and contaminants which are associated with human poisoning."

By abstaining from unclean foods, God's people demonstrated their gratefulness for their redemption from the corrupt, unclean world around them (Lev. 20:24-26; Deut. 14:2). To introduce anything unclean into the body temple where God's Spirit dwells is less than God's ideal.

The New Testament did not abolish the distinction between the clean and unclean flesh foods. Some believe that because these dietary laws are mentioned in Leviticus, they are merely ceremonial or ritualistic, and so are no longer valid for Christians. Yet the distinction between clean and unclean animals dates back to Noah's day—long before Israel existed. As principles of health, these dietary laws carry with them an ongoing obligation.

3. Regularity, simplicity, and balance.

Successful dietary reforms are progressive and must be approached intelligently. Eventually we should learn to eliminate, or use only sparingly, foods with high fat and/or sugar content.

Furthermore, we should prepare the foods we eat in as simple and natural a way as possible, and for optimum benefit, should eat at regular intervals. Complex, stimulating diets are not the most healthful. Many condiments and spices irritate the digestive tract, and their habitual use is associated with a number of health problems.

The Blessing of Christian Dress

God provided the first clothing for Adam and Eve and knows that we have need of suitable clothing today (Matt. 6:25-33). We should base our choice of clothing on the principles of simplicity, modesty, practicality, health, and attractiveness.

1. Simple.

As it does in all other areas of our lives, the Christian call to simplicity impinges upon how we dress. "Christian witness calls for simplicity.

"The way we dress demonstrates to the world who we are and what we are—not as a legal requirement handed down from the Victorian era, but as an expression of our love for Jesus."

2. Of high moral virtue.

Christians will not mar the beauty of their characters with styles that arouse the "lust of the flesh" (1 John 2:16). Because they want to witness to others, they will dress and act modestly, not accentuating the parts of the body that stimulate sexual desires. Modesty promotes moral health. The Christian's aim is to glorify God, not self.

3. Practical and economical.

Because they are stewards of the money God has entrusted to them, Christians will practice economy, avoiding "gold or pearls or costly clothing" (1 Tim. 2:9). Practicing economy, however, does not necessarily mean purchasing the cheapest clothing available. Often higher quality items are more economical in the long run.

4. Healthful.

It is not only diet that affects a person's health. Christians will avoid clothing styles that do not adequately protect the body or that constrict it or otherwise affect it in such ways as to cause the health to deteriorate.

5. Characterized by grace and natural beauty.

Christians understand the warning against "the pride of life" (1 John 2:16). Referring to the lilies, Christ said, "even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these" (Matt. 6:29). Thus He illustrated that Heaven's perception of beauty is characterized by grace, simplicity, purity, and natural beauty. Worldly display, as seen in transient fashions, has no value in God's eyes (1 Tim. 2:9).

Christians win unbelievers not by looking and behaving like the world but by revealing an attractive and refreshing difference. Peter said unbelieving spouses "may be won by the conduct of their wives, when they observe your chaste conduct accompanied by fear." Instead of adorning the exterior, he counseled, let believers concentrate on developing "the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible ornament of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God" (1 Peter 3:1-4).

Scripture teaches that:

a. The character shows forth one's true beauty.

Both Peter and Paul set forth the basic principle for guiding Christian men and women in the area of adornment:

"Your beauty should not come from outward adornment such as...the wearing of gold jewelry and fine clothes" (1 Peter 3:3, NIV). "I also want women to dress modestly with

decency and propriety, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or expensive clothes, but with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God" (1 Tim. 2:9,10, NIV).

b. Simplicity harmonizes with reformation and revival.

When Jacob called his family to dedicate themselves to God they gave up "all the foreign gods which were in their hands, and all their earrings which were in their ears," and Jacob buried them (Gen. 35:2,4).

After Israel's apostasy with the golden calf, God commanded them, "Take off your ornaments, that I may know what to do to you." In penitence they "stripped themselves of their ornaments" (Ex. 33:5,6). Paul clearly states that Scripture records this apostasy "as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come" (1 Cor. 10:11, NIV).

c. Good stewardship requires sacrificial living.

While much of the world is undernourished, materialism lays before Christians temptations ranging from expensive clothes, cars, and jewelry to luxurious homes. Simplicity of lifestyle and appearance sets Christians in stark contrast to the greed, materialism, and gaudiness of pagan, twentieth-century society, where values focus on material things rather than on people.

In view of these Scriptural teachings and the principles laid out above, we believe that Christians ought not to adorn themselves with jewelry. We understand this to mean that the wearing of rings, earrings, necklaces, and bracelets, and showy tie tacks, cuff links, and pins—and any other type of jewelry that has as its main function display—is unnecessary and not in harmony with the simplicity of adornment urged by Scripture.

The Bible associates gaudy cosmetics with paganism and apostasy (2 Kings 9:30; Jer. 4:30). As to cosmetics, therefore, we believe that Christians should maintain a natural, healthy appearance. If we lift up the Saviour in the way we speak, act, and dress, we become like magnets, drawing people to Him.

Principles of Christian Standards

In all its manifestations, the Christian lifestyle is a response to salvation through Christ. The Christian desires to honor God and to live as Jesus would live. Although some view the Christian lifestyle as a list of don'ts, we should rather see it as a series of positive principles active in the framework of salvation. Jesus emphasized that He came that we might have life and have it more abundantly. What are the principles that guide us to the full life? When the Holy Spirit comes into the life of an individual, a decided change takes place that is evident to those around that person (John 3:8). The Spirit not only makes an initial change in the life; His effects are ongoing. The fruit of the Spirit is love (Galatians 5:22,23). The most powerful argument for the validity of Christianity is a loving and lovable Christian.

Living With the Mind of Christ

"Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 2:5). Under all circumstances, favorable or adverse, we should seek to understand and live in harmony with the will and mind of Christ (1 Cor. 2:16).

Ellen White has noted the beautiful results of a life that is lived in this kind of a relationship with Christ:

"All true obedience comes from the heart. It was heart work with Christ. And if we consent, He will so identify Himself with our thoughts and aims, so blend our hearts and minds into conformity to His will, that when obeying Him we shall be but carrying out our own impulses. The will, refined and sanctified, will find its highest delight in doing His service. When we know God as it is our privilege to know Him, our life will be a life of continual obedience. Through an appreciation of the character of Christ, through communion with God, sin will become hateful to us."

Living to Praise and Glorify God

God has done so much for us. One way in which we can show our gratitude is through the praise that we give Him.

The Psalms strongly emphasize this side of the spiritual life: "I have seen you in the sanctuary and beheld your power and your glory. Because your love is better than life, my lips will glorify you. I will praise you as long as I live, and in your name I will lift up my hands. My soul will be satisfied as with the richest of foods; with singing lips my mouth will praise you" (Ps. 63:2-5, NIV).

For the Christian, such an attitude of praise will keep life's other affairs in an appropriate perspective. In looking upon our crucified Saviour who redeemed us from the penalty and delivers us from the power of sin, we are motivated to do only "those things that are pleasing in His sight" (1 John 3:22; cf. Eph. 5:10, NIV). Christians "live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again" (2 Cor. 5:15). Every true Christian puts God first in all he does, in all he thinks, in all he speaks, and in all that he desires. He has no other gods before His Redeemer (1 Cor. 10:31).

Living to Be an Example

Paul said "give no offense" to anyone (1 Cor. 10:32). "I myself always strive to have a conscience without offense toward God and men" (Acts 24:16). If our example leads others to sin, we become stumbling blocks to those for whom Christ died. "Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did" (1 John 2:6, NIV).

Living to Minister

A major reason Christians live as they do is to save lost men and women. Said Paul, "I try to please everybody in every way. For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved" (1 Cor. 10:33, NIV; cf. Matt. 20:28).

Requirements and Guidelines

Because of the impact a person's lifestyle makes upon his spiritual experience and his witness, as a church organization we have set certain lifestyle standards as minimal requirements for becoming members. These standards include the abstention from tobacco, alcoholic beverages, mind-altering chemicals, and unclean foods and the evidence of a growing Christian experience in matters of dress and the use of leisure time. These minimal standards do not comprehend all of God's ideal for the believer.

They simply signify essential first steps in developing a growing, radiant Christian experience. Such standards also provide the foundation essential to unity within the community of believers.

The development of Christian behavior—"God-likeness"—is progressive, involving a lifelong union with Christ. Holy living is nothing less than a daily yielding of the will to Christ's control and a daily conformity to His teachings as He reveals them to us in our Bible study and prayer. Because we mature at different rates, it is important that we refrain from judging weaker brothers or sisters (Rom. 14:1; 15:1).

Christians in union with the Saviour have but one ideal: that they shall do their best to honor the heavenly Father, who has provided such a rich plan for their salvation. "Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:31).