

**10 Christians appear to be narrow minded and determined not to let the rest of us have any fun!**

*Christians appear to be narrow minded and determined not to let the rest of us have any fun!* This question reminds me of a story about the comedian Groucho Marx meeting a clergyman. *I'd like to thank you, Mr. Marx* the priest said, *for all the joy you've brought into the world.* Quick witted as ever Groucho replied *And let me thank you, Father, for all the joy you've taken out!*

The idea that Christians dampen life by joyless narrow minded-ness dies hard. It should die though! I can think of a story that balances the Groucho Marx one. Two atheists joined in a Peace Eucharist in a Belgian Church. After the service they said to their friend the priest that they envied the sense of confidence and joyful freedom in that congregation. They found something intriguing about those Christians at worship, each playing their part in the praise of God.

Isn't it wonderful when non-Christians sense in their bones what Paul calls *the glorious liberty of the children of God* (Romans 8:21)! If your focus is outside of yourself in Christ there's a sort of self-forgetfulness which lowers the threshold for laughter. This is the very opposite of how some people see Christians.

*Narrow minded?* It's true that having a focus in life can make you appear so. To seek God and his kingdom brings passion into your life – passion and perhaps in some cases *more* passion than compassion. Enthusiasts in life can come across as rather unsympathetic characters carried away as they often are by their own agenda.

Jesus wasn't narrow let alone joyless. He had passion *and* compassion.

Mother Teresa of Calcutta talked about the need for Christians to allow Jesus to enlarge their hearts. For her this involved accepting the Lord's invitation to move out of her convent to work with the street people of Calcutta. *Where the Spirit of the Lord is there is freedom* (2 Corinthians 3:17).

*Christians look determined not to let the rest of us have any fun!* What's behind a comment like this? Many of the things that at first appear to be fun like drink, drugs and promiscuous sex are potentially devastating to our lives. They actually damage us. Some of the things we consider fun are actually vain attempts to fill the God shaped hole in all of us since, as we read in Ecclesiastes (3:1) *God has set eternity in the hearts of men.*

In scripture there's talk about experiencing 'complete joy' and 'perfect peace', fellowship with one another and the fair distribution of wealth so none go hungry. Jesus offers so much more than transient fun!

The commandments are given for our good. They're not so much 'Thou shalt *not*' commandments as 'Thou shalt not' commandments. They're given out of love by a God of love who delights in his children. Because they matter to him

he doesn't want to see them getting harmed by lying or stealing or coveting. In a strange way the commandments of God are more liberating than binding.

Chesterton once said the door of the church looks narrow but you find plenty of space when you commit yourself to going through it. To an outsider disciplines of Christian life like confessing your sins, going to church, giving your money and so on look forbidding. To a disciple they're things that help us keep the joy of the Lord as our strength a joy you can't keep to yourself for its circle expands towards heaven.

Imagine sitting by a television with a remote control. It's a satellite TV so there are hundreds of channels. You sit there scrolling through the channels restlessly until out of boredom you quit and do something else. Imagine instead sitting down with the same remote, keying in the programme you've been looking forwards to all day and sitting back to enjoy it.

The choice for God's very much like that. It's a life choice and it does exclude other things. Just like when you fall in love other relationships pale into less significance by your choosing one person above all others, so a choice for God makes other pursuits look somewhat shallow.

When the Lord says *seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness* he adds *and all these things will be added to you* (Matthew 6:33).  
*I have come to bring life* he says elsewhere *and bring it to the full* (John 10:10)

Of course there's enjoyment in Jesus!

*Total 774 words - just over 4.5 minutes to read*

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