

Westminster Shorter Catechism of 1647 - which you all know very well of course! - begins with the question: 'What is the chief end of man?' The answer it gives is: 'The chief end of man is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.' Now is that what we are supposed to spend all our lives doing? How would it go? You also say that you think there's a close link between glorifying God and enjoying God, and that link is reflection. Can you clarify that a bit?

CF: Yes. I think it's to do with the idea of looking into God's face, which is, of course, this is metaphorical speaking. We can't literally look into God's face. All our language about God is to do with - we're reaching for images to say, it's like this, it's like that. So, the moment when you look into someone's face and there's a shared thought darts between you, or a shared love. Or perhaps when you hold a small baby, and the baby looks at you and breaks out into a huge gummy beam. And that moment of reflecting back and forth the love and, I don't know, the closeness and enjoyment of a relationship, that's the kind of thing I think that I was wanting to describe. That we can reflect God's glory - but not as a kind of cold, reflective, hard surface, but as reflecting the look that we might share with our loved ones.

[7] Right, right. I see that now. Now then, living well must involve enjoying things. But you write that, somewhere in your psyche, lurks the suspicion that if you enjoy something it's probably sinful. I put that to our Voices.

Jan: I hope he approves of chocolate cake! I don't think it's necessarily sinful to enjoy something - I think it's if you're

enjoying something at somebody else's expense. So God's probably quite happy for you to enjoy going out and having a day out and enjoying it. But if you're leaving somebody else at home miserable, then it's not very good.

Emma: I was actually talking to my mum about this and she brought out about chocolate. About how, like chocolate is just incredible but - and God would quite approve of how awesome that is, but maybe disapprove of how people don't get paid a fair wage for when it's made and stuff. So I guess, stuff like that, he'll approve of when we enjoy it, but disapprove if we're not being fair to people.

Jim: I don't see God being petty, spiteful, disapproving. And I would rather think that enjoyment than feasting would be something he would generally approve - provided it's within limits: it's not destructive; it's not completely inconsiderate of other people. What would he actually disapprove of? I think acts of pettiness and spitefulness; acts of outright expansionism or imperialism would certainly fall into the categories that I would expect, with my limited understanding, that God would disapprove of.

George: God has a sense of humour, so he wouldn't be at all averse to you enjoying yourself. That would not be sinful.

[8] Catherine, what do you think of those answers?

CF: Depending on our personalities, we're either inclined to think that God's got a big book and he's watching - you know a bit like Santa Claus, to know whether we've been naughty or nice, and he's noting it all

down, and then we're going to be called to account. I think sometimes, depending on what kind of a background we've had, we've either got that there lurking, you know, that we may be in big trouble on the Last Day. Or else we've got a strong sense of God as a loving parent, who'll be delighted just to welcome us - rather like the Prodigal's father running out to meet him and not saying: 'If you could just clean yourself up a bit before you come in.' Or, 'What have you put your mother through?' So just rushing out and going, 'No, no, no, don't even bother with the apologies - just, here's a cloak, here's a ring, we're going to kill the fatted calf!' So I think, depending on what kind of maybe a church background, or a family background, we've got, we're going to veer towards one or the other. And perhaps both of those need the other as a slight corrective - so that we can not be either swanning into God's presence thinking, 'Okay, hand over the white robe,' or else, kind of coming into God's presence absolutely petrified. Because God is so much more and indescribably above and beyond, as well as right beside us, we can't really get our heads around it. So just looking to both ends of the spectrum to see that we're not being too narrow in our assumptions of what our joys and fears might be telling us.

[9] Okay, let's broaden it out a bit. Is it right, or possible, to enjoy God's creation while other people are in need - while they're not enjoying it? Let's hear what our Voices had to say about that and then come back to discuss it.

Emma: I do think it's possible and it's right. You've got to very much - like kind of understand that you are privileged

and try and help people as much as you can - like, people that are in need. But if everyone was miserable, then is there any point to God's creation? Is there any point in us living?

Jan: Yes, because I don't think you can actually help everybody all of the time - and if you help the people that you can help when you can help them. I can't change the world just in one day, but if I can help other people along the way, then I don't see why I can't have a bit of enjoyment with the rest of it.

George: It depends how cut off you are from the world. If you're insular and you're more concerned about yourself, then that question wouldn't arise. But if you stop to think about it, are you saying: 'What on earth am I doing, when all those people are suffering?'

Jim: Wholeheartedly yes. Yes. Because x is suffering terribly, it doesn't mean that we should all join him or her in his or her suffering. I just think we should tend to think of others, but get on with enjoying and participating in everything that this wonderful world has to offer.

[10] Do you think they've got the balance right?

CF: I think we're all agreed that there has to be a balance - that not to enjoy the good gifts that have been lavished on us would be, well, churlish I suppose, and disappointing to the giver. But I think always to have in mind that enjoying champagne on your terrace while other people are in real need, you've got to be aware of that dissonance, I think. In my mind is the parable of Dives and Lazarus - Lazarus is just there at the rich man's gate, in utter destitution, and it seems