

1 Timothy 4:1-6 — Why Must I Savor Earthly Pleasures?

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Welcome to CrossWinds. It is great to have you. The Bible has many verses that warn against materialism. There are other verses that tell us it is difficult for a rich man or woman to enter heaven. If you are like me, after a while we start wondering what God wants us to do with our money. Should we give it all away? Isn't giving it all away what the most spiritual people do?

There are some radical young Christians that talk about the importance of living with a wartime mentality when it comes to our Christian faith. We should live on a little as possible so we can give more to the kingdom and avoid the trap of falling in love with the world. What happens when one of these young couples with a wartime mentality has children? Is it right to deny their children the simple pleasures of a family vacation? They may want to buy all their clothes at Goodwill, but does that mean they need to buy all their children's clothes at Goodwill? They may want to drive an old clunker, but do they want their son or daughter to drive an unsafe car?

As Christians, what should we think about enjoying the simple pleasures of life like sizzling bacon, a Dr. Pepper, marital love, going to the movies or buying a new-to-me car? Are these pleasures to be avoided? Is it more spiritual to give up the pleasures God provides for the sake of the gospel?

If we allow ourselves to enjoy earthly pleasures it feels like we have become worldly people. If we give ourselves to rejecting the pleasures of this world, if we are honest, don't we start to become angry and bitter inside for God taking away our joy? These are the questions we will answer this morning.

As a church, we are studying our way through the book of 1 Timothy. This morning we begin chapter 4. This begins a very interesting section of this letter. Paul is going to teach us how to recognize subtle demonic teaching that has crept its way into the church of Ephesus and is still creeping into the church today.

Some will depart from the faith by following to the teaching of demons.

Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons... 1 Timothy 4:1 (ESV)

Paul started with the basics. The Bible is very clear there are only two teams on the field. There is God and his team. There is Satan and his team. It is a simple situation. You are either for the one true God of the universe or against him. Ultimately, there is no middle ground. Don't let anyone tell you differently.

This is why God didn't tolerate ancient Israel blending with the different religions around it in the Old Testament, such as the Canaanites. You can't blend worship of God with worship of demons.

They sacrificed to demons that were no gods, to gods they had never known, to new gods that had come recently, whom your fathers had never dreaded. Deuteronomy 32:17 (ESV)

I know this isn't popular but this is biblical. Behind Islam is a powerful demon. Behind Buddhism is a powerful demon. They masquerade as good but in reality demons are extremely destructive and they want to ruin your life. In the Psalms, it tells us what was behind the idol in the nations around ancient Israel when ancient Israel began serving them.

They served their idols, which became a snare to them. They sacrificed their sons and their daughters to the demons... Psalm 106:36–37 (ESV)

I want you to notice the goal of the demons that were behind the idols they worshipped. The goal was to lead them to kill their own children. I told you the demons are committed to our destruction and to the destruction of what is most precious in our lives.

Paul said the same thing in the New Testament.

No, I imply that what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be participants with demons. 1 Corinthians 10:20 (ESV)

My simple point is there are only two teams on Planet Earth. There is God's team and Satan's team. Satan is committed to getting you to join him so in the end you can fry like a sausage on the griddle. Satan is very tricky. He tries to worm his way into your life. He tries to get you to compromise the truth of God's Word and ultimately to take your life and the lives of the ones you love.

What we see in life is not purely physical. Behind physical reality is a spiritual war where Satan and his demons are influencing and leading the fallen world. Paul reminded us of this truth.

For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Ephesians 6:12 (ESV)

Those are the basics. There are only two teams. Now let's return to our text.

Paul said that in the later times — which biblically is any time after the resurrection of Christ — some people in the church will depart from the faith and switch teams. They will devote themselves to the teaching of demons instead of the teachings of Christ. Paul said we should look for people who will switch from the side of God to the side of demons.

The word *depart* is interesting. It doesn't mean to stray. It doesn't mean to wander. It means to get to the very edge of having something or obtaining something, then to intentionally turn away.

Paul said what will happen in the church is there will be people that look spiritual. You will have great confidence in them in the church. They will come to the edge of saving faith but at the last minute, instead of placing their trust in Christ, they will veer away and devote themselves to demonic teaching.

This is a real problem because many people in the church will be inclined to follow them because they looked so genuine.

Paul described what these people look like.

...through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared... 1 Timothy 4:2 (ESV)

The words *insincere* means pretending to have something they don't. This means these people look very spiritual but in reality, they are not spiritual at all. They are Christian fakes. They are liars. The worst part is they don't even feel guilty because their consciences are seared.

The word seared means cauterized. If you have a bad bleed in a war, the doctor will take a hot iron and burn the wound shut. The good news is the wound stops bleeding and is sealed from infection. The bad news is burning the skin kills the nerves forever so that part of your skin no longer feels anything. It can't feel pain or touch. The nerves are dead.

That is exactly what happened to the minds of these Christian fakes. They look spiritual but they don't love Jesus. They have many followers in the church but at the last minute they turned away from Christ. They are wicked, senseless,

lying people. As you can tell, Paul had very little love for these Christian fakes who turn away from Christ and lead people astray.

How do we recognize these people in the church that are following the teachings of demons rather than following the teachings of Christ? Just like Satan, they are slipperier than you realize.

You can recognize demonic teaching in the church because it will have an emphasis on abstinence from God-given pleasures.

...who forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. 1 Timothy 4:3 (ESV)

Demonic teaching forbids marriage and sex.

The way we can recognize demonic teachers instead of godly Christian teachers is they teach abstinence from God's good pleasures. For example, they forbid sex and marriage.

In the city of Ephesus, there were two lines of thought coming together. There was the teaching of the Essenes in the Jewish community. These were the Jews that were deeply devoted to God. They lived apart from society in the wilderness. They rejected earthly pleasures as evil. They saw marriage and sex inside marriage as evil. Thankfully they died out for obvious reasons. The Essenes were a powerful influence on the Jewish culture of Ephesus. They taught that the really spiritual folks denied themselves of earthly pleasures.

In addition, there was also a strong influence of Greek culture in Ephesus following the teachings of Plato. He taught that matter was evil and the spirit was good. The idea was to deny the body because what mattered was just your spirit. Earthly things were to be ignored while spiritual things were to be the focus.

Paul said denying yourself God-given earthly pleasures such as marriage, sex, and food does not make you super spiritual. It makes you super demonic.

Denying yourself the pleasure of marriage and intimacy in marriage to be more spiritual was not just something they struggled with in the ancient city of Ephesus. It was also something they struggled with in the early church. Early church fathers, such as Tertullian and Ambrose believed the extinction of the human race was to be preferred to sexual relationship even inside of marriage. Augustine, another early church father, was only slightly better. He argued that sexual relations inside of marriage weren't necessarily evil, as long as you didn't enjoy it. He frequently counseled married couples to abstain. Most of the early church fathers saw virginity as superior to marriage even though that is not in the Bible. In the Middle Ages, the Catholic church continued this line of thinking. The Catholic church began blacking out days of the year when Catholic couples were to abstain from marital intimacy for reasons of increased holiness. They continued blacking out days until half of the calendar was blacked out because they saw marital intimacy as evil and unspiritual. This continues today in the Catholic church where priests are still not allowed to marry because they believe it is spiritually better to be celibate. Is there any wonder why the Catholic church struggles with pedophile priests, homosexual priests and priests involved in extramarital sexual relations? If you want to give your life in service to God in the Catholic church you have to turn your back on enjoying one of God's greatest gifts — marriage and intimacy.

Why were all these church fathers and the church in the Middle Ages forbidding marriage and intimacy? According to Paul in Timothy it was because they were devoting themselves to the teaching of demons that told them to abstain for God's good pleasures rather than enjoy God's good pleasures. Why are we to enjoy God's good pleasures rather than abstain? When we enjoy God's good pleasures we spend more time praising and thanking God for them. When we deny those good pleasures God gets less honor and worship from our lives.

Church leaders do not need to be single. In fact, in 1 Timothy 3 we saw that you find a good church leader by finding a man that does a good job of loving his wife and leading his family. This assumes most church leaders will be married.

Go back to Genesis. God said it was not good for man to be alone so he didn't make man a fishing pole, a monster truck or a golden retriever. He made a woman. He then told the man and the woman to get busy and fill the earth. Children are always seen in the Bible as a blessing from God. The Bible talks about making sure your quiver is full of kids. That means blessed is the man whose Ssuburban is too small because God gave him a bunch of kids.

Remember our studies in Genesis: God officiated the wedding of Adam and Eve before the fall. God created Adam and Eve as sexual beings, and God is honored when a husband and wife bless one another in a sexual way. There is no sin in sex when a couple is married. There is only blessing. When a couple enjoys the good gift of God's pleasure with one another, their hearts are filled

with thankfulness and worship to God for his good gift, marriage and the marriage bed.

When you go to bed at night and you lie next to your spouse, does your hand ever reach over and hold his or hers and your heart swells up with gratitude to God that you are lying next to your best friend, a wonderful lover and you thank God for marriage and sexuality that God gave you to bless one another?

You wake up in the morning and see your spouse next to you so that thankfulness fills your heart so you pause and say to God, "Thank you for giving me such a good husband or such a good wife." Do you see this is what God wants? He created this world full of pleasures and he wants you to enjoy them so you are constantly turning your thoughts and words in thankfulness and worship to him for his good gifts and his many undeserved pleasures.

Demons want you to deny yourself of those good gifts so they can deny God of the worship he deserves that should come from the overflowing joy in your heart. Do you see the subtleness of this demonic deception?

Demonic teaching emphasizes abstinence from foods.

Another teaching going around the Ephesian church that still happens today is abstinence from certain foods. We are talking about people becoming vegans. The really spiritual people only eat whole wheat bread and a salad without dressing. Only spiritual babies enjoy bacon and eggs for breakfast, sausage for lunch and a fat juicy steak for dinner. The super spiritual people think they should abstain from all that pleasure, and as a result God gets less worship.

Even the apostle Peter struggled with this. In Acts 10, God gives Peter a vision of something like a sheet being let down from heaven and on the sheet were all kinds of animals and birds. Peter was told to get up and eat. At first, Peter refused because he said he had never eaten anything unclean. He was a good Jewish boy that told himself he was spiritually superior because he abstained from certain foods. God said to him, “Do not call unclean what I have made clean.” In other words, “Peter get up. Kill that pig and cook the bacon. Cook the shrimp and eat the lobster. Your mouth will be singing praises to God as soon as you taste them.”

What is the difference between a materialist and a Christian?

A materialist needs to have steaks, a new house, a new boat, a new car and sex to be happy because their happiness is found in their stuff. They worship their possessions. A Christian can take those same pleasures of food, relationship, intimacy, a car, new clothes, a house and receive them, enjoy them but rather than needing them to be happy, the joy found in them inspires the Christian to greater levels of worship to the creative God who gave us all these things to enjoy.

What is wrong with the way most Christians handle pleasure?

The problem with most Christians is we have a lingering sense of guilt for enjoying the good things God has provided. As a result, we rush through them and don't take the time to savor and enjoy them. Most of us rush through meals and don't take the time to enjoy the pleasure of oregano, cilantro, tomatoes, sugar, salt and spices. When we get up in the morning we rush out of the house rather than pausing for a moment and thanking God for the good house he

provided, the warmth of the family we enjoy within the walls and the gift of the children God provided. The honest truth is that Christians also rush through their marital blessings rather than taking the time to enjoy those blessings and let them lead to more praise and worship of God for those good gifts. Savoring God's good gifts will not turn you into a materialist. It will turn you into a more passionate worship of God for his goodness.

Why do we pray before meals?

Many times when we pray before a meal, we thank God for providing the food. This passage teaches us we should also thank God for the joy of the food we are about to enjoy.

Thank you God for ziti, lasagna, spaghetti and Italian sausage. Jesus thank you for every item on the menu at the Olive Garden. All of them bring forth worship from my soul.

If God wants us to enjoy the pleasures of life, why do people embrace asceticism?

If God filled our world with pleasure to be enjoyed, such as marriage, meals, family, summer warmth, flowers, vacations and shopping, why are demons successful in leading people away from pleasures into a life of asceticism and deprivation? I will give you two reasons.

1. **We want to mask inner wickedness by embracing outward piety.** When people struggle with sin, one of the ways they try to hide their losing battle with sin on the inside is they adhere to severe forms of self-discipline on the outside. For example, if someone is struggling with an addiction to cutting, they often adopt a severe asceticism in other areas of their lives. Because of

their inner self-hatred they will stop eating. On the outside they look extremely disciplined but on the inside they are out of control when it comes to self-hatred and sin. Demons love this. As long as they can get you thinking the way to solve your spiritual problem on the inside is by severe self-deprivation on the outside, they win. I like to think of it this way. The problem is always sin. The answer is always Jesus. Here is the way you beat your secret habit of cutting. Instead of focusing on severe self-deprivation, focus on enjoying Jesus. Listen to songs of praise and worship. Read your Bible. Talk to God in prayer. Go to church. Build Christian friendships where you can pray together and talk together and cry together. When we focus our hearts on Jesus, we find God changes our hearts. Our motives change. Our nature changes. Our appetites change. Our desires change. When we walk with Jesus, we find ourselves walking away from sin. You will wake up one morning two weeks later and say, "I haven't even thought about cutting the last two weeks since I have been walking with Jesus." My raging inner struggle went away, not by denying myself but by enjoying myself in Jesus.

2. **We embrace asceticism because when we don't understand the atonement.** This means that after we sin, we feel so broken and ashamed that even after we confess our sin to Jesus and ask for his forgiveness, we give ourselves harsh levels of discipline as a way of punishing ourselves for what we have done because we think that will pay for our sin. Here is the problem. The Bible tells us Jesus paid for all of our sin. No amount of self-punishment after we sin makes a dent when it comes to paying for our sin

before God. Deprive yourself of a meal to pay for your sin. Do you really think that makes a difference? How does hitting your head against a wall and calling yourself a jerk pay for your sin? It can't. Our sin is so serious that we deserve to die for it. Skipping a meal doesn't begin to pay for sin. Only the death of God's own son could pay for our sin and his death did pay for our sin. Jesus paid for all of our sin. He paid for the sin of our past, our present and even our future. Self-deprivation to punish yourself for sin shows you don't understand the seriousness of sin and how completely Jesus paid for all of your sin.

How do I apply this to my week?

...nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer. 1 Timothy 4:5 (ESV)

This is probably the best sermon application you will ever have. This week, enjoy the pleasures God offers you in this world. If God gives you the pleasure of a good meal, enjoy it and let it lead you to more worship of God for his good gifts. If God has given you a spouse, every morning and evening when you spend with them, let the joy of your relationship lead you to greater levels of worship to God for the gift of one another. If you have healthy kids, enjoy them and thank God for them.

Savor every good pleasure God gives you in this world. Enjoy it to the fullest. The more you enjoy it, the more enthusiastic of a worshipper you will become.

The best way to constantly worship God for his good gifts is to offer little prayers of thanksgiving throughout your day. Before you eat a meal, thank God

for providing the food and the taste buds he provided to experience it. Let your heart overflow with gratitude. When you wake up in the morning and see the cold weather outside, offer a prayer of thanksgiving to God for his good gift of a warm home. When you get together with friends that you enjoy, whisper a prayer of thankfulness to God for that good gift. This spring, when the grass grows and the flowers bloom and the birds fill the air and the sun warms the earth and things burst to life, enjoy every bit of it and let it lead you to prayers of thankfulness and worship.

At all costs avoid the demonic teaching that self-deprivation that says the more you deny yourself, the more spiritual you have become. If you buy that lie, your life will deny God the worship he deserves.



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