

WEAPONS THE DEVIL IS USING – RECREATION

2 Timothy 3:4

INTRODUCTION

- A. Paul wrote that in the last days people would be “lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God” 2 Tim. 3:4.
- B. In our modern nation of big business, “fun” is the biggest of the big businesses.
 - 1. We are a society all but obsessed with leisure, amusement, and play in all its many forms: arts, entertainment, recreation, sports, hobbies, crafts, travel, and the innumerable personal “interests” that we are involved with.
 - 2. It would be impossible even to estimate the time, the money, and the interest we invest in these activities as a nation.
 - 3. Consider, for example, the importance we place on sports. In a study reported in 1988, over one hundred amateur athletes were asked, “If you could take a drug that would guarantee you’d win an Olympic gold medal but would kill you within the year, would you take that drug?” More than half of these young people said yes.
 - 4. Our basic value system revolves around our fun.
- C. It is widely understood that these things have radically changed the society that surrounds us. But are we fully aware of how much impact the “leisure revolution” has had on those of us who are the Lord’s people?
- D. Do we have our eyes open to how powerfully the devil can use “fun” to hinder us in the Lord’s work?
- E. Let it be said at the very beginning that recreation in itself is not wrong.
 - 1. It was God, not the devil, who created pleasure.
 - 2. Whatever sinful pleasures there may be are nothing but cheap counterfeits of some good thing God created for us enjoy within His will.
- F. But granting that pleasure itself is not evil, let us admit that a greater proportion of the average Christian’s time, money, and interest is going to the pursuit of pleasure than was true in our grandparents’ generation.
 - 1. Here is the question we need to ask: where is this time, money, and interest being taken from?
 - 2. In all too many cases, it is being taken from time, money, and interest that would otherwise be going to the Lord’s work.
- G. Is it not a fact that our overemphasis on entertainment, recreation, sports, etc. is detracting from our spiritual lives and from the Lord’s work? The thing that is wrong is not fun — it is our fascination with fun, our near-obsession with it.
- H. What needs to be said about this fascination of ours with fun?

DISCUSSION**I. WHAT “RE-CREATION” WAS MEANT TO BE**

- A. The environment that God created for the first man and woman was surely filled with delights of both the mind and the senses.
 - 1. GE 2:8-9.
 - 2. God knew that beings created in His image would need things that would give pleasure and enjoyment.
- B. There was work to be done in the Garden of Eden: GE 2:15.
- C. We do not doubt that God provided for man to be refreshed and rejuvenated from his work.

- D. The perfect balance between work and rest/play — between being emptied and refilled — must have been a part of what made work itself pleasant and satisfying, rather than onerous as it came to be after sin. GE 3:17-19.
- E. Rejuvenation so that we can return to productive work is the essence of “re-creation.” True recreation replenishes our energies by giving pleasure in the doing of things that vary from our routine work. Life needs rhythm and balance between alternating cycles. In nature, God provided for the refreshment that comes from variation: the round of the seasons, the alternation between day and night, the variety in the weather.
- F. Happiness, pleasure, merriment — even fun — are gifts of God to man. EC 5:18.
 - 1. PR 15:13, 15; 17:22.
 - 2. EC 3:1, 4.
 - 3. EC 3:12-13.
 - 4. EC 8:15.
 - 5. EC 11:9-12:1.

II. WHAT WE HAVE MADE OUT OF RECREATION

- A. We err anytime we take a good thing that was meant to be a part of life and exaggerate it, making it more important than it was meant to be.
- B. With fun, we have made a secondary part of life our primary focus.
- C. Our interest in fun is bigger than our interest in the main business of life. What we have done with recreation is comparable to what children would like to do with dessert at mealtime: elevate a treat to the status of the main course. Nike was the Greek goddess of victory. Today, ads for Nike® sports equipment urge us to “Just Do It.”
- D. The evidence suggests that we have virtually made a god out of entertainment, recreation, sports, etc.
 - 1. We pay entertainers and sports stars far more money than anyone else in our society. Surely this makes some kind of comment on how important we believe these things to be.
 - 2. As for sports, our interest in athletics is part of a long tradition in Western civilization.
 - a. In ancient times, body culture and athletic competition were so important that actual religious cults were often based upon them. In Greco-Roman society, there were a variety of gymnasial cults.
 - b. The sexual promiscuity and debauchery that were often associated with athletics in ancient times suggest some interesting parallels with the sexual exploits of modern sports and entertainment stars.
 - c. The “Nicolaitans” — RE 2:6, 15 - may have been a group involved in practices similar to the gymnasial cults of Asia.
 - d. In practical terms, is our modern emphasis on physical fitness, sports, etc. different in any significant way from that of ancient times?
 - 3. There is obviously value in bodily exercise, but it pales in comparison to the profit of godliness. 1 TI 4:8.
 - 4. Anything that we come to love and treat as more important than God is idolatry. Consider the error of those in RO 1:25.
- E. We have devoted inordinate attention to our fun.
 - 1. We simply think about it too much; it has become a preoccupation, if not an obsession.
 - 2. We make a fetish (an object of abnormally excessive attention or reverence) out of fun.

3. Spiritual things need to get more of our attention. Paul said, "If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. CO 3:1-2.
- F. We have let fun infringe on priorities that are higher on the scale of importance. In our "budget" of time, money, and interest, we have allowed fun to get too big a slice of the pie.
1. We spend untold billions of dollars and hours in recreational and entertainment activities. See figures in the Statistical Abstract of the United States.
 2. All of us have borrowed money (on credit cards, if not otherwise) for fun and entertainment. How many of us would borrow money to supply needs in the Lord's work? We will make bigger sacrifices and endure greater hardships for our fun than for anything else in our lives, including the Lord's work.
- G. We have let fun gain too much power over us.
1. We are serving it rather than it serving us.
 - a. IS 47:8.
 - b. TS 3:3.
 2. Our character and the direction of our entire society are being influenced too heavily by the entertainment business. It would be hard to overestimate the power of Hollywood in our culture. See "The Poison Factory" in Michael Medved, *Hollywood vs. America: Popular Culture and the War on Traditional Values* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992), pp. 1-34.
 3. Our young people name sports stars as their most admired role models.
 4. We are getting too many of our basic character values from the business whose product is supposed to be only "fun."
 - a. This situation is a reversal of what should be the case. The entertainment business should serve our needs, and it might reasonably be expected to reflect our values; but it should not dictate our needs and values. It is evidence of how powerful the producers of entertainment are that Bill Clinton, as a presidential candidate in 1992, felt the need to court them and promise them power in His administration.
 - b. The truth is, Hollywood is leading this country down the wrong road — and many of the Lord's people are following like lambs led to the slaughter.
- H. We have made fun a value, a unquestioned criterion by which we judge all other things; it has become a benchmark by which everything else is measured.
1. We have accepted two false premises:
 - a. Pleasantness is an unqualified good.
 - b. Unpleasantness is an unqualified evil. We are not far from adopting hedonism as our national philosophy: the concept that pleasure is the summum bonum, the highest good, the moral goal.
 2. We have come to judge nearly everything by its entertainment value, by how fun it is — even things that were never meant to be judged by this standard.
 3. Even in the Lord's work, we are demanding to be entertained.
 - a. "Good" sermons, Bible classes, etc. are automatically equated with those that are "interesting." If we say a teaching presentation was boring or dry, we believe we have said the worst that can be said about it.

- b. The Lord's work simply cannot compete with temporal activities at the level of fun. It is a mistake to try to make it do so!
 - c. It would clarify our thinking if we would just go ahead and recognize that church buildings will never fill up like baseball parks and football stadiums.
 - d. Our demand that the church "interest" us is just as childish as the toddler's insistence that his parents must keep him entertained. The truth is, keeping ourselves interested in the Lord's work is our own responsibility.
 - I. Our attitude toward fun is sometimes remarkably similar to a child's.
 - 1. It is a matter of principle with us that "fun = good" and "good = fun."
 - 2. We insist that everything must be fun — or we will not participate.
 - 3. We put others on notice that if they expect to hold our attention, they must do or say things that are entertaining.
 - 4. We believe that fun is more important than eating or sleeping.
 - J. In some cases, especially when we are young, we seem to have missed the point that recreation is to be a replenishment of our energies from work. All too often, we have done little that we need to be re-created from!
 - K. We have sometimes pursued pleasure in such a way that it dissipates us. In our culture, that which ought to make us more often degrades us and makes us less.
 - 1. Consider the implications of terms like the following:
 - a. Dissipation — dissolute indulgence in pleasure; intemperance.
 - b. Indulgence — the act of allowing oneself unrestrained gratification.
 - c. Debauchery — extreme indulgence, the act of being led away from excellence or virtue.
 - d. Decadence — the state of having deteriorated or decayed morally.
 - 2. Unbelievers should be able to notice that we do not "run with them in the same food of dissipation" — 1 PE 4:3, 4. Cf. "the same excess of riot" (KJV).
 - 3. EP 5:3-4. Fun and frolic, even when good, do not constitute the "end all and be all" of life. It is not only our children who have to have expensive toys and enjoy expensive fun!
 - L. We have tried to find ultimate meaning and goodness in a thing that is only transitory. Cf. EC 2:1-11.
 - 1. The pleasures of sin, of course, are only "passing pleasures" - HE 11:25.
 - 2. But in the realm of temporal things, even the good things God created for us to enjoy are only temporary.
 - 3. We get less pleasure out of our pleasure when we make it an end in itself. Ironically, by making too much out of it, we get less from it than we would if we put less emphasis on it.
 - 4. The person who "lives in pleasure" is dead spiritually even while alive physically. 1 TI 5:6.
 - 5. The pursuit of pleasure cannot support the weight we are placing on it; we are expecting more of it than it can deliver.
- III. THE CONSEQUENCES OF WHAT WE HAVE DONE WITH RECREATION**
- A. Our problem of overemphasizing entertainment, sports, etc. is connected to nearly every other major problem we have in the Lord's work.
 - B. Our fascination with fun is one reason why we have to work overtime, are so deeply in debt, and have so little money for the Lord's work. See chapter on Materialism.

1. Addiction to temporal enjoyments is often to blame when we run out of money to take care of ourselves.
 2. PR 21:17.
- C. Our fascination with fun is one reason why we have the problems we do in our families. See chapter on Crippled Families.
1. When it comes to our spiritual health as families, there is a sense in which we are entertaining and recreating ourselves to death. We are pursuing these interests at the expense of higher priorities, and our families are hurting because of it.
 2. To judge by the time and money we spend on our various activities, some of us as parents appear to be more concerned about the athletic success of our kids than we are about their spiritual welfare.
 3. In particular, organized sports for young people have gotten completely out of hand — and they were of questionable value in the first place. See John Rosemond, *Six-Point Plan for Raising Happy, Healthy Children* (Kansas City: Andrews and McMeel, 1989), pp. 148-52, and John Rosemond, *Parent Power!* rev. ed. (Kansas City: Andrews and McMeel, 1990), pp. 147,48.
- D. Our fascination with fun is one reason why we stay overcommitted and have so little time for the Lord's work. See chapter on Overcrowded Lifestyles.
1. We are driving ourselves crazy trying to have it all (materialism) and do it all (overcommitment). We work at our play, play at our worship, and worship our work.
 2. We are being dangerously foolish if we think there is time in life to pursue every interest that appeals to us without our part in the Lord's work suffering.
- E. Our fascination with fun is one reason why we have so little time or inclination for personal evangelism. See chapter on Our Shortage of Personal Evangelism.
1. Think about it. Very many of us play in summer softball leagues that require at least one night a week, but how many of us spend one night a week in personal evangelism?
 2. The fact is, the reason many of us do not have as much as one night a week for personal evangelism is that we have so many recreational and entertainment "obligations."
 3. If the congregation began a program of personal work that required exactly the same number of evenings a week as our softball leagues, etc., many of us would insist that it was an unreasonable demand.
- F. Apart from the problem of overemphasis on fun that is good and clean in itself, it needs to be said that some of what we "entertain" ourselves with is just pure filth.
1. We are guilty of polluting our minds and hearts with things that degrade and dissipate rather than re-create.
 2. We sometimes seem to be unable to distinguish what is "fitting" for the Christian to indulge in from what is not. EP 5:3, 4.
- G. But whatever damage we have done to ourselves by entertainment that is immoral in itself, the greater problem is simply that our heart is in our fun — however clean — more than it is in the Lord's work.
1. All too often, we display a first-rate devotion to second-rate things.
 2. Sometimes the Lord's people are simply not as interested in the Lord's work as they are in things that are more fun.
 3. What would those who know us well say our real passions and enthusiasms are?

- a. What is it that really “turns us on”: recreation or the Lord’s work?
- b. What does the evidence suggest?
4. How many of us can say we have never forsaken the assembling of the saints for a sports event or an entertainment activity? Might we not sometimes be, despite our protests to the contrary, “lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God” – 2 TI 3:4.
5. We need to learn better how to set our minds “on things above” CO 3:1, 2.

CONCLUSION

- A. When we read about the Israelites who “sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play” – EX 32:6; 1 CO 10:7), can we help but think of ourselves?
 1. IS 5:11-12. There are reputable historians who argue that one factor in the fall of the Roman Empire was a weakness of the Roman people that had been produced by overindulgence in banqueting, entertainment, and athletic contests. What seeds are we sowing for the future of our own nation?
 2. AM 5:23.
 3. AM 6:3-6.
- B. God created pleasure, and He wants us to enjoy the lives He has given us in the world that He has made.
- C. But things that are nourishing in their proper measure can be deadly if we choke ourselves on them. The number of the Lord’s people who are “choked” with the “pleasures of life” is one of LK 8:14.
- D. What real, specific changes are we prepared to make to put recreation back in balance with other things and spend more time on spiritual priorities?