

Lovers of Pleasure Described and Warned.

by Edward Payson

A person who loves pleasure more than God is in a sinful and guilty condition, resistant to the truth, and destined for eternal damnation.

Scripture: Proverbs 21:17, Ecclesiastes 2:1, Matthew 16:26, Luke 8:14, Romans 1:25, 1 Corinthians 6:12, 2 Timothy 3:4, Hebrews 11:25, James 4:4, 1 John 2:15

Topics: "Worldly Pleasures", "Eternal Salvation"

Description

Edward Payson preaches about the dangers of being lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God, highlighting how this character is viewed unfavorably by God, as seen in the Bible. He explains that those who prioritize worldly pleasures over God's commands are in a sinful, guilty, and dangerous condition, resisting the truth and despising the righteous. Payson urges the congregation to examine their lives and consider if they are pursuing sinful pleasures, neglecting their duties to God, and finding more satisfaction in worldly pursuits than in serving God, ultimately risking their eternal salvation by prioritizing temporary pleasures over their relationship with God.

Transcript

"Lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God"

2 Timothy 3:4

words describe a character which is, alas! but too frequently found in this sinful world; a character too, which most men are apt to regard with a partial and favorable eye, especially when it is met with among the young. If nothing worse is known of a man, than that he is rather too fond of what are commonly called the innocent pleasures and amusements of life, he is considered by the bulk of mankind as a moral, amiable character, and almost good enough to be admitted into heaven; even though it may be evident from his whole conduct, that he is a lover of pleasure more than a lover of God.

It is evident from the context, however, that St. Paul, or rather the Holy Spirit by whom he was inspired, did not view this character with so favorable an eye. On the contrary, he classes those to whom it belongs, with the grossest and most notorious offenders; offenders, whose prevalence gives an aspect of peculiar danger to the age in which they live. This know, says he, that in the last days perilous times shall come; for men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy; without natural affection, despisers of them that are good, fierce, incontinent, false accusers,

lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God.

From the company in which these lovers of pleasure are here placed, we may easily infer what the apostle thought of them, and what is thought of them by him whose message he brought. Whether the perilous times, of which he speaks, have arrived, or not, we shall not pretend to determine; but certain it is, that very many are to be found among us, who, if we may judge from conduct, are lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God. To show, by a few simple marks, who belong to this number, is our present design.

I. This number includes all whose fondness for pleasure leads them to violate the commands of God. Nothing is more certain, or more universally known, than that men never willingly offend a person whom they love, for the sake of one whom they do not love. Equally certain is it, that when men are constrained to give up one of two things, they always give up that which they love the least. This being the case, it is undeniably evident, that all who provoke, or sin against God, for the sake of any pleasure whatever, do love that pleasure more than God.

Now there are various ways in which men may sin against God in the pursuit of pleasure. In the first place, they may, like our first parents, sin by indulging in forbidden pleasures, in those pleasures which are in themselves sinful. Among these, must be reckoned the pleasures, if they may be called such, which result from gluttony, intemperance, and sensuality: for these are all most pointedly forbidden by the word of God. Revellings also, or assemblies for riotous dissipation, are expressly mentioned among the works of the flesh; and even foolish talking and jesting are forbidden by name.

These, therefore, and all similar pleasures, which are expressly forbidden by the word of God, are in themselves, on all occasions and in all circumstances, sinful; and those who pursue them are lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God. In the second place, pleasures and pursuits which are not in themselves sinful, or not expressly forbidden, may become sinful by being pursued in an inordinate, improper manner, and by leading us to neglect duties which are expressly enjoined.

This is the case with all the pleasures of this life, even with those that are in themselves most innocent; such as the pleasures resulting from friendship, from literary pursuits, or from the enjoyments of the family circle. All these, though innocent in themselves, may and often do become sinful, in consequence of interfering with our duties to God and man, or of being pursued in an inordinate, unseasonable, or improper manner. For instance, we are expressly commanded to redeem the time, to pray without ceasing, to glorify God in all that we do, to deny ourselves, take up the cross and follow Christ.

Consequently, the neglect of any of these duties is a sin, a breach of the divine precepts, and therefore, if we indulge even in the most innocent pleasures, in such a manner as to waste our time, to lose opportunities of glorifying God, to foster a spirit of self indulgence, to encroach upon the season which ought to be allotted to prayer, or to unfit us for the performance of that duty, it is certain that we pursue pleasure in a sinful manner; and if we allow ourselves in such indulgences, if this conduct is in any manner habitual, it incontestably proves that we are lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God.

In the same number must be included, II. All who are led by a fondness for pleasure to indulge in amusements which they suspect may be wrong, or which they do not feel certain are right. When we love any person supremely, we are careful to avoid, not only those things which we know will displease him, but such as we suspect may do it. We always think it best, in such cases, to be on the safe side, and to avoid everything which we do not feel confident will not be displeasing.

It is the same, with respect to God. Those who love him supremely will avoid, not only what they know to be sinful, but what they suspect may be sinful; they will abstain not only from evil, but from the very appearance of evil; and if they are not certain that any proposed indulgence is wrong, yet if they do not know it to be right, they will reject it. They will say, there can certainly be no sin in not pursuing this offered pleasure, but there may be something wrong in pursuing it; and thus God may be displeased, and we will therefore keep on the safe side, and not even incur the risk of offending him, for the sake of any earthly gratification whatever.

If any are disposed to consider this as unreasonable and unnecessary strictness, we would refer them to the words of St. Paul, in the 14th chapter of the epistle to the Romans. He there solemnly assures us, that Whatsoever is not of faith is sin; that is, as is evident from the context, whatever a man does, which he is not fully persuaded is right, is sinful to him, even if it were not sinful in itself. And again he says, Whosoever thinketh anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean; that is, if a man suspects any indulgence to be wrong, it is wrong to him, for in partaking of it he acts against his conscience, and feels self-condemned.

All, therefore, who indulge in pleasures which they suspect may be wrong; all whose consciences condemn them in the silence of the night, after returning from a party of pleasure; all who are obliged to use many endeavors to quiet their consciences, and to persuade themselves that there is nothing wrong in their conduct, certainly pursue pleasure in a sinful manner, and are therefore lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God; since they will pursue pleasure, though they do not know but in doing it they are offending him.

Happy is he, saith the apostle, who condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth. But these persons do condemn themselves, in the very things that they allow. And again he says, He that doubteth is damned if he eat; that is, he that doubts whether anything be right, and yet will practice it, is condemned by his own conscience, and will be condemned of God, unless he repents. III. Those are lovers of pleasure, more than lovers of God, who find more satisfaction in the pursuit and enjoyment of worldly pleasure, than they do in his service.

That the more we love any object, the more satisfaction we find in its enjoyment, all will allow. This being the case, if we can ascertain in what a man finds the greatest pleasure, we can determine at once what he most loves; for no man is a hypocrite in his pleasures. To apply this remark to the case before us: If a man finds more delight in the service and enjoyment of God, than in earthly pleasures; if he forsakes them all to retire into his closet and converse with his Maker and Redeemer; if he finds no book like the Bible, no place like God's house, no day like the Sabbath, no employment like that of prayer and praise, no society like that of God's people, then it is evident that he loves all pleasures less than God.

On the contrary, if he finds more satisfaction in worldly than in religious pleasures; if he prefers a history, a play, or a novel, to the Bible; if he feels happier in a small select party, in a theatre or ballroom, than he does in his closet, or in the house of God; in a word, if he cannot seriously say to his Maker, Whom have I in heaven but thee, and there is none on earth that I desire besides thee; then it is as evident as anything can be, that he is a lover of pleasure more than a lover of God.

There is no more doubt respecting his true character, than if he were openly immoral and profane, or than there will be at the judgment day. Lastly: All who are deterred from immediately embracing the Saviour, and commencing a religious life, by an unwillingness to renounce the pleasures of the world, are most

certainly lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God. That men are always ready to renounce any object, for the sake of something which they consider more valuable, all will allow.

Consequently, when Christ invites sinners to come through him to God; when God seconds the invitation by saying, Come ye out from among them, and touch not the unclean thing, it is evident that all who refuse or delay to comply, from an unwillingness to renounce their worldly pleasures, are lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God. There is nothing but this preference of pleasure to God, that can possibly prevent them. Christ has opened the way for them to come to God; he offers to lead them to his Father, and to plead in their behalf.

But they will not comply, though heaven is the reward of compliance, and eternal wretchedness the consequence of a refusal. How very much then must they love pleasure more than God, since these powerful inducements cannot persuade them to forsake their pleasures and come to him. Having thus endeavored to show to whom the character mentioned in our text belongs, we shall proceed to show, in the next place, that, whatever may be thought of them by the world, or whatever they may think of themselves, they are in reality in a most sinful, guilty, and dangerous condition.

That the apostle considered them as sinful, in no common degree, is evident, as has been already observed, from the company in which he has placed them. It is still farther evident from the description which he gives of them in some of the verses succeeding the text. For instance, he there informs us, that such are persons of corrupt minds. That they must be so will be evident on a moment's reflection; for what can be a more satisfactory proof of a wretchedly corrupt state of mind, in a rational, immortal being, than a preference of unsatisfying, transitory, sinful pleasures; to his Creator; to a Being of infinite loveliness, excellence and perfection, the Author and Giver of every good and perfect gift?

Those who are guilty of this are idolators in the worst sense of the term. Idolatry is a breach of the first and great command, Thou shalt have no other gods before me; thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and soul, and mind, and strength. Now these persons have another god before the true God; they have an idol which they love more than they do him; an idol, to which they sacrifice not only their time, their attention, their talents, but even their immortal souls; an idol, too, of the most worthless and contemptible kind.

Though they are urged and entreated by the tender mercies of God, not to be conformed to this world, but to present themselves a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is their most reasonable service; yet they obstinately and ungratefully refuse to comply, and choose rather to sacrifice themselves on the altar of worldly pleasure, thus robbing God of his due, and ruining the souls he has given them, for the loss of which the whole world can make no compensation.

Well, then, may it be said, that they are persons of corrupt minds. In the second place, the apostle informs us, that they resist the truth. This they must do, for their deeds are evil. Christ assures us, that every one who doeth evil, hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. Such persons hate the truth, because the truth condemns and exposes their sinful but beloved pleasures. Its natural tendency is to separate them from their pleasures, and lead them to God; but they resist this tendency; they refuse to give up their sinful pleasures, and labor in various ways to persuade themselves that they are innocent, and that no evil consequences can result from their pursuit.

Hence they resist all attempts to turn them from the error of their ways, and all the convictions which at times arise in their minds; the preached word does them no good; they quarrel with those truths which

condemn them, as unreasonably strict and severe, and the language of their hearts is, We have loved our idols, and after them we will go. Hence, thirdly, they are represented as despisers of good men. They consider such men whose conduct reproves them, as the enemies of their happiness, and ridicule them as rigid, morose, superstitious or hypocritical persons, who are needlessly strict and scrupulous, and who will neither enjoy the world themselves, nor allow others to do it.

Hence, there are perhaps no characters who hate and despise the truly pious, more bitterly, than those who are lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God, This is to be expected; for the royal Preacher has long since informed us, that as an unjust man is an abomination to the just, so he that is upright in his way is an abomination to the wicked. The sensual, voluptuous Sadducees, those ancient lovers of pleasure, hated and despised Christ and his disciples, even more, if possible, than did the hypocritical, self-righteous Pharisees.

Lastly, the persons we are describing are represented as being dead in trespasses and sins. She that liveth in pleasure, is dead while she liveth; and this is equally true of both sexes. They are dead, as it respects the great end of their existence; dead to every thing that is good, dead in the sight of a holy God, loathsome to him as a corpse is to us, and as unfit for the society of the living Jehovah, as the naturally dead are for the society of the living. You need not be told, that, however dear the persons of our children and friends are to us, while living, yet after they are dead, after the animating, life-supporting spirit has departed, we wish to bury them out of our sight.

They cannot then enjoy our presence, nor can we take the least pleasure in theirs; on the contrary, they soon become intolerably loathsome and shocking; and were we unable to remove them, they would soon render our habitations insupportable. Thus, though God loves his creatures as such, yet when they become dead in sin, he ceases to love them; they become exceedingly hateful in his sight, even as a corpse is in ours. Nor are they any more capable of enjoying him. To use his own language, his soul loathes them, and their souls abhor him.

Never, therefore, while thus dead in sin, can they be admitted into heaven. They are evidently unfit for it; they could not enjoy it; for there, none of their beloved pleasures will be found. Besides, God will no more suffer them to enter heaven, than we would suffer the fittest apartments in our houses to be filled with the putrefying corpses of the dead; for heaven is the habitation of his holiness and glory, and he has solemnly declared, that nothing shall enter it that defileth.

They, therefore, who love pleasure more than they love God, will not, cannot be admitted into heaven, unless they repent, and wash away their defilement in the blood of Christ. And if they are not admitted into heaven, there is but one other place to which they can go at death, and that place will be their eternal habitation. Such is the character, and such will be the inevitable doom of all who are lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God. This being the case, it is surely of infinite importance, that we would ascertain whether this is our character.

Permit me, then, with the utmost tenderness, and with a most anxious solicitude for your best interests, your true pleasure, to ask all of you, especially the young, Are not some of you lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God? Do none of you indulge in pleasures which are in themselves sinful, which tend to ruin you for this world as well as for the next, and which are most clearly forbidden in the word of God? If not, and I would hope this is the case, do none of you indulge in the pursuit of what are called innocent pleasures, in such a manner as leads to sin, to sins of omission at least; in such a manner as leads you to

waste precious time, to utter innumerable idle words, to neglect watchfulness, self-denial and prayer, and unfit you for the right performance of these duties?

Are you not often in places and engaged in scenes, in which you would not wish the day of judgment or the hour of death to find you? In a word, do you not pursue pleasure in a way which is inconsistent with doing every thing to God's glory, with making preparation for death, with obeying the commands of Christ, and with securing the salvation of your souls? Do none of you indulge in pleasures which you suspect are not entirely innocent, for which your consciences reprove you after you return from them, and which you sometimes find it difficult to justify, even to yourselves?

Do you not find more satisfaction in these pleasures than in the service and enjoyment of God; and are you not deterred from complying with your convictions, and immediately commencing a religious life, by an unwillingness to give up these fascinating, but pernicious and ruinous pleasures? Yes, my friends, you cannot but know, and I know that this is the case with some of you; and I, yet not I, but the word of God declares, that all with whom it is the case, are lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God.

Yes, you love these irrational, transitory, unsatisfying pleasures better than the God who made you, better than the Saviour who died for you, better than the salvation of your own souls, better than all the joys of heaven. Hence you are dead while you live, dead in trespasses and sins, dead to everything good, dead to the great object for which you were created, dead in the sight of God, and utterly unfit for admission into heaven. Hence, also, you resist the truth. This is the reason that the preaching of the gospel does you no good.

You are often in the house of God, you hear what is said; you appear solemn, and perhaps at times, are affected by the truth, so that one would think you, like the young ruler, not far from the kingdom of heaven. But you go from the house of God. The world resumes its fatal power over your minds. Your love of pleasure revives. The enchantress waves her magic wand, and beckons you to some of the various temples where she is worshipped. You obey the signal. Your inclinations stifle the voice of conscience, and hurry you away.

I see them carry you to some resort of pleasure, falsely so called; there I see some of you engaged in gay and trifling conversation, which banishes all serious thoughts from your own minds, and from the minds of those with whom you converse. I see others led to places where the gaming table is spread, where the sound of the viol is heard, where the circling glass is employed to drown reflection, and brace up the drooping spirits in the pursuit of pleasure. I hear the plausible arguments, the entreaties, the sneers and sarcasm which are employed to overcome the firmness and banish the scruples of those, who are at first unwilling to join in the mad career.

I see and no longer wonder, that the truth is resisted. I no longer wonder that a preached gospel is rendered ineffectual. I no longer wonder that so few are rescued from the whirlpool of pleasure, or that I see its fatal flood strewn with the wrecks of immortal souls. I rather wonder that any escape; that I see some who have reached the shore, and while with a joyful surprise, I hear them singing the praises of their great Deliverer, I am constrained to cry, Truly, this is the finger of God!

For what power, short of his, can rescue any from these bewitching scenes, where the Tempter, in the mask of Pleasure, spreads his most subtle and fatal snares! These are the scenes where he carries on, with the greatest success, the diabolical work of temptation and death. These are the places where thought is banished; where religion is forgotten, where God, and death and eternity are kept out of sight,

where conviction is stifled, where conscience is seared, where the heart hardened, where the good resolutions, made in a serious hour, are broken; where the young and yet unhardened sinner is gradually trained up to vice and infidelity; where the ruin of millions of immortal souls has been finally sealed.

This being the case, we appeal to yourselves, my friends, whether we ought to keep silence, when we see many for whose souls we watch, as one that must give an account, flocking to these scenes of temptation and ruin? No, we cannot, we dare not be silent. Though you will perhaps resent this attack on your favorite pleasures, and consider us as your enemy because we tell you the truth; yet whether you will hear, or whether you will forbear, we must speak, and give you warning from God.

Not that we hope that our unassisted endeavors or warnings will avail. No, we know too well the strength of your attachment to those pleasures, to hope this. We know too well the specious names by which their deformity is veiled, and the plausible arguments by which the application of these names is justified. Once we thought that these arguments were conclusive, that these specious names were properly applied; that pleasures which displease and dishonor God, waste precious time, and lead to the neglect of duty and the ruin of the soul, might be called innocent pleasures.

Yes, with shame I confess that I once believed this. But it was all an error, a delusion resulting from that dizzy whirl of mind, that stupefaction of the nobler powers of the soul, which is produced by circling round the vortex of worldly amusement. That Power who has convinced me of my mistake, is equally able to convince and save you. This is all my hope, all my dependence, and to this Power I look for aid, while from the shore of this fatal, irresistible whirlpool, I call to those whom it is still sweeping away.

Help me, ye people of God, with your prayers. Hear and help thy servant, O thou prayer-hearing, wonder-working God, while in thy name he endeavors to pluck thy creatures as brands from eternal burnings. Ye creatures of the Most High! ye immortal spirits! ye probationers for eternity! listen to this call, to the voice of Jehovah. How long will ye continue to be lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God? How long continue to circle round that vortex which draws its wretched captives into the gulf that has no bottom; how long lie buried in slumber and death, dreaming of pleasure, while your Creator is displeased, while your Saviour is neglected, while death is approaching, while eternity is at the door, and your unprepared spirits are momentarily exposed to endless perdition!

What meanest thou, O sleeper! to slumber while this is thy condition! Is it a time for mirth, when the Judge stands before the door, crying, Woe unto you that laugh now, for ye shall mourn and weep! Awake, then, thou that sleepest; escape for thy life; look not behind thee, renounce thy vain pleasures, deny thyself, take up thy cross and follow Christ. Say not, my pleasures are too dear to part with. I know they are dear, dear to you as a right hand or a right eye. But what then?

It is better for thee to enter into life halt or maimed, rather than having two hands or two eyes, to be cast into hell fire. Say not, if we renounce our pleasures, we shall never more be happy. Rather you will never be happy till you do renounce them, and seek happiness where alone it is to be found. Were the Samaritans unhappy when they had renounced sinful pleasures and embraced the cross of Christ? No; there was great joy in that city. Was the Ethiopian nobleman unhappy, after he had believed on a crucified Redeemer?

No; he went on his way rejoicing. Renounce your idolatrous love of pleasure, and this joy will be yours. Enter the ways of wisdom, and you will find them ways of pleasantness. Cease to drink at your broken cisterns which can hold no water, and you shall drink of those rivers of pleasures which flow forever at the

right hand of God. Imitate the example of Christ, who began early to say, I must be about my Father's business, and you shall have that rest, that peace which he gives, and rejoice in him with joy unspeakable and full of glory.

Do any say, we would gladly renounce our unsatisfying pleasures, and follow Christ, but we feel unable to do so. We fear that when the hour of temptation comes, we shall forget and break our resolutions, and return to the world! My friends, the power of Christ can render you victorious over the strongest temptations. His grace is sufficient for you; and if you can consent that he should take away that inordinate fondness for pleasure that enslaves you, he will do it. You perhaps recollect that, in the account we gave you last Sabbath, it was mentioned, that when the young were persuaded to renounce their vain amusements, a glorious revival of religion soon followed.

If you could be persuaded to imitate their example, perhaps the consequences would be similar. Will you not make the experiment, at least for one month! Will you not for one month, one little month, say No, to every call of sinful pleasure, and devote yourselves to the pursuit of religion? Is this too much time to give to the salvation of your souls? Too much to give to him who gave you being; too much to give to that Saviour, who gave his blood for your redemption, and whose language is, My son, give me thine heart.

My dying, yet immortal hearers, will you not grant him this small favor? If you still hesitate, still feel undecided, let me entreat you when you go from this house to repair to your closets, and there lay open the Bible before you; bring to your minds the solemn hour of death, and the awful scenes beyond it, and with these scenes full in your view, survey your past lives, consider how you will wish they had been spent, when your last hour arrives; and then, with the eye of God upon you, and with your eye upon the judgment seat, decide whether you will follow Christ or your pleasures.

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