

ENTERTAINMENT

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Text: Luke 16:15

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I'm going to preach a message tonight on the subject of entertainment and actually start a series of messages that will last anywhere from five to eight weeks. As we consider the subject of entertainment or worldly amusements, we're going to address basically three areas, and I will give a definition to each one of those areas as we get to them. The first one is the theater, the second one is sports, and the other one is banqueting. All of these forms of entertainment were prevalent in the first century during the days of the Lord Jesus Christ and also during the time of the apostles and the early church. I have three messages in 2006 that you can go back and listen to. Now, this is a totally different message, but they'll be related, and that is on sports, the television, and worldliness, and I believe all three of those were preached in 2006. Wednesday night here in the church I spoke to you briefly on the subject of revival. There will be no revival in our lives, in our church until we deal with sin.

Jesus said in Luke 16:15, *"Ye are they which justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth your hearts: for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God."* The latter part of that verse says, *"for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God."* I believe that this a good rule to measure things by. In other words, that which is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God. If the world loves it, you better check it out; there's probably something wrong with it. If the world hates it, you probably ought to check it out because there's probably something good about it. In 1 John chapter 2 we find a description of the world.

Now, when we think of the subject of amusement, the word "muse" means "to think." The "a" that's added to "muse" means "not to think." In other words, to muse has the idea of meditating, concentrating, to think upon, and in our case as Christians, the things of God. Now, many times we ask the wrong question today. Often when we look at something or it comes into our lives or we're starting to examine it, we ask, "What's wrong with it?" assuming that it is probably okay. But the question we should really ask is, "What is right with it?" assuming that it is wrong, especially that which is coming from the world into the church. But many times we don't know how to define sin. Now, every Christian hopefully would say, "I'm against sin," but we have a problem defining sin. What is sin? You see, it depends upon our frame of reference. It depends upon whether we're looking at sin from a Biblical view or from a worldly view, and an individual's definition of sin is going to depend upon that perspective. Let me give you an example. Defining nakedness. Those who love God, those who read the Bible and read it from Genesis to Revelation and look at the verses on modesty would say, "Well, coming from a Biblical point of view, we could identify nakedness as maybe exposing the breasts or the legs or sleeveless blouses"; and we could go on with a list of things, and we say, "That's what I see in the Scriptures." Somebody else may come along who has not been immersed in the Scriptures, and they may be thinking, "Well, nakedness is defined as uncovering only the privates." In other words, they may say, "Well, you're not naked as long as you have a bikini on," but those who know the Scriptures would define nakedness totally different from that. Why? Because of a Biblical perspective and point of view.

In 1 John 2 verse 15 we're going to be considering three areas of temptation. The Puritan writers referred to what we're going to read in this passage as "the world's trinity" – in other words, the quest for pleasure and for profit and for position. All temptations will come from these three areas that we're going to read in this passage. As we consider this subject, many don't even know what "the world" is. I have a quote that I got from a preacher friend of mine that he actually got from another preacher, and it's based on 1 John 5:4

in defining the world. And here's what he said: "Anything that causes you to look at the commandments of God as grievous is worldliness." That's a tremendous way to give a description of worldliness.

So we need to understand what the world is, and I'm saying to you that entertainment is a revealer of the soul in that it will show whether or not a person is really walking with God. Fifty years ago churches across our land stood against worldly amusement, and 50 years ago altar calls were given for those who participated in the worldly entertainment, but now it is in the homes of the majority of Christians.

Now, notice in 1 John 2:15-17: *"¹⁵Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. ¹⁶For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. ¹⁷And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever."* Now, I want you to notice in this passage that there are three classes of sin. This passage tells us, first of all, not to love the world. Verse 16 divides the world up into three areas: (1) the lust of the flesh. That has to do with pleasure, sensual appetites, or sinful tastes; (2) the lust of the eyes. This has to do with profit, in other words, things that we behold, things that we desire in this world that God does not want us to have; and (3) the pride of life. This has to do with position. This is the most hideous in the passage. It's living for the applause of men; in other words, wanting to be recognized by individuals. Now, these are three areas in the world whereby we will be tempted.

In James chapter 4 we see the issue of spiritual adultery. Verse 4 says, *"Ye adulterers and adulteresses"* – male and female – *"know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is"* – what? – *"the enemy of God."* This is strong language. And James 1:27 says, *"Pure religion"* – underline it – *"Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this"* – Here it is – *"To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world,"* in other words, not to be stained or polluted by the world. This is pure religion. In 2 Timothy 4:10 God tells us through the Apostle Paul, *"For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world."*

There is a great contrast between the true believer and the pagan's lifestyle. I have some pictures of some of the theaters and the circuses that were in Rome, because we're going to be talking about Rome and Greece a little bit here tonight. The types of entertainment that I'm going to be speaking to you about were prevalent in the days of the Lord Jesus Christ and the apostles. The early church writers, especially in the first 300 years, gave much warning about entertainment, about sporting events, and banqueting, and they even went as far as talking about the candidates for church membership and baptism and the Lord's Table. Those who would want to come to the church, join the church, or who would want to partake of the Lord's Table and follow the Lord in baptism were questioned on these areas many times; in other words, if they were actors, athletes, players for prizes, comedians, magicians, gladiators or trainers, jugglers, Olympic gangsters, boxers, wrestlers, military, that is, taking up the sword against your brother, or if a person's job had anything to do with idols or the making and selling of idols, many times individuals were barred from coming into the local churches, especially in the second and third centuries.

Public entertainment dominated the Roman Empire from the time of the first century until the end of that Empire around the fifth or sixth century, and most public amusement was of pagan origin. Now, I'm going to be addressing all three of these – the theater, the sports, and the banqueting. Basically, as far as Greece and Rome are concerned, the origins of public amusement were pagan. They originally were connected with the festivals of the gods even though some had lost their religious connection. In other words, over the years, they began losing that religious connection and affiliation, but originally, all of these areas of public amusement were connected with pagan gods. One early church writer says, "The plays represents it as the temple of Venus and Bacchus who were close allies as patrons of lust and drunkenness." Another writer in the second or third century said, "Idolatry is the mother of all public amusement." In other words, Rome had many holidays that they used

for entertainment. Rome was obsessed with entertainment in these areas that I just mentioned. An excessive love of pleasure and amusements were the downfall of Babylon, Persia, Greece, Rome – and eventually America.

Titus 2:11 says, *“For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men.”* Now, notice what the grace of God that saves us teaches us. Verses 12 through 15: *“¹²Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; ¹³Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; ¹⁴Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works. ¹⁵These things speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no man despise thee.”* Notice in verse 12 that the grace of God that saves us also teaches us that we are to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, that we should live soberly and righteously and godly in this present world. And I want you to notice that we are a redeemed people, verse 14, and we've been redeemed from all iniquity, and we are to purify ourselves because we are a peculiar people, and we are to be zealous of good works.

The Theater

The word “theater” is mentioned in the Bible in Acts chapter 19, verses 29 and 31, but it is also mentioned many times by early church writers. I have over 60 quotes on just the theater and sports and banqueting in the first 300 years of early church writers. These are only a few. I have over 100 laying in my office. Now, what do we mean when we use the word “theater”? You could include a lot of things under this title. In the first century there were no such things as television and the Internet and video or video games or DVDs and things of that nature. But when we use the word “theater,” we're talking about the stage; we're talking about plays; we're talking about acting; we're talking about operas, dramas, musicals, television, videos, DVDs, and anything else that I have forgotten that can be put under this title.

Now, in Ephesus, the main road led directly to the theater, but in Acts chapter 19 verse 19, we also find that when people got right with the Lord, they burned their books. Today we could say you need to burn your books and your DVDs and your CDs and many other things to go along with that. The theater was central in the lives of ancient Rome, the Roman Empire. When we talk about Rome and the Roman Empire, we're not talking about the city of Rome; we're talking about the entire Mediterranean area, the Roman Empire. And the Caesars made provisions for the theater to appease and to satisfy the people. And, again, there were many theaters throughout the Empire. It's like today. People of the ancient world were given to theatrical entertainment. They wanted to be entertained, so the government made sure that the people were entertained, and much of this entertainment – the theater, the sporting events, and the banqueting – was free.

Now, what were some of the themes in the theaters in the first century in the time of Jesus Christ, in the time of the apostles, in the time of the early church writers? What were the themes? Just the same as they are today: Comedy. People are laughing themselves into hell. Crime. That's big today. I was sitting in a hospital in Louisiana Wednesday morning of this week while my son-in-law had gone in with my daughter for a little while, and there was one television in one corner and another in the other corner. I was sitting there trying to read my Bible, and I looked up at my son-in-law when he came out and sat down, and I said, “No wonder people aren't listening to our preaching anymore.” I said, “The filth and the garbage that is on these televisions.” There was a program – I don't even know what the name of it was – but it was dealing with a murder and looking at bodies and taking pictures of dead bodies and trying to solve this crime and that crime. Well, those were the same themes during the early church time – revenge, sexual immorality, indecent language, murder. We could go on and on with a list of synonyms. The dramatic arts took its rise in Athens amid the orgies of Bacchus. The Roman theater was mostly a copy of the Greek theater, and, again, they all began with religious festivals and activities, and as time went on, they drifted from that to some extent. “The Roman stage was essentially a pagan

institution, and it remained such in spirit long after the triumph of Christianity,” and that's a quote from another author. As a general rule, the theater was the largest building in the city. Of course, it was also used for other purposes as well.

Now, Ephesians chapter 5 verse 2 tells believers that we are to walk in love as Christ has loved us. And verses 3 through 6 says, *“³But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints; ⁴Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks. ⁵For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. ⁶Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience.”* Now, just notice the wording. The Apostle Paul is making a contrast between the believer and the unbeliever. He said in verses 7 through 12, *“⁷Be not ye therefore partakers with them. ⁸For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of the light. ⁹(For the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth;) ¹⁰Proving what is acceptable unto the Lord. ¹¹And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather”* – what's the next two words? – *“reprove them,”* and he said, *“¹²For it is a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret.”* Well, they're on television now broadcasted to the world. They're on the Internet. They're in the video stores. Verses 13 and 14 go on to say, *“¹³But all things that are reprov'd are made manifest by the light: for whatsoever doth make manifest is light. ¹⁴Wherefore he saith, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.”*

Now, we find then that Rome, Greece, England, America – it doesn't matter where you go – the theater is ungodly – yes, even Shakespeare and his plays. The Puritans and many preachers wrote against the plays and the theater, which, again, I'm talking about the television as well in our time. I've got a stack of articles a foot tall probably that I've collected over the recent years of writers here in America in the 1800s, preachers that spoke out against the theaters in New York and Boston and Chicago and other places – the Broadway-type theaters. Back in the 1800s they were speaking out and warning the public about these things. But here's what we do today. We Christianize everything. We baptize it, do we not? You see, the world knows what the theaters and the sporting events and the banqueting is all about. You know who it is that doesn't know? Christians, many Christians. Jesus Himself said that many times those who are lost have more understanding in some areas than even those who are saved. Now, I put that in my own words. But many times we try to sanctify and justify things because we want to be amused like the world.

Ephesians chapter 4, verses 17 through 19, reads: *“¹⁷This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth, walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind, ¹⁸Having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart: ¹⁹Who being past feeling having given themselves over to lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness.”* That sums up the lost world, and we are to have no part of that. Verse 20 through the end of the chapter says that we are to put off the old man and put on the new man.

Now, what about the television in our time? The video games? The movies? It has been called in years gone by “the devil's pulpit.” It is America's favorite altar, America's favorite pastime. It is now in the homes. You don't have to get in your car or your chariot or on your horse to go to the theater. One writer said, “I've watched TV from infancy to adultery.” That's just about the way that it is. It's become a baby-sitter with many people. And God says in Psalm 11:3, *“If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?”* Idolatry is anything that we place before God, and I'm saying to you that this is a Trojan horse; it is idolatry.

Have you ever read the list of things that God wants us to think about? Philippians 4:8 says, *“Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and*

if there be any praise, think on these things,” muse on these things. That leaves no room for the television, because you cannot find the list that is given in Philippians 4:8 on the television screen. Somebody will say, “Well, you can find something good every now and then.” It is no different than getting down in a septic tank swimming around trying to find a hamburger. It’s the same thing. All it is is filth and garbage. There’s nothing good that’s on it. Three years ago we gave the statistics that the average person watching four hours of television a day in a year’s time will spend 50 days watching television. It is a waste of time. It is destroying our lives, and it is infiltrating our minds so that we cannot respond to the things of God. There is no way that you can be right with God and have a television plugged up to the world. There’s no way that you can be right with God. It is impossible. It is absolutely impossible, and you’ll be angry half the time when the preacher preaches. The movie “Saving Private Ryan” is 170 minutes long, and in an average of every two minutes, there are curse words, profanity, and taking God’s name in vain in that movie. “Black Hawk Down,” 144 minutes long, in an average of every three minutes there is cursing in that film.

The Bible says in 2 Peter 2:6-8 that Lot vexed his righteous soul in Sodom by what he saw and by what he heard. This is very, very important. You see, Hollywood hates God. They hate God. What did people do before television? Well, they had a life. They were able to think. They were able to pray. They were able to talk. They were able to read. They were able to work. They were able to sing. They were able to hate sin. They were able to go to church. They were able to stay married and on and on the story goes. That’s what was going on before Americans got television. You ought to underline Psalm 101, verse 3. Write it on your doorpost or somewhere in your house. It says, *“I will set no wicked thing before mine eyes: I hate the work of them that turn aside; it shall not cleave to me.”* Hollywood hates God. I want you to understand that.

I want to give you some quotes before we go any further. Anton Lavey was a satanist and he wrote the satanic bible. Now, here’s what he said about television: “We can use TV as a potent propaganda machine.” He says, “Also, the birth of television (TV) was a magical event foreshadowing its satanic significance. Since then, TV’s infiltration has been so gradual, so complete that no one even noticed. People don’t need to go to church anymore. They get their morality plays on television.” He also said, “The TV set or satanic family altar” – now, this is what Anton Lavey called it – “has grown more elaborate since the early 50s from the tiny fuzzy screen to huge entertainment centers covering entire walls with several TV monitors. What started as an innocent respite from everyday life has become in itself a replacement for real life for millions, a major religion of the masses.” Even in “Star Wars” they indoctrinated individuals into “The Force,” and even back many years ago the film “Sergeant York” has war propaganda in that film. The man who worked on the homosexual sitcom “Ellen” said this: “If we can get people laughing, we can get our message underneath the door, and they will more readily accept that which would not normally be accepted.” And how many remember “Ben Hur?” Got to be a great film, huh? In 1959 the screenwriter – heard him say this with his own mouth – actually worked a homosexual romance into the movie without telling the star actor in the film – yes, 1959, a movie about the tale of Christ based on, I believe, a novel by an American author in the 1800s.

Between the background music and the acting and all that goes into films, I’m saying to you that they’re destroying our minds. They’re destroying our minds. I’m no fan of Socrates and Plato, but both of them opposed theatrical performances as hostile to morality. Plato says, “Plays raise passions and pervert the use of them and, of the consequence, are dangerous to morality.” He also said, “Plays are written merely to produce pleasure” and that “average men are trained by them to become lovers of pleasure.” I’ve got quotes by Aristotle and lawmakers in Athens had exiled the founder of the stage from Athens. Also presidents even in our country and early church writers and poets who wrote against this. In 1778 the United States Congress recorded “The Reprobation of the Theater,” and they earnestly recommended to the several states to take effectual measures to suppress gambling, horseracing, and theatrical entertainment. In October 1778 they enacted that “a person holding office under the authority of the U.S. who shall act, promote, encourage, or attend such plays shall be

dismissed.” I’ve got hundreds of quotes of lost atheists and Christians over the years that speak out against the theater and the sports and the banqueting. Even the lawmakers in Rome got concerned about the morality because of the theater. Even during the first, second, and third centuries they were very concerned. Many Puritans have written tracts and articles against the plays, and one writer made this statement in, I believe, a tract that he wrote: “The ungodly plays interlude so riff in this nation. What are they but a bastard of Babylon, a daughter of confusion, a hellish device, the devil’s own recreation to mock at holy things, by him delivered to the heathen from them to the Papist and from them to us.” And here’s a quote by another author: “As a bastard of Babylon, the stage which Shakespeare trod was in the eyes of his Puritan contemporaries more than immoral; it was unholy.”

Now, I’ve got a list of people who spoke out against the English stage, not only in the first, second, and third centuries but even during the reformation time. I’ve got many quotes from all areas and walks of life that say there is a serious problem in these areas. Laying before me are quotes just from the early church writers, the Ante-Nicene writers. You say, “Well, I don’t agree with everything they say.” That’s not the issue. The issue is that they were addressing the problem. That’s the only reason I go back and consider their writings. They addressed the problems back during the second and third centuries. I’m not going to even mention names, but I’m just going to skip around these quotes that deal with the theater and sports. One writer said, “Your daughters and your sons watch them giving lessons in adultery on the stage. Admirable too are your lying poets who beguile their listeners from the truth through their fictions, and the boxers meet in single combat for no reason whatsoever. Are such exhibitions to your credit? He who is chief among you collects a legend of blood-stained murders” – He’s talking about the gladiators – “engaging to maintain them, and he who misses the murder exhibition is grieved, for he was not doomed to be a spectator of wicked, impious, and abominable deeds.” This is, again, the second and the third century. Another writer says, “Neither may we watch the other spectacles” – that is, the theater – “lest our eyes and ears be defiled for participating in the utterances that are sung there.” They talk about the music that’s there also. And he says, “And as for adultery, both in the case of men and of gods whom they celebrate in eloquent language for honor and prizes, this is made the subject of their dramas.” Another says, “One might call the racecourse and the theater the seat of plagues.” Notice that. He called it “the seat of plagues.” Another writer said, “We renounce all your spectacles. Among us nothing is ever said, seen, or heard that has anything in common with the madness of the circus, the immodesty of the theater, or the useless exercise of the wrestling ground. Why do you take offense at us because we differ from you in regard to your pleasure?” This is a Christian writing and talking about the heathen. Why do you have a problem with us?

And, again, another writer said, “It will be made clear that the entire apparatus of the shows is based upon idolatry.” Another writer said, “At first the theater was actually a temple of Venus, and, to speak briefly, it was because of this that stage performances were allowed to escape censor. This is how they got a foothold in the world, for oftentimes the censors in the interest of morality put down the rising of theaters.” Again, these are amazing, and most people don’t even know that these writings exist. Another one said this: “Are we not in like manner commanded to put away from us all immodesty? On this ground again we are excluded from the theater, which is immodesty’s own peculiar vogue.” Another writer said, “If again we despise the teachings of secular literature as being foolish in God’s eyes” – and by the way, I do despise secular literature – “our duty is plain enough in regard to those spectacles that come from this source, the tragic and comic plays.” Another one said, “If you argue that the racecourse is mentioned in Scripture, I granted it once, but you will not refuse to admit that the things that are done there are not for you to look upon – the blows, the kicks, the cuss, and all the recklessness of hand.” Another one says, “The father who carefully protects and guards his virgin daughter’s ears from every polluting word takes her to the theater himself, exposing her to all its vile words and attitudes.” One says, “Does it then remain for us to appeal to the pagans themselves? Let them tell us whether

it is right for Christians to frequent the shows. Why? The rejection of these amusements is the chief sign to them that a man has adopted the Christian faith.” He's saying that one of the signs that somebody is saved is that they no longer participate in the sporting events and the banqueting and also the theater. Amazing, amazing. Christians stood against worldly amusements.

Sports

Now, if we're going to be Christlike, there is no way that we can be involved in the majority of sporting events. Football in our country is one of the most brutal. Colleges are identified not by their academics; they're identified basically by their sporting programs. During football season, we see people gather around the altar every Saturday for several months for college football, and they get all caught up in that. Spurgeon made this statement in the 1800s: "This is the age of excessive amusement. Everybody craves for it like a baby for its rattle. In the more sober years of our fathers, men and women had something to live for better than silly sports.” Again, I've got another list of quotes just on the subject of sports. When we talk about sports, we're talking about athletic contests, races, the gladiator games, the boxing, the wrestling, the Olympic games. One writer even says that those who are in the stadiums are more of a spectacle than the games because of the way they react to what is going on. I'm saying to you that this stuff is out of hell. You can't find this stuff in the Bible. Go to the Bible, go to Hebrew history, go to God's people in the Bible, and you don't find the gymnasiums, you don't find the sporting event. Where do these all come from? They come from the pagans, the Greeks and the Romans and the Egyptians and the Babylonians. That's where all of this comes from.

Football, boxing, and wrestling are very popular in our country. You can't get anybody to play flag football. Why? Because it's not brutal enough. You can't show off your strength and you can't knock somebody down. You can't hurt somebody. Imagine college football teams having flag football, and see how the stadiums get filled. The Romans were a glutton for blood. They wanted to see somebody hurt. They wanted to see somebody destroyed and somebody knocked down. And America is the same way today. There's no way that we can exhibit Christlikeness and the Spirit of Christ in sporting events that are contrary to Scripture. When I was growing up, there was cock fighting around the area where I lived, some of the most brutal things you've ever seen – and dog fighting. Anybody that can get enjoyment out of a human being hurt or an animal being hurt, they're sick in the mind, and they need to get right with God. To enjoy seeing anything hurt, anything bleed, there's something demonic about that.

Now, we're talking about sports, athletic contests. We're not talking about getting out in the backyard and enjoying yourself. We're not talking about taking a hike, enjoying nature, or the children out playing in the yard. We're talking about this competitive sports issue that is in our country that was prevalent in the first century. Second Timothy 3:1-5 says: *“¹This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. ²For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, ³Without natural affection, truce-breakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, ⁴Traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God; ⁵Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away.”* Verse 4 says that in the last days there would be those who would be lovers of pleasure. If you want to know what Christlikeness is, Christ-mindedness, read Philippians 2, verses 3 through 8, and see whether or not you can get out on a field or in a stadium or somewhere and try to knock somebody's head off and obey those verses at the same time.

Now, the Olympics have revived in the last hundred years but the original Olympics were in existence about 1000 years. The last Olympic game was played in 394 A.D. until its revival in the 1800's. They started in Olympia, the town they were held in, which was devoted to the worship of Zeus, one of the gods of the Greeks. This is where all this started – in religious festivals, sacrificed animals to the gods, pagan festivals. Religious rites were tied to the games in the beginning. I've seen some pictures of the one that took

place in Atlanta not all that many years ago, and it was just filled with paganism. The stadium in Olympia seated about 45,000 spectators.

The circus is not the circus as we see today, but the circus in the first, second, and third centuries had to do with chariot races. It had to do with a stadium. It had to do with racing. The word "circus" is the Latin word for circle. The Circus Maximus was probably the largest sports arena ever constructed. During the days of Jesus Christ, it seated about 250,000 people. That's a quarter of a million people in one stadium. This is why we have all these verses in the Bible – Titus, Ephesians 5, Ephesians 4 – discussing these things trying to show us the truth. The Emperor himself was usually present at the games and the races. You've got the gladiator games. Now, I could elaborate. I could spend an hour talking about the chariot races alone. We have races today – do we not? – and they're usually on Sunday, and they drive as fast as they can. They drive about 500 miles, and they end up in the same place they started from. The same thing was in the first century. Instead of horses, we've got motors with horsepower today.

The gladiators were inhumane. They were brutal in the arena. I could spend one hour or more just on the gladiator games. A multitude of men and animals died every year in these games. They were condemned criminals that died in these games, servants, slaves that died in these games, captives of war that were made to fight one another and fight animals, and then the persecuted Christians. Christians were sometimes martyred in these games in these stadiums. In the arena, murder was the practiced art at that time, man and beast sacrificed to the blood-thirsty crowd in these arenas. They even imported exotic animals to slaughter. They took lions and panthers and ostriches and bears and leopards and hippopotamuses, giraffes, crocodiles, and anything they could think of from the Middle East and even transported or carried animals in from Africa and places like that in order to destroy them in these arenas. Proverbs 12:10 says, *“A righteous man regardeth the life of a beast: but the tender mercies of the wicked are”* – what? – *“cruel.”* Every child needs to be taught that as they're growing up.

A quote regarding the gladiator games says that “at the inauguration of the Flavian Amphitheater, 5,000 to 9,000 wild beasts were slain in one day, no less than Trajan gave to the Romans. Under another ruler, 100 lions and 100 lionesses, 200 leopards, 300 bears, 1000 wild boars were massacred in a single day.” It is one thing if something has to be killed in a humane way for clothing, for food, or whatever, but to enjoy the blood – I grew up around cock fighting – brutal, putting the spurs on them and the blood and the flesh torn apart. And the dog fighting. A man got very angry at me several years ago because of dog fighting. He was raising dogs for dog fighting, and I talked to him about it. They also had the public baths, mixed bathing in the first century all throughout the Roman Empire. Again, I challenge you to study Hebrew history, study the Bible. You can't find these things. They're foreign to Jewish culture until Alexander the Great conquered Palestine, and then the sporting games were introduced to God's people. Alexander's legacy is seen in the Middle East in public buildings and gymnasiums for games and open air theaters.

Now, 1 Peter 4:3 & 4 says, *“³For the time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries: ⁴Wherein they think it strange that ye run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you.”* How many times have you been told you're odd, you're strange because you won't go to the places that others go, that you won't watch the things that they watch? Have you ever been told that? Verse 4 says, *“Wherein they think it strange that ye run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you.”* How many times have you had somebody get mad because you won't go in the place that serves alcohol? Somebody says, “Well, I go to the casinos. I don't gamble, but they have great food over there.” What about evil communications and abstaining from all appearances of evil? See, they think it's strange that we don't participate, we don't watch their videos, we don't watch the television programs they watch, we don't listen to the music they listen to. They think that we are strange.

Banqueting

The word “banquetings” in 1 Peter 4:3 is the only time it's used in the New Testament, but it's used in the Old Testament. Before we got saved, “we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries.” Now, what do we mean by banqueting? We're talking about gluttony, we're talking about drunkenness, parties as the word would be used today, luxurious feasts, rioting, immorality, worldly music – excess in these things. That's what we're talking about. The Romans and the Greeks did not understand why the Christians did not participate in their worldly activities. I've got writings also of pagan Romans, and if somebody quit going to the theaters or they quit going to the chariot races, they quit going to the gladiator games where men and beast were destroyed and mutilated, do you know what the pagans automatically assumed? They said, “He must be a Christian now. He's not participating in these things. He must have become a Christian. He must have joined that sect that is following the Nazarene, Jesus of Nazareth.” In 1 Peter chapter 1, beginning with verse 13, we read, *“¹³Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto at the revelation of Jesus Christ; ¹⁴As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance: ¹⁵But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; ¹⁶Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy.”* There's no revival unless we walk in holiness with God.

In 1 Peter chapter 2, notice verses 9 through 11: *“⁹But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light: ¹⁰Which in time past”* – that's before you got saved – *“were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now obtain mercy. ¹¹Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul.”* Most Christians don't know what sin is. They think they do, but they don't. We have blinders on. We're deceived. We don't know what real sin is. We can't even identify what the world is. Philippians 3, verses 18 and 19, says that their God is their belly. In Daniel chapter 5 there was a great banquet and feasting, drinking and gluttony, and you remember the story of the handwriting on the wall and the end of that kingdom. In Matthew chapter 14 there's dancing at a birthday party and there's feasting going on, and John the Baptist lost his head because of a dance. In Sodom we see the same thing.

When I was in the military many years ago, I went to the parties, but after I got saved in the first year I was there, I quit going to the parties that the chiefs sponsored, and they would come and ask me why I didn't go to them anymore. We were talking about this the other night, and some of you were telling me some things that you've done and been through. I'm simply saying to you that once we become Christians, we are not a part of this world. We've been taken out of the kingdom of darkness. We've been translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son.

Now, the Christians had their love feasts (1 Corinthians 11, Acts 2, 2 Peter 2, and a few other places). They got together and enjoyed one another's company and fellowship, ate together. Nothing wrong with eating. Nothing wrong with enjoying ourselves together. But they just did not participate in the worldly activities. Romans chapter 13:9-14 says, *“⁹For this [cause], Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. ¹⁰Love worketh no ill to his neighbor: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law. ¹¹And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of the sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. ¹²The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. ¹³Let us walk honestly, as in the day: not rioting”* – that is, overdoing anything – *“and drunkenness, not*

in chambering and wantonness” – that is, loose living – *“not in strive and envying.* ¹⁴*But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof.”*

I was in a home not long ago, and the entertainment center was six feet wide and about six feet long – the television alone. I was on visitation. I was sitting there talking to them about their son, and when I got up, I finally told them when they wouldn't respond to the Word of God, "There's part of your problem right there – that television." I said, "You need to get that stinking thing out of your house." Well, they haven't visited the church yet but hopefully one day God will speak to them. You can't be right with God and sit and watch TV. You may think you're okay, but you're not okay. And we don't need any substitutes. I get tired of this. I had a man out here the other day standing in the parking lot, and he was talking about how we've got to give substitutes to our children for Mardi Gras and for Halloween. No, we don't need a substitute for Halloween. We don't even need to have an event around the same time as Halloween. We don't need any substitutes. We don't need a substitute for Mardi Gras, the concerts, the races, the TV, the drunkenness, and sports. We don't need substitutes for that. You say, "What can a Christian do?" They can love God. They can enjoy one another's fellowship and company and get together and have meals together. They can talk about the Lord. They can sing. They can pray. They can discuss the mercies of God. There are lots of things we can do. We can hike. We can go fishing. There are all kinds of things that we can do to enjoy God, enjoy God's nature, just enjoy His creation. We can even sit out on the porch with a cup of coffee and listen to the katydid. That's probably an old Tennessee term. Do you know what a katydid is? Anyway, there are lots of things that we can do. We don't need to substitute things from this world that we live in that they're caught up in.

I challenge you to read 2 Corinthians 6, verses 14 through 18. We see the doctrine of separation, not being unequally yoked together with unbelievers. We're not to have communion with them. We are the temple of the living God. Verse 17 says to *“come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you.”* You see, this is the doctrine of separation. You've got to ask the question, "How did Christ and Shakespeare ever get to be put on the same level in our society and sometimes Shakespeare elevated above God?" Have you ever thought about those things? If Jesus spent a day with you in your home, what would you be reading, what would you be listening to, and what would you be watching? What would Jesus do with the movies and the televisions and the theaters and the music and things of that nature? I think we've already found that out in His Word. He spoke out hard against these things. What would Jesus watch? What would Jesus say? Where would Jesus Christ go today? We need to examine ourselves and our hearts. There is no way that we can have revival in our hearts and in our lives and in our church, in our community and in our nation as long as we participate in worldly amusements.

The theaters and the television today are of the devil. Children need to pray for their parents – Amen? – because we're the TV generation, and we're hooked on that thing. It's addictive. Notice 2 Corinthians 7, verse 1: *“Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit . . .”* You say, "Well, I don't commit adultery and I don't drink," but you sit and watch garbage on television. This passage in verse 1 continues, *“perfecting holiness in the fear of God.”* Amen, Amen, Amen! We're to cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit.

Conclusion

Church, little flock, I want revival. I want it in my life. I want it in this church, and I'd like to see a little spark of it in this community. But it's got to begin with us. It has to begin with us – the theater, the sports, and banqueting. When they think you're strange because you don't have a television, when they think you're strange because you don't participate in the leagues and the sporting events and don't follow national and college football programs, which are big business – And by the way, in the first century they were big business. They

were organized, the chariot races and all these things. And when people don't understand why you don't go to their parties and their banqueting, tell them why – that you love God, you love His Word, and that you are filled with the Holy Ghost and you want to walk in God's ways, and the Spirit lusts against the flesh and flesh lusts against the Spirit and these are contrary one to the other so that you cannot do the things that you would (Galatians 5:17). Please speak up and be counted as a believer.
