

Q 6.1 Does 1 Timothy 4 suggest vegans are following a demon and that animal flesh was created by God to be eaten with thanks?

God created fruit and vegetation, not animal flesh, to be eaten with thanks. If forbidding certain foods proves demonic influence, then that would mean God is following a demon, since God gave numerous food prohibitions throughout the Bible. Calling the Spirit of God a demon is blaspheming the Holy Spirit. The passage is not doing this but is instead talking about hypocritical liars who abandon the faith and forbid what God declares good.

Are vegans following a demon?

In 1 Timothy 4 it is written: *“Now the Spirit expressly states that in later times some will abandon the faith to follow deceitful spirits and the teachings of demons, influenced by the hypocrisy of liars, whose consciences are seared with a hot iron. They will prohibit marriage and require abstinence from certain foods that God has created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth”* (1 Timothy 4:1-3, BSB). Some understand this passage as suggesting that vegans are following a demon and that God created animals to be eaten with thanks. A closer look at the context of the passage, however, should make it clear that this reading is mistaken.

Qualities of church leadership

The context of this passage is Paul¹ describing the godly characteristics of someone fit for church leadership: “*Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money*” (1 Timothy 3:2-3, ESV). Needlessly inflicting violence on animals to serve the unrestrained cravings of the flesh for meat, dairy, eggs, cheese, or honey would run contrary to two specific traits included in this list: being ‘*self-controlled*’ and ‘*not violent but gentle*’. Veganism as a principle of showing kindness and gentleness toward animals, instead of being violent toward them, would therefore be a godly attribute according to this list rather than a quality that runs contrary to godliness. This should be the first indication that veganism is not what is being warned about in 1 Timothy 4.

Marriage and bodily training

Concerning these deceptive teachings that include ‘*prohibiting marriage and requiring abstinence from certain foods*’, Paul says: “*Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths. Rather train yourself for godliness; for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come*” (1 Timothy 4:7-8, ESV). Abstaining from

¹ The majority of biblical scholars believe the pastoral letters, including 1 Timothy, were not composed by Paul. They were not part of Marcion's Apostolikon in the mid-second century, which suggests they were most likely composed in the latter half of the second century by proto-orthodox opponents of the first century apostolic church. If this is the case, then they would be pseudonymous forgeries pretending to be Paul, and their contents would not represent the actual views of Paul or the early church. For the sake of the discussion at hand, we will bracket those concerns and assume Paul was the author of 1 Timothy.

marriage is elsewhere advocated by Jesus² and by Paul³. Certainly Paul here is not suggesting his own recommendation not to marry and that of Jesus is an *'irreverent, silly myth'* originating from demons. Instead Paul must have been referring to a specific concrete example that the church would later be facing from a group of former believers who deceptively teach to prioritize bodily training over godliness. Paul elsewhere acknowledges the spiritual value of bodily training, *"But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified"* (1 Corinthians 9:27, ESV). So he must not even be saying that bodily training is bad. Instead the main point Paul is making in this passage is that a church leader should have the power to discern whether a spirit is from a deceitful demon or is from God⁴.

Abandoning the faith and forbidding certain foods

The passage starts by warning that *'some will abandon the faith'*, which means those being warned about no longer believe in God or follow the guidance of God's Holy Spirit of love. People often misinterpret this passage to mean that anyone who forbids eating certain foods is possessed by a demon. But if this were true, then God would be condemned, because in the Garden of Eden that is exactly what God did – forbid from eating from a particular tree: *"but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you*

² "Jesus replied, 'Not everyone can accept this word, but only those to whom it has been given. For there are eunuchs who were born that way, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by others--and there are those who choose to live like eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. The one who can accept this should accept it.'" (Matthew 19:11-12, NIV).

³ "I say this as a concession, not as a command. I wish that all of you were as I am. But each of you has your own gift from God; one has this gift, another has that. Now to the unmarried and the widows I say: It is good for them to stay unmarried, as I do. But if they cannot control themselves, they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion" (1 Corinthians 7:6-9, NIV).

⁴ John likewise taught this principle in his letter: "Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world" (1 John 4:1, NIV).

will certainly die" (Genesis 2:17, NIV).⁵ God continued to make many food prohibitions throughout Scripture⁶. The apostles would likewise be guilty of having a demon when they instructed to abstain from certain foods⁷, and so would Paul⁸. Clearly God is not and never was possessed by a demon, nor were the apostles. Therefore requiring abstinence from certain foods is not sufficient to prove that someone has a demon. It only refers to certain people who have *'abandoned the faith'* as it explicitly states at the beginning of the passage. A Christian vegan who shows love for their animal neighbors and who faithfully follows the diet God established as very good would therefore not be someone whom this passage is warning about.

What did God create to be eaten with thanks?

God also did not create animals to be eaten with thanksgiving, just as God did not create humans to be eaten with thanksgiving⁹. God created fruit and vegetation to be eaten with thanksgiving¹⁰. Animals were created to be friends that we know by name¹¹, just as humans were created to be in friendly

⁵ Even if someone were to believe that the tree of knowledge of good and evil is metaphorical, God still very clearly made many food prohibitions throughout the Bible. Thus the point still stands that God would be condemned if making food prohibitions proves that someone has a demon.

⁶ "You shall not eat any of their flesh, and you shall not touch their carcasses; they are unclean to you" (Leviticus 11:8, ESV).

⁷ "You are to abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality. You will do well to avoid these things. Farewell" (Acts 15:29, NIV).

⁸ "But if someone tells you, 'This food was offered to idols,' then do not eat it, for the sake of the one who told you and for the sake of conscience" (1 Corinthians 10:28).

⁹ "You shall not murder" (Exodus 20:13, NIV).

¹⁰ "And God said, 'See, I have given you every herb that yields seed which is on the face of all the earth, and every tree whose fruit yields seed; to you it shall be for food.'" (Genesis 1:29, NKJV).

¹¹ "So Adam gave names to all cattle, to the birds of the air, and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper comparable to him" (Genesis 2:20, NKJV).

communion with each other¹². The Greek phrase πάση κτίσει (pasē ktisei) is sometimes translated ‘every creature’, as in the NKJV translation: “*For every creature of God is good, and nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving*” (1 Timothy 4:4, NKJV). This same phrase is used in Mark 16:15 when Jesus was instructing who to preach the gospel to: “*And He said to them, ‘Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.’*” (Mark 16:15, NKJV). Jesus in this passage was talking about preaching the gospel to people. Thus if we interpret πάση κτίσει (pasē ktisei) as meaning ‘every creature’, then that would mean 1 Timothy 4:4 is suggesting it is good to eat people as long as we do so thankfully. Hopefully no one interprets it as such. Instead, this line of reasoning should be an indication that the phrase means something else.

Properly translating the passage

If we look at the other dozen or so times the phrase is used in Scripture, such as in Romans 8:22¹³, a more fitting translation would be ‘*the whole creation*’ or ‘*everything created*’. Fruit and vegetation was the very good diet instituted by God when He created the whole world, and likewise marriage was the very good arrangement instituted by God at that same time¹⁴. Thus, when properly translated, 1 Timothy 4:4 is saying, ‘everything that was created by God and declared good should not be forbidden’, which specifically included marriage and a plant-based diet. Therefore, instead of promoting cannibalism, a better reading of 1 Timothy 4:1-4 is that it is saying we should not forbid either of the institutions God established as very good from the beginning of creation, namely the diet of fruit and vegetation and the unbreakable bond of marriage. Rather than forbidding these, we should be thankful to God for establishing them for us.

¹² “If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all” (Romans 12:18, ESV)

¹³ “For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now” (Romans 8:22, NKJV).

¹⁴ “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh” (Genesis 2:24, NKJV).

The table of demons

Elsewhere Paul mentions that one cannot eat from the table of demons while also eating at the table of the Lord, *“You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons too; you cannot partake in the table of the Lord and the table of demons too”* (1 Corinthians 10:21, BSB). An early church teaching preserved in the Clementine Homilies details what abstaining from this table of demons consists of: *“to abstain from the table of devils, that is, from food offered to idols, from dead carcasses, from animals which have been suffocated or caught by wild beasts, and from blood; not to live any longer impurely”* (Clementine Homilies 7.8). The Acts 15 Jerusalem Council describes abstinence from this table of demons, in conjunction with the golden rule, as representing the essence of what it means to walk by the Holy Spirit, *“For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things; that you abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from fornication [πορνεία (porneias)]; and whatsoever you do not wish to be done to you, do not to others: from which preserving yourselves, you shall do well, walking in the Holy Spirit”* (Irenaeus, Against Heresies 3.12.14).¹⁵ So if one were to interpret Paul as saying that the knowers of truth are the ones eating flesh and blood and that those abstaining from such are following demons, then Paul would have it backwards. But what is much more likely the case is that those who misinterpret Paul to be saying such are the ones who have it backwards.

Blaspheming the Holy Spirit

Jesus says that blasphemy against the Father¹⁶ and against the Son is forgivable, but blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is not: *“Therefore I tell you,*

¹⁵ See Acts 15:29.

¹⁶ See also the Coptic Gospel of Thomas 44 where Father and Son are both mentioned instead of just Son.

every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven" (Matthew 12:31, BSB). This came in the context of people accusing Jesus of doing good by a demonic power, to which Jesus said a demonic power cannot cast out a demonic power.¹⁷ Elsewhere He says, *"A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit; Therefore by their fruits you will know them"* (Matthew 7:18; 20, NIV). Since the very good diet that God instituted from the beginning was entirely plant-based,¹⁸ and showing peace, love, and kindness to animals is in alignment with bearing the fruit of God's Spirit,¹⁹ then calling veganism demonic would amount to blaspheming the Holy Spirit. So either Paul was blaspheming the Holy Spirit by calling veganism demonic,²⁰ which I do not think he was doing, or interpreters of 1 Timothy 4 are misusing Paul's statement in order to blaspheme the Holy Spirit themselves. I find the latter to be much more likely. If through ignorance you are guilty of doing this, then I encourage you to change your attitude; you cannot receive the Holy Spirit if you mistakenly perceive the Holy Spirit to be the spirit of a demon.

Giving thanks for what God calls good

In addition to the needless animal cruelty involved in killing animals to eat their flesh²¹, thankfully asking God to have the dead bodies of animals nourish our body is like asking God to have cigarettes and alcohol nourish our body: *"And*

¹⁷ See Matthew 12:22-29.

¹⁸ "And God said, 'See, I have given you every herb that yields seed which is on the face of all the earth, and every tree whose fruit yields seed; to you it shall be for food.'" (Genesis 1:29, NKJV).

¹⁹ "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Against such things there is no law" (Galatians 5:22-23, BSB).

²⁰ If Paul really was calling veganism demonic, and thereby blaspheming the Holy Spirit, then those who use Paul's statement to reject veganism as demonic would likewise be blaspheming the Holy Spirit. So whether Paul is guilty or innocent, anyone claiming veganism is demonic is guilty regardless.

²¹ "The righteous care for the needs of their animals, but the kindest acts of the wicked are cruel" (Proverbs 12:10, NIV).

*when you do ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may squander it on your pleasures” (James 4:3, BSB). Cigarettes, alcohol, and animal flesh are not what our bodies were designed to run off of, and we are instructed to take care of our body as a holy instrument of God²². If we follow faithfully God’s original and perfect instructions to eat a diet of vegetation that is devoid of animal products²³, then God will bless us with better health²⁴ and more wisdom²⁵ since those are the things our bodies were designed to run off of. We should therefore put behind us²⁶ our worldly lifestyle of violence toward animals that is contrary to God’s character²⁷ of kindness and love toward all²⁸. As author Matthew Scully puts it, *“Why just say grace when you can show it?”*²⁹ Instead of giving thanks for things God did not create to be eaten, we should give thanks for the food God said is very good to eat: *“Then God said, ‘Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the surface of all the earth, and every tree which has fruit yielding seed; it shall be food for you’; And God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good” (Genesis 1:29;31a, NASB).**

²² “Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own” (1 Corinthians 6:19, NIV).

²³ “Please test your servants for ten days: Give us nothing but vegetables to eat and water to drink” (Daniel 1:12, NIV).

²⁴ “At the end of the ten days they looked healthier and better nourished than any of the young men who ate the royal food” (Daniel 1:15, NIV).

²⁵ “In every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king questioned them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters in his whole kingdom.” (Daniel 1:20, NIV).

²⁶ “At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures” (Titus 3:3a, NIV).

²⁷ “For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want” (Galatians 5:17, NIV).

²⁸ “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Against such things there is no law” (Galatians 5:22-23, BSB).

²⁹ Scully, Matthew. *Dominion: The Power of Man, the Suffering of Animals, and the Call to Mercy*. New York: Saint Martin’s Press, 2002, page 45.