

Beware False Teachers

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[0 : 00] People have different opinions about food or diets and marriage.! With diets, some people just indulge.

! No restrictions. That's me. That's the good life for them. Eat whatever you want. And others insist that the good life is achieved through some dietary restrictions.

Some people say eat veggies only. Some others say no sugar. My wife is not here. That's her. Some others say eat fat and protein only.

And that's also the case with marriage. Some people say the good life is achieved through marrying whomever and however many times you want. Others say the good life is achieved through a lifetime of singleness without romantic relationships.

Well, in our passage today we encounter one such debate from the perspective of Christianity. A few weeks ago we heard about how Paul gave some qualifications for church ministry.

[1 : 11] And it seems that one of the reasons was because there were false teachers around. Verse 1 to 2. The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons.

Such teachings come through hypocritical liars whose consciences have been seared as with hot iron. Perhaps in the prophecy that is not recorded in the Bible, the Holy Spirit told them that there would be false teachers with demonic teachings who would lead people astray to the point of abandoning their Christian faith.

But even though the prophecy itself is not recorded, it's aligned with what Jesus had said. Which is what the Holy Spirit does anyway. He reminds us of Jesus and his teaching.

Jesus had said in the Gospels that there would be false teachers who would lead people astray. Nonetheless, the teaching comes from deceiving spirits and demons in verse 1 and through hypocritical liars in verse 2.

So the false teachers, called hypocritical liars here, are not the source of the teaching. They're just the media through which the teaching was given, was taught.

[2 : 42] The teaching is demonic by nature. To the point that even the consciences of the false teachers are, as it were, seared as with a hot iron.

This is a picture of branding, like a horse or a cow being branded with a hot iron to signify ownership. The consciences of the false teachers have been branded by demons because their teaching is demonic.

We might think, ooh, what is this false teaching? If it's demonic, it must be something really creepy or scary. We might imagine some creepy looking demons, like in one of those horror movies, influencing people to do scary things.

And then we get surprised when we read verse 3, the teaching. Wait, that's it?

That's the demonic teaching? It doesn't really seem scary. Well, yes, you see in the Bible, the main work of the devil is not really to point us to scary or extreme things, but to point us to the corruption of good.

[4 : 13] And therefore, to a corrupted view of the good God. And I think that's scarier than if demons were to appear to scare us, like in a horror movie, because if they were to scare us, we would go to God and his good.

But if demons could somehow corrupt our view of the good God, then we'd run away from God. We'd be in trouble.

And isn't that what Satan has been trying to do since the beginning of creation, at the start of the Bible? In our first reading from Genesis, we see that God created good things and gave them for us to enjoy.

God said, rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground. And then in verse 29, I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it.

They will be yours for food. All animals, all plants are given to us. God saw all that he had made, in verse 31, and it was very good.

[5 : 32] In chapter 2 as well, the Lord God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground, trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food.

We can affirm that even now. Mangoes, oh, half mangoes. Durian, a bit debated. And the Lord God commanded the man, you are free to eat from any tree in the garden.

But you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it, you will certainly die. God gave all good and pleasing things for humans to enjoy.

The humans were allowed to enjoy everything except for one, because that one tree brought death. Death. But then, remember what happened in chapter 3?

Look at what the snake, which is the devil, says in verse 1. Did God really say you must not eat from any tree in the garden?

[6 : 43] The devil's first lie was straight to the point. He wanted the humans to think that God was some sort of evil dictator who didn't want the humans to enjoy the good life.

And as a result, this is what Eve said in verse 2. The woman said to the serpent, we may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say you must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.

Actually, that's not what God said. God only said not to eat, but he didn't say not to touch. And I think because of the devil's lie, their view of God became slowly corrupted, and then they saw God's command to be more restrictive than it actually was.

And then the devil continued. Verse 4. You will not certainly die, the serpent said to the woman, for God knows that when you eat from it, your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.

Satan continued to try to portray God as someone who didn't want humans to enjoy the good life that he had. And then verse 6.

[8 : 00] The woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food, and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom. She took some and ate it.

Satan deceived Eve. And so she began to see God as this restrictive dictator who didn't want her to enjoy the good life.

And so she decided to determine for herself what the good life was to be. She saw that the only fruit that was forbidden was the one that she wanted.

It's the one that was good, pleasing, and desirable. All the other trees that God said were good, pleasing, and desirable were not.

The good life became for her anything except what God had declared to be good.

- [9 : 02] I think this is the core of the problem. And until now, this is what humans tend to think about God. That he withholds the good life from us.
- That he doesn't want us to enjoy life. We're still deceived by the devil. And so some of us rebel. If God doesn't want me to enjoy the good life, they say, then I don't want to have anything to do with God.
- I'll strive for the good life myself. I'll eat and drink and be merry. Who cares what God thinks? Some others respond in the opposite way.
- They try to pry God's hands open using their good deeds, religions, and sacrifices. They say, God, if I do this, if I do that, will you please give me the good life?
- If I sacrifice this and not eat that, if I deny my desire for a loving and sexual relationship, will you give me the good life?
- [10 : 07] But they see God in exactly the same way as the first group of people. Both of them see God as an unloving dictator who only begrudgingly gives good things to his people.
- Only after his people have made sacrifices and done good deeds, they think God would say, All right, I'll give you the good.
- Both of these people are deceived by Satan. And they are led away from the good God. And so, in our text, Paul here goes to the center of the problem.
- This is all a distorted understanding of what God is like. The false teachers forbid people to marry and order them to abstain from certain foods, perhaps to win God's favor, or to make them appear holy in front of God, or even worse, perhaps even to persuade God to save them.
- They want to be saved through their restrictions and good deeds. But Paul says, no, these things God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and who know the truth.
- [11 : 33] Food and marital love, sex in marriage, are gifts to be received with thanksgiving and to be enjoyed.
- Food is good. Enjoy it. Enjoy it. Marital love and marital sex are good. You're married, enjoy them.
- That's what God created these things for. To be received with thanksgiving and to be enjoyed.
- And those who believe in him as the giver and who know the truth that he has created all things for us to enjoy and who know the gospel that Jesus has died to redeem creation are the ones who are in the best position to receive them in thanksgiving.
- And so, verse 4 to 5. For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer.
- [12 : 52] Here Paul goes from just food and marriage to everything. Everything God created is good and to be received with thanks.
- Guys, we don't need to try to pry God's hands open. He's happy when we enjoy the good things that he has created.
- Like a parent is happy when their child enjoys the food that they've made. All these are ours to enjoy.
- Food. Marriage. Sex. Love. Good sceneries. Music. Love music.
- Coffee. I also like coffee. Friendship. Healthy bodies. So many things to enjoy.
- [13 : 51] Good things that God has given us as gifts. What do we do with gifts? We receive them with thanksgiving, and we enjoy them. Now, verse 5 is a bit difficult to understand.

Everything is good because it's consecrated or made holy by the word of God and prayer. What does that mean? Well, I think it doesn't mean that if we read the Bible and pray before a meal and then suddenly, somehow, that meal becomes holier than the other meals that are not prayed over.

No, I don't think that's what it means. The word of God here refers to God's word in Genesis that we've just read, declaring creation to be good, and also Jesus' word, declaring all foods to be holy.

That's what consecrated. That's what consecrated them. And the prayer indicates our response to God's declaration that creation is indeed good.

We acknowledge and receive all things as good and holy. So we pray, thank you, God, for this good food.

[15 : 11] Thank you for my taste buds that I can taste them. Thank you, God, for good music. Thank you that I can hear good harmonies.

You know that some people can't actually, they don't have the ability to actually enjoy music. Thank you, God, for my good marriage.

God has declared all things to be good and holy by his word. Therefore, they are consecrated. And we acknowledge that consecration through our prayers.

And I think this way we get to enjoy the gifts as well as the giver. Because when we receive the gifts, we have a communion with the giver through prayers.

We enjoy God's good creation because we enjoy him. Friends, God wants us to enjoy this good life.

[16 : 18] It's not perfect. We know this. But God wants us to enjoy this good life. In fact, this is how God lets us know how much he wants us to enjoy the good life.

Through the gospel that God came down in the person of Jesus and he abandoned the good life so we can have it. He left his life of bliss in heaven.

To come down here and even here, he forsook his own life on earth and embraced suffering and death. For what? So that we might enjoy the good life in him.

Like he said in John 10. I have come that they may have life and have it to the full. How? I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

He laid down his life so that we may have life and have it to the full. Enjoy it to the full. The first humans chose the one tree of death amongst many other good trees.

[17 : 34] And so humans deserve death, not the good life. We chose it. But Jesus, who deserves the good life, willingly chose the tree of death, the cross, so that he could die our death.

And we don't have to. We can live the good life in him. And so when Jesus returns, the Bible says he will renew this good life.

He will make it even perfect. And even though physical life will be utterly different, but we will eat and drink and enjoy perfect relationships.

No more brokenness. No more food that makes us sick. Maybe durian will not be smelly. I don't know.

No more bad music. No more things that break creation. No more bushfires. No more earthquakes. No more cancer.

[18 : 42] No less Bluetooth. How? Because Jesus abandoned his good life for us. That's how much God wants us to enjoy the good life that he has created.

So how do we apply this? Well, first, I think we must be wary of the devil's lie that corrupts our view of the good God. And I think today in Australia, the devil's lie is the loudest, not in religious or ascetic voices that try to restrict the good life, like in this passage.

But it's the loudest in the libertarian voices that want to fight for as much individual freedom as possible. But I think the core of the problem is still the same.

They view God as a restrictive dictator, and they want complete freedom in determining the good life for themselves. So unlike the religious false teachers in this passage, people today hate religious restrictions.

They want complete freedom, even if their individual choices lead to a bad life. I once talked to a friend of mine who was stuck in life.

[20 : 10] She was feeling very depressed. She was in a messed up relationship. And yet, even though she was in a relationship, she was having one night stands.

And she was constantly complaining about life. I asked her if she had any religion or if there was any God that she was following.

And she said, no, I am my own God. I am my own religion. I do what I want. And so although what she wanted to do was clearly bad for her, and she was depressed by her life choices and she was complaining about her life, she still maintained that she knew what the good life was and the way to get there.

And she wanted complete individual freedom, even freedom from God. Christianity says that she was deceived by Satan.

We must be wary of the devil's lie that makes us think that God doesn't want us to enjoy this good life.

[21 : 17] He does. Or the devil's lie that makes us think that we know the way to the good life. We don't. And so if to the restrictive religious teachers in this passage, the Bible says, be free to enjoy the good life that God has created, perhaps what the Bible says to today's libertarians might be, your so-called freedom leads you astray.

You know it. Your life is bad. Give it up. And embrace the truly good life that God has created for you in Jesus.

God knows what's good because he has created you. And he has died so you can have the good life. And so second application, like in verse 3, if you already know this truth and you believe it in Jesus, you should enjoy the good things that God has given you with thanksgiving.

I think sometimes Christians can have a too pessimistic view of the physical creation. We tend to focus on the brokenness of creation.

And we forget its goodness. I do. A lot of times. Sometimes we're even scared of asking for good things from God.

[22 : 59] But God wants to give us good things. This is that perhaps sometimes what's truly good might be different to what we think is good at the moment.

But we can still enjoy the good things that he does give us in the moment. Marriage or singleness.

Friendship. Good food and good company. Work or retirement. We receive them with thanksgiving.

Or sometimes we don't enjoy the good things that God gives us because we're distracted. We're distracted by labor and achievements. So we forget to stop and enjoy the good things.

Family and kids. Nature. Nature. Music. So let's make sure that we receive the good gifts from God.

[24 : 09] And not just set them aside. That's sad, isn't it? When someone gives you a good gift and then you just set it aside. Not just set them aside, but enjoy them with thanksgiving.

So, count your blessings. What good things has God given you? What good things do you have right now?

And pray to thank God for them. Let's pray now. Father, we thank you that you have created this creation to be good.

And we thank you for what Jesus has done on the cross. That he has redeemed us and creation. And therefore we have hope. This creation will be renewed and it will be perfectly good.

And we will have a chance. We will have the right to enjoy it. So help us, Lord, to enjoy even the good things that you are giving us right now.

[25 : 18] Even though the world is still broken. But by your grace, there are still good things in it. So that when people see us, they see something different about our lives.

That might want them to know where that good comes from. In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen. Amen.