

The Dangerous Doctrine of Dualism

¹ Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, ² speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron, ³ forbidding to marry, *and commanding* to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. ⁴ For every creature of God is good, and nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving; ⁵ for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer. (1 Timothy 4:1–5)

I remember at school before lunch, they would still make us pray before we went out to eat. A child would be asked to pray, and inevitably the prayer was, “For what we are about to receive, may the Lord make us truly thankful, Amen.” Even as a boy, I thought to myself, that's not a prayer, that's proverb, a wish. You didn't thank God when you said it, you expressed a hope that we might end up thankful. But at least it was still the custom then to set apart the food we ate with some gesture, however indirect, towards God.

There was something we understood about setting apart the act of eating to God, and perhaps there is still some of that out there. But I'd venture to guess that many Christians are actually closet dualists. That is, they believe life is split into dual categories: the physical, and the spiritual. The things that have to do with the physical, the body, nature, that's one compartment of my life, and the things that have to do with the spirit – church, the Bible, prayer, that's another compartment. And maybe, for some Christians, the only time those compartments touch is when they say grace.

That dangerous doctrine of dualism comes up in this passage. As Paul continues to outline how to order the church, he reminds Timothy of one of the great dangers ever facing the church, and that is false teaching. He's already talked about those false teachers who abuse the law, those false teachers who lean on speculative material, and now he speaks of those false teachers who will bring in heresies to do with creation. Paul was exactly right, because false teachings about food and marriage have always been a hotbed of heresy.

It seems since the Fall, we cannot properly unite our love of creation with our love of God. We are either loving the creature more than the Creator, and becoming idolaters, or we begin to despise the creation and try to love God in some unearthly, ethereal way. Both are dead ends, as we'll see. Paul is not going to beat around the bush: he wants us to beware of the deliberate deceivers, to beware of their deceitful doctrine, and then to be sure to delight in God's design.

I. Beware of the Deliberate Deceivers

¹ Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, ² speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron,

The Spirit has made it clear about false teaching coming. How did He make it clear? He had already warned through Old Testament Scriptures like Daniel, and through the Lord Jesus Himself, and now directly to Paul as an apostle. The Spirit warned that in the latter times, false teachers would come, and deceive people.

Some will depart from the faith. What does this mean? It means they abandon their profession of faith. They were among us, but not of us.

¹⁸ Little children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come, by which we know that it is the last hour. ¹⁹ They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but *they went out* that they might be

made manifest, that none of them were of us. (1 John 2:18–19)

How do they depart? By their listening and their speaking.

They choose to listen to ideas and teachings from deceiving (lit. wandering) spirits, doctrines of demons.

Sometimes we think that all the false teaching out there is concocted by men. But there is a huge network of dark spiritual forces committed to undermining biblical truth. In fact, even a renowned sceptic like Arthur Conan Doyle, who got involved in seances and spiritism, was shocked to find that the spirits he and others contacted were continually trying to overturn the fundamental teachings of Christianity. The message from those making contact with these intelligences masquerading as the spirit of a dead relative, or as the ghost of a person who once lived there, or as an alien from an extraterrestrial planet, they have all sorts of lies, but in this they agree: Christianity is not true. The Bible can't be trusted.

And there are enough people who have taught in Christian churches who start listening to the teachings coming from the demons, especially if it is dressed up with academic respectability, and intellectual pedigree. And so these thought-bombs go off in their minds, and they change everything. A man who once held to Christ's atonement, and the need for salvation by grace through faith now accepts that all ways to God are equally valid.

How do you end up there? By not making the Word your final authority. To become seriously interested in false ideas that you know the Bible opposes. What starts as dabbling curiosity becomes interest, which becomes serious attention, which becomes study.

They choose to be persuaded. They choose to accept the Serpent's version of reality. That is never just a mental change; it is always a moral shift as well. With the false teaching always goes a moral shift, usually in the area of sexuality.

Eventually the person begins practising what they knew to be wrong. Whether personally, morally, ethically, they begin to accept something they rejected. Their conscience initially objects, but the new teachings they're accepting give them justification to keep going. So they keep hushing their conscience, ignoring their conscience, pushing away their conscience. Eventually, the conscience hardens.

having their own conscience seared with a hot iron

Paul likens it to a scar from a deep burn wound. The words *seared with a hot iron* is a Greek word from which we get the English word *cauterised*. The nerve endings have been destroyed, no feeling is left. They have destroyed their own sensitivity to sin.

In the meantime, they keep pretending to be something they are not, in public. They keep up the mask, the pretence of being holy, of promoting righteousness, of being on the side of truth. But the word the Bible uses for people who keep up a show is the word which mean “stage-actor” - hypocriteis. A hypocrite is one who pretends to be on the outside what he knows he is not on the inside.

Now they take these demonic teachings and they speak these lies out. Whether they are trying to deceive, or whether they are just passing on the deceptions of demons, what is coming out of their mouths is lies. They are now speaking lies in hypocrisy.

Do they know it is wrong? Some do, and don't care, because they want money or fame or power or pleasure. Some have cauterised their consciences so they no longer feel whether it is right or wrong,

they just keep doing it.

II. Beware Their Dangerous Doctrine

³ forbidding to marry, *and commanding* to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.

Hinder marriage, commanding people to abstain from food and drink.

Of course this is not the only or even the main false teaching that comes from doctrines of demons. But because Paul takes the time to single it out, it's worth understanding.

The basic idea behind this deception is to make out that there is something low, unspiritual, maybe even defiling about the body, and those things of creation which we use or experience in the body. The two most obvious are food and sexuality in marriage. The demonic idea is to create a massive gap between the spirit and the body, between the supposed things of the Spirit, and the things of the Earth. Because once you believe in that division, you can go in so many false directions.

In Paul's day, there was an early form of a religion that would grow in the second century known as Gnosticism. This religion was like a vacuum cleaner that just sucked up any religion it found and added it to itself. So it was a hodgepodge of Greek Platonism, Oriental dualism, pagan mystery religions, Jewish legalism, and then it decided to absorb Christianity. The Gnostics were very strong on this idea of the body and matter being evil, and the spirit being good. But then some of them went in one false direction, and others went in another. Some of them decided, "since the body is evil, we must be as harsh and rigorous with it as possible. Deny it bodily pleasure. Fast often. No marriage, no luxuries." A harsh, ascetic legalism.

Some went the opposite way. "since the body is evil, it doesn't matter what you do with it. You can be as immoral as you want with your body, but it won't affect your soul." Eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die. This body is going to rot and decay, so do what you want. A reckless, lawless, libertarianism. So either way, you had plenty of sin. The sins of pride, hypocrisy, legalism, cruelty on the one hand, and sins of gluttony, and immorality and lewdness on the other.

Now Gnosticism died out in the third century, but this false doctrine of despising creation and dividing it from the spirit has never gone away. Throughout church history we have had movements to demand celibacy in the priesthood, cults which told people to not get married because of the soon return of the Lord, or to enter into a spiritual marriage with the cult leader. We have had food legalists trying to get us to return to the Mosaic law and forbid eating meats,

This can still occur.

The first is prudishness. Prudishness is an attitude that feels the very mention of sex is rude, unbecoming of a church, lowering its dignity. Prudishness wants no mention of it anywhere at anytime in church, or really in family, just the further away from it, the better. The problem is, that is just a fleshly way of dealing with fleshly sexuality. Because we are living in a crude, lustful age, with pornography everywhere, and fornication trumpeted and celebrated doesn't mean the biblical way to deal with this is to seal off your eyes, ears from anything remotely sexual, ban the use of the word, and like the legend of Victorians, begin to place stockings on table, chair and piano legs. Looking down your nose at something God created, and created good is not an act of piety. It is manifestly irreligious, ungodly, to despise what God calls good.

Prudishness doesn't explicitly forbid to marry, but it certainly looks down upon one of the good reasons to get married, and one of the blessings of marriage. So implicitly, it does.

Prudishness, like all man-made forms of sanctification, fails to deal with sin. There is no power in it. Snobbery and disdain has no power over the flesh. It just hides it while its festering under the surface. Inevitably, those churches, and those families that try to deal with sexual sin through prudishness find the rubber-band effect happening: either in themselves or someone in the family has a massive blow-back in the opposite direction. And suddenly, the prudes have become libertines overnight. It's the binge-effect. Try to deal with sin by proudly casting out any mention of that word, and soon you'll have seven spirits more wicked than the first coming in, and all manner of sexual sin.

Hebrews 13 tells us that marriage is honourable and the bed undefiled, but whoremongers and adulterers, God will judge. Within marriage, the physical relationship is something to be honoured, rejoiced in, and upheld as good.

Yes, we never want to stoop to the level of some gutter-talk preachers who tear off the veil Scripture places over this, and speak in explicit, embarrassing terms. We never want to condone or encourage any kind of immodesty in dress, or filthy innuendo in speech. We don't want to endorse immorality in music, or on the screen, or in literature. That should not even be named among us. But positively, we should rejoice that Song of Solomon is in our Bibles. We should speak of the goodness of the marriage bed.

The second way this manifests is food holiness. Food holiness is the subtle and quiet introduction of a kind of food regimen that makes you godlier. It is no accident that in cults and in legalist churches there are food laws. In fact, John Harvey Kellogg, invented corn flakes as a meatless breakfast food designed to reduce the sexual drive. Several cultists like Mary Baker Eddy, and sectarians like Charles Finney also taught salvation through diet. And the more legalistic the group, the more often what shows up is some kind of unwritten food commandments: thou shalt eat only organic. Thou shalt eat only free-range. Thou shalt eat only responsibly sourced. Thou shalt eat only whole grains. Thou shalt drink only free-trade. Thou shalt eat only natural sugars. Thou shalt eat no preservatives. No MSG shalt touch thy lips. Thou shalt eat nothing genetically modified.

Now most Christians will agree the Bible doesn't command you to abstain from these foods. But food holiness insinuates that if you care about being healthy, which is being a steward of your body, which is the Temple of the Holy Spirit, which is a way of loving God, then you really should eat this way. So by indirect, implicit ways, the insinuation is made: if your body is healthier, then you are holier.

If a strict or careful diet is just about feeling good, fighting off infection, eating in ways your body responds best to, fine. But when it becomes a kind of guilt or grace thing, where you feel defiled if you didn't keep your self-imposed food laws, or you feel holy and sanctified if you have, then you've constructed more man-made religion. There's a very fine line between what the Law called being ritually unclean, and what some people today mean by eating natural, wholesome, detoxified lifestyle. Oh, sure, you are not forbidden from coming to church if you've had a Big Mac, but if you feel you've sinned when you have, you're veering into food holiness. And like prudery, it won't keep you from the sins of proud legalism, or the sins of gluttony and intemperance.

Stewardship of the body is important. Eating in a healthy manner is part of good stewardship. But food holiness is a deception, because in some form or another it leads you to think sin is contained in foods, and that bodily health is holiness.

So what should we do instead?

III. Be Sure to Delight in God's Design

which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. ⁴ For every creature of God *is* good, and nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving; ⁵ for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer.

Here is why this matters. What God has created for our lawful use in this world is supposed to be received gratefully, and not refused by those who believe and know the truth. Christians, of all people, should have a right view of creation: of the human body, of foods, of sleep, of exercise, of medicine, of marital sexuality. If we believe and know the truth, then we should not be deceived by doctrines of demons that want us to despise what God has made. We should not disparage the marriage bed, nor the feasting table.

Notice, *every* creature of God is good. Not some, or the ones we deem most natural. No, God made it, He made it good. All of it is good. And in Mark 7, we read that Jesus declared all food clean. All of it is good, and all of it is clean. That does not mean that there are some foods that are uncursed. All food, if it comes from this earth, is under the curse. It is part of a fallen world, with decay and corruption. Yes, some foods are healthier for you than others, some foods are better for you, and some foods are tastier. But none are holier, none are closer to God, closer to Heaven. And none of them contain sin as one of their components or ingredients.

Every creature, which can be translated, “everything created by God” is good and to be received thankfully. That means the beauty of the countryside, the bushveld, the Drakensberg, the coast. It means the joy of the human body performing sports and amazing feats of coordination or endurance or skill. Creation includes the glory of the stars, the wonders of the animal world, our own pets. It includes the blessings of the weather, and every manner of clothing and shelter we've made for ourselves. It includes all our hobbies and crafts and amusements, all the games and comforts we've made of creation. It includes turning sound into music, turning colours into art, turning words into letters and books and poems. All of this is part of creation.

Does that mean everything in the world is good? No, there are plenty of things that we have made that distorts and warps and perverts God's creation. So how can we know if it is still good? Here is the simple test. Can you give God thanks for it? You can thank God for a walk in the park, for a good meal, for a sunset, but you can't thank God for a dirty song, you can't thank God for a book or painting that is defiling, you can't thank God what maims or destroys or defiles the human body.

Gratitude is an amazing tool that keeps us from either snubbing creation, and turning up our noses at it, or the opposite error of turning it into an idol and loving it for itself apart from God. But include gratitude, and you will almost always put creation in its right place: a gift that is to be enjoyed, and joy and credit is to be given to God, the source. Gratitude protects you from despising the marriage bed, or from idolising it. Gratitude protects you from frowning on bodily comforts, or from wanting them at all costs.

When we are thankful we are doing two things – we are enjoying what we are doing, but we are also *receiving* it. We are experiencing the pleasures of creation, but we are recognising they are gifts.

We remember the truth of Romans 11:36: “For of him and through him and to him are all things, to whom be glory forever.” All things are *from* God, all things are to be experienced and enjoyed *through* him, and all things are to return glory *to* him. The created thing was made by God, it is

rightly enjoyed by grace, and we return to God thanksgiving for the joy.

In verse 5, Paul tells us that we can sanctify, or set apart things in creation using the Word of God and prayer. The Word of God tells us how to lawfully use creation, and prayer is where you give thanks for it. If you are in any doubt over whether this thing is still good, then Scripture will give you the principles, and then in prayer, you can thank God.

If it is a lawful pleasure, if it is not forbidden in his Word, if it does not have the appearance of evil, if it does not cause others to stumble into sin, it is one of thousands of lawful ways of enjoying creation. Whatever cannot be enjoyed for God's sake should not be enjoyed at all. All that can be enjoyed for His sake should be enjoyed.

Christians don't only love and worship God in church. We can love and worship God at our jobs, when on holiday, when relaxing, when playing, when resting. The earth is the Lord's, and all its fullness.

This is my Father's world,
And to my listening ears
All nature sings, and round me rings
The music of the spheres.
This is my Father's world:
I rest me in the thought
Of rocks and trees, of skies and seas--
His hand the wonders wrought.

2 This is my Father's world:
The birds their carols raise,
The morning light, the lily white,
Declare their Maker's praise.
This is my Father's world:
He shines in all that's fair;
In the rustling grass I hear Him pass,
He speaks to me everywhere.

Here is a grand unity to all of life. "Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. (1 Corinthians 10:31)

You don't have to live your life in compartments. You don't have to split off the physical from the spiritual. They can be joined with a thoughtful, biblical act of gratitude to Him who gives us richly all things to enjoy.