

For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving,⁵ because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer. (1 Timothy 4:4-5)

God Made All Things Good

“That’s bad for you.” As a pastor and a parent, those words have come out of my mouth on occasion. When I’m counseling someone or when I’m teaching my kids to be safe and use good judgment, sometimes I say things like that. It makes you wonder why those bad things exist. Why do drugs even exist? Why does God let them be here in our world? They’re bad for us. But the truth is, most of the things that are bad for us come from things that originally were good for us. Many drugs that are abused have a legitimate medical purpose and almost any “good” drug can be twisted to a bad purpose. Driving too fast is bad for you. But having a car to drive to work is usually a good thing. Working too hard and stressing yourself out and never seeing your family is bad for you. But work is truly a blessing from God. If you’ve even been out of work, or if you’ve ever had an illness force you to be idle you know how much of a blessing it is to have worthwhile things to do. We have to admit that sin has done horrible damage to God’s world, and that damage makes many things bad for us. Yet, we also want to remember the truth that St. Paul spoke to Timothy today: **God made all things good.**

I.

Now, I don’t think that we would argue too much with that. So what Paul says here might not surprise us: **“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.” God made all things. Don’t reject his gifts.**

Why would we ever do that? Paul’s point might have come across more clearly if the first couple of verses of this chapter had been included in our reading for today. In verse one, St. Paul warns against “things taught by demons.” He goes to say that certain false teachers **“forbid people to marry and order them to abstain from certain foods, which God created to be received with thanksgiving.”** So in this chapter the good things that God gives us are marriage and food. Down through the ages, false teachers have attacked both of those things. Does that surprise you? Both in ancient and in modern times, there have been false teachers who claimed that sex was dirty and that real Christians would never get married. Not surprisingly, those groups generally die out in one generation. But false teachers still attack God’s gift of marriage. Outside the church today, sex outside of marriage is almost the norm, especially if you include living together. Liberal churches today generally can live with that. Of course, those teachings encourage sin. Inside the visible church is the teaching of celibacy in the Catholic Church. In general, the Catholic Church teaches that celibacy is better than marriage, and the clergy’s vows of celibacy are earning favor with God for the church at large. So it requires all priests, monks and nuns to be celibate. God does not command that.

What about food? Now, I’m not aware of any false teachers who ever argued that it was a sin to eat. But there have been many groups who argued that certain kinds of food were sinful. In Paul’s day, it was people who wanted to make Christians follow the Jewish dietary laws, so no pork or shellfish. Today, groups like the Seventh Day Adventists have all kinds of dietary rules. Mormons outlaw caffeine, so no coffee or tea. But you could also expand this to include traditional Catholic rules about fasting and “meatless Fridays” and modern evangelicals who think that fasting makes them more acceptable to God.

Why does all this matter? It isn’t about whether you can have pork chops for dinner today. It’s about making rules where God has not made them and then teaching that following these rules makes you a better Christian. False teachers proclaim that God doesn’t like pork or caffeine or meat with the blood still in it. What happens? Some Christians feel guilty because they like coffee and they don’t want to give it up. Or they feel obligated to fast on Fridays and they beat themselves up because they don’t enjoy it. They convince themselves that they’re not good Christians, so they have to try harder. And harder. And they make themselves into joyless fanatics. And those who do follow those rules walk around congratulating themselves on how advanced they are spiritually. Pride rules in their hearts.

So Paul points out that God made all things good. Now it is true that in the Old Testament, God did lay down dietary laws that were part of preparing his people to see Jesus when he came. But God makes clear that those laws are over. Jesus has come. God gave us all foods, God gave us marriage and family, to be blessings.

Now, does that mean that we can't ruin them or make them into curses? Not at all. If the only exercise you ever get is lifting your hand from the potato chip bag to your mouth, and you destroy your health, that's sin. But it doesn't mean that potato chips are sinful. It's mean that you're using them in a sinful way. The same point could be made for alcohol or sugar or even medicine. Of course, any person who makes their marriage an agony of selfishness and emotional pain has ruined one of the greatest gifts God gives us, as does the person who would rather sleep around than get married.

Thankfully, the Lutheran Church has not been greatly troubled by these specific issues. But maybe there are some other things that are harder for us. What about money? What about the internet? What about modern music? Would we be better off if we all gave up the rat race and moved out to Montana and lived in a log cabin with no electricity and only the food we could grow or hunt? Would we be better off if we unplugged our computers and our televisions? Would we be better Christians if we only listened to classical music and watched TV shows made before 1980? Sometimes, I think that we Lutherans can start to think like that.

The truth is, money is not good or bad. It's a gift of God. What we do with it is sinful or God-pleasing. The endless pursuit of wealth and the self-righteous condemnation of wealth both ignore the fact that God's gift is good. But what about that modern entertainment media? Surely there's just something inherently sinful about that, right? It is true that you can use the internet or movies to indulge every lust in your sinful heart. But you can use books and magazines the same way. Even the internet is not evil or good. It's just there. We can pat ourselves on the back about how much better we are than all those people out there who surf the web all the time. We can become modern day Lutheran Pharisees who don't drink or watch TV or listen to the radio or buy too much stuff. Guess what? That would be just as sinful. It would be rejecting the good gifts God gives us because we thought we were better than the average Christian. In the end, we'd think that God chose us to have faith because he saw just how good we were going to be. That my friends, is the opposite of faith. That attitude can kill our faith.

Faith is knowing that Christ came for us because we are guilty of sin. Jesus died because we misuse God's good gifts of money and marriage and technology. Jesus died to pay for all the times we indulged sinful desires and we for the times we congratulated ourselves on how good we are. Faith knows that Jesus paid for all that sin. He wiped it all away once and forever. Jesus rose to tell us that in God's mind and heart, we never committed those sins. To God, we are as perfect as Jesus was every day of his life. Faith clings to that, because it recognizes how far from being perfect we really are. Faith finds peace in the forgiveness that Jesus won for us. That faith is ours. God gave it to us, not because he foresaw how good we would be. He gave it to us because he loved us poor, rotten sinners. He came to us in baptism and the word and he planted that faith and that peace in our hearts. It is yours forever.

II.

And it is the key to receiving God's gifts with joy. When we know who our God is and what he does for us, then we're content with what he gives us, both the physical or spiritual blessings. **God made all things good. Receive his gifts with thanksgiving.**

God created his gifts to give us joy. Now, God gives good gifts to everyone on earth, not just to believers, because God loves everyone. He doesn't give them just to get a "thank you." But it is only right and proper that we give him that thank you, because the truth is, he doesn't owe us anything. Every gift he gives, even to us who believe, is still an undeserved gift. It's still grace.

Unbelievers do sometimes thank God for unexpected blessings. If they're in a car accident and they narrowly survive, they will often thank God. But if you ask them who they mean by that, it's usually a fairly generic version of God, not the God of the Bible. In some cases, it may be a very specific God, just not the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. While it is a good thing that they thank God for what he's done, they don't really have faith. So their gratitude is not truly pleasing to God. The Bible says that only when we trust in Christ can we ever please God. In the verse right before our text Paul says that God created all things to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.

So first of all, our gratitude comes from faith. So it recognizes that all God gives us is good, even if I don't see it as good. It recognizes that God chooses to give me everything simply because he loves me. So it constantly marvels at how God really is to us in this life. The gratitude that comes from faith knows that the greatest gift that I have ever received is Christ and his work on the cross to free me from sin and death and hell

and it sees that every gift I get between here and heaven points me back to Jesus. Every blessing is a reminder of that greatest blessing.

Paul says that every gift we receive is consecrated by the word and prayer. Now what does that mean? He's not saying that we have to come to church and recite every gift we get and then specifically give thanks for it. God's love is so great we can't possibly list all our blessings. Sometimes we have to thank him for the ones we don't know or can't remember. God is looking for an attitude, not a mechanical checking off of a list.

What he is saying is that our blessings are consecrated because we are consecrated. God's word makes us holy in God's sight. That's how the Holy Spirit makes us believers. And that word makes us approach all of God's gifts, even the ones we can't remember, as holy gifts of God. That leads us to prayer, to that attitude of constant thanksgiving for God. That's the natural result of knowing Jesus as our Savior and then recognizing that every blessing I get, my marriage, my house, my job, the dinner that will be on my plate this afternoon, my children – everything comes from him. When I see that and my faith rejoices in that, I consecrate all that God gives me. I call it holy through the word of God working in my heart and giving me faith.

In that sense, there is really nothing that's bad for you in this life. All that God made is good. Sadly, we live in a world that has been damaged by sin. In a sense even destroyed by sin. So we have an enormous ability to use God's gifts in a way that harms our faith and our lives and the faith and lives of the people around us. Many of the people around use the gifts God gives them in a way that hurts us. Sometimes, they don't even know that's what they're doing. But that doesn't make the gifts bad. It makes them and us sinners. But that's why Christ came: to free us sinners from death and hell and even from sin's power to hurt us in this life. By God's grace, you and I will not be punished, even here, for our sins. God has forgiven us for the damage we do to our own lives and for the damage we do to all the people around us. When God allows consequences of our sins to come into our lives, he's doing it because he loves us. He's doing it to teach us to live for him. When he allows other people's sins to touch our lives, he's doing that to teach us to trust him more. But all that he gives is truly good for us. Trust in him and use his gifts in way that shows your faith. Amen.