

Podcast: Where Crunchy Women Go Wrong

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[0 : 00] Hello, welcome to the Providence podcast.

My name is Chris Oswald, senior pastor at Providence Community Church. I'm dropping two podcasts this week because, oh, the text that we looked at last Sunday, which is usually the theme of our podcast, was dealing with a number of issues I felt like our folks would benefit from considering in further depth.

Last podcast was a beast, came in at 90 minutes dealing with eschatology. This one will be quite a bit shorter, dealing with overly developed scruples, overly developed scruples.

Now, I'm going to use a few words that I think might be not so popular words in the younger person's lexicon. And the first one would be scruples, which just means kind of excessive hangups.

That's how I mean it. And then the other word would be ascetic. And I think I mentioned this in a previous episode, not aesthetic, which kind of signals beauty, but ascetic, which kind of signals the absence of richness and goodness and so forth, a very stingy, stringent sort of perspective.

[1 : 26] I'm going to talk in general to everybody for about 70% of this, but I'm going to pivot toward women. And I want to say that I really am writing this in particular with women in mind. So men, you're going to benefit from hearing this, especially if you're married, but even if you're not.

And then around two-thirds of the way through this, we'll pivot and talk about women and specifically. The first thing I want us to understand is that godliness is success.

Godliness is success. If you ask the Bible, what does it mean to be successful? It will respond, to be godly is to be successful.

It's essential that you and I never get duped into believing any other definition of success other than the one that God himself carefully and consistently throughout his word provides.

As it says in Jeremiah chapter 9, So godliness is our definition of success as Christians.

[2 : 50] We dare not veer into any other definition of success other than godliness. Now there are four reasons, at least, that I can think of why godliness is the marker of success in scripture.

The first one is that a godly human is the most fully human kind of human. He or she who is godly is living up in a unique way to his or her original God-given design, which is to reflect God back to him and to the world around him.

A second reason is that godliness is really living in harmony with the basic design of creation. When you are godly, you are going with the flow in a good way.

You are living in harmony with the basic design and designer of this entire thing we call reality. Ungodliness and or, well, backslash sin, ungodliness slash sin is really, among other things, a kind of discordance with the deepest structures in reality.

Sin is dissonance. Godliness is harmony. It's peace. It's shalom. So when you are living a godly life, you are living in harmony with the way things are, the way things were meant to be, the way you were meant to be.

[4 : 04] The third reason why godliness is success that I can see is that a godly person is the most useful kind of person to the rest of the world. He or she will do the most good and do the least harm.

And a fourth reason that godliness is success is because godliness brings about all sorts of secondary benefits, both in this life and in the life to come.

Later in 1 Timothy 4, Paul will say that physical training is good, but training for godliness is much better, promising benefits in this life and in the life to come. Now we need to stress that godliness is success because we are, as human beings, significantly mimetic.

What does mimetic mean? Mimetic means that we tend toward imitation. And we have to be careful not to use the world's standards of success as our guide because the world has a problem.

It loves the creation over the creator. Indeed, it tends to turn the creation into false gods. So when it comes to success, if we're paying too close attention to the world, we'll make secondary things our measure of success.

[5 : 11] Popularity, money, physical strength, so on and so forth. And really, you know, we were in the Beatitudes a little while back. And really, I think this is what the Beatitudes are doing. The Beatitudes are defining success.

They're defining godliness as success. And then they're speaking specifically about what godliness is. And really, what's going on in the Sermon on the Mount in total is summarized in a phrase that Jesus uses later on.

You have heard it said, but I tell you. That's the guiding idea of the Beatitudes. Breaking people free from false definitions. Specifically, false definitions of blessedness or success.

So what Jesus is doing in the Beatitudes is he's breaking people free from the worldly mimetic cycle and aligning human understanding with God's understanding and God's definition of success.

So, if you want to be successful, you must be godly. Now, what does it take to be godly? Well, to be godly, one must see God rightly. To be godly, one must see God rightly.

[6 : 15] Tozer said, What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us. That quote has been inescapable for me as I've been reading 1 Timothy. It's the thing that keeps coming up over and over again.

What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us. Why does Tozer think that? Why does Tozer think that?

Well, he says later on in that same essay, We tend by a secret law of the soul to move toward our mental image of God.

We tend by a secret law of the soul to move toward our mental image of God. From the context of Tozer's writings, we understand what he means is we move toward means we try to become like.

We adjust our behavior and judge our behavior by our mental image of God. Now, a few weeks ago, we looked at Paul's discussion of Eve's deception.

[7 : 14] And a key part, in fact, probably the foundational part of the serpent's deception is the false representation of God.

The devil presented a God to her that was motivated by status. You get that? He was motivated by status. The devil presented a false God that was motivated by status.

And he used that to deceive Eve. He portrayed a God that was motivated by status, who had actually lied to them.

God had actually lied to them about what the fruit would do for them. He did that to keep his advantage over them. Let me read the text.

Now, the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord had made. And he said to the woman, Did God actually say, You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?

[8 : 12] And the woman said to the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden. But God said, You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.

But the serpent said to the woman, You will surely not die. For God knows that when you eat of it, your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.

So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. And she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate.

So how was Eve deceived? What was the deepest lie that the devil told? Well, the deepest lie was that God was a grasper, that he was so small-minded and threatened by Eve that he had lied to them about the nature of the fruit.

And so now Eve has, because of the devil's deception, a new image of God in her mind, a false image of God. And what does she do with this new image? She moves toward it.

[9 : 17] She follows it. She repeats it. God's a grasper. He's a schemer. She becomes a grasper too. She followed.

She imitated the false image of God presented to her. Well, anyway, that's kind of what Tozer's getting at when he talks about us moving toward our image of God.

It doesn't mean that we necessarily have the right image of God. But whatever our image of God is, there we will be moving. If we want to be godly, we have to have the right understanding of God.

So how do you know if you have that? How do you know if you have that? You know, one way you can determine, and I'm moving toward 1 Timothy 4, but one way you can determine whether you have the right view of God is how you view sex and how you view food.

One clue about whether or not you're seeing God clearly is how you view food and sex. Now, if you took just these two issues, food and sex, and you built a spreadsheet of biblical data, you would find an overwhelming number of verses dealing with these subjects.

[10 : 28] It really is, these two things are really the plot points by which the whole story of redemption pivots from this place to that place, and so on and so forth. And secondly, if you compiled all that data, you would be shocked to see how often those issues, when they are flawed, when people are doing food wrong or doing sex wrong, you'd be shocked to see how many times that is simply downstream of a person's wrong view of God.

Related to food, Eve is an obvious example, and I think there may be a case to be made that Adam's sin had at least something to do with sex. That would certainly fit the larger pattern we see throughout Scripture of men leaving God to join a woman in her error, and what motivates him to do that.

It isn't typically deception, exactly. Perhaps just lust or love, even. But you can keep going from there. What's going on is that these two fundamentals, food and sex, are really the basis of life in many respects.

They both have sustaining power and sensory pleasure, which is kind of interesting to me, that the things that God wired us in such a way as to not only see the things that are necessary for advancing life to be necessary, but to be desirable.

He made them pleasurable. So anyway, the point is, is that if you want to know how you view God, you can look at these two issues and how you think of these two issues, and there will be a correlation there of some kind.

[12 : 11] Here's an example. Before we get into 1 Timothy 4, I want to read to you Ephesians 4. In verse 17, Paul says, Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do in the futility of their minds.

They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardness of heart, due to their hardness of heart. They have become callous and given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity.

But that is not the way you've learned Christ. Assuming that you heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

So the Gentiles have the wrong practices related to sensuality. And I think sensuality definitely includes sex, but it's broad enough to include, in other texts it does include, sort of a gluttony as well, and drunkenness.

So sensuality can just be kind of a category, and then inside that category, you've got sexual sin, and then you've got drinking-related sins and eating-related sins.

[13 : 40] Where is this coming from? Why do they have these broken behaviors? Well, the text says that these broken behaviors come from a broken view of God.

They're darkened in their understanding, it says in the text. But what does it mean that they're darkened in their understanding? Well, Paul explains it. They're alienated from the life of God.

They can't see how God is. They can't see who God is. They can't see how God lives and how God acts. Now, Paul says that the antidote to having these broken behaviors about food and sex is to learn Christ.

He says, but that is not the way you learned Christ. And what does it mean to learn Christ? It just means to hear about Him and to be taught in Him. Paul explains that as well in the text.

So the idea here is that if you see God rightly, you'll have a right relationship with these two things.

[14 : 43] And if you see God wrongly, you'll have a wrong relationship with those two things. But the way that we work as people, it's really hard for us to know what view of God we really have.

We have to look at our behaviors, our behaviors, and then track those upstream and determine kind of, well, if these are my behaviors, then this implies that my view of God is X, Y, or Z.

Now, that's an example from Ephesians 4 of sins of excess, you might say. Broken behaviors related to sins of excess. But now when we get to 1 Timothy 4, we have sinful behaviors in the same areas, but now they're not sins of excess.

Let me read the passage to you. Now, the Spirit expressly says that in later times, some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared, who forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.

for everything is created, everything created by God is good and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer.

[16 : 09] So here we have people who are not sinning in excess, they're sinning in asceticism. What's going on here is the same thing that's going on in Ephesians.

They have a wrong view of God. They're moving toward their mental understanding of God. The thing I don't love about Tozer's quote is that it implies that you would know what your view of God is.

And as I said a moment ago, I really think that the more biblical way of talking about this is look at your behaviors and that will tell you to some degree what you really think about God.

Now, here's what I want you to think about. How do you know what God is like? How do you know what God is like? Well, in Ephesians, it says explicitly, you learn Christ.

You learn Christ. Who is Christ? Christ is the image of the invisible God, Colossians. He's the radiance and glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, Hebrews. He's the only begotten son of God, John.

[17 : 22] If you want to know what God is like, you look to Jesus. That is what God is like. And one of the things we see very quickly about Jesus is, first of all, that he was not given to sensuality.

He was rugged, mission-driven, self-controlled, focused on the Father's plan for him and not merely on the Father's gifts or creation.

But, and this is key, this is where I wanted to really hammer something home, but, Jesus was accused of sensuality. This is important.

If we want to know what God is like, we look to Jesus. And one of the things you need to know about Jesus is that he was accused of sensuality. Matthew 11, 18 through 19. For John came neither eating nor drinking and they say he has a demon.

The Son of Man came eating and drinking and they say, look at this glutton and drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners, but wisdom is vindicated by her actions.

[18 : 28] Now, this is important. Jesus was not given to sensuality, but he was, at least when it came to food and drink, an eater and a drinker. It says, that he says, the Son of Man came eating and drinking.

And apparently, he ate and drank enough to give some people ammunition to slander him as a glutton and a drunkard. So let's just review the points we've made so far.

Firstly, if you want to be successful, you will be godly. And to be godly, you must know God. Jesus is God. And the Son of Man came eating and drinking.

Now, back to that passage in 1 Timothy. The Spirit expressly says that in latter times, some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared, who forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.

Okay, one thing I want to talk about really quickly, just because I don't want to forget to do it, is that once again, if we're using the world's definitions for success, we will probably delay marriage past when we should.

[19 : 44] The average Christian, if they're using the world's definition or worldly counsel, we will probably, the world may even be at the point where subversively and quietly, it won't say the quiet part out loud typically, but the world might even get to the point now, have gotten to the point now where it essentially teaches an anti-marriage message.

But certainly to young people, it teaches a real skepticism toward entering into marriage too quickly. So, one of the things to be thinking about with this passage is, is anyone in your life encouraging delay in marriage in a way that you might need to reinvestigate?

But that's not the main point I want to talk about. The main point I want to talk about is the problem with the over-scrupulous woman. We need to get at this point more particular to apply this to somebody.

And, you know, everybody has trouble with this stuff. Everybody has had struggles, probably both with excess and asceticism. But I want to talk to women in general and specifically married mothers.

It is very important for married mothers to have a right view of God so that true godliness results in a proper relationship with food and sex.

[21 : 12] Now, I'm not picking mothers arbitrarily. I think in very significant ways, mothers are stewards of these things.

Food toward her children and her husband, sex toward her husband. Mothers are stewards of these things in a very particular way. I think I'm talking to a very specific issue that exists within the Christian home.

Now, over the years, I've seen women struggle on both sides of the spectrum in both their sexual lives and their food lives. I've seen women who struggle with overindulgence in one area and underindulgence in another area.

I've seen women who eat too much and seen women who eat too little and seen unmarried women who sleep around too much and married women who sleep around too little or have too little sex with their husbands.

But what we need to remember is that this is always due to a broken view of God. And I'm going to talk specifically because this text in 1 Timothy is dealing with this, which is kind of why I'm bringing this up at all, because I want to make sure we are understanding the problem of scruples, of too many scruples.

[22 : 29] What do I mean by scruples? Again, it's too many, a too rigid, weak conscience often, just a minimalistic, ascetic perspective on these two gifts that God has given us, food and sex.

Oh, and why am I talking about sex? Because when it says that those who forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods, forbidding marriage there is largely code for forbidding sex.

There was a movement of celibacy that was creeping into the church, forbidding marriage, pretty confident is mostly code for preventing sex.

That might not be why marriage is, certainly isn't why marriage is frowned upon today, but that's a different story. So I'm going to talk about excessive scruples.

Now, I want you to imagine that a woman is a bit of an extremist, a food extremist on the ascetic side. Well, what we need to understand there is that that is not a neutral position.

[23 : 39] What she is believing about God is showing up in how she interacts with food. Or suppose that, functionally, she's maybe a bit of a skeptical view of sex, maybe a bit of a dark view of sex, or a view of sex that is very peripheral to human life, to a good life.

These are all theological problems. And we have an explanation in our text that is theological. Paul says there's going to be these teachings of demons and they're going to lead people to be over-scrupulous in areas of God-given pleasure.

Why? Well, what does he do to fix it? What does he do to address the issue? He teaches us about God. For everything created by God is good and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving for it is made holy by the word and prayer.

So Paul's correction for the demonic teaching of culinary and sexual minimalism is to remind us who God is. God is good.

He creates good things. Everything, the text says, everything created by God is good. Now, let me hit pause for a second and deal with a specific subset of mostly women.

[25 : 03] I'm going to speak to what is the technical term is the primitivist gals and you'll know what I mean here in a minute. The thing I want you to hear is that God made atoms and he made chemicals he made hydrogen bonds and so on and so forth.

Now, don't get me wrong, there's a ton of wisdom in thinking twice about processed foods but this ain't the verse for that. Everything created by God is good.

This is not where you start talking about GMOs or Monsanto. Another way to say this is this verse is not aimed to reinforce your crunchiness. It's actually aimed to get you to be skeptical about your crunchiness.

If the primary idea you're taking away is, yep, everything created by God is good, therefore I will only eat non-GMOs, you are actually full of the error that Paul is trying to address here.

The point is really to make you suspicious about your crunchiness. Don't throw out a concern or thoughtfulness about food entirely but make sure, make sure you understand that this is all downstream in some respect of your view of God.

[26 : 19] Here's the thing I'm seeing, ladies. If more Christian mothers thought as deeply about God as they do about gluten, I think the world would be a different place. Point is, Paul's making God is good.

That's the main point. God is good. He's not stingy. He's not a nervous, anorexic God. God is jolly. He is joyful. The Son of Man came eating and drinking in enough quantities to be slandered as a glutton and a drunkard.

Ladies, could anyone ever accuse you of being a glutton and a drunkard? Not because you are, but because you are joyful and have a relatively cheerful attitude toward food.

Could anyone accuse you of being a glutton? Not because you are a glutton, but because you have a joyful, relatively cheerful attitude toward food.

Well, if not, is your behavior in conformity to the behavior of Christ? What about the marriage bed? Again, when Paul says they were prohibiting marriage, it's almost certainly the sexual aspects of marriage that they were primarily singling out.

[27 : 41] They would say that sex is not spiritual, it's not holy, and so on and so forth. But it's important to note in this passage, and you can look at the passage for yourself, that Paul lumps marriage and the marriage bed in with food when he says everything God created is good and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving.

Now, for the unmarried, the problem you've got is that God is saying no. Not no forever, but no for now. But if you're married, God has given you not only a green light, but in many respects, he's really kind of taken away the other options.

Like, this is his good will for you. Everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving.

We know that sexual immorality and gluttony are sinful because they flow from a wrong view of God. 1 Timothy 4 is here to remind us that overly developed sexual or food scruples also come from a wrong view of God.

Now, I am not, and I would encourage you to learn from my example here, I am not interested in helping a person sort through too fine details on what their view of God is.

[29 : 09] That might surprise you, and I owe you a deeper explanation, but I am extremely wary of essentially renting a high priest to come and sit with you to tell you what you think.

You're an individual, you will ultimately stand before God as an individual, and we do believe in community, and we do believe in fellowship, and so on and so forth, but we also believe in the individual and the individual's relationship with God.

I would just simply say that if you find yourself on one of these two sides, whether you're overly indulgent, or you're underly indulgent, I just remind you of some things.

Past traumas tell us lies about God. The sins of others tell us lies about God. Our own hearts can tell us lies about God. So think about it for an instance, like the obvious sort of problem related to food would be you had a parent that abused it.

They were overly licentious. They were gluttonous. Now, you're going to, in the flesh, if you don't turn this over to Christ, you're going to be led by their example in one of two ways.

[30 : 32] You're either going to be led by just following their lead and doing what they did, or you're going to be led by trying to correct and over correct for the error.

In both cases, you're really being led by their actions. So, rather than, I would just be, I would just be wise and careful and guard your heart about a bunch of people coming in and giving you extremely specific solutions.

What I'm doing is more broad than that and saying, if these things don't seem right to you, if your behaviors seem over scrupulous or over indulgent, what we've got here is a problem with our view of God.

The best thing you can do is to pray and ask God to correct this. It is not necessarily to start parsing through all the fine details of your view of God.

It really is the kind of thing that if you'll just recognize the behavior isn't what it should be, just simply go to God and ask him to show himself to you through Christ.

[31 : 41] As I'm staying, I don't love an overly analytical journey into the recesses of your heart here. I love God, this doesn't seem right, this behavior. I just know that that means I need to see you more clearly.

would you show me yourself? You look at your behavior, is it too indulgent, is it overly scrupulous, God, I'm not seeing you like I want to. Last thing I'll say about scruples, about being overly scrupulous,!

about having quote-unquote hang-ups, here's what I would say to ladies in particular, never surrender your scruples or your hang-ups because someone is simply telling you to.

Do it because you are persuaded that God is a certain way. Never surrender your scruples because someone is telling you to.

Do it because you are persuaded that God is a certain way. Ladies, you're commanded by God in Romans 12 to offer your bodies as living sacrifices to God, not to anyone else.

[32 : 45] Be fully persuaded in your own heart. Paul says, whatever is not done in faith is sin. Once you're convinced that you need to adjust in one direction or another, you can force yourself to be a little more compliant to the standard you believe is better, but don't run rough shot over your conscience.

We don't ravage our consciences. We don't let others ravage our consciences. We teach our conscience. We instruct our conscience. Teach yourself a new way of being like you teach a kid to read.

Don't let anyone, even yourself, run rough shot over your convictions. Even if some of your convictions aren't right, remember, God is patient, and so are his servants.

You can see something like this in play at the text. The goodness of God's creation is a fact, Paul says, but then Paul says, it is made holy by word and prayer. He's not saying it's made holy before God.

He's saying it is made holy before you. You'll get your heart and mind around the holiness of these things as you engage in the word and prayer.

[34 : 03] Last thing I'll leave with you is simply this. If there's one ideal I can give you, one set of behaviors to aim, it would simply be this.

If you're married in the area of both food and sex, you want to exhibit a general cheerfulness toward both. Why?

Because that's how God feels about both. All right, well, thank you so much for listening. Sorry for all the background noise, but I had to squeeze this in. We're about to go do some ministry stuff, and I had to squeeze this in while Angela was getting ready, so I don't know how much background noise this is going to pick up.

I know you really won't care all that much. Thank you so much for listening, and again, if any of this resonates, what I would really want you to do is just take a moment, get alone, and say, God, I just heard this.

I'm seeing maybe that this isn't where I need to be. Show me more of Christ. Show me more of Jesus, and conform my behavior to what I see. Love you guys.

[35 : 09] Peace out. Peace