

SPIRITUAL JUNK FOOD DESTROYS THE HEART
Titus 3:9-11

INTRODUCTION:

I hate to admit it but I like junk food. I *love* junk food. I crave junk food. Popcorn with lots of salt. Iced cola. Almond Joys. Ice cream. Corn chips. I could go on and on. I'm hooked on junk food!

In fact, I am so addicted to junk food that I am starting a new eco-friendly, green, environmentally sensitive campaign. I am rolling it out today. You are the first to hear it. Ready? Here it is:

**SAVE THE EARTH:
IT'S THE ONLY PLANET
WITH POPCORN**

We're going to have T-shirts, bumper stickers, billboards and ad-campaigns. Orville Redenbacher and I will be the chairmen of the campaign. January 19 is already National Popcorn Day but I want to push to make it a national holiday – to be celebrated with parades and fireworks and popcorn-eating contests. The epicenter for the celebration will be Sac City, Iowa, home of the world's largest popcorn ball, weighing in at 3100 pounds.

I know that popcorn has limited nutritional value but I love it! And that's what makes it junk food: the fact that it has little or no nutritional value. But the sad truth is that not only does junk food have little nutritional value, it can actually be harmful. These useless calories can pile up and pile on and be very unhealthy for us. In spite of what they may imply:

My older brother sent me his thoughts about junk food. He said:
*Watch out for deceptive packaging and misleading names.
Roloids don't do anything for love-handles (Get it? Roll-Aids). Slim
Jims won't help you lose weight, and Smarties don't work.*

There are probably other names of junk food products that are similarly deceptive but you get the idea.

There is also spiritual junk food. In Titus 3:9, Paul warned his young protégé, Titus, about some junk food we should avoid. It is of no nutritional value to you or to the Body of Christ and it can actually be very unhealthy to your soul. Paul wrote:

⁹*But avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and arguments and quarrels about the law, because these are unprofitable and useless.*

Commenting on this verse, William Barclay wrote:

The Greek philosophers spent their time on their fine-spun problems. The Jewish Rabbis spent their time building up

imaginary genealogies for the characters of the Old Testament. The Jewish scribes spent endless hours discussing what could or could not be done on the Sabbath, and what was and was not unclean. It has been said that there is a danger that a man may think himself religious because he discusses religious questions.

Wow! Even before Al Gore invented the Internet and even before the advent of email, there was a problem with people thinking that because they had discussed a religious topic, that made them religious. That is still around. There are those who think that because they have forwarded an inspirational email, that makes them a Christian. Forwarding someone else's message or discussing theology or listening to Christian music or even attending church is much easier than disciplined Christian living. And, frankly, that's part of the danger of spiritual junk food like foolish controversies, speculative genealogies, arguments and quarrels about the Law: they give the impression that you have done something religious when your heart may still be untouched by the hand of Jesus.

So let's take a few minutes to look at each of these categories of spiritual junk food that can destroy our souls.

I. FOOLISH CONTROVERSIES

The first junk food about which Paul warned Titus is "foolish controversies". Know this: there are some controversies that are important and some that are not. It is a mature Christian who can tell the difference and avoid the foolish ones.

Thomas Aquinas, who lived in the middle 1200s, was a very influential philosopher and theologian. He became famous for debating metaphysical fine points based on human reason.

Thomas wrote several ponderous philosophical books, the most famous of which was called *Summa Theologica*, ("summary of theology"). It contained, among other things, several dozen propositions on the nature of angels, which Thomas attempted to work out by process of pure reason. The results were pretty tortured, and to later generations, they seemed a classic example of good brainpower put to nonsensical ends. As one example Thomas posed the possibility that angels were neither male nor female but were hermaphrodites. He also speculated about whether hair and fingernails grow in heaven.

Isaac D'Israeli, a British author published a series of books called *Curiosities of Literature*. The first volume appeared in 1791. D'Israeli made fun of the Scholastic Philosophers of the late Middle Ages, and most notably Thomas Aquinas. D'Israeli suggested sarcastically that

Thomas could debate how many angels could dance on the point of a very fine needle without jostling one another.

The truth is that no such historical (and hysterical) debate ever really occurred. D'Israeli was making fun of Aquinas' books and his debates. But that silly illustration has been passed along so often that many people actually believe that such a debate took place. And now people even engage in foolish controversies about whether or not that foolish controversy really occurred.

Some people seem to relish a spirit of argumentation and seem to enjoy a good fight. They are ever ready to pounce on some fine point of doctrine and make a controversy out of it. It makes them feel smart to have noticed some little factoid that you may have overlooked.

The problem is that these folk have never figured out that all truth is equally true but that all truth is not equally important. For instance, there are 823,156 words in the King James translation of the Bible. That's the truth but that is not a very important truth and I don't really care if you remember that number or not. Equally true, but far more important, is the fact that Christ died to pay the penalty for your sin. And you'd better never forget that fact.

Paul was right to warn Titus to avoid foolish controversies. They are junk food to your soul.

II. SPECULATIVE GENEALOGIES

Paul also said to avoid speculative genealogies. Have you ever had someone ask you where Cain got a wife? People have wondered about that for centuries and have tried to create hypothetical family trees to come up with a wife for Adam and Eve's sons.

(By the way, in case you are still wondering about that one, the correct answer is: "We don't know." We don't know because the Bible doesn't say.) The Bible gives us several genealogies. Some people complain that the Bible gives us too many genealogies and they are boring reading. But rest assured of this, the Bible gives us every genealogy that is helpful to us.

We do not know where Job fits into the lineage of Jesus...or even if he does. Guess what: it must not matter. It must not be important. So there is no reason for us to waste the time and energy trying to make him fit someplace.

And that's part of the point: it is a waste of time to try to decide if Job was descended from Abraham or if Abraham was descended from Job...or if

they are unrelated. If it mattered, God would have revealed that to us but it doesn't so He didn't.

I said that part of the problem with speculative genealogies is that they are a waste of time and energy; but the other problem with them is that they can stir up trouble in the church. Because the Bible does not speak to that issue, we have no authoritative source for answering the questions. As a result, we fall back on human speculation. And where one person speculates on thing, a different person speculates something else and before long, an argument can result. Then, to try to bolster his argument, each will tell others about the disagreement and try to get them to take sides...in the mistaken belief that if more people agree with me than agree with you, that makes me correct.

Paul commanded Titus to avoid such speculative genealogies because they are unproductive and divisive.

III. HEATED ARGUMENTS

Paul also told Titus to avoid arguments. I agree with Paul on this one. (I'm sure he's relieved to hear that!) I've seen a lot of good come out of discussion but I have never seen anything good come out of an argument.

- In all my years, I've never known anyone to be argued into changing his mind. In fact, what usually happens is exactly the opposite. The longer someone argues, the more he seeks to defend his position. The more he tries to defend his position, the more sure he is that he is correct. Meanwhile, the other guy is becoming more convinced about his position. As a result, the longer the argument goes on and the louder the argument gets, the further apart the two sides become...and the less likely they are to come to some agreement. Someone has said that the two eventually suffer from "hardening of the arguments."
- I've never known anyone to be argued into changing his mind and I've never known anyone to be argued into the Kingdom of Heaven. Last week's CHRISTIAN STANDARD magazine had a terrific article about that very issue. Robert Wetzel wrote it under the title, "*The Boy With The Odd-Shaped Head*" and it is very funny and very insightful. One of Wetzel's observations was "one could win an argument (at least in one's own mind) but alienate the person you are trying to bring to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ." People are rarely, if ever, argued into accepting Christ as their savior.
- Marriages aren't argued into becoming better.
- Children aren't argued into become more obedient.

Typically, arguments just make things worse. It is true that the word argue comes from a Latin root meaning "to make things clear" but down through the years, the term has come to carry the idea of contention and quarreling. Discuss the issues? Yes. Become contentious and quarrel

about them? Never! It does damage to the heart: yours and your opponent's.

IV. LEGALISTIC QUARRELS

Paul also tells Titus to avoid quarrels about the Law. Now it is pretty easy to brush this one off and say that it doesn't apply to us because we do not live under the Law of Moses so we don't quarrel about it. We don't really care how far a person could walk on the Sabbath Day and still not sin because, as Christians, we are not bound to that legal system. We don't care how much weight a person could carry before it became classified as work. We aren't real fussy about keeping the feast days and the fast days because that doesn't apply to us.

So we might be tempted to skate right past this command. But be careful. There are more laws than just the Mosaic Law. Some have been very legalistic about which translation of the Bible they approve. Or what style of music must be sung. Or what publishing house prints their Sunday School material. Or what college educated their preacher. Historically, within our movement, some have been very legalistic about what name must be over the door if a church is to be considered loyal to the New Testament.

To become legalistic and then quarrel about the most minor points of the life and work of the church is to create strife and division. Paul says this is unprofitable and useless. It's like junk food for the soul.

CONCLUSION:

Have you ever noticed that junk food is an impulse-buy? Count on this, if it's at the checkout stand with the *Globe* and the *National Enquirer*, it's probably not all that healthy. At the grocery, if we want healthy, we have to go deeper into the store where they keep the good stuff. The same is true in the Word. If we want healthy, we need to go beyond the impulsive, rash and reckless reaction to what we read and hear. We are building up a body here. We need to pass by the spiritual junk food of foolish controversies, speculative genealogies, heated arguments and legalistic quarrels. To build up the Body of Christ and to build up our own souls, we must crave the nourishing *milk* of God's Word and then graduate to the *meat* of the Word. We must drink of the Living Water and feast on the Bread of Life. Eating junk food can be satisfying for the moment but, in the end, it fails to nourish the body and can actually do damage to it. The same is true in the Body of Christ.

So, this morning, let's ask God to give us the Bread of Life and let's decide we will feed upon that to nourish our souls.

INVITATION: #413 – “*Break Thou The Bread of Life*”