

Maintaining Good Health (Part 1)

Stewardship of Our Bodies

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I would like you to imagine for just a brief period of time that perhaps you were living back in the time when the temple in Jerusalem was in operation, and you, being a faithful Levite, were appointed stewardship of maintaining the temple and the grounds. How do you think that you would take care of that responsibility, knowing full well that it was the earthly dwelling place of God?

Do you think that you would approach that responsibility in an irreverent, slap-dash, careless, lackadaisical, "I'm too busy with other things"-kind of manner, or would you think that you would approach it in a highly respectful orderly and "whatsoever your hand finds to do, do it with all of your might" attitude?

In type, we have already been given this responsibility, and in fact it is a double-edged responsibility, and I want you to turn to I Corinthians 3 and we're going to read quite a number of scriptures here—verses 6 through 17.

I Corinthians 3:6-18 I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that plants anything, neither he that waters; but God that gives the increase. Now he that plants and he that waters are one: and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour. For we are labourers together with God: you are God's husbandry, you are God's building. According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another builds thereon. But let every man take heed how he builds thereupon. For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble: Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire: and the fire shall try every man's work of what

sort it is. If any man's work abide which he has built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire. Know you not that you are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple you are. Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you seems to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise.

In this context "temple" is used synonymously for "church," thus referring to the entire body of believers. This can be determined by Paul's use of the term "building," meaning an edifice as his metaphor. He is showing that each person, as part of the building, has some affect on the quality of the whole building by means of how he conducts his life.

In this metaphor Paul ties all of us together as a team having a specific responsibility of doing all we can to build up and strengthen the church. There can be no doubt that the ministry bears the greater burden, but everyone is involved. He begins by giving himself and Apollos as examples, and that's why he says, "I have planted; Apollos watered; ...So then neither is he that plants anything, neither he that waters; but God that gives the increase. Now he that plants and he that waters are one: and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour. For we are labourers together." Everyone is involved.

The *King James Version* makes a difficult-to-understand translation when it says, "Now he who plants, [meaning Paul himself], and he that waters, [meaning Apollos] are one." The use of the term "one" by the translators I think is fuzzy to say the least. Here is how the *Revised Standard* translates that: "He who plants [Paul] and he who waters [Apollos] are equal." They are not one in the sense that they are identical or that they are bound together like Siamese twins, but rather each is of equal importance to the final result.

I want you to notice how frequently Paul emphasizes this team aspect. In verse 9 he says, "We are labourers together." Now at that point you might think the "we" only refers to Paul and Apollos, but in verse 10, "According to the grace of God which is given unto me as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another builds thereon. But let every man [that is a

part of the building, and not just Paul and Apollos] take heed how he builds thereupon."

Verse 12 says, "If **any** man ..."

Verse 13 says, "**Every** man's work shall be made manifest."

Verse 14 says, "If **any** man's work abide ..."

Verse 15 says, "If **any** man's work shall be burned, ..."

Verse 17 says, "If **any** man defile the temple of God, ..."

There is no room for anybody who is a part of the body of Jesus Christ to get away with the misconception that what they do, or what they think, or what their attitudes might be, doesn't matter. One of the great dominant themes of Paul's teaching is the personal responsibility of each individual for his life, and the fact that somehow, somewhere, and at some time, each one will have to render account to God for what he has done. Are we building, or are we destroying?

But how can Paul say that the various parts of the body are equal, or we might say bear equal responsibility? I'll tell you why he can say, that because there is a biblical principle that covers that, and you have gone through this parable many times. In fact there are two of them that Jesus gave: The Parable of the Talents, and the Parable of the Pounds.

If you can recall, the three servants in that parable are not expected to produce the same quantity in terms of results, but each is expected to be equally faithful in what was entrusted to their stewardship. And so the one who received five pounds was supposed to, and he did, increase it to ten. He doubled it. The one who was given two pounds increased also exactly the same percentage. The percentage was equal even though the quantity that was required of him was not the same. That's what Paul is referring to. Some **are** given greater gifts, and therefore more is required of them, but God expects equal growth (if I can put it that way) according to the gifts that have been given to the person.

In verse 17 Paul uses the word "destroy" twice. "If any man defile ...[other Bibles translate that *destroy*] ...the temple of God, him shall God destroy." That is a strong warning to those committing sins that are named in other parts of the epistle. Remember, he wrote this in the context of problems that were going on within the Corinthian church and it's written for our admonition.

In this epistle, somebody said one time in my hearing, that there are twenty-one specific sins that are named in I Corinthians. But just some of the major ones are: advocating false doctrine, strife between the brethren, jealousy, sexual immorality, and all kinds of others. This is a reminder that they were being held responsible by God regardless of what it might have looked like to them in the present.

In other words it may have appeared, looking on the surface of things, that they were getting away with something, that God had not plagued them—yet; that God had not chastened them—yet; that God was looking the other way. They were forgetting that they were not to walk by sight, but they were to walk by faith. The very fact is that they were overlooking the principle that whatever a person sows is eventually going to be reaped in one way or another. So, "If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy." There comes a time of judgment. Nobody escapes.

Judgment is now on the household of God, according to I Peter 4:17, and so we are being evaluated, and it's very likely that sooner or later we will be corrected for what we are going through, and that's good. God corrects every son He loves, and so that's a good thing.

God would destroy them because the church is holy, and their false doctrines or their conduct—whether they were aware of it or not—were seeking or being used to destroy the church. The church is holy because it belongs to God, and He has separated it from the world. Each member bears responsibility for keeping himself holy.

Perhaps there is nothing we need more toward imparting understanding of this factor than a deeper or stimulating awareness of the fact, despite of the way things may look on the surface—our world view, our perspective of

things, the way we look at life and all of its jumble of events—that we had better look through the prism of this biblical fact that if we are converted, if we have the spirit of God, we have a responsibility to God. We are members of His body, of His church, and therefore we are included in His great purpose.

There is yet another level of understanding of this concept of the body, and I am of course referring to the taking care of our physical bodies. It is because we belong to God, and because we are holy, and because we're integral parts of the body of Christ that this responsibility falls upon us with greater intensity than it does to those who are not.

In John 14:23 Jesus says this:

John 14:23 Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words, and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.

It is here that Jesus introduces the basis for this concept that we have Christ in us, to illustrate the closeness of the relationship with the God Family. Under the Old Covenant, God is conceived as dwelling in the Temple, and as being mysterious and distant. The veil separated the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place, and so the Holy Place was a place that only the priests could go, and the Most Holy Place only the high priest could go, and he only once a year. And yet that Most Holy Place—the "Holy of Holies"—was considered to be the dwelling place of God, and only one human being, one day of the year—on the day of Atonement—was ever allowed into that dwelling place of God.

Do you know, and are you aware that the average Israelite never got inside even the Holy Place? There were various courts around the edge of the tabernacle, and later the temple. That's where they came. They never got past the brazen altar and into the building. God was distant. They were cut off from God, as it were, and so they were not allowed into His presence. But under the New Covenant WE become the dwelling place of God, and God becomes knowable and personal. What an awesome difference!

Now back to my original question. If you were given responsibility for the care of the physical Temple in Jerusalem, how would you take care of it? I think that if you were a sincere Levite and it was your responsibility to take care of those things, you would probably take care of it with all of your might, with deep reverence, knowing that it was the dwelling place of God.

Let me now update this. How are you taking care of **your body** now that **you** are the dwelling place of God? Are you giving your body the same kind of reverent care that those people who took care of the temple did? It's something to consider, and to consider very deeply. It is a weighty responsibility. I kid you not. This is part of our stewardship.

I Corinthians 6:15-20 Know you not that **your bodies** are the members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ, and make them the members of an harlot? God forbid. What? Know you not that he which is joined to an harlot is one body? For two, says he, shall be one flesh. But he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit. Flee fornication. Every sin that a man does is without the body: but he that commits fornication sins against his own body. What? Know you not the your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit which is in you, which you have of God, and your are not your own? For you are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit which are God's.

Our responsibility is not merely spiritual. Our responsibility is spiritual **and** physical. Now Paul very clearly confirms the concept that Jesus showed there in John 14:23, and your body in this context zeroes in on the individual member of the church, and it tells why. *We are not our own*. We've been bought with an awesome price in order that a relationship with the One who gave or paid the price, that this might be established; and of course with the Father as well, because He was One with the Son in doing what was done.

Now Paul's concern in this context is that debauching the body by involving it in sin is a threat to the continuation of the relationship, and it doesn't

matter whether the sin is spiritual, or whether we might term it as being physical. The term "physical sin" does not appear in the Bible. As far as I know, that term was coined by Herbert Armstrong.

We normally think of sin as being the breaking of a law, and that is certainly not wrong. "Sin is the transgression of the law," so it's not wrong to think of it that way, but the Bible's usage of the term "sin" is much broader than that. "Sin" in the biblical sense is "to fall short of the glory of God." "Sin" in the biblical sense is simply "to turn aside from *the* way." It's to go off the path, to the left or to the right. It doesn't matter. "Sin" is described as "missing the mark." The arrow misses the whole target. See, you've missed the mark. That's sin. "Sin" simply indicates the failure to do what is right, and "right" is the way that God would do it. Of course, some sin, some failures, are far more serious than others.

Let's go back to the thought that "you are not your own." We're going to reflect on something that we touched on several sermons back on the Parable of the Unjust Steward. I just want you to remember a couple of things from that parable.

Paul says here in I Corinthians 6 that our bodies belong to God, but their care has been given to us as a stewardship responsibility of glorifying God in our body as well as in our spirit. Now here's where the parable begins to come in.

Do you remember Jesus making the mention of *unrighteous mammon*? I think everyone of us will remember that, but He used two other terms synonymous to "unrighteous mammon." The one term was "that which is least," and the other term was "that which is another man's." ("You belong to another.")

In the parable, Jesus did not say, "Ignore these." He simply pointed out that they were secondary to the **true** riches. Remember there were three terms for true riches: 1) true riches, 2) that which is your own, and 3) that which is much. All three meaning the same thing.

What He did as He concluded the parable is that He clearly pointed to a direct connection between the two levels of responsibility, because He said, "He that is faithful in that which is least (unrighteous mammon: that which

belongs to another), will be faithful in that which is much (the true riches; that which is your own)."

The care of your bodies is a stewardship responsibility that falls within the parameters of "the unrighteous mammon" (that which is least; that which is another's) category. It is nonetheless a major responsibility.

Let's go to II Corinthians 6:16, and we're going to read through to Chapter 7.1.

II Corinthians 6:16 And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God; as God has said, I will dwell in them,

You can see which application He is making here. It's not the temple collectively. It is the temple in its individual parts, because He refers to "I will dwell in **them**," meaning individual people.

II Corinthians 6:16-18 ...and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be you separate [be holy] says the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing: and I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and you shall be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty.

II Corinthians 7:1 Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh, and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

Keeping yourself healthy is an aspect of holiness.

Turn now to Romans 12:1:

Romans 12:1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present **your bodies** a living sacrifice...

Think brethren back to the Old Testament sacrifices, and what God had to say about the sacrifices. They were not allowed to sacrifice anything that was blemished. The best that they had was to be given on the altar. Do you see the tie?

Romans 12:1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, *acceptable* unto God, which is your reasonable service.

If you look in your margin, they will tell you that the alternate translation of that word "reasonable" is "*spiritual*." Offering our healthy bodies to God is a spiritual service.

Romans 12:2 And be not conformed to this world: but be you transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God.

Truly brethren, the care of our bodies truly falls within the parameters of unrighteous mammon: that which is least; that which is another's. God expects us to be responsible enough that we will take care with all diligence that which belongs to Him. We were bought with a price, and we are not our own any longer.

In an overall sense our stewardship responsibility is done in order not to destroy the relationship established, but to improve it, to edify, to build up the relationship with Jesus Christ. Good health is extremely valuable even though poor health can be overcome in one's drive to be perceived as successful. Maintaining good health promotes the strengthening of the relationship with Jesus Christ. "He that is faithful in that which is least"—(taking care of the body)—"will also be faithful in taking care of that which is most."

It is here that some practical spiritual ramifications of the closeness of the relationship are given. I'm referring back to what we just read through here—II Corinthians 6:16 and carrying through to Chapter 7.1 and Romans 12. We begin to see that taking care of our bodies has very strong spiritual overtones, and it is part of the sanctification process and thus it is tied

directly with growing, overcoming, coming to purity of life, avoiding the pitfalls of life, living the abundant life, and thus our witness for God.

All too frequently we can make a great deal of serious effort to keep ourselves from committing sins like idolatry, adultery, fornication, or whatever, while at the same time virtually ignoring the physical care of the body by being either ignorant of what God requires of us, or foolishly thinking that maintaining it should be of no concern physically, that it really doesn't matter. Yes, it does.

Perhaps those of you who are younger would find it helpful to ask somebody who is older and whose health is deteriorating, or maybe asking somebody who has had to deal with poor health much of his life how important having good health is.

Now we've come to a place in the sermon where we're going to make a bit of a bend. I want you to turn back to Genesis 2, all the way back to the beginning, so that we see an important aspect of our responsibility here before God.

Genesis 2:15 And the LORD God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it.

"Dressing" and "keeping" describes an overall responsibility for everyone, and it pertains to what we are to do with our life. It applies both in the physical and the spiritual aspects of life. We are to begin where we are and cultivate; dress. I'm going to give you a couple of synonyms for that word *dress*: cultivate, embellish, or encourage growth. Isn't that what you do out in the garden when you cultivate it? That's what you're doing. You get rid of the weeds. You are encouraging growth so that your plants are embellished. You are cultivating them so that they produce the greatest amount of fruit. And then the term "keep" means "to preserve." It means to guard, to protect, through maintenance, from decay and deterioration.

There is a direct tie between this concept here in Genesis 2:15 and Jesus' instruction in the Parable of the Unjust Steward. Jesus instructs that one area is more important than the other, but He also makes it clear to us that the same basic principles of success that apply to one also apply to the other.

The same principles that produce success in the area of unrighteous mammon (*that which is least*, or *that which belongs to another*) also can be applied to the true riches—*that which is most; that which is your own*.

Now what God wants is faithfulness in both: *that which is least* [the physical] and *that which is most* [the spiritual]. The same principles that will produce or achieve success in the one (*that which is least*) will also work to produce success and achievement in *that which is most* in the building of character in His image, which is God's overall purpose. Both areas require what? Diligent study. Meditation. Goal-setting, as well as consistent faithful application.

Many will not do what is necessary for success either because they are ignorant, or that in some cases they do know, but they lack the character or the sense of responsibility. Instead they spend their time justifying the way they are, or maybe proclaim themselves to be, because that is where the deception begins, that they are victims of the system and that there is no way out.

We're going to explore this a little bit because there is a measure of truth that we are victims. Everybody is a victim.

Turn to Exodus 20:3-5. This is right in the midst of the Ten Commandments.

Exodus 20:3-5 You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make unto you any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: You shall not bow down yourself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity [the lawlessness] of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me.

This is a warning right in the midst of the Ten Commandments that those who break His law are sowing the seeds that are going to affect those who come after them, and so the children become victims of the sins of the parents. We'll just broaden it out a little bit and say "ancestors."

There is a saying, and it's kind of an interesting saying, that if one desires good health, make sure that you pick your parents right. This is of course impossible, but it does highlight the fact that ancestry plays a fairly important role in the kind of health that people receive right at birth. Or put another way, that one's genetic makeup received from his parents is important. The effects of people's sins are passed on to the following generations. God is faithful. It happens.

Something to consider is appearing where this warning does, which appears right in the midst of the commandments. It seems to indicate that the basic cause for this occurring—the passing on of the effect of sin—is idolatry. Instead of people hearing, believing, and doing the instruction of the Creator God, people establish their own authorities and believe in following them to their own deterioration and eventual destruction.

Isn't that what Adam and Eve did in the garden? Instead of listening to God—"Don't take from that tree and eat from it,"—they established their own authority by listening to Satan, and did what he said, and committed sin, and then the result followed. This is the same process that we're talking about here. And because they believed Satan rather than God, he became their idol—the one that they bowed down to and submitted.

Sometimes the idol is ourselves that is done in the pampering and the pandering of the self. It is a form of narcissism, pandering to the tongue's desires rather than the body's real need. This takes place both in the physical and spiritual areas.

And yet there is another way that we are victims, and that is the accumulative effect of all of these sins. I want you to go to the book of Revelation 18.

Revelation 18:1-2 And after these things I saw another angel come down from heaven, having great power; and the earth was lightened with his glory. And he cried mightily with a strong voice, saying, Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and is become the *habitation* [the home] of demons, and the *hold* ...

This word "hold" does not mean "hold" in the normal sense. It is actually a watchtower. If you can think of vultures sitting up on a tower watching what is going on down below them, looking for every opportunity to leap on those who are below them and begin to tear them to pieces, you get the idea of what he means by *watchtower*.

Revelation 18:2 ...and the watchtower of every foul spirit, and a cage [in this case it does mean a prison] of every unclean and hateful bird.

"Bird" is symbol of demons. You know the attitudes of men and women in prisons are not very good. There are angry people in there, and everybody is "innocent." Everybody is a victim, and all they're thinking about is ways to get out and to get even. That's the kind of atmosphere that we live in. We can't see these beings, but they are there. God's witness is true.

Revelation 18:3-4 For all nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, and the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth are waxed [are grown] rich through the abundance of her delicacies. And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, Come out of her my people, that you be not partakers of her sins, and that you receive not of her plagues.

Brethren, we were **born** into and held slave to an already full-blown highly developed anti-God, anti-life culture, called in the Bible "Babylon the Great," which is governed, ruled by, is the home of, the prison of, the watchtower of multitudes of demons, and this culture that we have been born into is their creation. Their goal in life is the destruction of humanity, and of God's purpose.

Back in the sixties, I read a book written by a German author whose name I have forgotten, but the name of the book was called "Dance With The Devil." The theme involves two young people who were invited to a dinner party by the Devil. They didn't know that it was the Devil who invited them, but what happened at the dinner party convinced them that their host was indeed the Devil.

His purpose for inviting them to the party was to recruit them to work for him. His presentation was to convince them that his system was the best for them. His purpose was to show them how profitable it would be for them, and failing that, to convince them that there was really no other way to go, and that they were in effect trapped.

The method that he used to do this was to call in one demon after another. Please understand that in the book they didn't look like demons. They looked like men, but they were in reality demons. His method was to call in one demon after the other to give clever, overwhelming reports on how well they were proceeding at destroying the creation, including mankind.

And so there was a demon assigned to work through men to pollute the air. Another demon was over pollution of the waters. A third was in charge of the destruction of the soil. A fourth was manipulating economics and to encourage women to leave the home in favor of the workforce. A fifth demon was assigned the responsibility of destroying morality through movies. Another one over music. Another one over sports. Another one over novels. Another demon was in charge of developing weapons that could kill people more effectively and efficiently and in larger numbers all the time. Another was responsible for destroying the forests. And on and on it went.

In the book, the couple was able to save themselves by perceiving what was going on, and fleeing, which is the advice that is given to us here. We are to flee the system that is the incubator of these anti-God, anti-life programs once we are made aware of what is going on, and receive power to come out of it through the application of truth.

None of this is easy, because Babylon's way has been engraved in our hearts, and therefore it's part of our thinking, part of our attitudes, part of our habits. It's part of our character, and it is part of what we have been given the responsibility of overcoming, with the help of God. But at conversion, its way is the way that we strongly tend to think and to see things.

It is Babylon that gives us our perspective on health, and Babylon is a mixture of good and evil. Unfortunately, if you are paying any attention to

the state of health in all the world, it is overwhelmingly more evil than it is good. Even this has a tendency to produce a feeling of helplessness, or hopelessness, in working toward changing things in regard to health.

I want you to go back to the book of Daniel, in chapter 1, and I want you to think of this vignette from Daniel, and Shadrach, and Meshach, and Abednego's lives, and put yourself in their position, and understand what was going on here.

Daniel 1:3-15 And the king spake unto Ashpenaz the master of his eunuchs, that he should bring certain of the children of Israel, and of the king's seed, and of the princes: Children in whom was no blemish, but well favoured, and skilful in all wisdom, and cunning in knowledge, and understanding science, and such as had ability in them to stand in the king's palace, and whom they might teach the learning and the tongue of the Chaldeans. And the king appointed them a daily provision of the king's meat, and of the wine which he drank: so nourishing them three years, that at the end thereof they might stand before the king. Now among these were of the children of Judah, Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah: Unto whom the prince of the eunuchs gave names: for he gave unto Daniel the name of Belteshazzar; and to Hananiah, of Shadrach; and to Mishael, of Meshach; and to Azariah, of Abednego. But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's meat, nor with the wine which he drank: therefore he requested of the prince of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself. Now God had brought Daniel into favour and tender love with the prince of the eunuchs. And the prince of the eunuchs said unto Daniel, I fear my lord the king, who has appointed your meat and your drink: for why should he see your faces worse liking than the children which are of your sort? Then shall you make me endanger my head to the king. Then said Daniel to Melzar, whom the prince of the eunuchs had set over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, Prove [or test] your servants, I beseech you, ten days: and let them give us pulse [vegetables] to eat, and water to drink. Then let our countenances be looked upon before you, and the countenance of the children that eat of the portion of the king's meat: and as you see, deal [or compare us]

with your servants. So he consented to them in this matter, and proved them ten days. And at the end of ten days their countenances appeared fairer and fatter in flesh than all the children which did eat the portion of the king's meat.

On the surface this looks much like a very nice children's story, but it's much more than that, and there was a great deal at stake in what was going on here. Daniel and his companions were specifically chosen not only because they showed much promise intellectually, but because they were of royal blood. They were of the king's children, or of the king's family. They were of the line of David.

What these Chaldeans wanted to do was to teach the learning and the language [the tongue] of the Chaldeans. This makes very clear the Babylonians' intentions. They were going to make Daniel and his companions into full-blown Babylonians. Remember what Babylon represents. It represents the world—the world at its worst, the world at its best, but the world nonetheless. And who does Judah represent? Judah represents the church. Judah represents those who have made a covenant with God.

And so here were these young men. Incidentally, how old was Daniel? One commentator that I read calculated that he was no more than fifteen or sixteen years old. I'll tell you, there's hardly an adult here who would want to be put into the position that these young men were put into, because in modern language what the Babylonians were going to do was to thoroughly brainwash these young men and turn them into full-blown Babylonians. They were going to strip them, as it were, of their Christianity—their way of life, their beliefs, their faith, their ideals, their character, so that they could be fully integrated into Babylon for the purpose of being the liaisons between the king and the Jews, and to persuade the rest of the Jews by these wonderful examples of these young men. So they were going to train them to be leaders to persuade the rest of the Jews to become full-blown Babylonians.

Nobody knows for sure the complete story of all that was at issue here to Daniel, Meshach, Shadrach, and Abednego regarding the food. It could have been unclean, i.e. Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14. It could have been food that was offered to idols, and therefore a defiling of the conscience was

involved. Or it could have been because of the richness of the food. Or it could have been all three of them together.

Even though we don't know the whole picture there, one thing is absolutely sure, and that is they put their lives on the line because of their belief in God regarding religion, regarding food—something that very many of us might think was not worth losing your head over. But they understood a great deal about the principles that were contained in the Old Testament, and they believed them, and they were going to be faithful to them even though it only involved food.

There is something that needs to be considered here that is a matter of logic and understanding other portions of the Bible. The test, it says, was only for ten days. That's hardly enough time for food all by itself to make such a visible difference. I mean vegetables all by themselves to make such a visible difference between **their** countenance and the Babylonians who were there. It is right in here that the lesson—the real lesson—of this vignette is. The conclusion has to be that the success of Daniel's plan was due more to God's sovereignty and blessing the spiritual faith of these four young Jews than it was the diet itself. This principle is very vital for us to remember. The principle is this: God allows no one to be a loser who is faithful in their responsibilities to Him.

Turn now to Mark 10:23.

Mark 10:23-28 And Jesus looked round about, and said unto his disciples, How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God! And the disciples were astonished at his words. But Jesus answered again, and said unto them, Children, how hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. And they were astonished out of measure, saying among themselves, Who then can be saved? And Jesus looking upon them said, With men it is impossible, but not with God: for with God all things are possible. Then Peter began to say unto him, Lo, we have left all, and have followed you. [Meaning, "We have sacrificed."]

Daniel, Meshach, Shadrach, and Abednego were willing to lay their lives on the line to sacrifice themselves over something that many of us would consider to be a very minor affair. "Lo, we have left all," Peter said. Daniel, Meshach, and Abednego left a great deal more. Their lives were on the line here, and so was the head of the man who was the head of this operation for Nebuchadnezzar, which is interesting, because he got caught in the operation of the faith of these poor young Jews.

Mark 10:29-30 And Jesus answered and said, Verily I say unto you, There is no man that has left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, *for my sake* and the gospel's, but he shall receive an hundredfold now, in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions, and in the world to come eternal life.

That is a promise that God will more than make up for anything that must be surrendered for Christ's sake. It is examples like these that give rise to the principle that God adds what we lack when what we do is motivated by faith. God greatly rewards sacrifice and faithfulness in carrying out duties imposed by His way of life. And of course you understand what I have in mind. Taking care of our body is a duty, and we are to be faithful, and God will more than make up for those who act in faith.

If one enters life born with a predisposition to illness because of the sins of the fathers, how can God be blamed for that? Is God to be blamed because He gives men free moral agency, and then men misuse it? I'm leading to something here. Another aspect of this maintaining good health is that good health is *not* an inherent right.

Because some people do feel that it is an inherent right, they go through life with a chip on their shoulder, accusing, maybe silently, God or others because they are in the condition that they are in, and so they feel victimized. But that feeling isn't helping them to overcome and grow at all.

Turn to III John 2, and we will touch on something that John had to say about this. John is writing to his friend Gaius.

III John 2:2 Beloved, I wish above all things that you may prosper and be in health, even as your soul prospers.

According to the commentaries, what John says here really is a wish. It's a desire. It is a longing. This word in Greek can imply a prayer, or a petition, but it is not the specific word for prayer or petition. It really does mean *wish*, the way we would use the word. I have no doubt that John prayed for Gaius' good health. The way this is framed, remember that John was an apostle. He was a man who walked and talked with Christ for three and one-half years, and one who really knew the mind of Christ. He was the only one of the original apostles who was left by this time, and did not look upon good health as an inherent right, but rather he "wished" that Gaius would be in good health.

There are some aspects of this facet of health that need to be considered for fuller understanding. I want you to turn back to John 9 to an episode that happened in Jesus' life.

John 9:1-5 And as Jesus passed by, he saw a man which was blind from his birth. And his disciples asked him, saying, Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind? Jesus answered, Neither has this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him. I must work the works of him that sent me while it is day: the night comes when no man can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.

Now first let's look at the disciples. They understood that the sins of the fathers are passed onto the children, even as the commandment says. They also understood that a person's own sins can cause the infirmity. However, (at least it appears here) that what they had not considered is that this is not true in every case. In other words, the Creator, in His wisdom and for His purposes, makes some subject to some infirmity right from the womb.

There are some things that we can learn about health afflictions just from this section and others that we will pull into. The first thing is that it is clear that

Jesus did not disagree that sin causes sickness, disease, affliction. He didn't disagree. Second, it is also clear that the ancestors'—or we might call it the individual's—sins are not always the cause of sickness either. I will just give you a couple of scriptures that I know that you're familiar with.

Job 2:6-7 And the LORD said unto Satan, Behold, he is in your hand; but save his life. So went Satan forth from the presence of the LORD, and smote Job with sore boils from the sole of his foot unto his crown.

Did sin bring that upon Job? God told Satan, "Go ahead and do with him what you will. Just don't kill him." The affliction was caused by Satan. Are you beginning to see what I'm driving at here?

Mark 5:2 And when he was come out of the ship, immediately there met him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit.

Jesus made it clear that mental illness can be the result of demon possession. The person was out of his mind.

Point 2 then, expanded a bit, is that illness (mental or physical), might have a spiritual cause and not have directly been caused by either the individual or the passing through natural causes from ancestors.

The next thing we can learn from this episode is that despite what the cause might be, good can be done, and God made evident and glorified in the situation. Isn't that what Jesus did? Now this is the principle that we can learn from.

Notice the contrast between the disciples' reaction, and Jesus' reaction. The disciples looked for a cause, i.e. a generally negative "Who can we blame for this circumstance?" Jesus' approach was positive. "What can we **do** about this condition?" Or perhaps put differently, "How can we glorify God within it?"

We don't have the powers or the gifts, and we can't go around raising people from their infirm condition, and neither should we feel guilty, because that

responsibility just hasn't been given to us or we would have the powers, because God always enables His servants to do His will by giving the gifts that are needed to carry them out. But what we can do IS important toward glorifying God, because Jesus added that while He was in the world He was the light of the world, the inference being that when He left, WE would become the light of the world. It becomes our responsibility to glorify God. Didn't Paul say that we are to glorify God in our body and our spirit?

Turn back to II Corinthians 12 and we will close on this example. Apparently here is a man who had every right to feel as though he was a victim.

II Corinthians 12:7-9 And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for you: for my strength is made perfect in weakness.

Right there Paul could feel like a victim. "Well Father, you're not going to heal me?" We could say on the surface of this thing, he said it was a messenger of Satan. "You've afflicted me with this. You have allowed Satan to afflict me with this. This is not because of my sins. I am paying a penalty for something somebody else did. I'm innocent, and yet I have to pay the penalty."

I don't know how far we can go with that, but we can go in that direction with it and think that way.

Now notice Paul's attitude in verse 9.

II Corinthians 12:9-10 Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.

Here is a wonderful vivid example of the way that we should look regarding our lot in life. Paul was content because of his trust in God. He knew God was aware. He knew that God was aware regarding his physical health. He also knew that God was going to supply his need in order to enable him to carry out his function in God's work. There is no accusation that God is unfair. Rather there is a measure of rejoicing. "Gladly," he says, "...take pleasure in his infirmities." Why? Because infirmities kept him humble. His infirmities kept him dependent upon God for his strength every day, and therefore spiritually he was far stronger in the things that really mattered in life, and therefore he went forth confident that life was going in the right direction, under the right circumstances, or God would have changed it.

We will stop there and next week, God-willing, we will continue to lay a foundation and carry on through with some other things regarding maintaining good health.