

Eating: How Good It Is! (Part Six)

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Most of us have probably had close acquaintances or family members who smoked. My wife and I have also had experience with smokers in our families. Four relatives, two from her extended family and two from mine, were heavy smokers, and all of them knew that it damaged their health. Three have already died of illnesses directly attributable to smoking. One died at age 44 and another at 49. A third succumbed to lung cancer in his early seventies, fairly young for a member of his family, who regularly lived into their late eighties. The fourth, still alive in her late fifties, suffers from two diseases, either of which could kill her quickly, or more likely, afflict her with drawn-out and painful disability. To her credit, when her doctor recently told her to quit smoking or die, she quit cold turkey.

None of these people needed the Surgeon General of the United States to tell them that cigarette smoking endangered their health. Obviously, deliberately breathing smoke into the lungs clashes with the lungs' need of clean, pure air! Even when I was a boy in the 1930s and 40s, people regularly called cigarettes "coffin nails." They knew they were taking a risk, but they were willing to ignore it. Smoking perfectly illustrates the insanity of human nature and presents a graphic object lesson that captures the essence of the principle that *we ignore truth at our own peril*. Spiritually, we risk destroying our relationship with God, or physically, condemning ourselves to the slavery of self-induced poor health.

We all know Jeremiah 17:9, but perhaps that familiarity is itself a danger because of its proclivity to produce contempt. When the scripture says, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked," its ramifications to life are profound. It becomes clearer when we add synonyms: Human nature is dishonest, underhanded, untrustworthy, misleading, crooked, and insincere besides. To appease an appetite or receive instant gratification, it craftily tricks us into discounting plain truths as unworthy or unnecessary.

Proverbs 22:3 adds another thought: "A prudent man foresees evil and hides himself, but the simple pass on and are punished." According to this scripture, smokers are obviously not prudent. Those in the Western world, at least, know significant risk is involved. Human nature, however, is a gambler; it is all too willing to put far off the evil day by rationalizing that it will not happen to the self. Yet punishment looms despite the rationalization. Human rationalizations will not turn aside laws of cause and effect. By contrast, II Timothy 1:6 reveals the Spirit of God is soundminded, that is, self-controlled. It will direct itself in the right path.

It has always been this way. God's Word shows the gambling nature of carnality from the very beginning, establishing the pattern from which we must learn. Adam and Eve ignore the truth God gives them and gamble, based on Satan's persuasions, that they can have what they desire much more quickly and receive pleasure while doing it.

As God's children, He thoroughly warns us of our responsibilities:

Now it shall come to pass, if you diligently obey the voice of the Lord your God, to observe carefully all His commandments which I command you today, that the Lord your God will set you high above all nations of the earth. And all these blessings shall

come upon you and overtake you, because you obey the voice of the Lord your God. . . . But it shall come to pass, if you do not obey the voice of the Lord your God, to observe carefully all His commandments and His statutes which I command you today, that all these curses will come upon you and overtake you. . . . So you shall be driven mad because of the sight which your eyes see. The Lord will strike you in the knees and on the legs with severe boils which cannot be healed, and from the sole of your foot to the top of your head. . . . Moreover all these curses shall come upon you and pursue and overtake you, until you are destroyed, because you did not obey the voice of the Lord your God, to keep His commandments and His statutes which He commanded you. And they shall be upon you for a sign and a wonder, and on your descendants forever. Because you did not serve the Lord your God with joy and gladness of heart, for the abundance of all things. . . . (Deuteronomy 28:1-2, 15, 34-35, 45-47)

Verses 1-2 and 15 state the general parameters, while verses 34-35 deal generally with mental and physical diseases by which He will punish us. Verses 45-47 give God's conclusion and its cause. Whether the blessings or cursings come upon us through the working of natural law or God directly taking a hand is moot. God is instructing us that they *will* happen, and He wants us to choose life. We can hardly complain that God has been unfair.

These principles apply far beyond producing and maintaining good health because what characterizes the sons of God is that they seek and apply truth in *every* area of life. In return, their use of the truth sanctifies them, sets them apart, for what God's laws produce for our good.

The Importance of Truth

Jesus says in John 8:32, "You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." Truth sets us free! Among other things, it frees us from eternal death, debilitating mental hang-ups, and diseases of the body.

What kind of message does it send to God if His children, those called by His name, either do not seek truth or carelessly ignore what they have? Perhaps it would be good for us to think of it like this: He is Truth personified. Therefore, to ignore truth is to ignore Him and, by extension, to ignore salvation. Remember, salvation is the *active, continuous process* by which God delivers us from what causes disease in the mental and physical areas of life and eternal death in the spiritual. Is it really worthwhile to ignore truth?

Truth does not come to us all at once. It gradually accumulates in those who ask, seek and knock for it, then use it in their own lives to glorify God. We do not always easily find it. Sometimes truth emerges only after a long and confusing search that is constantly impeded by conflicting information. Nevertheless, we must persevere!

Ignoring What We Know

We can describe the American diet in one brief phrase: "too much and too little." It is comprised of too much of things known to be destructive and too little of the things known to be constructive. We eat too much food and absorb too little vital nutrition. The critical aspect of this for us is not the availability of helpful knowledge but a combination of a failure to take advantage of readily known principles of good health and allowing our appetites to persuade us to gloss over what we already know.

Hardly a person alive does not know that drinking Coke and Pepsi is absolutely no good for one's health. Soft drinks may indeed be refreshing to the taste, but they fail even to quench one's thirst! In the end, they actually make one thirstier than before—and they are diuretics besides!

Twelve ounces of Coke contain the equivalent of twelve teaspoons of white granulated sugar and comes loaded with caffeine. A dash of phosphoric acid gives it fizz. Phosphoric acid, known to corrode a steel nail in short order, is the ingredient that makes Coke a good polish for the chrome on one's car. Does anybody deliberately eat twelve teaspoons of sugar at one sitting? Yet we will if we get it in a Coke because human nature convinces us it is acceptable presented this way. It tastes so good!

The so-called diet drinks sweetened by aspartame are even worse. In the body, aspartame first converts to formaldehyde then to formic acid, which in turn moves the body toward metabolic acidosis. Aspartame (sold under the brand names Nutrasweet, Equal, etc.) has been found to be disorientating to nerve impulses in the brain, and it is potentially dangerous for people with blood-sugar problems, epileptics and Parkinson's disease. It causes dizziness, headaches, slurred speech, blurred vision, memory loss, depression, joint pain, muscle spasms, and feelings of aggression, cramps, and vertigo. It even mimics multiple sclerosis and lupus. "But that's okay," human nature says, "because, after all, I am getting such a tiny amount that it can't possibly hurt. Besides that, I still get the kick from the caffeine and far fewer calories, so I can stay on my diet and lose weight."

Benjamin Franklin remarked, "You will observe with concern how long a useful truth is known and exists, before it is generally received and practiced on." Some things are physically far worse for us to consume than the meats forbidden in Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14. These are things men have concocted to make money, provide convenience and extend shelf life so processed foods will not spoil before they are sold.

It is wise to remember Herbert Armstrong's one sentence directive concerning nutrition: "Eat things that will spoil and eat them before they do." We should eat foods that are grown as close to the natural way God intended. Raw foods provide the most nutrition; vegetables in particular should be cooked just enough to make them palatable for consumption.

The Fruit of Self-Control

The fruit of the Spirit are listed in Galatians 5:22-23. The last one Paul lists is self-control (NKJV) or temperance (KJV). A principle of interpretation we use when qualities like this are listed is that the most important comes first. However, *why* does Paul list them in this order? The list begins with "love" and ends with "self-control/temperance." Did Paul arrange this list in this order because it takes love to precipitate all the other characteristics, and if a person truly walks in the Spirit, the fruit will culminate in temperance?

Possibly, but understood this way, self-control is not the least of the fruit of the Spirit but a major goal. Most of the time, we do not sin because we are in ignorance, but because we simply will not make the sacrifice to control ourselves. Were Adam and Eve in ignorance when they sinned? Of course not! They sinned because they did not control themselves to obey what they knew. If this principle were not so, God could not hold the uncalled, the spiritual Gentiles of this world, guilty based on natural law. Romans 2 makes it clear the uncalled know a great deal, but even with that knowledge, they still do not submit. Temperance is the fruit that, when applied to life, provides the right balance to glorify God.

Temperance, in modern English, usually refers only to restraint toward alcoholic beverages, but the biblical application is much broader. The Greek word, *engkrateia*, is the noun form of a verbal root that means "strong in a thing; strength; power; dominion; having power over; being master of." Its true biblical application, then, is synonymous with "self-mastery" or "self-control." Paul uses it this way in relation to the general demeanor of a bishop in Titus 1:8: ". . . but hospitable, a lover of what is good, sober-minded, just, holy, self-controlled." He applies it to sex in I Corinthians 7:9: ". . . but if they cannot exercise self-control let them marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion." In I Corinthians 9:27, this word describes his discipline of his body in following this way of life.

Barnes' Notes on Galatians 5:23, p. 388, comments:

It denotes the self-rule which a man has over the evil propensities of his nature. Our word temperance we use now in a much more limited sense, as referring mainly to abstinence from intoxicating drinks. But the word here used is employed in a much more extended signification. It includes the dominion over all evil propensities, and may denote continence, chastity, self-government, moderation in regard to all indulgences as well as abstinence from intoxicating drinks. . . . The sense here is, that the influences of the Holy Spirit on the heart make a man moderate in all indulgences; teach him to restrain his passions, and to govern himself; to control his evil propensities, and to subdue all inordinate affection. . . . A Christian must be a temperate man; and if the effect of his religion is not to produce this, it is false and vain. . . . Nothing does more scandal to religion than such indulgences; and, other things being equal, he is the most under the influence of the Spirit of God who is the most thoroughly a man of temperance.

II Timothy 3:5-7 makes a helpful point about the importance of self-control in the use of truth:

. . . having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away!
For of this sort are those who creep into households and make captives of gullible women loaded down with sins, led away by various lusts, always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.

The word "self-control" does not appear in these verses, but its lack is a major part of these women's problem. Their exact problem is unknown, but what we see here makes a good illustration.

Many modern versions change "the knowledge" in verse 7 to "acknowledge." Spiros Zodhiates says regarding this Greek word, "In the New Testament, it often refers to knowledge which very powerfully influences the *form* of religious life, a knowledge laying claim to *personal involvement*." Put another way, this word indicates not mere agreement with or admission of truth newly found but of truth already affecting the seeker's life. The knowledge these women received was not affecting their lives for the better.

Our challenge in life is not to become a tremendous reservoir of information that indeed may be true, but to control and rightly use what we already have while continuing to seek yet more. We acknowledge truth only when we use it in our lives, something these ladies were not doing. Considering the flood of information we have at our fingertips in this computer age, it is vital for us to understand that God judges us according to how well we use what we have.

Whom Are You Following?

Genesis 3:22-24 briefly describes mankind's separation from God's direct leadership:

Then the Lord God said, "Behold, the man has become like one of Us, to know good and evil. And now, lest he put out his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever"—therefore the Lord God sent him out of the garden of Eden to till the ground from which he was taken. So He drove out the man; and He placed cherubim at the east of the garden of Eden, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life.

History records a never-ending succession of man's poor leadership choices. This passage relates the immediate aftermath of the very first one.

As mentioned earlier, Adam and Eve cannot control themselves to use the truths God gave them. Instead, they reject God's counsel, choosing to believe the Serpent's persuasions of quick reward, and he becomes their leader. The curse God gives includes forcing them, and therefore us also, to live with the choice they made. This is the earliest biblical mention of one of its major rules: Whatever a man sows, that he will also reap (Galatians 6:7). It also alludes to yet another principle: The effect of our choices does not stop with us. They continue to reverberate beyond us affecting others, especially our children. (See "Little Things Count!" *Forerunner*, June 1996.)

Thus, the sins of the fathers pass on to the children (Exodus 20:5-6). They in turn, like Adam and Eve's children, continue the string of bad choices that have produced this world and all its evil systems and tragic results. This whole rotten mess began because two people did not believe truth freely given them by God! Instead, feeling that it did not matter all that much, they did not control themselves to make the right choice of whom they would follow. This greatly encapsulates events, but the point is valid.

God has given us the opportunity to break away from Satan's leadership. The Adversary's leadership influences the world to produce processed foods that are stripped of much of their natural nutrition to give them a long shelf life. These products do indeed fill us, but they do not support vibrant, good health. Satan's ways are the ways of death in every area of life, not just moral and spiritual ones. We must make an effort to return to the more healthful, natural foods God has provided. Too some extent, they are still available, and it is our responsibility to seek them out.

Early in this series, we saw that virtually all the ingredients necessary to prepare us for the Kingdom of God are things already within our immediate environment: God Himself, the church and the spiritual resources He makes available through it, spouse, family and employment—and then there is food and eating, which we usually do three times a day. Three times a day we have an opportunity to make choices, exercising control over our spirits and our bodily appetites, using truth and glorifying God in dressing and keeping our bodies.

In addition, eating gives us a wonderful and frequent opportunity to show God that our redemption—at the cost of His Son's life—has not been in vain. We can demonstrate that we are breaking from the sins of the fathers and from the systems that those sins created and sustain.

What is involved here are major principles that parallel each other in both spiritual and physical areas. On the one hand, we are all generally the same; the same Designer and Creator created us all according to similar patterns. At the same time, however, all are different to some degree. Each of us is responsible to become a scientist seeking truth about himself, believing what he finds, and then

overcoming excesses in his appetites and desires by using vision and self-control in applying the truth he discovers.

Each must begin where he is. We cannot afford to stand around, frozen in place like a deer staring into headlights. We cannot afford to waste time justifying ourselves and blaming everybody else, feeling overwhelmed because we feel we have been victimized by life. Everybody has been victimized by life! Everybody has been caught in the same entrapping slavery to Satan and sin. The very reason God redeems us is to set us free to overcome our spiritual, mental and physical victimization.

This does not suggest that this is easy to do. Israel's trek through the wilderness after being redeemed from Egypt was not easy. Breaking from the effects of wrong choices is hard enough to do, even when we know we are dealing with the absolutes of God's Word. When looking for truth among the scientific researches of men, it becomes exceedingly difficult. This is not because the researchers do not mean well, but because they generally reject the absolutes of God's Word and cut themselves off from the source that would balance out and give true direction to their conclusions.

This is especially noticeable in the area of health. So many books and ideas are available in the public market that it presents a formidable challenge just to keep from falling into absolute confusion. There is truth out there, but it requires patient perseverance.

It also requires us to be aware how our body reacts to things. Many people simply do not want to do this, and they end up paying a price because they are not following through on one of God's first commands to mankind: to dress and keep. God's laws work inexorably. What we sow, we will reap.

Are You Balanced and Becoming?

Ephesians 4:1 contains an interesting principle hidden within the Greek word translated as "worthy." The word includes a dimension that relates to health issues and is something we should strive for in our relationship with God. Paul writes, "I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to have a walk worthy of the calling with which you were called."

D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, in his commentary on Ephesians, tells us the word has two basic ideas, and both are important to this subject. The first is that of "equal weight." Imagine a scale with objects of equal weight on opposite sides so that it does not tilt. The scale balances perfectly; it is "worthy." If it tilts, it is "not worthy." In context and in practical application in life, Paul is saying that doctrine must perfectly balance with practice for us truly to walk worthily of our calling. However packed one's head may be with truth, if it is not being used, he is unbalanced—he is not walking worthily. It is equally true that, if one says that Christianity is no more than living a good life and that learning other truths is not important, and thus he fails to search and expand his understanding of truth, he is also walking unworthily.

Hebrews 6:9-11 provides us with an example:

But, beloved, we are confident of better things concerning you, yes, things that accompany salvation, though we speak in this manner. For God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister. And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end.

These people were in trouble because they were failing to maintain the balance. In this case, they had apparently been diligent at the academic level, but their practical application of truth had declined drastically. They had become unbalanced and poor witnesses of God and were falling away.

The second idea in the Greek word rendered "worthy" is the sense of "becoming." The translators could have translated Ephesians 4:1 as, "I . . . beseech you to walk in a manner becoming the calling with which you are called." The same word appears in the first phrase of Philippians 1:27: "Only let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ. . . ." The King James translates "worthy" as "as it becomes." The basic idea is of matching. It is similar to a person adorning himself with clothing or accessories that are suited to him or match.

Thus, Paul is saying that our doctrine and our practice must never clash, just as the colors or patterns in our dress should not clash. Much of modern music and art perverts this principle. The very heart of true beauty is the central idea of balance, harmony and congruity. Things of beauty match; a cacophonous clash of discordance, color or symbols jar the senses.

Titus 2:9-10 helps to demonstrate this principle: "Exhort servants to be obedient to their own masters, to be well pleasing in all things, not answering back, not pilfering, but showing all good fidelity, that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in all things." Paul's metaphor is that doctrine is the basic garment of God's way of life, and the way we live it is the adornment that complements it. Life has to match, be balanced and congruous with, the doctrine, making it attractive and causing people to admire it and gravitate toward it.

The vivid picture Mark 9:20-22 paints may help us understand:

Then they brought [the demon-possessed boy] to Him. And when he saw Him, immediately the spirit convulsed him, and he fell on the ground and wallowed, foaming at the mouth. So He asked his father, "How long has this been happening to him?" And he said, "From childhood. And often he has thrown him both into the fire and into the water to destroy him. But if You can do anything, have compassion on us and help us."

Herbert Armstrong, commenting on demon influence, said that demons reveal themselves by influencing people toward extremes of human behavior. He did not mean that the people were necessarily possessed but certainly influenced toward that manner of conduct.

This influence has affected all of us to some degree. Has this world influenced us to do certain things? If so, we have been influenced by demons. This is not God's world; Satan and his horde of minions created the system and govern it. They are the principalities and powers we wrestle against (Ephesians 6:12). Their influence permeates the entire system from top to bottom. Thus John warns, "Do not love the world or the things in the world. . . . the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—[are] not of the Father" (I John 2:15-16). This is why we must be so careful about who and what we are following.

Think of anything extreme, things that are foolish and unbalanced, unbecoming to God or man—and demons are behind it. They influence people to excesses of anger, violence, depression, paranoia, schizophrenia, asceticism, hermitism, alcoholism, drug addiction, voyeurism, fetishes, cannibalism, anorexia, bulimia and any other form of behavior that is destructive of the self and divisive of relationships.

Demons, the principalities and powers of Ephesians 6:12, will do whatever they can to keep our life from matching the truths God has given us in doctrinal form. Working toward improving and maintaining our health is an effort toward balancing what we believe with what we do. It is an adornment to God and His way; it is a stewardship responsibility. Demons will attempt to convince us to do nothing. They will put discouraging thoughts like, "It doesn't really matter"; "There is so much information out there. It is so confusing"; or "My grandfather broke every law of good health and lived to be a hundred!"

There might be scores of such arguments, and every one of them is nothing more than pressure to accept this world's lies. Each of them essentially and completely leaves out of the picture God's leadership and influence to help our efforts succeed, which is the whole reason for the demons' efforts. Undeniably, God's Word provides the balance we need to walk worthily in this physical area of life, as well as in the spiritual. We will continue to show this as we progress through this series.