

Maintaining Good Health (Part 4)

More Biblical Examples of Eating

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During last week's sermon, we began exploring some of the 700 settings in which eating appears in the Bible; and we found that there is a great deal of instruction beyond the mere fact that somebody is pictured as eating. God inspired the Bible's writers to use common, physical aspects of life to instruct us about the unseen spiritual. And the parallels between the physical and the spiritual give us a common ground that yields understanding the things that we might otherwise never see.

Eating is a context that reveals very much about God's providence, about a culture in which the eating is taking place, about the character of the people involved, who is in, who is out, who is up, who is down. And we can also learn a great deal about hospitality from these instances. So pay attention, because very often eating signals much larger issues. It is the venue that provides the springboard to an incisive grasp of very helpful instruction.

Today we are going to continue along the same line, with a wide variety of scriptures that give instruction within the framework of eating. I hope that, from these sermons, it will help you to carefully observe *what* one eats, *with whom* one eats, *how much* one eats, *where* one eats, and even *when* one eats. Because all of these things, at any given time, can be very important to the instruction that God wants to get across to us.

We are going to begin in Proverbs 23. It is good to remember what Proverbs is. It is instruction from God to His children, who are living in this world. It is wise, common sense, advice that—if it is followed—is going to help us to get ahead. That is, live the best kind of life possible. And this instruction is reduced down to just a simple saying that can be easily retained, but it might provide very great rewards if it is followed.

Now, we are going to read all the way through verses 1-8. And you will see that there is a common thread that is running through all eight of these verses.

Proverbs 23:1-8 When you sit down to eat with a ruler, consider carefully what is before you; and put a knife to your throat, if you are a man given to appetite. Do not desire his delicacies, for they are deceptive food. Do not overwork to be rich: because of your own understanding, cease! Will you set your eyes on that which is not? For riches certainly make themselves wings; they fly away as an eagle toward heaven. Do not eat the bread of of a miser,

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nor desire his delicacies; for as he thinks in his heart, so is he. "Eat and drink!" he says to you, but his heart is not with you. The morsel you have eaten, you will vomit up, and waste your pleasant words.

There are times that *excessive eating*—gluttony—is shown by the Bible to be a moral issue. In these first eight verses, it is not there directly. It is kind of in the background; but it will come to the fore, in just a little bit. But in these verses it only makes an appearance, and then it disappears. "Put a knife to your throat"—which, you see, is a warning to make sure that you do not eat too much.

Now get the setting here. The person, who is shown in the first few verses, is eating with his boss. God uses the word that they have translated into the word *ruler*. Of course, that would immediately make one think of a king. However, do not limit it to that—because it can also indicate a *supervisor*. That is, somebody who is your head on the job. Somebody who holds a position that might be attractive to have a relationship with, because you could take advantage of this. But do not ever forget that he is in a position too, to take advantage of you. That is the beginning warning here, as well.

Understand also that inviting one to a meal is a very common practice of those who are in business. It is often the venue for attracting a person into some sort of deal. This is because people who are in this line of work (salesmen or whatever), people who are in positions of authority—who are able to manage the affairs of a company, or to manage the affairs of an employee. They understand that they can use food and drink in a nice, warm, convivial atmosphere in which food is being served—because it does something physiologically to us, to be in that sort of a position.

And so, we will say salesmen (and I do not mean to just put this onus on them). They will often use a dinner to entertain a client, because the dinner makes a person more agreeable and the deal more acceptable than it otherwise would be if it was just done coldly—in a bare room, with no furniture or anything like that. Because in a bare room with no furniture, the "victim" (the person who is buying the product) would be in a much better position *not* to be distracted by other things. He would be thinking about the deal that was being made, rather than the conviviality of the circumstance that the meal provides. And the wine, because wine really gets your guard down—if you do not watch out.

God forbids priests (the ministry) of drinking wine before they are going to speak the Word of God. It does something to a person. It is not always good, in certain circumstances, because the wits are down a little bit.

So this phrase that says, "put the knife to your throat"—what it means is *curb your appetite*. What it means is *control yourself*. What it means is *keep your wits about you*. Now in the particular situation that is shown, he is telling us that there is reason enough for a person to think that if your boss invites you to dinner (in this case, the ruler or king)—why would he be doing that, except maybe he has ulterior motives. There was some motivation in which he got you into that position in hopes to be able to *use* you. In other words, a meal can be a form of manipulation. It can be a tool for control.

Please do not let me paint too bad of a picture, because it does not have to be this way. It can be really a reward. An employer can use that for that end, and that he has no ulterior motives. He simply does want to reward you. He simply does want to get to know you better. But God is saying to be on your guard.

Why would He say that to His converted children? Because they are living in the world, and our guard might be down—thinking that these people think exactly the same way as we do, and they do not! The world is essentially driven by self-centeredness—and using somebody for their own interest, rather than your interest. So God is putting out a warning there: Just be careful, because a *meal* presents an opportunity for someone to take advantage of you. Put your guard up!

He also gives some positive instruction in a sense, where He said, "Put your guard up. Put your knife to your throat—because I want you (I am speaking as if I am God.) to represent Me in the right way. Show that you are a person of self-control. Show that you are a person of moderation. That is, that you have your appetites under control. I want you to represent Me in a way that will bring glory and honor to Me; and, of course, it will do you (or, us) good as well."

Beginning in verse 5, the instruction becomes a little bit different. Such an occasion also gives *us* the opportunity to take the advantage. You see—"Wow, the boss is talking to me. I can use this for my ends, as well." And there is the opportunity for us to think of this meal as being a way to promote ourselves—to gain, to make a profit from it. This is why He says here,

Proverbs 23:5 Will you set your eyes on that which is not? For riches certainly make themselves wings; they fly away like an eagle toward heaven.

He is saying there to restrain yourself from thinking that you are going to take advantage from this and that you are going to get a promotion out of it (You see, the "riches" part), or to gain some end for yourself. What God is saying is, "You are thinking carnally." That

is, we are thinking of profiting from this for ourselves, and that is not the right approach.

Then, verse 6 makes a little bit more of a change again, in warning us that—in certain situations—there are times when you do not even want to eat with those people. Such an occasion probably was something that came across (I was going to say "the screen"—thinking about computers—but they did not have computers in Daniel's day). But there was some reason why he (along with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego) would not eat that food. And it is very possible that one of the reasons they would not, is that they were not allowing themselves to become indebted to these people in any way. It was sort of like very gently telling them (as Abraham did in many cases—when he refused gifts from people) that he did not want to become indebted to them. And so he [Daniel] would not eat the king's dainties.

Verse 7 says: "As he [the evil person] thinks in his heart, so is he." This reminds us that what a person *is*, is not always clearly visible. We may totally misread the person. And so, what is on the inside (in the heart) may not be readily visible on the outside—because the person is a good actor. They are playing a role and attempting to ensnare you, so that they can use you. So [the evil person] says, "Eat and drink"—but his heart (his will, his motivation) are *not* really *with* and *for* you. He is maneuvering to manipulate you and to take advantage of you.

So as this series of verses closes out, it actually gets back to the first thought once again; and he is saying, "Be on guard," when you find yourself in a situation like this.

Proverbs 23:8 The morsel you have eaten you will vomit up.

What he means is that (1) if the person who invites you to dinner (your boss, your ruler, or whatever) does not have the right motivation for giving you the meal and (2) you do not have the right motivation in accepting the meal, then there is not going to be a good end that comes from this. In other words, both of you are not in the right frame of mind. Each is using the meal for his own gain, for his own end. Then God warns that "the morsel that you eat shall you vomit up."

Food goes into your stomach, and from there it is assimilated into the body. If you vomit it up, you get no use at all from it. That is the picture. If you vomit it up (because both you and the other person are not in the right motivation) and "lose your sweet words." In other words, all of the persuasion that you put into whatever it was, in trying to sell yourself to this person—rather than simply being his servant (working for the company, to help them make money or whatever). Wrong motivation is not going to produce the

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right kind of end.

Proverbs 23:20-21 Be not mix with winebibbers, or with gluttonous eaters of meat; for the drunkard and the glutton will come to poverty, and drowsiness will clothe a man with rags.

Here we are beginning to see *drunkenness* and *gluttony* as indicators of a lack of discipline, leading to problems in other areas of life. In these two verses, what is produced (the fruit of drunkenness and gluttony) is *poverty*. Now, it does not have to be poverty. That is just one fruit. Other things could be produced, as well; but poverty is just typical. And if a person is a drunkard and they are a glutton, they may still be able to make a tremendous amount of money. They may get wealthy. But something else will go to pot.

In this case, he is simply confirming that what will be produced will not be what we expect, and it will not be good. So here, morality and the fruit of immorality begin to get into the picture. The fruit of excess—excess drinking, excess eating—is not going to be good. It will not produce the right kind of things.

In chapter 28, in the *King James* anyway, this is a good example of sometimes the translation is good in the margin—or sometimes you have to look into a concordance to see what a word means.

Proverbs 28:7 Whoever keeps the law is a discerning son, but a companion of gluttons shames his father.

Let us go back to the thought that I said at the very beginning here. Remember that the book of Proverbs is instruction from our Father in heaven to His children who are living in the world—where everything is reduced down to sayings. Piquant sayings, aphorisms, are produced to give us something easy to remember.

"Whoever keeps the law," in this case, means one who keeps the law is a person who is moderate— in self-control. You get that understanding from the rest of the verse, because "riotous men" (King James Version) if you will just look in your margin, or look into a concordance, you are going to find that word really means *gluttonous*. Somebody who eats too much is *a shame to God*. One of the fruits of God's Spirit is self-control. And because it is a fruit of the Spirit, if you will just think backwards, it will then tell you that a lack of self-control is not godly. It is *sin*—short and simple. And it brings shame to

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God. It does not glorify Him in any way, shape, or form.

So the way to glorify God is through moderation. Paul later says to let your moderation be known, in all things. Moderation being self-control. Now, let us go back to the book of Philippians, because the apostle Paul gets into the act here.

Philippians 3:17 Brethren, join in following my example. . .

In I Corinthians 11:1 he said, "Follow me, as I follow Christ." So here he says:

Philippians 3:17 Brethren, join in following my example, and note those [pay attention] who so walk [that is, live], as you have us for a pattern.

Many times we can read things and not understand it; but, if we see somebody doing it, then we grasp what is meant by what was written.

Philippians 3:18 For many walk, of whom I have told you often. . .

He is talking about people who were Christians. They walk now—they are living their lives.

Philippians 3:18 . . . and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ. . .

How did they become this way? There was a variety of ways that they may have sinned as a way of life; but what Paul draws upon is:

Philippians 3:19 whose end is destruction. . .

That is their destiny. That is what awaits them.

Philippians 3:19 . . . whose God is their belly. . .

Now understand this! It was not necessarily gluttony; but, in this case, *belly* (being the

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place where food goes) becomes the symbol of a person having their mind turned in on themselves. You see, what we are getting to here is the root cause of gluttony. It is self-centeredness. "Whose god is their belly." The word "god" there means that we are dealing not only with gluttony, but also with *idolatry*. It is the worship of the self. We are getting into pretty serious stuff here—in which *eating* is the venue through which this is shown.

Philippians 3:19 . . . whose glory. . .

That is, reputation. That is what the word "glory" means here. When we glorify God, what we are doing is embellishing His reputation. We are embellishing the Family, the Family's name—because we are doing things right. It is our glory to do that; and God receives glory as well—because it improves, embellishes the reputation of the Family of God.

Philippians 3:19 Whose glory is in their shame. . .

Now these people—their "glory" (what everybody knows about them, and thus what forms their reputation) is in their shame. It is what they are doing.

Philippians 3:19 . . . who mind earthly things.

There is the root cause of sin—and, in this case, of an excess of eating. Eating too much! And God is telling us that we have our mind on the wrong things. Another way that Paul might put this is that a heavenly minded person (a spiritually minded person, a person whose mind is God-centered) would not do that. They would control themselves, discipline themselves, so that they would be moderate in their approach to the eating of food, to the imbibing of alcohol, or (for that matter) not going to excess in *anything* in which there might be a possibility of borderline conduct.

In other words, as we were told many times in the past, stay away from the edge of the cliff. Do not see how close you can come. Allow yourself plenty of room (in your stomach), and do not keep on eating until you are absolutely satiated. Stay well back.

We will look at one more here, in the book of Titus.

Titus 1:10 For there are many insubordinate, both idle talkers and deceivers,

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especially those of the circumcision. . .

You might say this is the advice of a Pastor General, Paul, to a pastor who was working under him—warning him of these people, to look out for them. And, in this case, he is saying that what he needed to be looking out for, especially, were they of the circumcision. Now, these were undoubtedly Jews. Why did he have to pay particular attention to them? Were the Jews any worse than anybody else? No, they were no worse than anybody else. The thing was that they had many doctrines, many teachings, and many practices that were exactly the same as the true church. And so, around that type of individual, one has to be attuned a little bit better than if one is around people that we know absolutely are unconverted.

Titus 1:11-12 . . . whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole households, teaching things which they ought not, for the sake of dishonest gain. One of them, a prophet of their own, said, "Cretians are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons."

So gluttony, then, is shown as a sign. It is a *symbol*. It is a figure of those who have their minds on the wrong things. That is one aspect of eating. But there is another aspect of *eating* that might even be considered as "normal" (and ordinary), but the Bible also shows this reveals a sinful attitude. You will know what I mean almost as soon as I give you the verses.

Matthew 24:36-39 But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only. But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and did not know until the flood came, and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be.

Jesus used this illustration—eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage—to show the indifference towards God of people caught up in the normal courses of living, even when there was evidence all around them that things of *major* consequence were happening. Because they had their minds on the ordinary things of life, they do nothing to take advantage of the knowledge that is in other areas, that is warning them that the Sword of Damocles is just about ready to come down.

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Now Peter embellished on this same thought a bit, in II Peter 3.

II Peter 3:3 Knowing this first, that scoffers [scornful, cynical people] will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts [or desires].

The critical thing here is "their own."

II Peter 3:4 And saying, "Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation."

So, what do you do if you have the thought, "Well, things are just continuing right on"? You keep doing what you are doing. You eat. You drink. You marry. You give in marriage. God is calling that *indifference*. It is an *avoidance of reality* (that something is occurring).

II Peter 3:5-6 For this they willfully forget [Notice what he says here.]: that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water, by which the world that then existed perished, being flooded with water.

What illustration did Jesus use? Exactly the same illustration—Noah's flood. In the time before the Flood, what were people doing? Even the people around where Noah lived, they knew that Noah was building the boat. It was no secret. He could not hide that thing in his garage. It was right out there in the public. And even if he never said a word (in terms of physically speaking before the people), there was 120 years that people knew that he and his family were building a boat. And in 120 years, it is entirely possible that news of that got all over the world.

You know the old saying: Television (tell a vision), telephone, tell a woman. (I kid you ladies.) People talk, do they not? Sure. Communication is a lot faster now; and it does not take but just an hour or so to get something that happens in China all the way to the United States—because of radio, and because of the Internet. So events occur very rapidly, but I do not think that what Noah was doing was hidden from anybody. 'Word of mouth' alone, even if he never preached—that building of the ark would have been a witness. That is why he says that they were *willingly* doing what they did—eating, drinking, going about business (as though nothing was happening).

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II Peter 3:7 But the heavens and the earth, which are now preserved by the same word, are reserved for fire until the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men.

Let us go back to the book of Amos, because we are going to pull something out of more recent Israelitish history. (When I say "more recent," I mean more recent than Noah.) Believe me, Amos is a book for our day. This is really telling. Amos tells those Israelites:

Amos 4:4 "Come to Bethel and transgress, at Gilgal multiply transgression."

These were evidently areas in which they held Feasts of Tabernacles at that time. Maybe we should say "Feast of Tabernacles-like events." We are not really sure. These were both places that had very significant things that occurred in Israelitish history. Things that had to do with Abraham, and with Isaac, and with Jacob.

Amos 4:4-5 "Come to Bethel, and transgress, at Gilgal multiply transgressions; bring your sacrifices every morning, and your tithes every three years. Offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving with leaven."

No leaven was allowed in the sacrifice. Amos, you will understand, is talking very sarcastically to these people. "Sure, come to these places. Sacrifice your time and energy and your money to come here. And come, while you are at it, all bound up and laden with sin." (That is the leaven.) "Sure, bring those things with you."

Amos 4:5 "Proclaim and announce the freewill offerings; for this you love [It is just like you.], you children of Israel!" says the Lord GOOD.

Now listen to what follows, because Amos is getting ready to nail these people to the wall—to show them that God has been warning them all along about what they are doing. And now His warning is coming from a prophet. Before, it was not from a prophet. It was things that were happening in the weather. It was things that were happening out in the fields.

Amos 4:6-8 "Also I gave you cleanness of teeth in all your cities [famine, droughts], and lack of bread in all your places [But what was the result?]; yet

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have you not returned to Me," says the LOORD. "Aso I withheld rain from you, when there were still three months to the harvest. I made it rain on one city, and withheld rain from another city. One part was rained upon, and where it did not rain the part withered. So two or three cities wandered to another city to drink water, but they were not satisfied; yet have you not returned to Me," says the LOORD.

"It didn't produce any repentance. You went right on marrying, giving in marriage, eating and drinking. You went right on, in life, as though nothing was happening." I think you can see that the times that they were going through were a bit more advanced than the times that we are going through here in the United States. But let this be a warning. It is coming. And when you see it, make sure that you do not respond the way that the Israelites did—that you respond the way God wants us to respond.

Amos 4:9-10 "I blasted you with blight and mildew. When your gardens increased and your vineyards, your fig trees, and your olive trees, the locust devoured them; yet have you not returned to Me," says the LOORD. "I sent among you a plague [diseases]. . .

I have mentioned a couple of times, in the announcements, how the church of God is really being smitten with *disease*. I have been in the church over forty-one years. My memories are pretty sharp, in terms of what was going on back in the '60s. You never heard of these kinds of things in the church then, because they hardly ever occurred—people dying of these horrible diseases. But they are creeping up on us. And every week we give you accounts, in the form of prayer requests, of people in the church facing very unusual things—as far as the church of God is concerned. Maybe not unusual in the fact that we have never had them before, but rather in the number that we are having.

Amos 4:10-11 "I sent among you a plague after the manner of Egypt; your young men I killed with the sword, along with your captive horses; I made the stench of your camps come up into your nostrils; yet have you not returned to Me," says the LOORD. "I overthrew some of you, as God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah, and you were like a firebrand plucked from the burning; yet have you not returned to Me," says the LOORD.

Do you see the indifference?

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Amos 4:12 Therefore thus will I do to you, O Israel; because I will do this to you, prepare to meet your God, O Israel!"

It is going to get worse.

Now let us go to Amos 6. I chose this one because it specifically addresses the leadership. Of course, it is directed in its context not directly at the church, but at the nation. But we, in the church, have to see the principle that is involved here; and, if the shoe fits, wear it.

Amos 6:3 Woe to you who put far off the day of doom, who cause the seat of violence to come near.

God is saying that, because we are not doing the right thing, we are actually bringing this thing upon us—causing it to occur.

Amos 6:4-6 Who lie upon beds of ivory [an image of luxury], stretch themselves on your couches, eat the lambs out of the flock, and the calves from the midst of the stall [*Eating and drinking.*]; who sing idly to the sound of stringed instruments, and invent for yourselves musical instruments like David [Are we being entertained, or what?]; who drink wine in bowls. . .

Not glasses, not cups—but bowls! Does that not picture an abundance of drinking? You can see what God is pointing to here. We are being entertained right into *the tribulation*. As far as the nation is concerned—we have got our eyes on rock groups, our eyes on the stage play. We have got our eyes on movies, and on television. And while we watch them—being entertained—*the evil day* keeps advancing on us; and we are doing nothing!

Amos 6:6 . . . and anoint themselves with the best ointments, but are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph.

That is so interesting—that Amos points to Joseph. He did not say "Israel" this time—but "Joseph." And that certainly makes me think of the end times, because who better represents the Israelitish people at the end times—and the tremendous prosperity that God has given us—than Ephraim and Manasseh (Joseph). As nations, we are using

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that prosperity to blind ourselves to what is happening out there. And so we are *eating* and *drinking*. And so doing something that maybe considered "ordinary" is the symbol of *the indifference* to what is happening as the nation rots from within—both morally and spiritually.

I do not want to pass this series of verses here without mentioning that he is especially pointing to the indifference of the wealthy—meaning those who have been empowered to be able to do something. They could be in a position where they could effectively cause things to occur, that will break the back of the immorality that is within, let us say, their area of reference. Maybe a government department (whether it is the Justice Department, or the Interior Department, or the Commerce Department, or the White House, or wherever). Instead, they just drift right along as though nothing is happening.

They do not change in their own lives, and they do not demand of those who are under their authority that they do anything either. So God points the finger at the leadership. Of course, those of us in the church (like the ministry) we have to bear the responsibility of this to be sure that we do our part—at the very least, setting the right example to those that we are working with and teaching. And so He points at the leadership and says, "You are doing **nothing** to stop what is going on. You have the position from which to be able to be effective in turning things about; but [you] do nothing."

So, as you study, do not quickly pass by—with your thinking—when you see something about eating; because it very definitely signals larger issues that may not lie right on the surface. If you do a little searching, ask questions (who, what, why, where, when, how), and do a little bit of looking things up—you are very likely to pick up some things that might not be right on the surface.

There is no doubt that one of the major things that eating pictures is *a lifestyle*. How, and what, and with whom one eats are signals that identify one as godly or ungodly, moral or immoral. It begins to show an approach to life.

Jesus got involved in something here, back in Luke 15. Here we see a good example of somebody eating and drinking.

Luke 15:1-2 Then all the tax collectors and sinners drew near to hear Him. And the Pharisees and scribes complained, saying, "This Man receives sinners and eats with them."

This is one of the themes that runs through Luke's writing. He shows that Jesus had

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very much contact with what the Bible calls "sinners." To the Jews of his day, "sinners" were a special class of people, who were held in contempt by the religious of that day. The Pharisaic tradition forbade them to share a meal with those that they considered to be "sinners." But through what Jesus did—it affirms something (a number of things, actually).

First of all, it affirms that God's creation of earthly life—including eating and drinking—is good in principle. The important part there is the *in principle*. It is a gift from God, as we are going to see in just a little bit. And so it is good in principle; but people corrupt it and abuse it.

Another thing that it shows is that God is open to all classes of people. Remember He is God in the flesh. It also shows us (as we begin to expand this principle out) that nobody can escape being labeled as a "sinner." It is just a matter of degree. It is just a matter of human perception as to whether a person is a "sinner" in other men's eyes. It also shows us that they did not make Jesus into a sinner—because He never sinned.

Now, stop and think about this. We are rubbing shoulders with sinners all the time. It may be at work. It may be in the shopping area. Where are you going to go that you are not rubbing shoulders with sinners?

Some men's sins go before them; and others' follow behind. There are people whose sins are very obvious. There are other people whose sins are not so obvious; but they are just as bad. Indeed, they may be worse than those who are considered to be "sinners" by the religious of the world. What is the difference if a person commits fornication or if a person is self-righteous? They are both **sinners**. You see, the difference is largely in degree. One may be well hidden. The other may be open.

Now, when you begin to think of that in those terms, you begin to realize that what I said earlier is that we are rubbing shoulders with sinners all the time. We are sinners. We should not be sinning as a way of life. We should be striving to overcome. But we all have our problems. So, what should our approach to these "sinners" be? It should be, really, the same as Jesus. He did not avoid them, like the Pharisees did. He actually made them a part of His company. He went to their homes, apparently, and ate. Maybe He was the hospitable one and invited them to come to Him. So the general idea is this: We are to be hospitable, friendly, kind to them—just do not **do** as they do. That is all.

One of the reasons that I went into this is because there are some groups, within the greater church of God, who act toward other groups as if that other group was peopled with "sinners." They act as if coming in contact with their own brothers in the faith is

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something that is somehow going to taint them. Pardon my sarcasm, but what a way to promote unity! Can you not see the self-righteousness that is there? And they are, in a sense, lifting their skirts in holy horror and running off, and separating themselves from others. However, their sin of *self-righteousness* may be held by God to be far worse than *the obvious sin* of their brother in the church who is somewhat different from what they are. We wonder why the church is split up the way it is. That is just one reason; but it is a big reason.

We are going to take a little bit of a turn on this now; because we have to get a little bit more of a balanced look on eating. It is Solomon who provides us with an interesting approach, in the book of Ecclesiastes. Actually, he mentions *eating* and *drinking* at least five times. The first one that we are going to look at here is in Ecclesiastes 2.

We are reaching a conclusion here, to this point—in this treatise that he is writing here. And after examining the things that he did in Ecclesiastes 1, and up to this point in chapter two, he concludes:

Ecclesiastes 2:24 Nothing is better for a man than that he should eat and drink, and that his soul should enjoy good in his labor. This also, I saw, was from the hand of God.

Remember that I said earlier that Jesus confirmed that, in principle, *eating* and *drinking* are good! That is very plain—and that is exactly what Solomon said. Eating and drinking *and work*. This is going to become a little bigger (more important) as we go along. These are from the hand of God.

There are, unfortunately, some of us who have gotten the idea that work is bad—that work is a curse. And it even kind of implies that back in the book of Genesis. Like it is a curse, because of Adam and Eve's sin. But I do not think so. God had it in His very mind, from the beginning, that His children would *work*. He is the Creator. He works! If we are going to be in His image—the Creator works creating—He would want His children to work too. Working is not a curse. It is a gift from God, to be able to do it.

Ecclesiastes 2:25 For who can eat, or who can have enjoyment, more than I?

In other words, who had a better opportunity to do these things than Solomon (to whom money was nothing) did. He had power. He had money. He had position. He had

everything!

Ecclesiastes 2:26 For God gives wisdom and knowledge and joy to a man who is good in His sight; but to the sinner He gives the work of gathering and collecting, that he may give to him who is good before God. This also is vanity and grasping for the wind.

The idea here is not "pleasure seeking" in terms of *eating* and *drinking*. But, rather, it is an encouragement (from Solomon, from God) for us to seek joy in the common ordinary things of life. In order for one to do this, you almost have to begin where Solomon began here and understand that these things are gifts from God.

Every good and perfect gift comes from the Father of lights, you see. And what has He given you? He has given you *food* to eat in abundance. He gives us things to *drink* in abundance. He has given us *work* in abundance. All of them are good! That is where you begin. Do not think upon these things as "necessary evils" in any way. *Eating* and *drinking* God intended to be enjoyed!

Now, when God said back there in Genesis 3 (you know, by the sweat of your brow that you are going to labor), what He meant was that what sin did was not change the fact that God intended us to work from the very beginning—because He did. Did He not tell Adam and Eve to dress and to keep? That is work! Even if they had done things perfectly in the Garden, they still would have had to work.

So *work* was one of the very first gifts that God ever gave to human beings—right along with food. All of the fruit of the trees were there as well. And so the place to begin to really enjoy in the right way—in balance—*eating* and *drinking* and *work* is to begin with the concept, the way God intended it, that they were good gifts (gracious, abundant gifts) from our Father in heaven.

What sin did was that it threw into the mix a sense of despair and hopelessness—a sense of vanity. That is, that work is useless. That work is not going to accomplish the things that we want it to accomplish. A sense that "I'll never get anything out of this, because I no sooner build it and something destroys it." Those kind of things. That was what was introduced by the sins of Adam and Eve. But *work* can still be a cause of pleasure and joy, along with *eating* and *drinking*.

Now we want to go to chapter 3, because he brings this up again—in a slightly different context.

Ecclesiastes 3:9-13 What profit has the worker from that in which he labors? I have seen the God-given task with which the sons of men are to be occupied. He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also he has put eternity in their hearts, except that no one can find out the work that God does from the beginning to end. I know that nothing is better for them than to rejoice, and to do good in their lives, and also that every man should eat and drink and enjoy the good of all his labor—it is the gift of God.

Again, the idea here is not pessimism. Rather it is a counter to something (a thought, a concept) that we are able to entertain in our minds. That is, that because we are unable to see everything that is going on—we do not see everything has its proper cause and effect. And (here is the dangerous part) we do not really **see God** in the picture, in the right way. It slips our mind. Within the pressures of life, we get focused on what we are doing. And (unintentionally, I think, in many cases) we leave God and His sovereignty, His purpose, what He is working out—it slips from our mind and we slip into this attitude of depression and despair, that "life is not worth it."

So what Solomon is appealing to here is that we not forget that God is watching over everything. He is guiding everything in life toward the "end" that He has in mind! Not what we have in mind, but rather what He has in mind. And so every situation in life *comes with God's approval*. Do you understand that? Whatever happens to us, God has either (1) passed on it personally or (2) He has caused it to occur. And, therefore—with His help, with His guidance, with the enabling that He gives us—everything that we consider to be "work" can be accomplished.

And so Solomon's appeal is: "Hey, how can you lose?" That is what he is saying here. God has made everything beautiful in His time. But everything beautiful ends. That is when we begin to get discouraged, because we begin to think that we have failed. Maybe we did not fail; but God has shifted gears on us and moved us into a new mode—in which He wants us to continue going with the same efforts, with the same zeal and vigor that we used to produce what we thought got swept away.

If God is God (and He is!), then He is on the job. Nothing was lost that we used to accomplish whatever it was. And so, the thing that we have to come to in our faith, is to understand God's watchfulness (His oversight in *everything* that is going on) and the fact that our relationship with Him is far closer than maybe our minds can even except. But we will learn.

So really, this is a wonderful appeal by Solomon to "Don't forget God,"—because He is

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overseeing all of these things; and He has not left us hung out here to dry. He is still there. So do not be overly concerned. God is on His throne.

Now, he advances us a little bit further in chapter 5. (Please do not forget that *eating* and *drinking* is involved in all of these things.) There is a great deal that is very good instruction here.

Ecclesiastes 5:13-18 There is a severe evil which I have seen under the sun: riches kept for the owner to his hurt. But those riches perish through misfortune; when he begets a son, there is nothing in his hand. As he came from his mother's womb, naked shall he return, to go as he came; and shall take nothing from his labor, which he may carry away in his hand. And this also is a severe evil—just exactly as he came, shall he go. And what profit has he who has labored for the wind? All his days he also eats in darkness, and he has much sorrow and sickness and anger. Here is what I have seen: It is good and fitting for one to eat and to drink, and to enjoy the good of all his labor in which he toils under the sun all the days of his life which God gives him: for it is his heritage.

Now Solomon makes a slight digression here, because he focuses in on the attitudes and the fruits of a person who is greedy for money. What he is saying here is that the greed warps a person's outlook on life so that the things that God intends to be a pleasurable blessing cannot be enjoyed. You see, in this case the focus on the object of the greed was money. With some other people, it might be power.

But he is warning us that if the focus is wrong, the fruit is not going to be good. And even if we accomplish what is it that we want to, because of sin (that is, lust, greed, avarice) that is within us, it is not going to produce the *enjoyment* of that thing that we hoped for in the beginning. A good tree cannot produce bad fruit; and an evil tree cannot produce good fruit. That is what Solomon is saying.

So accomplishment through sin—even if it be billions of dollars that enables you to buy the very best of food, the very best of drink, the very best in homes, the very best in automobiles, the very best in yachts—if it is sinfully driven and accomplished, the life is still going to be hollow. And so, at the end, he says, "Put the emphasis on the right thing—enjoying what God has given you, and not worrying about piling all of this up." Enjoy *eating* and *drinking*, because just having "more" is not necessarily going to make it any better. How many pairs of pants can you put on at once?

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He might be a billionaire, but Bill Gates only puts on his pants one leg at a time (if you understand what I mean). He has a twenty automobile garage! You know, when you have a twenty automobile garage (and let us just say that he has twenty automobiles)—how much energy is expended in managing twenty automobiles? You see, after a while, it begins to be something that drags you down.

Ecclesiastes 8:14-15 There is a vanity which occurs on earth, that there are just men to whom it happens according to the work of the wicked; again, there are wicked men to whom it happens according to the work of the righteous. I said that this also is vanity. Then I commended enjoyment, because a man has nothing better under the sun, than to eat and to drink. . .

That is hard for us to grasp. No better thing than to be able to eat and drink. Now remember: This is a man who had everything! I am sure that he had more money than even Bill Gates dreams about. But, when it came right down to it, what is this wise man saying? It did not matter. The *enjoyment of life* consists of the gifts that God gave at the very beginning. What did He give? Work, food, things to drink. What is he talking about here? He is talking about family, and enjoying things with them. We will see that, in just a little bit.

Ecclesiastes 8:15 . . .and be merry: for this will remain with him in his labor all the days of his life which God gives him under the sun.

The concept here is the seeming injustice that is taking place in the world. I say "seeming" but it may not be "seeming." It may be real injustice. But injustice can bring a sense of *frustration*—because what happens to the good man is what happens to the evil man. And what happens to the evil man, is what happens to the good man. And so the good man is rewarded with injustice. And the evil man is rewarded with health, wealth, power, and position.

And, if you are not careful, you look at that thing and you say, "Why live? Why do good? Because if I do good, I end up like Joe Blow over here (who did good all of his life). And look at what he ended up with—nothing. And if I do evil, then I become like the people in power." For a righteous person, that can be a very appealing persuasion to make him feel that doing right and good in his life is not all that it is cracked up to be. And so Solomon assures us that the really important things in life are simply things that are available to anybody—(1) to be able to eat, (2) to be able to drink, and (3) to be able to work.

Now, we are headed to a conclusion here.

Ecclesiastes 9:7 Go, eat your bread with joy, and drink your wine with a merry heart; for God has already accepted your works.

This is something that is written directly to God's converted children—those who have His Spirit. He is saying, "Get your mind in balance. Understand what is important in life." *Food*, that God supplies, is important. *Work*, that God supplies, is important, and *wine* (standing for being able to drink).

Ecclesiastes 9:8 Let your garments always be white. . .

Do you know what that means? Be righteous. Keep the commandments.

Ecclesiastes 9:8-9 . . .and let your head lack no oil. Live joyfully with the wife whom you love all the days of the life of your vain life which He has given you under the sun. . .

So here he adds another thing that is a good gift from God—**marriage and family**. (A spouse.)

Ecclesiastes 9:9-10 . . .all the days of vanity; for this is your portion in life, and in the labor which you perform under the sun. Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might; for there is no work or device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave, where you are going.

Let us make that instruction, perhaps, just a little bit clearer. Solomon is saying begin where you are, with an assumption (and it is a correct assumption) that your circumstance in life has come with God's approval. God is now accepting your works—regardless of the circumstance.

And so things that are important to God are (1) *family union*, (2) *food and drink*, (3) *clothing*, and (4) *work*. That is, enjoying them and using them with the right concept. These are the things which form a God-given basis for life. Be righteous and work with great diligence. That is pretty clear.