

## Maintaining Good Health (Part 6)

### The Difference Between Jacob and Esau

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During my previous sermon we saw that Esau's major character flaw was revealed through the medium of eating. We saw there were twin sons, different in physical appearance, both physically strong, but with a clear contrast and expression of personality in them.

Esau could almost be described as back-woodsy. He was kind of a frontiersman. The Bible describes him in one phrase as "a man of the field," meaning outside the boundaries of what would normally be considered to be civilized. In other areas we find that he was a generous person, magnanimous, impulsive, kind of lovable, living for the moment, but as I mentioned, also somewhat of an airhead. He was careless, lacking in vision, and he also very much lacked strong principles.

I think it is good to understand though that Esau was not what we would consider to be a vile person. Today he would be labeled as a common, ordinary good neighbor and citizen. He was simply worldly. His interests were not the same as God's, and so he paid little or no attention to the things that interest God. He is, in the Bible, one of the Bible's major verbal portraits of a worldly person.

By contrast, Jacob is described as a man having a quiet temperament. He was plain. He was persevering and almost dogged in his tenacity, preferring to use clever deceit and inventive strategy to achieve his ambitions. There can be no doubt from the pages of the Bible that he was a creative man. He was a man who did look ahead. He did not merely live for the moment. He was always planning on how he could get the upper hand and the best of the deal so that he could always come out on top. Therefore he got ahead, if I can put it that way, through shrewdness. He was clearly not above lying to get the things that he wanted. He was persistent in persevering, and over the long haul of a lifetime he became by far the better man of the two.

I have mentioned that this story of these two men is much like the myth of the race between the tortoise and the hare. Jacob, like the tortoise, through much plodding persistence succeeded, while the more colorful hare—Esau—failed, because in the end Esau beat himself. One man desired immediate gratification; the other deferred gratification to achieve his ends.

Jacob too was his own worse enemy, but he never despised or turned his back on the hallowed things of God. With the help of God and his calling he was able to overcome, and in the end to be measured as one of the great men in the history of Israel. And in the end he was not labeled as worldly, like his twin, but was truly a man of faith like his father and his grandfather before him.

Turn now to Genesis 24 because I want to go through what is clearly given in the Bible as a contrast to Esau. This occurred whenever Abraham sent his top servant to find a wife for Isaac. If you would read all through the story you would find that Abraham was very specific in pointing out what he wanted the man to find, and that the servant was very careful to make sure that he did exactly what Abraham wanted him to do. The reason I bring this up is because eating came into the picture.

**Genesis 24:32-33** Then the man came to the house; and he unloaded his camels, and provided straw and feed for the camels, and water to wash his feet and the feet of the men who were with him. Food was set before him to eat, but he said, "I will not eat until I have told about my errand." And he [either Laban or Bethuel] said, "Speak on."

He was determined to get this thing accomplished before he took care of his own immediate need. The story goes on how he reiterated exactly everything that appeared earlier in the chapter. We will pick up the story in verse 50.

**Genesis 24:50-56** Then Laban and Bethuel answered and said, "The thing comes from the LORD; we cannot speak to you bad or good. here is Rebekah before you; take her and go, and let her be your master's son's wife, as the LORD has spoken." And it came to pass, when Abraham's servant heard their words, that he worshiped the LORD, bowing himself to the earth. Then the servant brought out jewelry of silver, jewelry of gold, and clothing, and gave them to Rebekah: he gave precious things to her brother and to her mother. And he and the men who were with him ate and drank [but not till everything was over] and stayed all night. Then they arose in the morning, and he said, "Send me away to my master." But her brother [Laban] and her mother said, "Let the young woman stay with us a few days, at least ten; after that she may go. And he said to them, "Do not hinder me, since the LORD has prospered my way; send me away that I may go to my master."

He was determined to do exactly what his master said to do. What we have here is the sharp contrast between one who deferred immediate gratification in order to accomplish the end that God wanted to be accomplished. He refused food and water, as well as the persistent appealing of Rebekah's family.

There are other examples of this in the Bible. Jesus did not give in to the appeal of food at the time of the temptation of Christ. A little bit later, in Jesus' ministry, in John 4, when He was conversing with the woman at the well, the disciples wanted Him to eat, but He replied that His food was to finish the work that His Father gave Him to do, clearly asserting again that His immediate need was secondary to the situation.

One of the major principles that we can learn from these episodes is that our most severe temptations and trials are going to be found in common everyday circumstances. We might like to fancifully picture ourselves giving our life for Christ before a firing squad, or maybe even sawn asunder as Isaiah was reputed to have been, or perhaps holding fast our faith while imprisoned in a concentration camp. But that kind of thing did not happen to very many in the biblical story. Most of the temptations and tests occur right in the midst of everyday commonplace events like eating, conducting our business affairs, or relating within a family or community.

Jacob had vision, and he looked ahead. Esau may also have looked ahead, but the immediate was more important to him. He could not control himself and patiently wait on the Lord, because he did not value highly the things of God. He despised them. He treated them contemptuously. He lacked proper vision and self-control. All of those are tied together in the one package.

Things that are valued highly are treated with affection. They are considered to be precious by us, and they are treated with respect and honor. They are treasured. They are polished. They are handled with care, and they are put into a safe place. Things that are not honored are treated as common. They are kicked around and just thrown into the corner whenever they are not needed.

Each man clearly revealed the areas of life that he gave the highest priority to. One succeeded. One failed. And the eating, or the attitude toward eating, or the attitude toward food and meeting an immediate demand was more important to Esau, and that was the showcase for the one who failed. He would rather eat than sacrifice for achieving a very great reward.

The idea, the concept that there is one personality type that is better than the other in the eyes of God is not the issue in this case. Esau was a lovable person. He was kind and generous. If anything, Jacob was the one who looked as though he was the bad guy, but it did not turn out that way in the end.

The issue that is of the greatest value to us in these stories lies in the answer to the question: Why did Jacob succeed and Esau fail? It was not a personality thing. Why did Jacob value certain things more aggressively than Esau? Is it possible Jacob had a distinct advantage that gave him an edge over Esau?

Perhaps it is Paul who most vividly and aggressively uses the lesson that is of greatest value to us here. I want you to turn to Romans 9. The context here begins all the way at the beginning of the chapter, but we begin to get into the meat of the issue for us when we get to verse 7.

**Romans 9:7-11** Nor are they all children because they are the seed of Abraham; but, "In Isaac shall your seed be called." [That is, those who descend from a spiritual promise.] That is, those who are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted as the seed. [They are the real sons of Abraham.] For this is the word of promise: "At this time I will come, and Sarah shall have a son." And not only this, but when Rebecca also had conceived by one man, even by our father Isaac (for the children [Jacob and Esau] not yet being born, nor having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of Him who calls.)

Election and calling are synonymous in this context here. Even though calling more strongly would indicate an invitation, and election a choosing, he is using them—election and calling—here as though they are inextricably linked as being inseparable. Election and calling. Calling usually occurs later on in life. We were called, but in the secondary sense we were also elected; but Jacob was elected from the very womb, and in that sense he did not have to be called. That is why Paul linked them together so that *we* can understand this and make an application.

**Romans 9:12-16** It was said to her, "The older shall serve the younger." As it is written, "Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated." What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? Certainly not! For He says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion." So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him that runs, but of God who shows mercy.

Herein lies Jacob's advantage. Jacob had God's election, or selection, or we might say calling from the womb by God that gave him a very decided edge, an advantage that Esau did not have. Jacob's election, his edge, had nothing to do with anything genetically inherent within either one of them. It had nothing to do with what either one of them had done that could add an advantage to themselves, because they had done nothing. They were still in the womb. It had everything to do with what God chose to do, and did. He *gave* Jacob the edge. Now it took a while, but Jacob eventually responded correctly.

What is important to us right now is that the Sovereign God exercises His right to make moves and to use people as He designs. Now this is Paul's point as he begins here in Romans 9, and herein lies the major lesson for you and me. God's moves, that is, what He elects to do, are not matters of emotion, but of will. He did not like Jacob better than Esau. He just willed it, that is all, because they had done nothing to gain God's favor.

You see, in our case we can do nothing to gain God's favor before the calling. That is not the issue, because if our calling was based on that, He owes you and me something. The whole point is to show He owes us nothing but death. *He owes us nothing but death.* Now whether we think that God's choices are right or wrong, fair or unfair, does not amount to a hill of beans. Was God unfair to Esau? We are going to see in a minute that Paul says, "Don't you even think it!" It does not amount to a hill of beans. It does not matter, because first of all, God is Creator, and He can do whatever He pleases. It is His creation. Secondly, what He does is always right anyway. He never makes mistakes.

Right now my concern is that we understand, as Paul says in that context, that God is never unfair, and we cannot allow an attitude of being a victim of His to creep into the picture. I am bringing this up partly because brethren, I do not know whether you know it, but this is a big thing in the church right now. I do not mean the Church of the Great God. I am talking about the *whole* church, and it comes out in interesting ways.

**John 3:22-26** After these things Jesus and his disciples came into the land of Judea, and there He remained with them and baptized. Now John [the Baptist] was also baptizing in Aenon near to Salim, because there was much water there. And they came and were baptized. For John had not yet been cast into prison. Then there arose a dispute between some of John's disciples and the Jews about purification. And they came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, He who was with you beyond the Jordan, to whom you have testified—behold, He is baptizing, and all are coming to Him."

They were beginning to feel a little bit victimized because their hero, their leader, was being shoved as it were into a secondary place, and this new guy who was rising up on the scene—one Jesus, the cousin of John the Baptist—had the people flocking to Him. They were feeling a bit offended for John, for their leader. Now listen to John's reply, because it really shows the man's understanding of this issue.

**John 3:27** John answered and said, "A man can receive nothing unless it has been given to him from heaven."

In other words he is saying, "God is giving these people to Jesus. God is withholding them from me."

**John 3:28-29** "You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, 'I am not the Christ,' but, 'that I have been sent before Him.' He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. Therefore this joy of mine is fulfilled."

What a man! He says, "I take pleasure in this occurring that Jesus is getting all the attention and the respect from people."

**John 3:30-36** "He must increase, but I must decrease. He who comes from above is above all; he who is of the earth is earthly and speaks of the earth. He who comes from heaven is above all. And what He has seen and heard, that He testifies; and no one receives His testimony. He who has received His testimony has certified that God is true. For He whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God does not give the Spirit by measure. The Father loves the Son, and has given all things into His hand. He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."

John the Baptist had come to grips with this concept that Paul is later expounding upon there in Romans 9. He understood that his role in the vast scope of God's purpose was limited by the overruling wisdom of the Creator, and so he just carried out his purpose for himself.

We must come to understand that this is why salvation is called or spoken of as being *free*. It is free, because God is not bound to show mercy to anybody, because all have sinned and come short of the glory of God, and all too often we forget that the invisible God is working things out according to *His* purpose, not ours. It is GOD who is free to do as He pleases. He owes nobody anything. He is the one who is free. If He gave us what we deserved, we would die.

On our part, salvation is *extremely* costly, because it cost the life of the Creator for it to be given, and secondly it cost our life to accept it. So from a man's point of view, salvation is not free, except that God is free to do what He good and well pleases. That is the way salvation is free. It is free on God's part.

As we continue to pursue this thing, it is going to begin to tie into spiritual gifts, which Martin spoke on last week.

**I Corinthians 4:6-7** Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively transferred to myself and Apollos for your sakes, that you might learn in us not to think beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up on behalf of one against the other. For who makes you to differ from another? And what do you have that you did not receive?

Even the very life that we have came from God. He is the One that makes our lungs work. He is the One that makes our heart beat. He is the One who is ultimately responsible for whatever we are. Whatever gifts we have been given, they have come from Him.

Perhaps if I can explain this well enough, you will understand what I mean. When I worked in the steel mill we were constantly repairing huge machinery that they used in the mill to do the work that had to be done there. If we were not doing that, we were probably constructing a new building or something into which new machinery was going to be put.

In order to do the jobs, we had to make from time to time things that we called jigs. A jig is nothing more than an instrument or a tool that is made to carry out a specific job so that the man can do his job a little bit better. Very frequently, all a jig does is hold something in place while you are doing something else, so therefore what you are doing will not move until you are ready to put it in permanently. Often times a jig is a tool that you make right on the spot in order to do the job, because the ordinary tools that you would use would not do the job, so you make one for yourself.

Every man who makes a jig *empowers* that jig to do what it is supposed to do. He gives it every, shall I say, gift for it to carry out its function. Nine times out of ten, when the job is over, it gets thrown away. It is just scrapped. If the job is going to be repeated, then it is likely that the man will stash the jig somewhere so that when that job comes up again he can go get that jig. It is already made, and he can proceed and do the job more efficiently.

The man creates the jig. I am putting the man in place of God. God creates people to carry out functions for Him, and He empowers them with those functions. What we have got to begin to do is understand that He has empowered *everybody* to carry out functions within His creation as He leads it toward the conclusion of His purpose.

"What do you have that you have not received?" Let us not get too far from Jacob and Esau. God empowered both of those men to carry out a function that becomes a lesson for all of mankind, and one, as we say, made it, and the other we say did not, because he gave in to immediate gratification. This is not to say that he is lost forever. God used him for that time. God used Pharaoh. He said, "I have *made* you this way." Pharaoh could not see even as far as Esau could! But God made him that way in order for the circumstances to be produced that enabled God to be glorified in the releasing of Israel from Egypt.

Go now to I Corinthians 12 to see where this principle is applied to the church just in a general way.

**I Corinthians 12:27-29** Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually. And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all workers of miracles?

Of course not. But Paul's purpose in this chapter is to show that God has empowered, gifted people, to carry out functions within the church.

I mentioned in some ways it is a problem in the greater church of God because people begin to get feelings of jealousy because somebody seems to be more prominent than they, and they begin to think that this person is better, or this person is not as good or whatever, and offense begins to arise. That is the very thing that Paul was battling here in I Corinthians. He said, "Why should you be puffed up? What do you have that you have not received? And what does it matter to you if God made this person the way He did, and has made him more prominent than you?"

This is very interesting, because whether these people realized it or not, they were calling God into account. They forgot about the Creator who was creating this body that He calls "the body of Christ." Now this gifting does not make anybody any better, but it does make them responsible for carrying out a function that God wants them to carry out.

Let us go back to Luke 12 and I want you to see this, because God is wonderful in the way He runs things.

**Luke 12:47-48** "And that servant, who knew his master's will, and did not prepare himself or do according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he who did not know, yet committed things deserving of stripes, shall be beaten with few. For everyone to whom much is given, from him much more will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more."

God evens everything out in His judgment. There is no respect of persons in God's judgment. Those who have been given much have a higher standard to meet. Those who have been given little do not have to meet the same standard as those who have been given much. So God judges a person based upon what he does within the parameters of the gifts that He gave to them, so that everything is evened out in the end. He could not be more fair. There is no respect of persons in God's judgment. What He wants us to do is fulfill our responsibility, and if we do, great!

**I Corinthians 3:8** Now he who plants and he who waters are one, and each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor.

I want you to look at that word *one*. "Now he who plants, and he who waters are *one*." If you look in the *Revised Standard Version* you will find that word "one" is translated "equal." They are equal. They bear equal responsibility within the framework of the gifts that have been given. God does not expect too much (if I can put it that way) of those who are less gifted. He only requires of them that they grow within the framework of the way that He gifted them.

We will go to one more place so that you can prove this, because I do not want you to feel that you were standing behind the door when the gifts were handed out. Not at all!

**Matthew 25:14-15** "For the kingdom of heaven is like a man traveling to a far country, who called his own servants and delivered his goods to them. And to one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one."

**Matthew 25:20** "So he who had received five talents came and brought five other talents, saying, 'Lord, you delivered to me five talents; look, I have gained five more talents beside them.'"

**Matthew 25:22** "He also who had received two talents came and said, 'Lord, you delivered to me two talents; look, I have gained two more talents besides them.'"

Do you begin to see the way God judges? All are not expected to produce the same results, but all are expected to produce equally, faithful to what they have been given. That is the lesson there. Each one there increased by a hundred percent. Now please do not pin me down on the hundred percent thing. I am just saying this is what God has shown us. He judges each equal to the amount of the gifts, the talents, that are given, to what is entrusted to them.

It is very interesting, I think, that the one who was not faithful to what he was given failed to produce on the basis of his reasoning that God was unfair. "You're a hard man, God." He felt he was a victim. So many do today. They are victims. Everybody is a victim in this world that we live in. We are all equal that way to some degree.

I went all through this for two reasons. One, to point out to you that Jacob was not inherently a better person than Esau, and neither are we inherently better than any of us, or of anybody that is in the world. I am sure that this is one of the major reasons why God chose twins to illustrate this. You would think that two fellows who came out of the same womb would be very much alike, or whatever. They had the same mother, but they were not very much alike at all.

Let us make three conclusions here from these scriptures.

- 1) We have the same advantage over those not called as Jacob had over Esau. We are not inherently better, but we are "called" and "elected" by God.
- 2) Those who judge themselves among themselves are not wise. Everybody is different. Some are gifted the same way, but even judging that is not wise, because the environments that we came out of and all the experiences we had in the past have formed and shaped us in a way that the judgment is not good. In that same context there in I Corinthians 3 and I Corinthians 4, Paul said to judge nothing before its time, "until the Lord comes" he said.
- 3) Each person bears his own responsibility to edify, to build up the body, according to what each has been given.

Let us go back to Romans 9 again, and we will pick up the context in verse 18 because there is more here that sometimes is a hard nut for some to swallow.

**Romans 9:18** Therefore has he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardens.

This is what is hard for some to understand.

**Romans 9:19** You will say then to me, "Why does he still find fault? For who has resisted His will?"

In other words, the accusation is made against God. "Well, God didn't create this person to be a very good person, so why should God find fault with them and punish them?" Paul's answer to that is, "Who are you to accuse God of doing something wrong?" That is what he is saying in verse 20.

**Romans 9:20** But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed say to him who formed it, "Why have you made me like this?"

Does not God have the right to do as He pleases with His creation? This is what I mean about this being a hard nut to crack once in a while, because what we see going on in the world, what we see going on in our own lives, it is very easy to slip and fall on the pity-pot, and the first thing you know you feel like a victim, and without realizing it, the first thing you know, you are accusing God. We all do it.

I am not immune from this at all. Maybe that is why I am giving this sermon. I see it in myself, and I do not like what I see there. God has every right to do whatever He pleases, just like with John the Baptist. There was a man that Jesus said was as great as anybody whoever lived. Nobody was greater, and yet God was taking things away from him, and eventually he had his head cut off. What a fine kettle of stew that was.

Is God evil because apparently Paul had his head cut off, and Peter had his head cut off, and He allowed the apostle John to be thrown into a pot of boiling oil? We have to wonder: Has our faith grown to the place where we can accept what is dealt out to us in life without becoming accusative of God, or of other people, and make all kinds of self-justification, feeling like we are the victims of circumstances, that we had nothing to do with it?

Even consider this: What if we did have nothing to do with it? Is God still right to permit, or even to bring bad things upon us that we have done nothing to earn? Did He do it to Job? He sure did. This thing about God's sovereignty is not something to be brushed off, because it impacts on our lives in a major way, and it is around this doctrine that trust forms, that God be trusted in every circumstance in our life. I find that a hard question, and that is what Paul is addressing here.

**Romans 9:21** Does not the potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel for honor, and another for dishonor?

That is what He did with Jacob and Esau. He made one of honor, and the other of dishonor, and He had every right to do it. They both came out of the same womb. They both probably were from the same egg, and two different sperm. You know what I mean. Same father, same mother, but vastly different to their approach to life.

**Romans 9:22-23** What if God, wanting to show His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction. And that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had prepared beforehand for glory.

Notice that. "He had prepared beforehand for glory." It was nothing that they did at all. It was simply that He *willed* it. "I'm going to save these, and not them." Do you understand brethren, this is what He has done with *us*? He has "prepared beforehand [us] for glory," getting into the area of predestination.

**Romans 9:24-26** Even us, whom He has called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles? As he says also in Hosea: "I will call them My people, who were not My people, and her beloved, who was not beloved." "And it shall come to pass that in the place where it was said to them, 'You are not My people,' there shall they be called the sons of the living God."

It is circumstances like these that lead people to stand in judgment of God, confidently oblivious that they have insufficient wisdom, knowledge, or understanding to judge the Almighty. Whether we are aware of it or not, we do it. We have a great deal of growing to do in these areas.

I will bring up a problem that has been in the Church of the Great God. In principle, this is exactly what some are doing in relation to the calendar that they want changed. They are calling God into account, and are blind to the fact that this is what they are doing, despite the fact that the church and the Jews have been using the same calendar we are today for at least sixteen hundred years.

These people call God into account without the words you see, but they are doing it. They are accusing God of really not caring about all of those who came before us, "If He really cared, He would have changed the calendar." "God, why did You allow us to have such a dumb calendar?" Now they do not say that, but that is what is happening.

Actually what we are witnessing here again is the destruction of these people's faith. That faith is replaced by sight. Walking by sight. You see, a calendar that is their own creation. It is really a sad thing, because really what they are doing is trusting in their own works.

Let us go back to I Timothy 2. This is still part of the same thought, but put into a little bit different context.

**I Timothy 2:1-2** Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and for all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence.

Setting this out beyond the church, because sometimes we are puzzled why we in the United States should be subject to such an immoral president who seems to be a congenital liar, who has an extremely aggressive and ambitious wife, and also with a vice-president who, while he is not immoral sexually, is afflicted with a strong streak for telling tall tales, like he invented the Internet, and then in every speech he reinvents himself and he is somebody else again.

Now God says that we are to pray for these people. It is really hard to pray for these people when it seems God has put Pharaoh right on the throne here in the United States, or somebody like him anyway. But that is what He tells us to do, to pray for them, and of course we wish we were not plagued with somebody like this. We wish that things could be the way they were before these things came along. If you ask a church member about it, he will shrug his shoulders, and do you know what he will say? He will say, "I guess it's God's will," and it is. The shrugging of the shoulders is, "What can we do about it?" We cannot do a thing about it except do what God says, and that is to pray about it. And it is God's will.

What I am leading to again here is this. All too often we fail to apply the same level of thinking to the church, and that it is somehow unthinkable that God would allow His church to be invaded by false ministers preaching false doctrines, and these are men who are intelligent and charming wolves in sheep's clothing. But I want to show you a scripture here in I Corinthians 11.

**I Corinthians 11:17-19** Now in giving these instructions I do not praise you, since you come together not for the better but for the worse. For first of all, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you, and in part I believe it. For there must [God has willed it. "There must." It is necessary.] also be factions among you [Now he is going to tell you why.], that those who are approved may be recognized among you.

God says He is going to allow false prophets to come into the church because He wants to see who is going to stick by his guns and use his faith. These people may be charming and appealing, but we have to be on our toes. We should understand that this *has* to be this way, if only from one example. God put that Pharaoh right on the throne to be a burr under the saddle of God's people there in Egypt. Pharaoh was a false prophet, and sitting in the highest seat of power as well.

There is no respect of persons with God. When He allows these things to happen, it is not only a test to see who is going to stand out and give evidence that they really do believe Him, but every single one of these is going to be a means of producing greater likeness to Him, for us to be in His image. So what I am saying is what we look upon as a plague, as accursed, is in actual fact working in the direction to make those who are approved better than they ever would have been otherwise. But whatever God does is right. He never makes mistakes. He does want to see whether His children are on the ball. He will watch over us.

Let us go to Romans 11. I will really think you will find this interesting. I just discovered it this week and I am kind of excited about it really! It is actually following the same context that Paul began there in Romans 9. He is just carrying it out to its right conclusion.

**Romans 11:7** What then? Israel has not obtained what it seeks; but the elect [those who have been called and elected of God] have obtained it, and the rest were blinded.

Now God is responsible for this. We cannot escape the responsibility for blinding, because it is His creation, and He can do whatever He wants with people. So the rest were blinded.

**Romans 11:8-10** Just as it is written: "God has given them the spirit of stupor, eyes that they should not see, and ears that they should not hear, to this very day." And David says: "Let their table become a snare and a trap, a stumbling block and a recompense to them. Let their eyes be darkened, so that they do not see, and bow down their back always."

I am mostly concerned about verses 7 and 8. In that passage there Paul uses three scriptures. In the first quotation he weaves together the principles contained in Deuteronomy 29:4, and Isaiah 29:10-13. Most of it is taken from the Isaiah reference, and just one principle taken from Deuteronomy.

**Deuteronomy 29:4** Yet the LORD has not given you an heart to perceive and eyes to see and ears to hear, to this day.

**Isaiah 29:10-13** For the LORD has poured out on you the spirit of deep sleep, and has closed your eyes, namely, the prophets; and He has covered your heads, namely, the seers. The whole vision has become to you like the words of a book that is sealed, which men deliver to one who is literate, saying, "Read this, please." And he says, "I cannot, for it is sealed." Then the book is delivered to one who is not illiterate, saying, "Read this, please." And he says, "I am illiterate." Therefore the Lord said: "Inasmuch as these people draw near Me with their mouths, and honor Me with their lips, but have removed their hearts far from Me, and their fear toward Me is taught by the commandment of men."

What he does is very interesting. When they were written, they were written in Hebrew, but Paul apparently did not use the Hebrew Bible. He used the Septuagint Bible which was written in Greek,

the Old Testament, you see. What he did is, he updates it, and he paraphrases it so that it comes out essentially the same, but he injects a word in there that is really interesting. So he updates it into the Greek language of the time, paraphrases it, and he inserts a word and actually changes the scripture.

Now it is Paul's paraphrase that I feel is so interesting that there is something of importance to those of us living right now, and it is something that I feel we very much need to be aware of if we are going to respond to our calling to the greatest extent and grow.

It is because of the word here translated in the *King James*—"slumber." In more modern translations they might say "stupor." I looked at one this morning, and it said "sluggish." Now these translations are in no way wrong, but what is very helpful to know is that the choice of words that the translators used shows us the *fruit*, or the consequence of what God chose to do, rather than the *cause* of the stupor, or the slumber.

In order to understand what I am getting at, that what Paul actually said there, you have to understand a little bit of psychology, and this is true psychology. Too much of a good thing eventually produces the same effect as too much of a bad thing. It will produce indifference, apathy, being unmoved, a stupor, being sluggish, going to sleep. We become casual toward it as though it is a thing owed to us rather than a wonderful gift given, and it will produce a "Been there. Done that!" attitude. "Ho Hum. Is that all there is?" It is summed up very well in Acts 17 in a little phrase, what I am talking about here:

**Acts 17:18-21** Then certain Epicurean and Stoic philosophers encountered him [Paul]. And some said, "What does this babbler say?" Other said, "He seems to be a proclaimer of foreign gods, because he preached to them Jesus and the resurrection. And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, "May we know what this new doctrine is of which you speak? For you are bringing some strange things to our ears. Therefore we want to know what these things mean." For all the Athenians and the foreigners who were there spent their time in nothing else but either to tell or to hear some new thing.

There is the principle: *Some new thing*. Now this is what has happened to our culture. Everywhere that one looks there is an almost frenzy, seeking after more and more sensation. In the movies the visual impact of violence is intensified with blood splattering all over the place. The visual stimulation of sex is intensified to a place where we have become a nation steeped in voyeurism.

In entertainment parks like Six Flags, Magic Mountain, and Carowinds, the rides have become increasingly more dangerous, pushing the "G" forces humans can experience almost to their limits. Foul language has invaded radio and television in an effort to shock people into hearing. You know, keep them tuned in.

Then there are things like bungee jumping and sky diving. Musicians, (if one can call them that) do everything they can to produce raw stimulation through a very intense throbbing beat, accompanied by twisting gyrations of simulated sex. I wonder if it is not something like the golden calf incident in the wilderness. People write romance novels in which every picturesque word is used to conjure up a vivid picture of romantic love. But on the other hand, some writers produce a scary sense of cemetery fear and demonic horror.

Did you ever notice how often the Israelites in the wilderness complained about food? They were not at all happy with what they considered the plain healthy diet that God provided. They lusted after the

stimulating things that they experienced while they were in Egypt. They grew apathetic toward the bread from heaven—angels' food—that has a taste of honey to it.

What is gradually happening in our world is that the overwhelming majority of our fellow Israelites are becoming drugged by the constant sensation that they need more and more and greater and greater intensity to satisfy the craving, and so we are enslaved. A major affect—the stupor—is what happens to human beings when they are repeatedly impacted by some stressful event or set of circumstances. It does not matter whether we consider the event or the circumstance to be good or bad. We probably react more quickly to the bad, but the result will eventually be the same. The fruit—the stupor—is that we eventually become apathetic to it, good or bad.

Apathetic indicates being unmoved, indifferent, without feeling, or interest. It is a word that closely parallels the meaning that we in the church give to the word "Laodiceanism." There are scores of ways to illustrate this, and some are everyday common occurrences. Some of them are simple, and some of them are quite complex.

When you enter a room or a home where there is a pungent fragrance, let us say of coffee, it immediately produces a stimulation. But before long you are barely aware of it, because your mind begins to adjust to the fragrance and is subconsciously dismissing the fragrance as irrelevant. The feeling and the interest wanes. Our mind adjusts to each new thing we buy. It does not matter whether it is a new car, a new dress, or even a new house. It is not long before what once was new and stimulated us becomes less interesting, and there is a growing tendency then to neglect it.

There was a time you washed your car every week, or every couple of days, or whatever. After a while you do not even see the dust on it anymore. Far more seriously, men in warfare adjust to the specter of death so that it has nowhere near the psychological impact upon them that it had when they first went into battle. Being considered a veteran has very much to do with being able to deal with the possibility of a violent, brutal, and agonizing death until one almost becomes numbed by death.

People who go through repeated calamities in life come to the place where they are apathetic toward them, and they do not care what happens. If they are very sick, they begin appealing to God to put them to death. They would rather die than go on living because they are becoming apathetic to life. The pain and the discomfort and the always being in need, always being tired, always aching, always having fear, puts them to the place where they become numb to life and indifferent toward it, and they would rather die.

This is one of the underlying factors in the book of Hebrews. The people had become weary of well-doing. They had become apathetic toward and negligent of their responsibilities toward God. We might say that the gun-lap stretch had gotten to them, and they had regressed so far that Paul said, "I believe you need to go all the way back to the beginning and learn the first things again." They no longer cared, because of the constant stimulations taking place in their life.

The Greek word that Paul used actually means "to prick." It is like you take a needle and you prick somebody with it, and there is an immediate sensation. But I guarantee you that if it happened often enough, and repeatedly enough, you would become numb to it, and you would just become indifferent.

What God says here is that He put Israel into what resulted in stupor by causing them, or allowing them, to constantly experience the stimulation of prosperity. "Let their table become a snare,"—a table piled high with food with all of the good things of life.

You have probably heard the story about the angels being called before God. "How can we put man into a position where he will be in a *won't care*, whatever," and Satan came up with the idea. He said, "I'm going to prosper them to death." I can understand where that story came from, because that is exactly what is happening. Does not God say in Deuteronomy 32:15, that when Jeshurun became fat, (meaning prosperous), then he kicked? He became numb, apathetic, insensitive to God and his responsibilities and all of his attention went on the seeking of further sensation. That is why I described a little bit about the world that we are in right now. We are rolling toward a crisis that is produced by people who become numb to God by constantly being bombarded with one sensation after another.

Turn to Romans 1. This scripture shows that God did this before. This time he is talking about the Gentiles.

**Romans 1:26** For this reason God gave them up to vile [degrading] passions. [There was nothing to stop, nothing to put a brake on the use of the desires and feelings that people have.] For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature.

What were they doing? Seeking stimulation.

**Romans 1:27** Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due [or fitting].

Are we becoming Sodom and Gomorrah? Are we already Sodom and Gomorrah?

**Romans 1:28** And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting.

They were given over to irrational ideas. It results in all kinds of monstrous behavior. Stimulation. God gave Israel over to stimulation. What did it do? It produced apathy toward Him. They are blind.

**Romans 1:29-32** Being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil mindedness; they are whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful; who knowing the righteous judgment of God, that they who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them.

Stimulation. In order to produce blindness in Israel, God gave Israel over to the seeking of stimulation. Virtually anything that a man can think of to do in terms of getting some excitement results in apathy toward God, apathy toward fellowman. That is why you have these crazy, senseless, absolutely weird murders taking place.

As I was preparing this sermon, it dawned on me why the Amish call themselves by a descriptive title. They call themselves "the *plain* people." They are telling the world, and reminding themselves, that they do not need the stimulations of this world in order to have an abundant life. The moniker "plain" was taken from what the Bible says about Jacob. He was a "plain" man. He was much different from Esau who required the stimulations of this world for him to feel as though he was being fulfilled. I believe that Jacob's being plain was actually a fruit of God's election of him, and it helped to protect him from many of the excessives that he might otherwise have gotten himself into.

Some are puzzled by Israel's failure to live up to the Old Covenant. Brethren, do we live up to the New Covenant? Even if Israel had lived up to their responsibilities under the Old Covenant, they still would not have measured up to the responsibilities of the New, because the responsibilities of the New are so much higher. God simply did not empower them to achieve that level—the empowerment aspect that is of critical importance in carrying out God's will. Israel was empowered to reach the level God wanted for His purpose, and they should have been able to carry out what He willed them to do. Some did, but the overwhelming majority simply chose to live in ways that He had not willed. The same was true in Paul's day for those Christians living then, and the same is true today.

Because we have been elected by God, His empowerment to live up to that election has already been given. I want you to think about that. There is no reason for us to fail, because God never calls on anybody to do something without empowering, without gifting, them to be able to do it. That is Paul's argument through this whole thing—Romans 9 through 11. *We must choose*. For a long time Jacob languished, not paying much attention to his election, but before it was all over, it was God, through His efforts, who managed to get Jacob turned around to pay attention and to carry out what he had been empowered, gifted, graced, to be able to do.

Turn now to Ephesians 1, because herein lies our advantage.

**Ephesians 1:3** Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in heavenly places in Christ.

Did you notice that Paul has written this in the past tense? Those to whom he was writing in Ephesus are no different from what we are today. We have already been blessed with all spiritual blessings that we need in order to be saved, in order to live up to the level of the gifting that God has given to us. There is no reason to fail. *All* spiritual blessings [have been given to us].

**Number 1:** *We have been blessed with all spiritual blessings:*

**Ephesians 1:4** Just as he has chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love.

**Number 2:** *We have been chosen:*

**Ephesians 1:5** Having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will.

**Number 3:** *He has adopted us into His family :*

**Ephesians 1:6** To the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He has made us accepted in the Beloved.

**Number 4:** *He bestowed grace upon us; forgiveness, so that we could be accepted within the body—the beloved, the church :*

**Ephesians 1:7** In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace.

**Number 5:** *He has redeemed us through the forgiveness of sin :*

**Ephesians 1:8** Which He has made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence.

**Number 6:** *He has given us wisdom and insight into His plans for the future :*

**Ephesians 1:9** Having made know to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He has purposed in Himself.

**Number 7:** *He has given us an insight into the future :*

**Ephesians 1:10** That in the dispensation of the fullness of times He might gather together in one [one Family, one Kingdom] all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him.

**Number 8:** *We have been given a share of the reconciliation before all the rest of mankind :*

**Ephesians 1:11-13** In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will, who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of his glory. In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise.

**Number 9:** *He has granted us His Holy Spirit :*

**Ephesians 1:14** Who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.

I think that is a good place to stop. If you want to carry on, you can go back to Romans 11, and beginning in verse 11 you will find there that Paul does not drop the subject until chapter 11 is finished, and during that period of time between verses 11 and 33 he makes sure that he admonishes us that "now is the time of our salvation."

Now is our time to take advantage of the advantages that we have been given, and so he admonishes us to be very strong in making sure that we do not do something, continue to live in a bad way, or whatever it is, and get ourselves lopped off the trunk of the tree.