

Maintaining Good Health (Part 7)

Our Spiritual Diet

John W. Ritenbaugh

Given 16-Sep-00; Sermon #467

Last week's sermon drew us more directly into what I feel are the major issues that one can draw from the lives of Jacob and Esau: Esau, the uncalled man of the world; Jacob, the elected of God. Jacob's election gave him a decided advantage towards fulfilling the purpose of God, but he was not better, inherently, than Esau. Yet his outlook of life, his perspective on things (or we might say today, his worldview) was decidedly different from Esau's. His approach to the business of life was not something that happened suddenly, but rather, as we can see from the story as it unfolds in the Bible, it developed as God led him through life. Because of this, Jacob was able to make better choices than Esau did. He always had a better alternative that Esau did not possess.

Through these stories, we have been seeing that most of the choices in life are going to take place within common, ordinary, everyday circumstances—like eating, drinking, working, relating within a family and in a community. It is the apostle Paul who gives a clear listing of some of our advantages in Ephesians 1, by saying that God has given us *all spiritual blessings*—by choosing us (even as He did Jacob). We hold the same advantage over the unconverted world as Jacob had over Esau.

And thus, *because of God's election of us*, He has adopted us into His Family. He has bestowed upon us grace, thus redeeming us. He has given us wisdom and insight into His plans for the future, thus creating vision. He is revealing to us that we will share in the reconciliation to come of all of mankind, which is going to be our great responsibility during the Millennium. We have been made God's special treasure. We have been granted His Holy Spirit. So, these advantages are the framework within which we are to use our free moral agency, but they are of no value to us *unless* they are taken advantage of.

Very much of what we covered last week was drawn from Romans 9-11. And it was in Romans 11, and Romans 1, where a circumstance very similar to what we face today in this world is found. In Romans 1, God did it before by giving the Gentiles up to a reprobate mind. That is basically what Paul recorded there in Romans 11:7-8. Paul used the word "prick" [King James] Israel into stupor. It is a stupor in which people gradually become unfeeling to true spiritual and moral values.

So what God has 'given us over to' is allowing the carnal mind to spend itself on continuous sensation-seeking stimulation. By "us" I do not mean the church specifically. I mean Israel in general. But it is impacting upon us, because most of the church is in "Israel"—where these things are occurring. It is a circumstance in which the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life are virtually running wild.

In Romans 1, in reference to "reprobate mind" I found these paraphrases in a couple of commentaries. One commentary said, "Degrading passions seeking stimulation." Another one said, "Irrational stimulation resulting in monstrous behavior." This is because, as the stimulation of one sensation fades away, each time the stimulation has to be cranked up a little bit higher to get the same kind of 'high' that one experienced before. The process will gradually, in the long run, produce stupor and apathy, unfeeling indifference towards the highest priority areas of life—meaning the relationship with God and fellow man. Until we become (like it says in II Timothy 3) "without natural affection."

What we must do is *guard* against being caught up in the stupor-producing spirit of the times. And so Paul warns us of this in Romans 11, as we continue on from verses 7, 8, and 9 to verse 11. So let us turn there. We are going to read through to verse 21.

Romans 11:11-21 I say then, have they stumbled that they should fall? Certainly not! But through their fall, to provoke them to jealousy, salvation has come to the Gentiles. Now if their fall is riches for the world, and their failure riches for the Gentiles, how much more their fullness! For I speak to you Gentiles; inasmuch as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry, if by any

means I may provoke to jealousy those who are my flesh and save some of them. For if their being cast away is the reconciling of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead? For if the firstfruit is also holy, the lump is also holy; and if the root is holy, so are the branches. And if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive tree, were grafted in among them, and with them became a partaker of the root and fatness of the olive tree, do not boast against the branches. But if you do boast, remember that you do not support the root, but the root supports you. You will say then, "Branches were broken off that I might be grafted in." Well said. Because of unbelief they were broken off, and you stand by faith. Do not be haughty, but fear. For if God did not spare the natural branches, He may not spare you either.

Please understand that, when Paul wrote this, it was more directly pertinent to their situation. Gentiles were being called into the church, and sharing in the same salvation as the Israelitish people. That was an entirely new circumstance. Paul was reminding the Gentiles that their salvation hinged upon Israel's covenant relationship with God. This was because God's promises were made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It is from these men that the Israelites descended, and thus the promises come first to the Israelites.

Today, salvation is being offered to the Gentiles, and that is commonly accepted. And so some of the cutting edge of what Paul wrote might seem to be lost. But Paul's warning is that now is the time of *our* salvation! This is how it applies to us, nineteen centuries after Paul wrote this. Now Gentiles being called into the church is commonly accepted. But Paul's warning to us is that *now* is the time of *our* salvation, and just like these Gentiles to whom Paul was writing, we need to take heed of our advantages and not look down in scornful pride at the unconverted.

In very common terms, Paul is saying to us, "Hey! Wake up to the fact that *you* can be replaced."

While it is true that the unconverted Israelites are stumbling around, they are not doomed to an irreparable fall. God is bringing good to us now, because

now is the time of our salvation. Our *advantages* do not lie in anything that we have inherently, or have done (earned); but they are possessed on the basis of God's favor—just as they were to Jacob.

Romans 11:22 Therefore consider . . .

This is the follow-up to Paul's statement there, that concluded in verse 21, where "if God spared not the natural branches [the Israelites] take heed lest He also spare not you."

Romans 11:22-24 Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off. And they also, if they do not continue in unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. For if you were cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these, who are natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree?

It is something to consider—serious business. So *kindness and sternness* are both aspects of God's character. In an overall sense, His kindness has been given to us *now*; but we need to understand that the positions can be reversed, and we too can be objects of His sternness. Even now, the church is recipient of His sternness—in the scattering. But even in scattering, it is done in love—to ultimately prepare us better than we otherwise would have been and to save us. If He had left us as we were, we would not be prepared for His Kingdom to anywhere near the degree that is being accomplished in this scattering.

Now when the blindness of the unconverted is wiped away, God is prepared to graft them in. We understand that the time is going to come in the Millennium and the Great White Throne Judgment. We are being prepared to help these people to make it when their time comes. The reason some are accepted and some are rejected is because *God has willed it!* That is what the lesson is in these three chapters—Romans 9, 10, and 11. Therefore, we need to dig in and take care of the business at hand, which is God's business—submitting to God's work, that is, forming and shaping us into His image.

All of this explanation began with Jacob and Esau, a bowl of stew, a bad choice of when to eat or not eat by a man who had no calling. The result was that he treated his birthright, which in this case was a holy thing, contemptuously. He despised it, as Moses wrote. That seemingly simple event produced *the choice* and *the result* of such long-lasting and painful consequence that even today it reverberates and it continues to provide the sons of God with profound lessons. So as we leave this, the question is "Will we, like Jacob, use *our* advantages profitably or, like the enjoyable, likable Esau, fritter them away in the world?"

This leads right into one of the most important of all contexts in which eating is a parallel. That is the assimilation of knowledge—especially the knowledge of God—and growing from it. Everybody knows the truism that *we are what we eat*. That implies that our body can only work with what it is given in the way of food.

The Bible expands upon this to teach us that *the feeding of the mind* parallels that truism. It too can only work with what it is given in the way of genetics, formal instruction, examples from other people's lives, and personal experiences that are digested and assimilated in the mind through thoughtful meditations.

Luke 12:22-23 Therefore He said to His disciples, "Therefore I say to you, Do not worry [take no anxious thought] about your life, what will you eat; nor about the body, what you will put on. Life is more than food, and the body is more than clothing."

What the phrase "Do not worry" is doing is implying a concern greater than the normal concern of managing what one does possess. It is our responsibility to be concerned about what we possess, and to have a concern for our needs off into the future—and to prepare for those times. There is nothing wrong with that at all. But it is wrong to allow that thought to become overbearing in one's life and to always be anxious about it.

This instruction from Jesus is directed at everybody. We might think that those who are very well off are not concerned about what food and clothing represent here—that is, the material, physical areas of life. But it seems from what we learn from history, and maybe even our own personal experiences,

that no matter how much one possesses, the drive is still there to "get more"—and, at the same time, to be insecure about losing what one already has. So the instruction is to everybody—whether one is poor, or whether one might be considered to be wealthy. "*Take no anxious thought.*"

Our focus, though, is going to be on the statement that "life is more than food and clothing." There is more to life than that which is material and physical. What Jesus is indicating here is that mental stability must come from *within* a person—not from the outward, physical provision that one has made, or even that God has given. To set one's heart on material possessions, or to worry about the lack of them—rich or poor—is to deprive oneself of the abundant life and live in perpetual insecurity.

This approach to life is one surefire way to deprive oneself of major blessings of life that God wants us to enjoy. God has called us and enabled us to live *an abundant life*! That is what Jesus said in John 10:10. In order to do this, we must be weaned away from the overwhelming dependence we have upon physical things to supply this. This is not easy. In other words, life will not balance out unless and until the mind is fed with a nutritious diet.

II Timothy 1:6-7 Therefore I remind you to stir up the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For God has not given us a spirit of fear [perpetual insecurity; paranoia about tomorrow], but of power and of love and of a sound mind.

It takes the Spirit of God to produce a sound mind in a human being. The implication of Paul's statement is that, as long as the mind is devoid of the Spirit of God, the mind is *not* entirely sound. We are not "all there." There is a natural instability.

Now, in terms of this sermon, it means that if the mind is *not sound*, it is *not healthy*. We are talking about mental health. It is limited in its outlook, unstable to some degree. It is deficient in its ability to properly cope with life. The reason is because it cannot set things in their proper, righteous context. Rather, it has a strong tendency to twist situations toward its own self-centered perspective.

This kind of a situation does not make for good relationships. That is why there are divorces. That is why there are wars. And we are going to pick up another simple principle that applies to this. Notice what Jesus says:

John 6:63 "It is the spirit who gives life [that is, makes alive]; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life."

Think about the sound-mindedness. Think about the Spirit of God. We are tying together the Spirit of God with what Jesus said here—*the words of God*. This statement that He made is simple, yet at the same time, it is profound in its implications. There is more to God's Spirit than words. But, for the purpose of this sermon, it is enough for us to know that God's Words ("The words that I speak to you, " said Jesus) play a large part in producing life—*abundant life* that God intends that we live.

Now it is obvious that we have life apart from the words of God. And so what Jesus is referring to is life that is *greater than* what we have apart from the Word of God. And that the "words of God"—the Spirit, as it were—have the possibilities of producing a quality of life in us that far exceeds anything that can be lived by a person without those words.

When you put these verses together, we find that this quality of life—the abundant life—is not achieved by or through material things. Material things can be helpful. But without the true concepts contained within God's Word, the "abundant" quality is going to be missing—because *true abundance* is ultimately dependent upon spiritual things, not material.

We are going to go all the way back into the Old Testament, to the book of Deuteronomy, to a very familiar chapter. Remember that Deuteronomy was written in the last month of the wilderness journey. That is why you will frequently find in the book a statement like what appears here.

Deuteronomy 8:2 "And you shall remember . . .

He wants them to reflect back upon the wilderness journey—or to *us*, our spiritual pilgrimage.

Deuteronomy 8:2-3 "And you shall remember that the LORD your God led you all the way these forty years in the wilderness [Why did He do this?], to humble and test you [to prove. Why?], to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not. So He humbled you, and allowed you to hunger, and fed you with manna which you did not know [They had no experience with it before.], nor did your fathers know. . .

They had had no experience like this, and with manna. But ultimately, what was the reason for all this humbling, all of this suffering, all of the going through what they went through?

Deuteronomy 8:3 ". . . that He might make you know that man does not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the LORD."

This is one of the earliest references in all of the Bible to parallel *physically eating* and *spiritual eating*. It is not directly stated, but rather it is implied in the comparison between manna and going hungry, and *eating the Word of God*. "Man does not live by bread alone; but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord." He is very clearly saying that as long as we just have physical life apart from the Spirit of God—as long as we just have physical life apart from the Word of God—our life is not going to be the kind of life that He wants us to live. We do not live merely by material things. That is, we do not live the quality of life that He wants us to live, within His purpose.

So Israel's experiences in the wilderness were intended by God to teach the Israelites that all of life—both physical and spiritual aspects—depend upon God's providence. Who gave them the manna? God did. Who gave them the Word of God? God did. Both of them were provided by God.

We are to remember this and to understand that if our lives are going to reach the kind of balance and quality that God wants us to have—there is, as we would say, 'the real world' (that is, the material world). That has to be taken care of, and we are provided, by God, the food. And then there is the spiritual realm, which is just as *real*. And, as we understand it, even more

real than the material realm; and God also provides for that. So we look to Him for both areas of life.

Now, a major problem is that by nature we are drawn to focus almost totally on the physical. *Our* wilderness experiences are provided to let all know that there is a spiritual aspect to life that *requires* being fed—just as surely as the physical. (1) Prayer, (2) study, (3) meditation, and (4) obedience are the assimilation process in this parallel. It is within this process that the relationship with God, worship, and religion are intended to play a part in life.

Worship is more than adoration and reverence. Worship is the response of the whole person to the whole of God's will in all of life—in church, at home, on the job, in the community, in the family. Our direction is *always* to be whatever God wills. Living, you see, by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God. This is what enables our mind to assimilate the spiritual food that He is providing for us.

When the body cries out for food, one feels an emptiness in the stomach, weakness in the muscles, and even sleepiness will occur. If it goes on long enough, there is faintness and an ache in the head. But when the spirit is *malnourished*, either from deprivation or from a wrong spiritual diet, the gradual reaction in life is far different. Spiritual weakness appears, and so does sin. And with it—anger, irritability, exasperation, frustration, depression, discouragement, melancholy, despondency, gloominess, bitterness, resentment, self-pity, hopelessness, despair, paranoia, hatred, jealousy, wars in the family, arguing, divorce, drunkenness and other drug addictions, and competitiveness—because life becomes more and more *self-centered*.

Part of the purpose of this series of verses in Deuteronomy 8 is to point those that first heard them—and now us—to the fact that *the source* of spiritual nourishment is actually more important than the nourishment itself. This is because if one has the right source then the nourishment will be good. Otherwise, the situation is hopeless. The source *must* be God!

There is another source of spiritual nourishment. "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord"—

not Satan! Not the ruler of this world, not the spirit of this world. If we have the right source, then we can be sound-minded. "Sane" is what Paul is saying. These kinds of attitudes that I just gave you will begin to diminish. They will play less and less of a part, of a role, in our relationships.

In Matthew 4:4, Jesus quoted this verse when He was tempted by Satan—implying in His answer that (unlike Esau) He was receiving a vitality that kept Him going even though He was not physically eating. Therefore, He did not need to succumb to Satan's temptation. But Esau so easily caved in before the temptation that Jacob set before him.

Israel too demanded bread, food, in the wilderness, ate, and then proceeded to die in the wilderness. On the other hand, Jesus denied Himself bread, trusted God, and, in submission to Him, He retained His righteousness and lived. There is quite a lesson there.

Something very similar to this appears in John 4. Jesus was talking to the woman at the well. Surely, the conversation that they had must be encapsulated here. There was a great deal more to it than what is actually recorded in the Bible. But time was dragging on, and it says in verse 30:

John 4:30-34 Then they went out of the city and came to Him. In the meantime His disciples urged Him, saying, "Master, eat." But He said to them, "I have food to eat of which you do not know." Therefore the disciples said to one another, "Has anyone brought Him anything to eat?" Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work."

Undoubtedly, the disciples expected Jesus to be both physically tired and hungry, but on His own testimony, He was not. There is a lesson here.

When Moses went up into the mount, he was with God forty days and forty nights—fasting. If I understand that circumstance correctly, when that forty days and forty nights were over, he went down the mount; and the situation with the Golden Calf was taking place. After that was over, he went right back up and fasted another forty days and forty nights. I do not know whether he ate when he went down the mount in between the two periods, but there is a lesson here.

When we put the two of these together, Moses was in the presence of God. It was a type of really personally driving himself to seek the Kingdom of God. And when we put this together with what Jesus said, it shows that seeking God's Kingdom became Jesus' food. And in that, it draws Him, fills Him, and strengthens Him.

There is an exhilaration that comes from knowing God's will and knowing that you know that you are doing it. I believe God does physically strengthen those who are doing it above what they normally would be, and even those who are infirm.

Jeremiah 15:15-16 O LORD, You know; remember me and visit me, and take revenge for me on my persecutors. In Your enduring patience, do not take me away. [Jeremiah prays.] Know that for Your sake I have suffered rebuke. Your words were found, and I ate them, and Your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart; for I am called by Your name, O LORD God of hosts.

There are two things here. One is that Jeremiah clearly ties studying into God's Word and meditating upon it as being a parallel with *eating*. And the second thing is that—even as a person receives strength, energy, vitality, and health from what he takes into his stomach—so does the Word of God also produce within the person a joy and exhilaration, and other spiritual qualities and attitudes that strengthen and confirm the person "in the Lord," as it were.

In Isaiah 55, Isaiah gets into the act.

Isaiah 55:1-2 Ho! Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat. Yes, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend money for what is not bread, and your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to Me, and eat you what is good, and let your soul delight itself in abundance [prosperity].

This appeal by Isaiah continues the theme that there is a *food* that nourishes the inner man and fills one's life in a way and with an abundance that all of a person's material things cannot. *Of course, the food is spiritual; and the*

Source is God. It is interesting too—not that he said to "come and buy" but to "buy without money." Material food can be purchased with material wealth, but it must be bought.

You might recall the foolish virgins of Matthew 25. Are they not advised to go out and buy oil from those that sell in preparation for the coming of the Bridegroom? Well, let's put these two together. The *food* in Isaiah 55 and the *oil* in Matthew 25 *cannot* be bought with money. It can be bought *only* by means of dedication—the spending of one's life. Dedication and commitment of one's life in submission to Christ—from those appointed by God to "sell" it. That is, His ministry. And this "buying"—this dedication—is by means of being *a living sacrifice* in prayer, in study, in meditation, and in obedience. One becomes energized by means of the food of God's Word, because that is the way it is assimilated into the life.

Back to Jeremiah, this time in chapter 3. This is a promise from God.

Jeremiah 3:15 And I will give you shepherds according to My heart, who shall feed you with knowledge and understanding.

They are the ones that the virgins are to go to and purchase, through their sacrifices, from. So here is very clear Old Testament evidence that this principle of *feeding the mind* with correct instruction leads to good spiritual health. And what is the good spiritual health? He is showing that a mind fed with the right things is able to produce wisdom—the right application and discernment of the right way of doing things—holiness, and happiness. Then one's life becomes balanced. It becomes sound. These are the elements of an abundant life—the right knowledge, understanding, wisdom, holiness, and the blessing of happiness.

God's Word, if it is believed and put into practice, produces within the person a perspective of and a balance to life that cannot be found in any other way. Nothing that man has produced through philosophies or religion can even come close to what God's Word can—if it is believed and practiced.

The Bible instructs, but choices must be made to secure the best diet for the mind to work with and to be assimilated into one's moral and spiritual character and other expressions of personality. We are going to go back to the New Testament once again, this time to I Peter 1.

I Peter 1:22-25 Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart, having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever. "All flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of the grass. The grass withers, and its flower falls away, but the word of the Lord endures forever." And this is the word which by the gospel was preached to you.

I Peter 2:1-2 Therefore laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby.

What I want to draw your attention to here is the implication of one's mental health contained within this passage.

Today, much emphasis in the field of physical health is placed on eating things that are organically grown, without harsh chemical fertilizers and pesticides—because eating foods grown with chemical fertilizers and pesticides are deficient in nutrients. They also pollute. That is, they carry with them the contaminants to the body. In addition to that, there is also much emphasis on cleansing the body internally, by using certain programs as well.

That is what Peter is saying here, except that the context is in a *spiritual*, moral, ethical context. God's pure Word can purify, but it is the *mind* that it purifies—from the corruption of our pre-conversion experiences—if we will use it! It begins with *eating* it, imbibing it. And *if* it is assimilated into us (by meditation and use), it will purify the mind.

Now, can you remember what Paul said in Ephesians 5?

Ephesians 5:25-27 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.

Is that not what we want physically? We want a body that is whole, clean, and pure—without the blemish of disease. All of those characteristics that I gave before are blemishes on the mind! And this is *a necessary* process that we have to go through, in order to be purified from within. We have to eat good food into the mind, in order that a conversion takes place—in which the pure replaces the contaminated. And the pure becomes the basis for our thinking, rather than the contaminated.

"Seeing you have purified your souls *by obeying* the truth." Do you see the process? They took the truth in, meditated upon it, determined ways that they were going to apply it; and, as they applied it, their mind was purified by it—through the Spirit, the Word of God. And what did it produce? The most important characteristic of God—unfeigned love! And he mentions here, especially of the brethren.

All of these companies that are producing what I will generally call "health foods" make claims that, if we will just use their product, it will improve physical health. That is almost exactly the same claim that Peter is making here, that will be the benefit of *eating* God's Word and using it—except that he extends the good health all the way *to eternal life*. It says, "the word of the Lord endures forever" and "this is the word which by the gospel is preached to you."

I Peter 2:1 Therefore laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking.

He is pointing out additions to that list that I gave you before. These are, in a sense, more active than the ones I gave you before, which are mostly attitudes that take place in the mind; but they impact on the activities, the works, the conduct of our lives. But he is telling us here that we need to get rid of (from ourselves) spiritual junk food.

Then comes another listing. I will give you what these mean. The first one is *malice*—which is ill will, the desire to inflict pain, and to make others uncomfortable. The next one is *deceit*. It means lying, being crafty, seductive, slanderous. *Hypocrisy*—pretending to be what one is not. *Envy*—the desire to possess what belongs to another. And then *evil speaking*—using the tongue to destroy reputations.

Then in verse 2, he tells us that we need to *crave* God's Word—in much the same manner that a baby craves milk. It is good to understand that Peter's emphasis here is *not* that we should desire elementary spiritual food. The emphasis is on the energy that a baby expends putting forth to let its mother and father know, "Hey, I'm hungry!" Crying, raising a storm—"I want to be fed!" And God tells us through Peter, here, that *we* should have the same kind of desire for His Word that a baby has to be fed. Babies act in such a way that they think that their very life depends upon the next feeding.

Peter says "the *pure* milk of the word." The word is sincere in the King James and it literally means "without wax"—referring to honey which had all of the wax filtered out of it, so that it was absolutely pure honey. The word came into the English language, from the Latin, as "sincere"—meaning without pollution, so to be unpolluted by fraud and deceit.

God's Word is truth. As it says in Psalm 12:6, God's Word is refined seven times. And so Peter tells us to do this, in order that we might grow spiritually. And he is, of course, implying that God's Word promotes spiritual growth just as surely as we are told that *good food* promotes good health and growth as well. I bet you did not know that there was a "health food" section in the Bible. But that is basically what he is saying. The food is God's Word. And his intention is that our mind should be fed.

Paul got into the act, using the "milk" figure two different times. The one is in I Corinthians 3:1-2. Whereas Peter was in no way chiding people (there in I Peter 2:1), here Paul *is* chiding people. He is very strongly chiding them:

I Corinthians 3:1-2 And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people, but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are not able.

Paul judged the Corinthians as being weak, based upon their behaviors and their attitudes—because what they were doing and their attitudes reflected no spiritual progress. And so he fed these immature Christians "milk" because they were not ready to digest solid spiritual food. And what this does is that it clearly ties one's spiritual diet to *behavior* and *attitudes*.

Maybe you do not feel it because maybe this is not directed right at you. But I will tell you, this was really a scathing putdown of these people. As you read through I Corinthians, Paul tells them that they were puffed up, they were vain, and they were proud people. He goes right down the gamut. Probably the worst thing that you could tell somebody like that is, "You're nothing but a baby." Yet these people thought so highly of themselves.

I have no doubt that Paul seriously hurt people's feelings—many of them, in the congregation. And yet he felt that he was free and clear before God of any charge of causing offense. He is not questioning their conversion but he is rebuking their lack of growth. I will tell you, brethren, the very fact that God put this in His Word tells me that they needed it. They were guilty, and they needed to have their bubble burst.

Paul got into the act again in Hebrews 5. Here he repeats a similar image.

Hebrews 5:11-14 Of whom we have much to say, and hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and are have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

Milk, as Paul used it, represents elementary instruction. And *solid food*, or *meat*, advanced doctrine. In the first use (there in I Corinthians 3) the use was toward an embarrassing immaturity that required that the people be fed like babies. It was also producing strife within the congregation, proving that the people were far more carnal than they were converted.

Now in the Hebrews account, it is a bit more complex. The people had been far more mature in the past, but they had regressed. What happens to you if you have good health and then you binge, maybe for several years, on a bad diet? Do you think your health is going to stay at the peak of perfection that it was before? It is going to regress.

Well, that is what happened to these people spiritually. There had been a time when they were more mature; but they had let it slip. They had regressed. So it presents a situation vaguely similar to elderly people becoming afflicted with dementia. And the result was that these people were drifting aimlessly and becoming spiritually hard-of-hearing.

There is an additional insight here in regards to a spiritual diet. Paul told these people that their problems were directly related to *lazy hearing*. I will repeat that. *Their problems were directly related to lazy hearing*. You see at the end of verse 11 he said, "Since you have become *dull* of hearing."

The same word as that word dull is translated in Hebrews 6:12 as *slothful*. They were sluggish. They were lazy! I do not know whether your Bible has a marginal reference or not, but right in the margin, for "dull" it says "sluggish."

So, Paul is charging them with being lazy listeners. In other words, it was not that they were not having the possibility of good spiritual food, but they had turned off the ear, turned off the mind. They were not diligently putting forth the effort to *think* upon what was taught them. They were merely accepting. But the fact that they were not using what they heard was proof enough for Paul to understand that they were not thinking through the seriousness nor the practical applications of what they were hearing. So they were not assimilating what they heard, and the result was a lack of faith.

If you are familiar that the book of Hebrews, you will know that this is the problem. Their *faith* suffered as a result of them not making the effort of diligently seeking out God's Word in meditation and in prayer. And the rebuke that is given these people here in Hebrews 5:11-14 is far more serious than the one in I Corinthians 3. These people were older in the faith, and they had frittered away a large amount of time that could have been spent growing. No doubt, what Paul was attempting to do here was to shame them, shock them, into a realization of how far they had slipped by calling these grown people—some of them undoubtedly elderly—"babes." ("Infants" is really a more correct translation.)

He goes so far as to tell them that they are unacquainted with the teaching about righteousness. In other words, like an infant, they did not understand the difference between right and wrong. And you know that is the way that maturity is characterized. The mature person is no longer acting like a child. An infant must be instructed and chastened by its parents until it understands.

So these people, even though they had the availability of a good spiritual diet, were imbibing junk food into their minds, and shutting their minds to the good diet that they could have had. The result was being weak spiritually, just as surely as a poor physical diet works to destroy a person's physical vitality.