

## Maintaining Good Health (Part 9)

### Putting Truth Into Practice

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As we begin this sermon on maintaining good health, I want us to understand that I can in no way be considered a professional expert on nutrition and diet. I have a fair number of years observing the subject, and I am able to grasp some biblical principles on what good health is and how it can be obtained. And they are going to be my primary source.

This sermon is directly linked to my previous sermon—even though that previous sermon ["Be There Next Year!"] (which was the one right after the Feast of Tabernacles) was not part of this series. But a principle that we touched on in that sermon, and that is in this sermon, is very important to the subject. That is that though we may possess certain knowledge about some concepts, we may not really *believe* that knowledge in the biblical sense of what faith is.

Mere agreement with God regarding His way of life very frequently does not really "cut it," as we would say. Faith involves trust, and trusting is active. It involves actually *making use* of knowledge. That is, putting what we say that we believe to work so that it is actually producing good results.

Now faith, belief about something, is, in a biblical sense, dead—useless—unless it is being put to use, working toward the good results promised by Almighty God. And so, when Paul admonishes us to "stir up the gift . . . which is in you" [II Timothy 1:6], he is in effect telling us to *discipline ourselves* to put what we say that we believe into action. Most specifically that gift is the Holy Spirit. But Paul's admonition includes, within its intent, all of the truth that we have been recipients of because we have been given that gift.

Because of grace, the elect are responsible to God to act in agreement with those truths. To act contrary to them is to quench the Spirit. You will see how this harmonizes with that sermon that I gave just a couple of weeks ago.

Acting contrary to the Spirit (and all that intends) stifles, smothers, good results. It inhibits growth in a godly direction. But to do so—that is, to serve the Spirit—requires discipline and self-control to act in agreement with it. It seems that virtually everything in life—whether it be spiritual (in terms of Satan), the world (in terms of the culture and its pressures), in term of our appetites (working right within our own bodies)—is working *against* us giving ourselves over to obedience. Therefore, we must *stir up* the gift that is in us.

In like manner, the same principle is true regarding good health. There is, as we say, a ton of information "out there" that, after examination, we may agree with and which we could use to improve things for ourselves. But what good is it doing us if we do not stir ourselves up to discipline ourselves to make use of it? It is no good at all. It is dead—just like spiritual faith is, if we say that we believe something of God but do not use it.

**Proverbs 25:28** Whoever has no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down, without walls.

If we do not control ourselves, if we do not discipline ourselves to make use of the knowledge that we are able to get—whether it is "out there" in the world in terms of good health, or whether it is in terms of the truths of God—what good is it? We are like a city with a broken down wall, which means that we are open to attack. And bad results are very likely to come, because everything it seems is working against *putting truth into practice*. It matters not whether the truth involves things physical, or whether the truth involves things spiritual.

A week or so ago, I heard two comments on radio talk programs that touched on these principles. The first time that I heard this it involved a program with three men—all former professional athletes. Two of them played in the National Football League, and one of them was a professional hockey player. They were interviewing a fourth man. And somehow, in the flow of conversation, something motivated the fourth man (the one who was being interviewed) to turn the tables on them—by asking them what made the difference between really top professional teams and the "also-rans."

Well, the one man, a former tight end who played for the Oakland Raiders and another team as well for quite a number of years, answered immediately, and he said, "*Discipline*." That was his one word answer, and the other two men immediately agreed.

Now he meant that the really good players disciplined themselves to do the right thing (in regard to football, or hockey, or whatever it is). They disciplined themselves to do the right thing regardless of how the game was going at any given moment and regardless of how everybody else was playing. *They will make use of the truth about their game*. And then he added, "When you have a whole team of men who do that, they win almost all the time."

The very next day, on a different program (but also one that involved itself in sports), another sports figure was being interviewed. This was a different program and different men altogether. In this case, the man being interviewed was an older man. He had some connections to high-level basketball programs. And, since we are from Charlotte, this man had something to do with the Atlantic Coast Conference (with Duke, North Carolina, North Carolina State—that level of basketball).

In the course of the questions, he was asked, "Why is it that some teams seem to be able to produce top-flight, top-level basketball teams all the time?" Again, in the course of his answer, he said that in any top-flight team (in any top-flight basketball conference) from one college to another (from one conference to another)—all things being equal—the talent level is about the same. In other words, they are all pretty much equal. He went on to say, then, that it was his observation that what makes the difference is whether the coach is able to get his players to *believe* in his system.

He went on to add (and this is pretty close to his exact words) "If the kids don't believe the coach's system, they simply will *not* do it regardless of how athletic they are." And so he says that out on the basketball court, in the heat of the game, they will essentially do their own things. And he said that out on the court, in the heat of the game, what they really believe comes to the fore. They will simply revert to the way they have always done things.

These two interviews, given on those programs, illustrate the biblical faith principle as applied to a game. We must first come to believe the way of life, and then we have to stir ourselves—discipline ourselves—to put it into practice. And it is my job, as a minister, to find ways to help us to believe in God's way of life.

Whether we have thought it through or not, every one of us is driven, motivated, by *belief*. God wants to bring us to where we believe Him—rather than our own experience, or this world—so that, by faith, we are motivated to produce the good works that we are being created to perform. This faith will *not* be a dead faith. It will produce the good results.

I began this series on maintaining good health by showing that making the efforts to maintain good health is a stewardship responsibility that comes with our calling. Let us go back to a scripture that I practically began with, eight or nine sermons ago.

**I Corinthians 6:13-15** Foods for the stomach and the stomach for foods, but God will destroy both it and them. Now the body is not for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. And God has both raised up the Lord and will also raise us up by His power. Do you not know that your bodies are the members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ, and make them the members of a harlot? Certainly not!

**I Corinthians 6:19-20** Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you are bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.

Paul uses the word "body" in a dual sense. Do not forget that what I am doing in this series is paralleling between *the physical* and *the spiritual*, using the spiritual that is in God's Word and applying the principle that is there to good physical health. Paul is using "body" in both the spiritual sense, that is, the spiritual body—the church, and also the physical body of each member.

In the first couple of verses that I read, it says, "the body is *not* for fornication." It is a specific statement about a generality. *Sin is destructive!* The body—whether it be the church or your own body—was *not* made for sin. It was *not* made for fornication. So, without saying it, Paul is saying that this is destructive to your body. God did *not* create us to sin. "Fornication" here is the Greek word *porneia*. It includes a broad range of sexual sins, all of which are perversions of the right, godly use of sex. And Paul is using it as an illustration to teach about sin's destructiveness.

Sin is somewhat like junk food. (That is, junk food in the physical realm.) Eventually, it is going to get us into trouble—regardless of how *good* it feels going down. "The body was *not* made for junk food" any more than "the body was *not* made for fornication." It is just two different realms—one physical and one spiritual. Of course, the spiritual is far more important in the long run than the physical. But nonetheless, to not do the one that is secondary is to not take advantage of truth. It is a simple principle with the physical paralleling the spiritual, but important in the long run to both physical and spiritual health.

We cannot delude ourselves into thinking that junk food is not destructive. It is. It may not show up right away, but brethren, show up it will—maybe in huge doctor bills, maybe in a great deal of pain and discomfort. (We will talk more about that delusion a little bit later.) We cannot deceive ourselves into thinking that we can escape its destructiveness.

Let us reflect back a little bit on some of the foundational principles that are given to all of mankind. They are found in the early chapters of Genesis. In chapter 1, mankind was given dominion, and mankind is responsible to rule over God's creation. Our life, our conduct, our body are the most specific aspects of God's creation that we are to rule over.

In chapter 2, our responsibility is made more specific. He tells Adam and Eve (and, of course, us too—because we are Adam and Eve's children) that we are to dress and to keep. It is our *stewardship* responsibility before God. We are to beautify, to enhance, to embellish, to improve the raw product. That is what "dress" implies. And we are to "keep," which means that we are to maintain. We are to inhibit the destruction of whatever we have the responsibility for keeping from degeneration.

So, in chapter 1, we are told that we are to rule; and, in chapter 2, it is made more specific. We are not to just "maintain," but we are to beautify. In chapter 4, we are admonished in God's response to Cain, that our desire to go contrary to God's desire is always going to be a part of the mix. He told Cain—and, therefore, you and me—that *sin lies at the door*, but you must master it! Control it! Overcome it! Is that not simple? Right in the beginning of the Book, our responsibility is just laid out—in clear terms.

Now let us tie this into that previous sermon. In other words, we must stir up the spirit that is in us to discipline ourselves. Putting all of the principles contained in Genesis 1 through 4 together, I think that we can see that God is showing us that our major field of operation in His purpose is those areas that are closest to us. It is right at home, baby. Our self (if we can add chapter 3 and the family to it). Everything is right there. Our major field of operation is ourselves, our mate, our children. Sin is at the door. Conquer it!

You will also recall that, perhaps in the first or second sermon in this series, I mentioned that, though we are all generally the same (because God has used a common design-pattern for every one of us), we also have built within us through the genes pools enough variety that we are all specifically different. Therefore, at one and the same time, we are *the same* and yet we are all *specifically different*. That is so easily seen. All I have to do is to look at all these faces in front of me, and they are all different. Yet they are all the same—they are faces.

Those differences carry through in areas in respect of good health. What this does is present us with a requirement that each and every one of us must study into and increase our knowledge of our body's needs—in order to maximize and maintain good health. Everybody has that responsibility. And though we can turn to books on nutrition, and good health, and exercise, and all of those things—we all have to remember that there are enough *specific differences* that we have to think of these things in relation to ourselves. We have to take those generalities and put them into practice in our own lives—because we have examined and we can see from the patterns that we have what *our* specific needs are, and everybody's may not be exactly the same.

All of us are, to some extent, victims of our ancestors' sins, but God knew this when He called us. He knew, when He called us, exactly what we were like. Problem #1—what were we like when He called us? Spiritually and physically, we might have been derelicts—really bad. I do not know. All of us are a little bit different. None of us are exactly the same. But the important thing here is that God knew this when He called us.

And when He revealed Himself to us and we accepted His invitation to enter into the covenant, we found ourselves responsible to seek first the Kingdom of God. We are to strive to overcome, and to grow to maturity. We are to submit ourselves, to become in His image. And this means working towards "dressing" (improving) ourselves in knowledge, understanding, wisdom, attitude, character—and, within the framework of these major (giant) areas, working toward improving our physical health as well.

**Proverbs 23:7** For as he thinks in his heart, so is he. "Eat and drink!" he says to you, but his heart is not with you.

I am a strong believer in the principle that we are considering here—that it is one of the major keys to improving one's physical health, just as surely as it is in improving our spiritual health. The sense of the usage of the word "heart" here is synonymous with the English word *within*. So, "As he thinks *within*, so is he." What we see on the outside may not necessarily tell us what he is like in his heart. It is the sense of "within," because it is what we are *within* that eventually shows up on the outside

In order for a person's health to change for the better, it must begin within. It is how a person thinks—combined with what he thinks about—that produces the condition, and the activity, that we see on the outside. Now let us look at this in a spiritual sense.

**Mark 7:15** There is nothing that enters a man from outside [here is just the opposite] that can defile him; but the things which come out of him, those are the things that defile a man.

**Mark 7:21-23** For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within and defile a man.

Jesus uses this principle here, in this particular context, in a negative sense. Evil proceeds from within—"within" to "without"—but so does good! The same is just as true of good as it is of evil. Just as surely as sinning proceeds from within, so does righteousness—right doing. Now let us look at something regarding this, back in Ezekiel 36. This is another very familiar scripture, but the principle is implied here in regard to physical health. Here is a promise:

**Ezekiel 36:25-26** Then will I sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and will give you a heart of flesh.

The "within" part—the thing that motivates the actions on the "without," the outside—we see here, as God states it, that this is something that He must do. We cannot, on our own, create a change in our heart. So God is involved in this process.

We will not turn to it, but in David's prayer of repentance (Psalm 51:10), he appealed to God with all of his heart. He said, "God, create in me a clean heart." He understood that the sin with Bathsheba, and the sin involving the murder of Uriah, was something that proceeded from within him, but it produced very terrible actions on the outside. His lust got him into the adultery, and then his desire to hide the effects of his lust and to wipe away the only one who could testify against him, led him to murder, and he compounded the sin. David understood that came out of his heart. So he was asking God for a miracle of a changed heart so that he would not act like that on the outside.

Now, let us go to Jeremiah 4. There are probably other scriptures just like this, but this one will serve as an example of the pattern that is involved here.

**Jeremiah 4:4** [God is speaking.] "Circumcise yourselves to the LORD, and take away the foreskins of your hearts, you men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem, lest My fury come forth like fire, and burn so that none can quench it, because of the evil of your doings."

**Jeremiah 4:14** O Jerusalem, wash your heart from wickedness, that you may be saved. How long shall your evil thoughts lodge within you?

So we see the opposite hand here. The change of the heart is a project in which both *God* and *we* contribute to the changing. We are not excused from this process. There are decisions, choices, that we have to make regarding what we are going to allow to come out of that heart. The fact that it is there is a reality, but also the fact that God can make it so that those things are able to be resisted, controlled, disciplined, thus giving the heart time to change *if* we will exercise our options. "Choose you this day" the right hand or the left, good or evil. In so doing, we are circumcising, we are cleansing, we are doing our part in this project. And so our part in this is to step out in faith—trusting Him, yielding to His truth, and putting it to work in our lives.

But let us examine this a little bit further and go back to the book of Exodus. Remember that "sin lies at the door," but you must master it.

**Exodus 32:9** And the LORD said to Moses . . .

We have comedy records at home that we have had forever in our house. They must be at least thirty years old. So these comedies were from back when everything was still fairly clean. And one of these stand-up comedians said, "Every time that God looks down, things are bad." There is a bit of sarcasm there. It was not God's fault. But every time that God looks down, things are bad.

Well, I cannot help but think of this. Here they were at Mt. Sinai. God is looking down. Here is Moses, standing between God and the people. And

what had just happened was the Golden Calf incident, and God did not cotton to that too lightly. That was a very serious offense, because you know what they were doing? They were redefining the image of God into what they thought was right. Bad, bad business. They redefined the image of God from Creator to bull. That is really interesting, because men can control bulls to some degree.

**Exodus 32:9** And the LORD said to Moses, "I have seen this people, and indeed it is a stiff-necked people.

A stiff-necked people!

**Exodus 33:3** "Go up to a land flowing with milk and honey; for I will not go up in your midst, lest I consume you on the way, for you are a stiff-necked people."

Things were not getting any better in Jeremiah's day either.

**Jeremiah 17:23** But they did not obey nor incline their ear, but made their neck stiff, that they might not hear nor receive instruction.

Well, we have a part in this process. We are to circumcise our hearts. We are to make decisions in harmony with God's Word, by faith—exercising our faith to yield to Him. But always "sin is lying at the door." And we stiffen our neck and let the sin *in* rather than booting it *out* of the way and overcoming. That is the pattern that is established in the relationship between God and Israel, and which God wants to remove from our lives. He gives us His Holy Spirit to enable us to do it.

This theme of man stiffening his neck—refusing to believe in God's truth and do what he is commanded to do—runs throughout the Bible. And so every time that sin knocks at the door, we are as likely to open it as to slam it shut in its face and not let it in. And so it comes into our heart, and it goes out in an action that is not good.

Somewhere we are responsible to draw a line and say, "No!" It takes discipline to do that, when our appetites are screaming, "Ah, this looks so good. It was so thrilling the last time." But somewhere the line has to be drawn. And every time we do that, we are circumcising our heart. So that is our responsibility in this process. When God says in the book of Hebrews:

**Hebrews 4:1-2** Therefore, since a promise remains of entering His rest [the Kingdom of God], let us fear lest any of you seem to come short of it. For indeed the gospel was preached to us as well as to them; but the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard it.

This is the reason that Israel died in the wilderness. They heard it, but they stiffened their neck and did nothing to correct their lives—because they did not *believe* it. Instead, as they were playing the game of life, they kept reverting. It is like those basketball players who really were not sold on the coach's system. And so, when they got out in the court, they just did what they always did, and fell back on their athleticism rather than the system (the way). It is a simple principle, but really meaningful.

The Israelites simply would not *yield their minds* to admit that God was right. They seized upon their own opinions and observed them—rather than what God told them to do. Maybe each individual Israelite did not actually go through the process of rejecting. That is, maybe each one did not think it all through and say, "I'm going to set my will, and I'm not going to do it." They simply just kept right on doing things as they had always done. And thus, their actions and their attitudes spoke for them—revealing what they, in their heart of hearts, really believed. You cannot keep what is in your heart hidden. It will come out.

Now, let us go to Luke 5. We will not go through the whole story here. It is really just the conclusion that I want for this sermon. Jesus said:

**Luke 5:39** "And no one, having drunk old wine, immediately desires new; for he says, 'The old is better.'"

Jesus is showing here the general reaction of men in terms of meeting something "new." Of course, He is specifically using it in terms of the truth of God, but the principle applies to physical things as well. That is, that the general principle at work in the human heart—mind, "within"—is to immediately put up a defense and say, "No, the old way is better." That is, to reject the truth—to reject the new system, the new way of life—and to say, "No, I've been getting along with this, this way, for all these years." And so there is an immediate reaction to hold fast to what we already have.

I am not saying that this is entirely wrong. It all depends upon *what* it is that we are defending. Because of this, first of all, we have to be careful to understand that this defense mechanism is built right within us. Carnally, we are naturally thinking, "I am *right* in what I am already doing." There is some self-satisfaction there. And so, immediately, the defense mechanism goes up; and we say, "I am right."

Now, God is not saying, "Get rid of that." Rather, what He is saying, is "Give consideration to what you hear. Evaluate it against My Word. And, if the principle is right—because it agrees with My Word—then hang on to what you have and accept this new thing. But because My Word is absolute, and the principles in it are absolute, then if, upon consideration, it does not agree with My Word—reject it. Don't even worry about it. Go on."

But, you see, what happened with the Israelites was that they heard what God said (either from Mt. Sinai, or through Moses and Aaron), but they would reject it without consideration—without evaluating it against the truth that they already had from God. That is bad business, because what that eventually leads to is *hardening our hearts* against Him.

So what is needful here is a proper evaluation using God's Word as the standard against what we hear that might be new to us. And, put the defense mechanism up; but be honest enough with yourself to evaluate it in the light of the principles that are within God's Word. The key here is whether our mind is honest enough to admit to ourselves that what we are hearing is true.

That is what Israel never overcame. Even those who gave it some consideration still had within them too powerful a mechanism that they

brought with them—namely, the culture of Egypt. The culture of Egypt, in which they were in bondage—they brought it with them; and they rejected *out of hand* what God said through Moses. Do you know how I know that is true? How many made it from Egypt to the Promised Land? Two men, and ostensibly their families. (I do not know, but I think the families too.) Everybody else rejected it. That is a pretty small remnant, is it not?

I just hope, brethren, that the same percentage does not hold true for the church of God. But it is a powerful warning that there is on our shoulders a major responsibility to evaluate what we hear and balance it off, prove it, against God's Word. And then have the faith and the honesty that, once we have evaluated it and see that it is right, to make it a part of our thinking. I do not care where the truth comes from. Whether truth comes from God's Word, or truth comes from the world—if it is truth, it is true. And if it is true, it needs to be made a part of us.

I do not know how many Israelites actually said, "Well, here's the way I see it." But that is really moot. It really does not make a difference. The fact of history is that their conduct did not change, their attitudes did not change, and in the game of life, they kept right on doing the things they had always done—as they had done them. They died in the wilderness. They left Egypt, but Egypt never left them. It was within their heart of hearts.

Now, let us go back to Hebrews again, to that section that precedes Hebrews 4.

**Hebrews 3:12-14** Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God, but exhort one another daily, while it is called "Today," lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence [conviction, faith, boldness] steadfast to the end.

Understand this: Poor health habits (like sin) wear a cloak of deception (the deceitfulness of sin). Satan is the deceiver, is he not? He is! So let us pick up another thing from the book of Hebrews, chapter 11. This is in reference of Moses. It says of him . . .

## **Hebrews 11:25** Choosing . . .

He made a choice. He was confronted with one of the most awesome choices that any human being has ever had to face in the history of mankind. If we understand the history properly, what Moses had to choose between was whether (1) he was going to be pharaoh of the most powerful nation on the face of the earth at that time—and have all of the honors and dignities, all of that wealth and power that came with that office—or, (2) if he was going to give all that up and go out into a wilderness with a scraggly bunch of slaves.

**Hebrews 11:25** Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than [here is the choice] to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin.

If sin always immediately brought terrible results (horrible experiences), then nobody would do it. We would say, "Oh, no. I don't want to do that!" It is, in principle, exactly the same with an unhealthy diet. It *always* tastes good while it is going down, while it is in our mouth, while we are indulging our appetite. It tastes so good. It is enjoyable; but the end results may be, years later, *bad*! Are you getting the principle that is involved here?

In the spiritual realm, it is exactly the same. While sin is going down, while we are participating in it, there is enjoyment. There is pleasure. If it immediately gave pain, then we would withdraw from it in horror (if it shocked us, like an electrocution). One man said, "If sin were without pleasure, only the mentally deranged would commit it." Sin contains death, and we would know that; and only the mentally deranged would do it.

I would like for you to reflect back on that sermon that I gave two weeks ago. Does it not say, in II Timothy 1:6-7, that the spirit that is in us—the gift—is the spirit of love, power, and *a sound mind*? When we permit ourselves to sin, according to this man's definition, we are somewhat mentally deranged. We know, at least intellectually, that sin produces death, and yet we involve ourselves in it.

In the parallel, the same is true with good physical health and good mental health. In both of them, we allow ourselves to think within parameters that are eventually going to produce depression, produce paranoia. Those mental

illnesses are nothing more than the results of an extended period of self-centeredness in terms of negative thinking. They are caused by giving ourselves over to *demonic thinking*. Not that we are demon possessed, but that is the way demons think. They are weird! But we give ourselves over to it, and we end up mentally ill.

The same principle is true in regard to physical health as well. There are many things that we know about general rules of good health—diet, exercise, or whatever it is—and we know that the pattern of life that we are following is wrong; and yet we do it anyway. And eventually, we cut short our life; and we produce, very possibly, long periods of bad chronic physical health.

The change that really produces [good results] is when we change our thinking. That is what it takes. "As we are within" so are we. So the change has to be made there. We can make changes on the outside. The world is doing it all the time. But what I am talking about here is the right way that will produce the real results for the longest period of time. That is, the good results.

It begins with repentance—change of mind; and it is preceded by faith in God. Because we believe Him, because we want to glorify Him, because we want to produce the good results by doing the works that He is creating us for, whether they are spiritual, or mental, or physical—the principles are the same. We look in God's Word for the truth. We open up our mind to it and, by faith, we step out and do it. We control ourselves—we discipline ourselves—to follow the principles that are in God's Word, those things that are true. That is the secret of good health—mental health, physical body health, and spiritual health: faith, repentance, believing truth, and going from there.

But how do we overcome this deceitfulness of sin? There is *a powerful attraction* knowing that these things are pleasurable and our appetites want to be satisfied. And so the "sin lies at the door." And we are confronted with *a choice*—good on one side, bad on the other. Well, Jesus Christ gave us the answer, in a simple statement in the book of Luke.

**Luke 8:14-15** "Now the ones that fell among thorns are those who, when they have heard [Heard what? Truth. The Word of God.], go

out and are choked with cares, riches, and pleasures of life, and bring no fruit to maturity. But the ones that fell on the good ground are those who [Here it is.], having heard the word with an honest and good heart, keep it and bear fruit with patience."

"Those with an honest and a good heart." *Honesty* plays a very large part in whether we are going to take advantage of truth, and make it a part of us, and use it. But how do we deceive ourselves? We deceive ourselves through rationalization and justification—by allowing our appetites to overwhelm what we know is true. Sin, in God's sight, engulfs the mind with a cloud of alibis and cover-ups in order to hide the "wrongness" of what we do from ourselves. Our appetites twist and besmirch truth. And it makes us reason: "Well, this isn't so bad." "How about just one more time?" "I'm too weak." "God will just have to take me the way I am." "God's going to have to do it for me."

Now, we are all victimized by thinking this way—until eventually, in the process, we will actually transgress. Part of the answer to this dilemma perhaps might lie in this—we have been deceived in thinking of sin far too much in the sense of actually breaking a Ten Commandment law. Let me qualify that. "Sin *is* the transgression of the law" (I John 3:4). That is absolutely true. But that verse does not stand alone in the Bible. Actually, sin is more than that! It is much broader than that.

I think that it is far better to think of sin in terms of *falling short of the glory of God*. That is much broader, and at the same time, it is really much more accurate. The central concept involved in the term "sin" is *failure*. It is failure to live up to the standard, and the standard is God Himself. The glory of God includes, then, His attitudes, His intents, His very thinking processes—all of which produce the way that He lives.

Incidentally, the Bible calls *the way He lives* "eternal life." It is so named in John 17. Eternal life is a way of life that *includes* everlasting life. But eternal life is much more than "everlasting" life because living everlastingly would not be at all good unless we are living like God lives—the way He lives. Eternal life encompasses the way He lives.

So we are deceived—lured—into actually transgressing through neglect, carelessness, laziness, irresponsibility, ignorance, bull-headedness, fearfulness, shortsightedness, ingratitude for forgiveness and the awesome potential that has been freely and graciously handed us on a golden platter. We are detoured from progress to holiness, and are enticed into sin by not really seeing God, by not taking seriously the subtle influences that are on the fringes of actually transgressing the law. If we stop it there, we will not transgress! You do not allow neglect, carelessness, and foolishness to continue the process to actually breaking the commandment.

I want you to think about this. This is so good to just think of this in terms of health. We would not have any problems with a bad diet, you see, if we had disciplined ourselves never to let the appetite deceive us into following through. It would never happen. "I'm not going to eat that."

Do you not do that with bacon, with ham? You do not give it a second thought. God says, "Don't!" And you just set your mind. There is no question about it, and it is really no problem.

That same principle can be worked into our mind, into our heart, into our character, into our thinking to stop any practice that is going to make us fall short of the glory of God. The only difference is that the things that I am now talking of are not written in the Book in terms of a law. Right? That is the only real difference. So, at the foundation of good spiritual health and good physical health is *the way we think* and *what we think about*.

**James 1:12-16** Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved [tested], he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord has promised to those who love Him. Let no man say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death. Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren.

Here, James confirms what I have just said. That is, that we are *lured* into sin through our *thinking processes*. And the way to stop sin, and the way to improve health, is to *change our thinking*. Between what God does and what we are responsible to do, it can be done. It will be done! And, if you understand it, this is where *real conversion* resides.

**II Thessalonians 2:9-10** The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved.

Here is an essential piece of information. One of the major areas that separates those who are being saved from those who are perishing is that those who are being saved love truth! They do not allow sin to deceive them. They love truth. Truth sanctifies. "Sanctify them with Your Word; Your Word is truth." Truth sets apart people who use it. It sets apart those who love truth and use it. What for? For *the reward* of using it. It matters not whether the reward (if I can put it that way) is eternal life or whether it is better health. Truth, believe and used, will sanctify you for good health. It will set you apart.

Now let us understand something about salvation. That is, being saved. It is a process. Consider how God shows this to us. When God brought Israel out of Egypt, they were redeemed; but the process of salvation was not yet ended. It had actually only begun. It did not end until they were in the Promised Land, a type of the Kingdom of God. The journey through the wilderness was intended to *prepare* them for living in the Land. But a whole generation died within that process because they did not believe God's truth.

It is that simple. It was not mixed with faith. They did not believe it; and they died! They did not have a love for truth. They set their mind against it, and would not use it. The journey (that God shows us) of the children of Israel through the wilderness is intended to be understood by us that *salvation is a process*. Salvation is not a religious title. It is not a right. It is

not some kind of a theological term given to make people feel a measure of peace. Please understand this: It is the experience of being saved from what would otherwise destroy us.

All truth does not come to us at the moment of redemption. We receive truth as a process that begins with the calling. Redemption by the blood of Christ is a major step in that; but then we have to go, we have to walk, through the wilderness. It does not end until we inherit the Kingdom of God. And all along the process, God is providing more truth; and we are continually being delivered. Because we accept the truth, we are being continuously delivered from the very things that would kill us. Salvation is a process.

Again, the same principle holds true in regard to good health. We do not get good health because we learn one thing about good health habits. It is a continuous process that frees us from things that are going to produce bad effects later on, unless we change.

**II Thessalonians 2:11-12** And for this cause God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all might be condemned who did not believe the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness. [That is, in sin.]

They gave in to the pleasures of the appetites of the flesh, or of the mind. Those who will not yield to a love a truth, Paul warns, will be given "a deluding energy." That is what this word means, which is translated in the *King James* "strong delusion." It is a deluding (meaning a tricky, a deceitful) energy.

It is the word *energy* that I want you to think about here. Energy moves us in the direction of its course. This is "a deluding energy," a deceitful energy. Which way is it pushing, moving, against the people who do not have a love of the truth? It is taking them not toward God. It is taking them away from God. Correct? Absolutely, it is correct. This is a warning from Paul of what God is going to allow—or, actually cause to occur—in those people who do not have love of truth. And this "deluding energy" is going to lead to these people perishing.

I want you to think of something here. First of all, there is an alternate translation to this. It means *an activity of energy*. "Activity" means that we are doing something. Activity of "energy"—you see, there is *energy* and it is active. It is moving people toward what? Toward perishing!

I will show you how this process works. You have seen this in the church with your own eyes, your own experience. What happens when people leave the church? Maybe they leave the church over one thing. It does not matter what that one doctrine is. They get something in their mind, and they believe this particular doctrine. They believe that this is a "loose brick." That is, that the whole institution is going to fall down and collapse, because they found this loose brick that they think Herbert Armstrong was wrong about (or somebody else in the church was wrong about). And, "They don't have the authority to preach this thing, because it is all wrong." So they leave the church.

I will guarantee you—on the basis of this scripture, and on the basis of the experience that I have seen in the church (and that you have seen in the church), that it will not be long before those people have gone from that doctrine, that they rejected. That is, that they will have gone *from* that one doctrine that they first rejected *to* another doctrine that they reject, to another doctrine that they reject, to another doctrine that they reject. And, the first thing you know, they are back in the Protestant church.

That deluding energy keeps *pushing* them toward absolute destruction. Once they start rejecting things (unless God in His mercy gives them the opportunity to repent), the energy that is involved in that rejection is going to create other things in them that they soon will not believe in. This is serious business here. You have seen it with your own eyes. It may be a year, or two process; but, the first thing you know, they are right back in the vomit.

This scripture here is a parallel to Romans 1—where it says, "God gave them over to a reprobate mind." What we are talking about here is very similar to an addiction. Once the addiction get a hold of the mind that way, it needs to go further and further and further to get its "kicks," its pleasures. And the process is repeated to the place where they go right into the Lake of Fire.

Let us conclude for today. I am not going to go through this whole thing now. Probably in my next sermon, God willing, I will open up with this scripture that we are now going to close on. This scripture, in a way, confirms basically what is the theme of this sermon.

**Philippians 4:6-8** Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts [that which is "within," the inner being which produces the motivation, the drive, and the energy that we see on the outside] and minds through Christ Jesus. Finally . . .

That word "finally" is really not the best translation. There is nothing wrong with it, in the sense that it is wrong totally—for it is not. There are just better ones. What Paul said there is better understood as "in this connection." In other words, it is a statement in which he is gathering everything together (especially the things that appear just before this).

**Philippians 4:8** *In this connection*, brethren [in regard to the peace of God, in regard to guarding your hearts], whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things.

Now, he makes it very specific in verse 9—what these things are.

**Philippians 4:9** The things which you have learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you.

All of those terms about what we are supposed to think about were to be understood in relation to the preaching that Paul did, in relation to *the example* that he set before them, in relation to the *counsel* that he gave them

privately. They were to think on these things, because who was Paul? He was the apostle of Jesus Christ. He was Jesus Christ's agent to these people. He was the agent of the Word of God, and everything that Word implies.

Paul is telling us that the solution of these things is to *eat Jesus Christ*. (Do you remember that sermon?) We are to *eat* Christ.

I think that is a good place to stop. And if I can summarize in just a few words, it is that good physical health follows the same pattern as good spiritual health and good mental health. For there to be an effective change, the change has to be from "within" to "without." There has to be *a change in our thinking*. There has to be *a change in what we think about*. And these things, if they are put to practice, will produce the good results that we want so much to have produced in our lives.