

Maintaining Good Health (Part 10)

Truth and Health

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If a person believes that it does not matter what he eats, how much he eats, or whatever he eats, whether he ever gets any exercise, or that his sleep patterns matter not at all—will not that person be subject to what that lifestyle produces? In the same manner, if a person believes that he should study into his reaction to certain foods, how much he eats, his exercise, and sleep patterns, and carefully stays within them (that is, at least, what he has discovered works for him)—will he not, too, produce what he finds as good results to him?

If a person cares not at all what is ingested into his mind, and thus involves himself in seeking out (through reading, experiencing, and witnessing) extreme forms of human behavior—is that not going to effect his own conduct, how he thinks about and judges such activity?

These questions loosely illustrate major principles given and expounded upon in the very Word of God. To give you a couple of these principles:

Galatians 6:7 Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.

Deuteronomy 30:19 I have set before you life [on the one hand] and death [on the other] . . . therefore choose life.

Romans 2:6 [God] will render to each one according to his deeds.

This is the controlling principle of God's judgment. God bases His judgment on *evidence*. Deeds give evidence to what is in the person's heart.

The very basis of the way taught in the Bible is that obedience to law produces the good life. Now "laws," as I am using the term here, are those forces whose actions or reactions occur consistently according to nature. Because laws are consistent, they can be depended upon to produce exactly what they were intended to produce—for good or bad—for those who exercise their powers. There is no need of *the knowledge of laws*, if we are going to carelessly ignore them. Thus, it is vain to yearn for a better life if we choose to ignore the commands for the good life (or for the good that life can produce). That is, *if* obedience to the laws and principles that produce the "good" are not used.

Here is something to consider. By the time that God calls us, we are pretty much already damaged goods. There are reasons for this. As we begin this sermon, I want you to turn with me to Proverbs 20, where there is a fundamental principle of life.

Proverbs 20:29 The glory of young men is their strength, and the splendor of old men is their gray head.

Taken as a whole, the proverb teaches us that there is a place in life for both youth and old age. That is, one is not inherently better than the other. Each has its share of positives and negatives. Each can be made better by taking proper advantage of the positives. But, conversely, each can be made worse by ignoring the positives.

Some commentators suggest that "youthful strength" has a deceptive quality to it, in that youth are lured into failing to look around them at those who are already old, and then wisely preparing for the time when the glorious strength of youth is gone. Or, let us change the wording there. That is, to wisely prepare for old age by taking steps to retain the strength of youth as long as they can.

Instead, the immature youth—and all of us have been this way—are lured into carelessly thinking that the strength will always be there, or failing (again, carelessly) to think about it at all. The youth may not actually say to themselves, "I'm going to do all that I can to destroy my health." No, we simply ignore the evidence all around us.

There is an interesting word picture, in this regard, that appears in Amos 6:1-6. This is not in regard to health. In this case, it is in regard to what is going on within the culture of Israel. He is describing the people who are living within it, and I think this pretty much conforms to the way most of us are in regards to spiritual, mental, and physical health.

Amos 6:1 Woe to you who are at ease in Zion, and trust in Mount Samaria, notable persons in the chief nation, to whom the house of Israel comes!

God begins by describing a complacent, self-satisfied people. People who think that life is always going to go on the way it is right now. And so God tells these people, in verse 2:

Amos 6:2 Go over to Calneh and see; and go from there to Hamath the great; then go down to Gath of the Philistines. Are you better than these kingdoms?

In other words, are the Israelite kingdoms any better than these people were—who at one time were powerful and mighty nations, in the glorious strength of their youth?

Amos 6:2 Or is their territory greater than your territory?

The reason that God points to these cities is that they had fallen from their great and glorious strength; and now they were no longer great, powerful, strong, vigorous, and influential. The glorious strength of their youth was gone. And God is pointing out these people to them to say, "Do you think this can't happen to you?"

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

Here God tells them exactly what their attitude is. In their complacency and their failure to react in the right way (in reality taking care of themselves) and the problems within the culture, they are actually causing greater violence to occur. Then, in verse 4, he describes the way that these people are living.

Amos 6:4-6 [Those] who lie on beds of ivory, and stretch out on your couches, eat lambs from the flock and calves from the midst of the stall [That is, living the good life.]; who sing idly to the sound of stringed instruments, and invent for themselves musical instruments like David; who drink wine from bowls, and anoint themselves with the best ointments, but are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph.

So there they are, in the strength of their youth and the glory of their power, and they are partying while Rome burns, as it were.

It is the very fact that little or nothing is done to extend the good health that proves the carelessness. Instead, the constant appearance of evidence in the form of poor health in many, many old people and the very strong possibility of the youth preserving it—if *that is ignored* they also end up just like that.

When we reflect back on our youth, most of us will admit that we pretty much ignored the things that we did know tended to produce good health. We may not have known many of the specifics then, but all of us were aware of many generalities regarding good health. There is not a single one of us that was completely in the dark and in total ignorance. None of us is guiltless. None of us can escape the power of the law. Laws are going to work regardless of us.

Now turn with me to a scripture that we used in this series once before. In Romans 2, and we are going to read this, beginning in verse 6. I already quoted a portion of this to you, a little bit earlier, as being one of the fundamental principles of how God judges. Now we are going to see it right in its context, and lead up to the conclusion that I want for right here.

Romans 2:6 Who will render to each one according to his deeds.

The implication is nobody escapes the judgment of God—whether it comes naturally by law, or whether He personally and specifically enforces it. Then He begins to divide people into two groups.

Romans 2:7 Eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality.

That is the group that takes care of things—takes care of business, as it were. They believe that they *should* follow the laws, in order to produce the good. However, the next verse has the contrast.

Romans 2:8 But to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness [What is going to come? Not eternal life and immortality, but]—indignation and wrath.

That is the way laws work—for our good *or* for our bad, depending upon how they are used.

Romans 2:9 Tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek.

"The Jew first" because they are more responsible before God, because God has made the covenant with them.

Romans 2:10 But glory, honor, and peace to everyone who works what is good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

So, whether you are one of the called or whether you are unconverted—laws work! It does not matter whether you are young. It does not matter whether you are old. It does not matter whether you are male. It does not matter whether you are female. It matters not! Laws are impersonal, in that regard. They simply *work*. And "whatsoever a man sows, that shall he also reap." And then Paul adds:

Romans 2:11 For there is no partiality with God.

I specifically went through this because of the mention of the Greeks here. It shows you that, whether a person is called or not, laws are going to be working—for them or against them, depending upon their response.

Romans 2:12-13 For as many as have sinned without law [or, apart from law. That is, the Gentiles.] will also perish without [apart from] law, and as many as have sinned in the law [Those who are converted, those who have made the covenant.] will be judged by the law (for not the hearers of the law are just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law shall be justified).

Do you think that the Gentiles, who are unconverted, are not going to be blessed if they obey (by nature) the laws of God? Oh, yes, they will. They may not get salvation, but they are going to be blessed—because of their obedience.

Romans 2:14-15 For when the Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves, who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves their thoughts accusing or else excusing them).

Paul is affirming here that there is natural law; and that nobody, whether they are aware of God from a biblical standpoint, or completely cut off from Him and in the Gentile world, is guiltless. Paul's main concern is moral law; but, in principle, he is covering all law.

Even back in "the dark ages"—when I was in high school—one quarter of the year, instead of having gym, we were given classes on general rules of health. I pretty much ignored them. If we have willingly not followed the law that produced the good, is there any justification for feeling victimized?

The same is true in regard to the spiritual, moral, and ethical areas of life. When we were young, we knew that it was wrong to murder, to commit adultery or fornication, to steal, or to lie. But we pretty much *ignored* them too. Often the desire of the moment persuaded us to "do our own thing."

By way of coincidence, something kind of interesting happened within the last couple of weeks that I feel is interesting to this sermon. It was announced that a group of musical experts chose the all time *best* "pop song." First of all, they gathered together three thousand songs. Then they distilled them into three hundred; and, from that, they further distilled it into one hundred. Then they arranged the one hundred from low (being number 100) to the highest (being number 1, that they thought was the

best all time pop song). I do not know what all of their criteria were. All I heard was the reporting and the general means by which they did it. But the top song that they chose as the best of all times was the Beatles' "Yesterday," with the lyrics by Paul McCartney.

So, Evelyn and I pulled that song out and listened to it, to see why—or, what it had to say. The melody gives one the impression of sadness. When it is combined with the lyrics, it very definitely gives one the understanding that things in life did not work out the way that youthful enthusiasm thought it should.

The first stanza begins: "Yesterday, all my troubles seemed so far away. Now it looks as though they're here to stay. Oh, I believe in yesterday. Suddenly, I'm not half the man I use to be. There's a shadow hanging over me. Oh, yesterday came suddenly."

The song then goes on to relate a love that went wrong. McCartney wrote that *love* (and I will inject here, "or, life") *was such an easy game to play*. But it went wrong, because he foolishly acted in haste. And now he longs that he could turn back the clock and do it all over again, far more wisely. At the end, he says, "I need a place to hide away."—as he longs to escape from the fruits of his foolishness.

My main purpose in my previous sermon was to establish that the same basic principles that produce good spiritual health also produce good mental and physical health. But the process of producing the good must be generated from within—and has, at its foundation, *what one believes!* Just as surely as evil is generated from within, so also is righteousness—whether it is spiritual, moral, or ethical righteousness or mental and physical health righteousness. It is the *use of truth* that sets us apart for receiving the good result of our conduct. However, we must overcome constant pressure, or inclination, to reject or ignore the truth—and cave into our appetites, or pressures from the world or Satan.

This inclination can be mastered, but this often requires a radical change of thinking. In the spiritual realm, this is what is at the heart of repentance and conversion. We saw that this *change of thinking* is a project involving both God and the self. On the one hand, God says that He will give us a new heart. On the other, He also shows us that we have the responsibility to circumcise our own heart as well.

We saw that salvation, rather than being a "one moment in time" experience, as the Protestant world tends to teach it, is the active continuous process of *being delivered* from those things which bring us disease in the mental and physical areas of life—and death in the spiritual.

There is a way (shall we call it a formula) that Jesus gives in Matthew 7 that needs to be followed by each and every one of us who recognized that we have pretty much wasted our youth. We need to turn about. So, what is the formula? He gives a very simple one, in this case.

Matthew 7:7 "Ask, and it will be given you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you."

A simple formula of how to get hold of truth! That is all-important. All our lives, we have had the tendency to ignore much truth that we have at our disposal. We have just carelessly, thoughtlessly, cast it aside. We simply do not use it; and then, too late, "yesterday" catches up with us. We wish we had not lived the way we have.

So here is the process that is needed to break the cycle of bad habits that all of us have gotten ourselves into. We do this *by faith*. We *ask* by faith. We *seek* by faith. And we *find and use* by faith.

Interestingly, here in Matthew 7, all three imperatives—ask, seek, and knock—are in the present tense. What that means in practical application is that this formula is an ongoing process that one must patiently persevere through, controlling ourselves to seek "the good"—by studying, searching for what works to produce the good, and then yielding to Him to follow what we find.

In the last sermon, we briefly touched on the fact that sin, that is, "falling short of the glory of God" in spiritual or physical areas, is pleasurable—and that it wears a cloak of deception. It hides itself behind a web of neglect, of carelessness, of laziness, of irresponsibility, ignorance, stubbornness, fearfulness, ingratitude, and rationalization. Whether it goes into our stomachs or into our minds, we say to ourselves things like, "It hasn't hurt me yet," "Others seem to be getting away with it." Or, "Look at me. We shouldn't take things so seriously. It won't hurt you." Do you know what that is? It is *foolish, stubborn pride* that resides in us.

Turn with me to another very familiar scripture; but it applies, in this way, to us. So frequently, we just allow things to slide by.

Ecclesiastes 8:11 Because the sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily . . .

When we are young, we carelessly ignore the things that we do know. We say, "I'll get around to it sometime later—when I'm a little bit older, when I'm a little bit more settled (or whatever). It hasn't hurt me yet. I see other people getting away with it. Look at that person that lived to be ninety years old, and they ate that junk all of their lives." Yes, there are going to be cases like that. But what God is looking at is, are we going to just presumptuously *assume* that it is not going to happen to us? Is He not looking to see whether His children are willing to conform to law?

Ecclesiastes 8:11-12 Because the sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil. Though a sinner does evil a hundred times, and his days are prolonged, yet surely I know that it will be well with those who fear God, who fear before Him.

That is, that conform their lives to law—as best they understand it. Brethren, we have to understand that sin always is implacably working toward producing disease and death! In Romans 7, Paul personifies sin; and he calls it "*the law of sin* that is within me." Do not laws work consistently? Absolutely! And Paul said that it was right in him.

Finally, in that sermon, we saw that—in order to *overcome* these pressures to cave in to the deceitfulness of sin, it takes an open and honest heart that loves truth. "Open"—in that verse [Luke 8: 15]—indicates a willingness to hear, in spite of the seemingly inborn nature of stiff-necked resistance to something contrary to what one has always done.

Do you remember the parable that Jesus gave about putting new wine into old bottles? He said there (and I am paraphrasing) that there is a natural resistance ("The old is better.") to law, to truth, that seems to be built right into us. And it is a strong tendency—a pressure from within—to keep on doing the "old." That is, to push it aside; and to say "It hasn't hurt me yet. I see no evidence that is going to happen." But those who are wise recognize that sin is implacably working toward producing *disease* and *death*. So "open" indicates a willingness to hear, in spite of this pressure.

Do you know what makes infants and youths so appealing, so adorable? There might be many reasons for this, but one of them is that they are so weak and so defenseless. There is an innate desire in us to protect them. But a second reason is that they are so openly innocent. They are unspoiled by the clever deceitful sophistications of this world. I bring this up because Jesus said that we have to become like little children—open, innocent, not deceitful, not subject to the sophistications (which are so often nothing but lies) that gloss over the bad effects of things. We have to become as little children.

That verse also said that we have to have an noble and good heart. This suggests a willingness to admit to the self that what one has always done has been glossed over, under a cloud of self-deception. At the very end of that sermon, we saw that those who turn from truth are drawn further and further into sin—or, what Paul calls *a strong delusion*. [II Thessalonians 2:11]

You will not find that in the *King James*; but that is exactly what the Greek word means—"a deluding energy." Energy indicates a power. That is, *a deceitful power* that draws us further and further into sin. This is why I said that it produces something very similar to an addiction to a drug. *Sin has an addictive quality to it*, that requires an ever-increasing degree of participation in its perversion in order to supply the pleasurable satisfaction, which one originally found in doing it.

We are going to go back to the verses that we ended that previous sermon on, because I want to tear them apart and expound on them a little more thoroughly than I did then. I really did not do them justice the last time I spoke.

Philippians 4:2 I implore Euodias and implore Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord.

Philippians 4:5-9 Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand. 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 and minds through Christ Jesus. Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever 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. The things which you learned and received and heard and seen in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you.

This section deals with the importance of what goes in—whether to the mind or to the stomach—the principle is the same. They parallel one another. And this is a section that deals with the importance of *what goes in* and what it has towards producing *what comes out* of life. Pay careful attention to *the sequence of instruction* having to do with (1) how we think and (2) what we think about.

The sequence begins in verse 2, with Paul addressing a squabble between two women—Euodias and Syntyche. What they were squabbling over, nobody knows; but it was serious enough that it was dividing the congregation. People were taking up sides. Some were on this side, and some were on the other side. "This is the way I see it." "Well, this is the way I see it." That kind of thing.

In verse 5 it says, "Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand." That word is gentleness is *moderation* in the King James and is another one of those words that is difficult to find one English word to use as its synonym. How it is translated depends a great deal upon the context in

which it appears. Just to give you an idea of what latitude there are, in the use of this word—other translations, besides the *King James*, render it in this manner: Instead of "moderation," *patience*. Instead of "moderation," *modesty*. Instead of "moderation," *softness*. Instead of "moderation," *forbearance*. Instead of "moderation," *graciousness*. Instead of "moderation," *gentleness*. Instead of "moderation," *magnanimity*. And (listen to this last one) instead of "moderation," *sweet reasonableness*.

All of those words have a common thread running through them. The person doing what those words suggest is using some form of self-constraint—controlling themselves. That is essentially the advice that Paul gives here. It is really a very gentle admonition to be careful about (1) our conduct in our relationships and (2) what comes out of our mouth.

At the end of that verse, it says, "The Lord is at hand." This statement can be taken two ways. One is that Christ is coming, and we do not want to be found dividing the brethren. Always remember that every situation is preparation for His return. That is very important. *God is watching*, and *every situation is preparation for His return!* That has to be our approach.

The second application is that *Christ is always, under every circumstance, a part of our relationships*. What Paul has in mind here is what Christ said in Matthew 25.

Matthew 25:40 "Inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me."

Would you do the same thing to Christ as you did to your fellow member of the congregation? The very gentle admonition is "restrain yourself," because Jesus Christ is involved in every situation in life. And, secondarily, Christ is coming. Use every situation to make sure that you are taking a step in the right direction toward His return. Take advantage of it, to do the right thing.

Philippians 4:6 Be anxious for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.

The *King James* says "careful." Some of the newer translations say "anxious." This word, in the Greek, also has two meanings. It can be used in a positive sense, or in a negative sense. In a positive sense, it means, "to be genuinely concerned or interested in the welfare of." The exact same word appears in Philippians 2:20 (in a positive sense).

Philippians 2:20 For I have no one like-minded, who will sincerely care for your state.

Talking about Timothy, the word "sincerely" here is the same word that is translated in Philippians 4:6 as "be anxious for nothing." And in Philippians 4:6 it has essentially a negative aspect to it. In a negative aspect, it means, "don't be unduly concerned or worried about." In other words, do not be driven to anxiety (fearfulness) about life. Stop being perplexed or agitated by what is going on.

Now, let us examine this a little bit further. Anxiety is the outward appearance of fear within, and the fruit produced often causes division. Now, why? One of the realities of life is that some feel as though they have to *control* every situation in life, so that the actions done work out the way that *they* think they should. Or they fret, and maybe even pitch a fit (as we might say). Some people are obviously this way; and we label them as "controllers."

Controlling is a fear- and pride-driven characteristic. Controllers think that they know better than everybody else, and they seek to impose their way in virtually every situation and relationship. At the same time, they fear that things will not work out in the way that they think that they should. One thing you can be certain of—that faith in God is not a large part of the picture (according to the way *they* see things).

One of the sad things is that everybody—all of us—have some degree of this drive in them. We get anxious, and we get antsy. Sometimes, very angry—if things are not done the way that we want them done. If they are not, we think the results just will not work out right.

What we are looking at here, in verse 6, is a parallel of what Jesus said in John 14:1—where Jesus said, "Stop being troubled!" He said that very strongly. He tells His anxiety-ridden disciples, " Stop being anxiety-driven!" And then He goes on to show *why* we do not have to be filled with anxiety.

John 14:1 You believe in God, believe also in Me.

What He was pointing out to His disciples—and to us—is that if we really do "see" God, then we should know that He is with us. And, in every matter, the solution in life is to let your needs be made known to God *in prayer*. Did you notice that appears in this verse?

Philippians 4:6 Be [anxiety-driven by] nothing; but in everything by prayer [Not trying to absolutely control every situation, but by prayer] and supplication, *with* thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.

The first step to cure anxiety is *prayer mixed with faith*. Please do not forget the context. The context here was a squabble that was going on between two women. Somebody or both of these ladies were anxiety-driven. Both of them wanted to control the situation *their* way. But Paul said, "Hey, wait a minute. Whose church is this anyway?" To whom do you owe your life? Do you not owe it to God, because He has forgiven your sins? He has given you His Spirit. Is He not the One that we are to look to, to provide the answers (the solutions) to our problems in life? Why are you so anxiety-filled that it has to be done your way?

Let us draw this out further. I think that Paul would agree (and this is what he intended) that these requests to God must be definite, specific requests. God already knows our needs. Jesus said that in Matthew 6. But He wants *us* to correctly recognize them, evaluate them, and express them to Him—accompanied with thoughtful expressions of thanksgiving for what He has already given, and promises to give in the future.

Why is this important in maintaining good health? Was the health of this congregation suffering because these two ladies were fighting? Yes, it was. And we see what is happening in this process that Paul is suggesting here. Paul is telling us that, through prayer, God is disciplining us to *think* within certain well-defined perimeters that have Him—and *His way*—as the center. (Not us and our way; but Him and His way at the center of the thinking.) *If* it is going to be our way, *then* there is every reason why we are going to be anxiety-driven.

If we, by faith, believe that He really is with us—and we make these specific requests to Him—then we are exhibiting *our faith* to Him that He is going to supply the solution to this problem. Why get excited?

Do you understand that dependence upon Him is being created by this formula that Paul is giving us here in Philippians 4 as a solution? As these requests are answered (and they will be), we will come to know that the results did not come from within us—but from our Father in heaven. God *will* govern His Family! And, here comes the result:

Philippians 4:7 And the peace of God . . .

Is not peace the opposite of anxiety? If we follow what God tells us to do . . .

Philippians 4:7 And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

So Paul is saying, then, that one of the benefits from doing things this way is going to be *tranquility of mind*. That is, a respite from the restlessness and irritation so common to the carnal mind, so that it is constantly reaching out for some new stimulation to satisfy its insatiable longing (in this case, for control).

I do not know whether or not you have seen it, but this is one of the major factors in life that produces good health in every area of life. Peace, in this sense, is that *conviction* that because we are reconciled to God through Jesus Christ, and because He is directly and intimately involved in our lives, regardless of the way that things look on the surface, everything really is all right. Is Romans 8:28 still in the Book? That is what this is [here in Philippians 4]. It is an expounding on how to apply Romans 8:28—in this case, in a squabble.

I want to encourage you to understand: What Paul is talking about here is not a passive fatalism; because Paul then goes on to add that this peace will stand guard over our minds. That is what it means. It will "keep you." It will stand guard over our minds and thoughts—like a sentinel—giving us the opportunity to meet and cope with the problems of life. Even though I know that all of that is not specifically there, I know that it is correct; because it is God's way for us to overcome problems.

We do not just sit there doing nothing! And, if the peace of God is there, it enables us to think sound-mindedly—and to search, and ask, and knock at times when we are not in a state of agitated irritation and fear. Is God on the job? He is there. He will answer—in His good time, and in His way. So this peace prevents troubling anxiety from influencing our thought processes; and thus preventing unworthy, ungodly, self-centered reasoning from entering into our relationship with others.

I want you to think of this in regard to physical health. Is not stress (anxiety) one of the major causes of debilitating disease? Of course, it is! And in verse 8, he gives these characteristics of things that we should put into our minds. The first word, in verse 8, is "finally." This is not technically wrong, but it does not adequately convey what Paul's intent was. It is better understood if translated "in this connection." Another Bible renders it this way—"in this regard, as I close this letter." That is a pretty good one, because it gives the indication that the letter is coming to a conclusion and, at the same time, so is his thought regarding this issue that he is addressing.

So, when it says, "in this regard, as I close this letter," it is in regard to anxiety (verse 6), the peace of God (verse 7), and coping with the problems of life. Occupy your minds with whatsoever things are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, and so forth. What is he saying? He is saying that, in order to get the

right results, we have to put the right things *in*. He is telling us to program our minds with the right things; because what goes *in* to the mind eventually determines what comes *out*—in words, attitudes, and actions. It is the "garbage in, garbage out" (wholesome in, wholesome out) principle.

Then, in verse 9, he defines wholesome. I am using that one word to encapsulate all the terms that he gave there in verse 8. He defines "wholesome" more specifically as what they had learned, received, heard, and seen *in him*. Not necessarily "out in the world" or elsewhere—but in him. He is, therefore, telling them and us (without directly saying it) to "eat Jesus Christ"—because he, Paul, as Jesus Christ's apostle to the Gentiles, was Christ's agent to them—and their teacher to learn Christ's way of life. So Paul was pointing out to them that they needed to concentrate on what he gave them—because what Paul gave them, he got from the Lord.

This, therefore, clarifies that the thinking on the virtues that he recommends in verse 8 are specifically aimed or purposed toward the Kingdom of God. It is not merely abstract thought about things that are true, pure, and so forth. Rather, it is meditation—controlled thinking—that is directly aimed toward understanding God and His way of life more clearly.

Verses 8 and 9 is the conclusion, then, and the ultimate answer to his stream of thoughts regarding the squabble between the two women. And that is, *if* we put the right things into the mind in the first place, *then* the possibility of things like the squabble between the two women is far less likely to occur—because we will then be guided by what God says to do in the first place.

Secondly, since the squabble had already occurred, the solution to it lies in the counsel given by Paul in these same passages. So, in one sense, we have come full circle and around to the starting point in this parallel between the physical and spiritual eating. The quality of what goes *in* turns the quality of what is produced. Only if it is believed and practiced with patient endurance will it produce good results. And that is why those imperatives—ask, seek, and knock—are all in the present tense.

I Thessalonians 5:23 Now may the God of peace sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

This verse is not defining man as a trinity. What we are looking at here is a Hebraism. This connects to the previous scriptures that I was using, because good health is a combination of spiritual, moral, ethical, mental, and physical. This is what God wants us to seek as a goal in our life—to do as much as we possibly can, in each of the areas of life, to produce the right things.

I do not believe that we can have a really healthy life without a spiritually healthy mind as well as a physically healthy body. That is where this verse comes into this. "I pray God that your whole spirit *and* soul *and* body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." This Hebraism was a common saying among Hebrew people; and it simply means *the whole*—every part, totally, completely. A.T. Robertson, in his *Authoritative Word Pictures In The New Testament*, Volume 4, says that it means *every part of each of you*. God wants us to be totally healthy, as much as can be.

This Hebraism corresponds with loving God with all of our heart, all of our soul, and all of our might. But it is paraphrased somewhat, and it is put into a more specific context by Paul here in I Thessalonians. Good mental health and good physical health are achieved by the same basic processes as good spiritual health and salvation. They begin by putting first things first. And what comes first? The Kingdom of God comes first.

John 8:32 [Jesus says,] "And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."

I want you to apply this principle to every area of life. It applies to spiritual health, mental health, moral health, and physical health. We have to be working with truth. And if we are working with truth, it will produce the right things. But Jesus is not saying here that we will be sinless.

When we combine the principle that we have here with other things that we have heard (even in this sermon), then we understand that being free, freedom, is a process—just as salvation is. It is something that is gradually—step by step—accomplished. Freedom is that way as well. And that is why we have to continue to ask, seek, and knock. We do not get it all at once.

The seeking after these things—good spiritual health, good mental health, and so forth—is a lifelong process! It will not come all at once. So it is *truth* that sets us free. Now, in the spiritual area, it sets us free from eternal death. It can also set us free from all kinds of mental hang-ups, and free from chronic and debilitating diseases.

Now let us add to this as we go on. Jesus said in John 17:17 that we are sanctified by truth. He also tells us (in that same verse) that God's Word is truth. We have to understand that God's Word is not the only place that truth resides. God's Word, though, does contain that truth most essential to good relationships, especially with Him, most essential to salvation, most essential to fulfilling God's purpose, most essential to the abundant life.

But many, many other things—in the physical areas—He has left for mankind to discover and publish, so that it can be known and shared with others. But even here, we have to be dealing with basic truths. And even here, God's Word—in the form of principles—deals with physical things. They are contained within God's Word, and we will go into some of these things in another sermon.

So you remember what the word *sanctify* means? It means, "set apart" or "separated from." It comes from a root whose basic meaning is "to cut." That is, to cut away from others or other things. The basic overall intent of the word is to indicate something that is, in some way or ways, different; and therefore it is separated and distinguished. Those who *seek out* and *use* truth are made different by the very fact that they seek out and then use the truth that they found—especially in regard to spiritual truth. Truth sanctifies for good spiritual health, for relationship health, for mental health, for physical health—if it is used. But, by way of contrast . . .

John 8:34 Jesus answered them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin."

Those who commit sin are its slaves. Remember earlier that I said that the basic notion and concept of sin, biblically, is one of failure—failure to live up to a standard, failure to hit the bull's eye, failure to stay on the path. We find here that there is a form of slavery. This addiction, this deluding energy, produces slavery from these *failures* in the use of truth. We are addicted to, held in bondage to, ways of thinking that produce death, mental illness, and disease—rather than freedom. Sin is slavery. Sin deceives us into continuing the same old patterns. That is, the same old patterns of ignorance, neglect, carelessness, foolishness, and so forth.

One man illustrated this in this way. He said that when the slaves were freed by the Emancipation Proclamation of Abraham Lincoln in 1863, that many slaves, though they were now legally freed

from their owners, remained slaves simply because they were ignorant of their freedom. Their former masters deceived them by not informing them. Truth was withheld from them.

In like manner, for sin to continue in our life, it must continue to deceive us—because we have been made legally free by the blood of Jesus Christ. We have been *redeemed* from slavery. And, because we have been redeemed, we have also been empowered to walk away from error—if we so choose!

There is a vivid picture of this in Exodus 13, when Israel was coming out of Egypt. Did God not say to Moses on the banks of the Red Sea, "Why are you standing here? Speak to the children of Israel that they go forward!" They were redeemed. They had to walk away from their slavery. We are redeemed, but we have to walk away from our slavery.

Let us go back to the book of Proverbs again, and we will finish up on this thought.

Proverbs 29:1 He who is often rebuked, and hardens his neck, will suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.

I want to pick up the thought of being stiff-necked, hardening our neck. Then let us go back to Romans 1.

Romans 1:21-25 Because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts [that is, their reasonings], and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things. Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creation rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

What a difference these verses show between the claim that these people made with their mouth and the reality of their lives. Paul said that these people described in this chapter exchanged the truth of GOD for *the lie*. Do you understand that in every sin this principle is at the base? By nature, we would rather follow lies than the truth of God. And even though we are converted, we have to understand that the law of sin is working within us—to deceive us with a deluding energy that is always trying to pull us *away from* truth and *toward* continuing to follow the old bad habits, in a lie, in our lives.

God is extremely patient with us. He will work night and day to bring us to exercise our will—our redemption—and to walk away from our slavery, by obeying the truth. That is, to be doing things in accordance to His will. But eventually, as Romans 1 shows, His patience seems to be exhausted, and He abandons those who are stiff-necked to their own will.

I do not perceive that with any of us, because I do not see us abandoning God. God is true. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life." And consequently, the more truthful that one becomes with himself and with God, the more he is delivered from sin and its effects—because it allows righteousness to come forth. But one of the major keys to good health—spiritual, moral, ethical, mental, and physical health—is truth! It is our responsibility to *ask* for it, to *seek* for it, and when we find it to *practice* it. This is the life of conversion that glorifies God.