

## Maintaining Good Health (Part 11)

### Self-Control

**John W. Ritenbaugh**

**Given 09-Dec-00; Sermon #478**

I think all of us should be able to relate to the illustrations that I am going to use as I begin this sermon. This illustration is anecdotal. It is drawn from Evelyn's and my family experiences. I'm thinking right now of four people—two from her extended family and two from mine—who were heavy smokers. All of them knew full well that it was damaging to their health. One died at age 44. Another died at age 49. A third died in his early seventies of lung cancer. He came from a family whose members regularly lived well into their late eighties. All of them died of illnesses directly attributable to their smoking.

The fourth is still alive. She is a woman who is in her early sixties. She has two diseases that could either kill her very quickly, or more likely they are going to cause her a fairly long dragged out period of painful disability. To her credit, when the doctor told her recently to quite smoking, or die, she quit smoking "cold turkey." It can be done.

I go into this because people did not need the Surgeon General of the United States to tell them that cigarette smoking was dangerous. That announcement from the government was not made until 1964. Even when I was a boy in the thirties and forties, people regularly called cigarettes "coffin nails." They knew full well that they were taking a risk in smoking, but they were willing to ignore it.

I can hardly think of a better illustration of both the insanity of human nature and a word picture that captures the essence of the last part of the previous sermon I gave in this series, which was "ignore truth at your own risk"—the risk of destroying one's relationship with God, or condemning oneself to slavery of some sort.

We are going to look at two very familiar Scriptures that deal with the principle that we are dealing with at the beginning of this sermon. The first one is in Jeremiah 17:9.

**Jeremiah 17:9** "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?"

Human nature is dishonest. It is underhanded, untrustworthy, misleading, crooked, and insincere besides. It craftily tricks us into discounting plain truths as unworthy or unnecessary in order to appease an appetite or to receive some instant gratification.

We heard from Richard's sermon last week ["Poor Choices"] that the word "deceitful" has a direct connection to the name "Jacob" through the root that both of those come from. What it is pointing to is that human nature supplies ideas, rationalizations which supplant the truth for the lie, and the lie is simply whatever the heart thinks is appropriate at the time. I bring this up because there are several places, mostly in the New Testament, especially in Paul's writings, where he refers to "*the* lie." I think that there is a direct connection to what I have just given to you.

The second verse that we are going to look at is in Proverbs 22. There are two scriptures here that we are very familiar with.

**Proverbs 22:3-6** A prudent man foresees the evil, and hides himself, but the simple pass on and are punished. By humility and the fear of the Lord are riches and honor and life. Thorns and snares are in the way of the perverse; he who guards his soul will be far from them. Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.

When verse 3 is connected to Jeremiah 17:9, and we understand the principle that is there, it is telling us, without saying it directly, that human nature is a gambler. The implication from that verse is that the simple and the prudent both see the same problem, but the prudent man stops himself and turns aside and goes no further with that idea. The simple foolishly sees the potential danger, but he goes right on gambling and goes on and does it

anyway. Human nature is all too willing to put the evil day far off, as we saw in the book of Amos in the last sermon, by convincing itself that it will not happen to oneself.

I think there is a tendency in us to isolate verses in the book of Proverbs and deal with each one separately. There is nothing wrong with that. It depends on what you are looking at or studying into, but there are times when there is actually a context of several verses in the book of Proverbs all relating to the same basic subject, and this is one of them right here. It begins with: "A prudent man foresees the evil and hides himself." But verses 4, 5, and 6 are directly connected to that introduction. "By humility and the fear of the Lord are riches and honor and life."

How does that fit into the principle stated there in verse 3? He is telling us that if a person really does have "the fear of the Lord," he will humbly then submit himself to the wisdom that is seen in the evil, and turn aside. From it he will receive riches, honor, and life. It may not be great riches. It may not be great honor. It may not be "great life" as we would say, but it is going to pay off. That is the point. If a person will humble himself, and instead of being perverse or imprudent, he will be wise and prudent.

Verse 5 directly connects to verse 3. "Thorns and snares are in the way of the perverse." The imprudent person, the perverse person, foresees the evil, but he goes right on and does it anyway. Can you begin to see a theme here? That theme is: We reap what we sow.

Many of us are willing to take warning and turn aside rather than go on and be punished. Let me tell you something that you know well, but I will repeat it again: Human nature is going to try to deceive you to put up rationalizations and go on anyway. Human nature is going to gamble. It is a gambler at heart by nature, and it will go right on, and saying, "It won't happen to me."

"Thorns and snares are in the way of the perverse; he who guards his soul will be far from them. Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it." That is directly connected to verse 3. A

wise parent is going to train his child when he is young to be a prudent person. Then when the child is older, he will not depart from that prudence. He will stick to the path that the parent taught him.

This week, as I was studying in preparation for this sermon, I found that the verbal root of the word that is translated here "train" means "put into the mouth." Is that not interesting? Of course what the author, Solomon, means here is condition the mind, that he does it within the context of eating. We are to put into the mouth—condition the mind—so the child will not gamble, but be prudent and actually help himself along a very great deal in life. The author here is actually taking advantage of the parallel with eating food. If a child is trained this way, he will act prudently, become God-fearing, and humble.

At the very beginning of God's Word, the gambling nature of human nature is shown, and the pattern established for us to learn from. Adam and Eve ignored the truth God gave them and gambled on the basis of Satan's persuasion that they could have what they wanted much more quickly, and have fun while they were doing it. As sons of God, we are amply warned of our responsibilities.

We are going to go to another very familiar scripture, but we are going to look at it from this point of view. Go to Deuteronomy 28.

**Deuteronomy 28:1-2** "Now it shall come to pass, if you diligently obey the voice of the Lord your God, to observe carefully all His commandments which I command you today, that the LORD you God will set you high above all nations of the earth. And all these blessings shall come on you and overtake you, because you obey the voice of the LORD your God."

That is very clear. Verse 15 is equally clear.

**Deuteronomy 28:15** But it shall come to pass, if you will not obey the voice of the LORD your God, to observe carefully all His commandments and His statutes which I command you today, that all these curses will come upon you and overtake you.

On the one hand, life; on the other hand, death.

**Deuteronomy 28:27-28** The LORD will strike you with the boils of Egypt, with tumors, and with the scab, and with the itch, from which you cannot be healed. The LORD shall strike you with madness and blindness and confusion of heart.

There is a direct connection made between disobedience and diseases of the body, as well as mental illnesses.

**Deuteronomy 28:34-35** So you shall be driven mad because of the sight which your eyes see. The LORD will strike you in the knees and on the legs, with severe boils which cannot be healed, from the sole of your foot to the top of your head.

**Deuteronomy 28:45-47** "Moreover all these curses shall come upon you and pursue you and overtake you, until you are destroyed, because you did not obey the voice of the LORD your God, to keep His commandments and His statutes which He commanded you. And they shall be upon you for a sign and a wonder, and on your descendants forever. Because you did not serve the LORD your God with joy and gladness of heart, for the abundance of everything."

Now I will summarize that. Verses 1, 2, and 15 state the general parameters for the entire chapter. Verses 27, 28, 34, and 35 deal specifically with mental and physical diseases. Verses 45-47 give an ultimate conclusion as to *why* these things would come upon us.

Whether the blessings or curses come upon us by means of the workings of natural law or God directly taking a hand is moot. He is instructing us that they *will* happen. That is the way laws are. They work, and that is why they are laws. They work consistently within the parameters of their operations. God will once in a while intervene and take a hand Himself directly because He wants something to occur. We become then an instrument in His hands.

I want to look at a verse in Psalm 90 which was authored by Moses. All of us know situations in which people seemingly broke every health law in the book, and they lived to be ninety, and they were never sick a day in their life. What we are going to read here is that the Bible basically gives reason why this will occur from time to time. It does it very simply and broadly by stating the following:

**Psalm 90:10** The days of our lives are seventy years . . .

I am sure that most of you have thought about this from time to time. Here we are, reading something that Moses wrote back in the 1400s BC, and people were living how long? They were living roughly 70 years—an average figure. Here we are today, living basically about the same length of time. But even in those days there were some who lived longer than that. How long did Moses live? He lived to be 120. How long did Joshua live? He lived to be 110. In Joshua 14:10 Caleb states that he was 85 years old. There is every indication in the context there that he was still a very strong man at the age of 85. What I am getting at here is what it says in the rest of verse 10.

**Psalm 90:10** . . . And if by reason of strength they are eighty years, yet is their boast is only labor and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away.

Some people are stronger than others. There are differences from person to person, and so some are going to be able to get away with breaking laws regarding health that others cannot take a chance doing. What I am trying to get across to us is, "Why take the chance at all?" I will explain this as we go along. God is working something out here because He wants to see what our attitude is going to be toward law in general. God is instructing us that laws are consistent, and they will work. The instruction implied throughout Deuteronomy 28 is for us to choose life.

Because we are given many warnings in God's Word, we can hardly say that God has been unfair. This principle that I am talking about goes far beyond producing and maintaining good health, because what characterizes the sons of God is that they seek and use truth in every area of life. In return, truth's use sanctifies them. It sets them apart for what the laws of God will produce

in a good way, and that God Himself will take cognizance of, and bless besides. Truth sets free—free from eternal death, free from debilitating mental hang-ups, and free from diseases of the body.

What kind of message do you suppose it sends God if His children—those who are called by His name—either do not seek truth or ignore what they do have available to them? Do you know that He says in His Word that He is "*truth personified*?" Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life." He is those things personified. He is our Creator. To ignore truth is to ignore Him. To ignore truth is to ignore salvation. Remember that salvation is that active, continuous process by which we are delivered from those things that bring us disease in the mental and physical areas, and in the other area—the spiritual area—eternal death.

Truth does not come to us all at once. It is a gradual accumulation of those who ask, who seek, and who knock for it, and then use it in their own lives to glorify God. It is not always easily found, and sometimes truth emerges only after a long and confusing search impeded by a great deal of conflicting information. But God expects us to patiently persevere.

It has been said that the American diet can be described in one brief phrase: "Too much, and too little." Too much of things known to be destructive, and too little of things known to be constructive. Too much food, and too little nutrition. I think the critical aspect of this for us is not ignorance, because there is very much already contained within the general knowledge about the principles of good health that is floating around out there. To me, for us the critical aspect is that we are so easily persuaded by our appetites to gloss over what is already known. We are all guilty of this. I am guilty of it. But in ignoring truth, we reveal our immaturity and irresponsibility.

There is hardly a person alive who does not know that drinking Coke is absolutely no good for one's health. Probably less generally known is that the so-called diet drinks, sweetened with Aspartame, are even worse. One 12-ounce bottle of Coke contains 12 teaspoons of white granulated sugar, and is loaded with caffeine besides. Only a fool would sit down at a table and willingly eat 12 teaspoons of sugar in one sitting, but we will do it with a Coke because human nature convinces us it is okay because of the way it is presented to us. It tastes so good.

Do you realize that Aspartame causes disorientation in the nerve impulses to the brain, and it is also a cause of cancer? "But that's okay," human nature says. "After all, you're only getting a tiny amount, and it can't possibly hurt. Besides that, you still get the kick from the caffeine and fewer calories, so you can stay on your diet and lose weight."

Brethren, I for one am convinced that there are physically far worse things for us to consume than the meats forbidden in Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14. These are things that men have concocted to make money, to provide convenience, and to produce shelf-life so that their products will not spoil before they are sold. Remember Herbert Armstrong's one-sentence directive concerning nutrition? "Eat things that will spoil, and eat them before they do." He meant we should eat things that are as close to the natural way that God intended them to be grown, and then cook them just enough to make them palatable for consumption.

Let us go back to the New Testament to Galatians 5.

**Galatians 5:22-24** But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the its passions and desires.

Look at that last verse first which says: "crucified the flesh." Do you know what that means? "Crucified the flesh" means that at conversion—at the time we had faith in God; at the very beginning of the process; at the time we repented; at the time we decided that we wanted to make the covenant with God and so we were baptized—we renounced and put to death and buried a life of sin and all of its wicked passions and appetites.

Let us go back to verse 22 again. One of the fruits of the Spirit—the last one listed by Paul—is translated in the *King James Version* as "temperance." One of the principles we generally use when qualities are listed like this is that the most important is listed first. I find no problem with that. I accept that. But the question to me is, "Why are the others listed in the order that *they* are?"



The fruits are listed beginning with love, but ending with self-control. Is this listing arranged in this order because it takes love to precipitate all of the other characteristics, but if a person truly is walking in the Spirit the fruit will culminate in self-control? I do not know. It is just a thought. Understood this way, temperance is not the least of the fruit but the major goal for practical application in a person's life.

I sincerely believe that most of the time we do not sin because we are in ignorance, but rather because we simply will not make the sacrifice to control ourselves. Were Adam and Eve in ignorance when they sinned? Of course not. Now if this principle were not so, then God could not hold the uncalled—the spiritual Gentiles of this world—guilty on the basis of natural law. Temperance is the fruit which, in actual application in life, will provide the right balance to glorify God.

Temperance, in modern English, is usually applied only in restraint toward alcoholic beverages. However, in the Bible, the application is much broader. Temperance is the noun form of a verbal root that means *strong* in a thing; strength; power; dominion; having power over; being master of. Therefore, its true biblical application is synonymous with the English "self-mastery" or "self-control." It is used this way in relation to general demeanor.

Turn to Titus 1:8. Paul is describing here the qualifications for an elder, and he says that this person should be . . .

**Titus 1:8** But hospitable, a lover of what is good, sober-minded, just, holy, temperate.

He means there that an elder should be self-controlled in a general way in every area of his life. It is also used in I Corinthians 7.

**I Corinthians 7:9** But if they cannot exercise self-control, let them marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion.

That word "contain" is the same word that we just saw in Titus 1:8 and that we just saw in Galatians 5:24. It is used again in I Corinthians 9.

**I Corinthians 9:25** And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things.

This means "disciplined." That is further expounded upon in verse 27, where Paul says this in relation to himself:

**I Corinthians 9:27** But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.

Do you see where he says, "I discipline my body, and bring it into subjection"? Very interesting. Do you know what that literally means in the Greek? It means, "I give myself a black eye." That is what it literally means! Paul said that in order to control himself, he buffeted himself. He bruised himself. He would put himself through pain to keep control of his affections, of his appetites, because he did not want to find himself cast out because he was disappointing God with a careless attitude toward law.

Carrying this further, *Barnes Notes* has something to say in their commentary regarding this same word.

*Barnes Notes Commentary on the Book of Galatians* : It includes the dominion over all evil propensities, self-government, moderation in regard to all indulgences, as well as abstinence from intoxicating drinks. The sense here is that the influence of the Holy Spirit on the heart makes a man moderate in all indulgences, teaches him to restrain his passions and govern himself to control his evil propensities. Nothing does more scandal to religion than such indulgences, and other things being equal, he is the most under-the-influence of the spirit of God who is most thoroughly a man of temperance.

An interesting episode occurs in II Timothy 3:1. This is the chapter that begins by telling us that "in the last days perilous times shall come." I think that is kind of interesting because perhaps the context of the whole chapter involves *the last days*. Paul picks up an illustration from his time, and if it happened in his time, it is going to happen in our day as well.

**II Timothy 3:5-7** Having a form of godliness, but denying its power. And from such people turn away! For of this sort are those who creep into households and make captives of gullible woman loaded down with sins, led away with various lusts, always learning [referring to the women], and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.

I do not know exactly what the problem was of these woman that Paul is referring to here other than the brief description that is given there. Part of it here is kind of interesting, because most modern versions change that word "knowledge" into *acknowledge*. I am going to quote you exactly what Zodhiates says in his dictionary regarding the Greek word that is used here: "In the New Testament it often refers to knowledge which very powerfully influences the form of religious life; a knowledge laying claim to personal involvement."

In other words, these ladies were studying and studying, studying, studying, perhaps all kinds of things. I do not know exactly what they were, but it never had an impact on their lives. It never came to use in their Christian life, and so Paul calls that silliness or gullibility—people being led astray. They undoubtedly had an agreement with truth. There was an admission that truth maybe had been found, but it was not affecting the life of those who were finding it.

The challenge in life for us is not to become a tremendous reservoir of information that indeed may be true, but rather to control and rightly use what we already have while we continue to seek yet more. But truth is only acknowledged when it is used in one's life. This is something these ladies were not doing. The truth was available, but it was not being acknowledged. The knowledge was there, but it was not being used, and that is why later translations changed that word "knowledge" into "acknowledge," because the recognition of what that Greek word means was not affecting the form of their religion.

This has practical impact. I have mentioned Adam and Eve now twice, and I am going to go back to Genesis 3 again, to verses 22 and 24 where God is pronouncing the curses.

**Genesis 3:22-24** Then the LORD God said, "Behold, the man has become as one of Us, to know good and evil. And now, lest he put out his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever"—therefore the LORD God sent him out of the garden of Eden to till the ground from which he was taken. So He drove out the man; and He placed cherubim at the east of the garden of Eden, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life.

I call on these verses because I want us to see how important this issue of self-control is. I am going to pick up on the theme of Richard's sermon last week about the bad choices mankind has made in choosing leadership. That is what Adam and Eve did here. They chose Satan rather than God to be their leader. I mentioned earlier that Adam and Eve could not control themselves to use the truth that God gave them. Instead they chose the Serpent as their leader. The curse, which we just read, that God gave them is that He forced them, and therefore us, to live with the choice that they made.

We say today, "Well, you made your bed, and you sleep in it." It is just another way of saying something else, that "whatever a man sows, that shall he reap." As far as I know, this is the earliest indication in the Bible of that principle. The laws of God cannot be ignored without a price being paid. Now we have to make a choice. *Do we honestly want to pay the price?*

We have not even gotten really to the most important aspect of "paying the price," but we will before the sermon is over. What we are seeing here is yet the beginning of another principle, and that is that the effect of our choices does not stop with us. I mentioned earlier that not only did Adam and Eve have to live with their choice, we had to live with their choice too, because the whole world became condemned in Adam and Eve to live with the choice that they made. God said, "Okay. If you have done this, so will others."

History has proved God out to be absolutely correct, because it says in Romans 5:12 that even though we may not sin in exactly the same way that Adam and Eve sinned, yet we have all sinned. We have all chosen the wrong way. We have to know then that the effect of *our* choices will not stop with us, either, any more than the effect of Adam's and Eve's choices stopped with

them. When we do not stop something like this in our lives, they will continue to reverberate beyond us, affecting others, and our children especially.

How can we put into the mouth of our children the right things? How can we train them up in the way that they should go if we are setting the wrong example as parents before them? The laws of God cannot be avoided. They cannot be ignored. Human nature is a deceitful gambler, and it is pushing us in that direction all the time.

The solution to this is the Spirit of God, and the fruits of that Spirit, ending with temperance [self-control]. Somebody somewhere along the line has to do what Adam and Eve did not do, and begin to control themselves. This whole rotten mess on earth began because two people did not believe the truth, but instead felt it did not matter all that much, and therefore did not control themselves to make the right choice as to who would be their leader.

I know, brethren, that I am encapsulating these events very much, but I am sure you can get the point. You might also recall that very early in this series I stated that virtually all the ingredients necessary to prepare us for the Kingdom of God are things that are already in our immediate environment. 1) There is God Himself; 2) There is the church; 3) There is God's Spirit; 4) There is our mate; 5) There are our appetites, which could be a negative; 6) There is family; 7) There is employment; and 8) There is food, and eating, which we usually do three times a day.

Three times a day we get the opportunity to make choices and exercise control over our spirit and our bodily appetites, making use of truth and glorifying God in dressing and keeping our body. It gives us a wonderful and frequent opportunity to show God that our redemption, at the cost of His Son's life, has not been in vain, and that we are in the process of breaking from the sins of the fathers and from the system whose sins they created and sustained.

Now we are getting to the really serious part. What we have involved here are major principles that parallel each other in the spiritual and physical areas. Since we are all, on the one hand, the same—that is, we were all created by the same Designer and Creator according to various similar

patterns, but at the same time we are all to some degree somewhat different—each of us then is responsible to become a scientist, seeking truth about oneself, and believing what one finds, and then overcoming one's appetites and desires through a combination of vision and self-control by applying truth found in order to produce growth and/or improvement.

Each of us is responsible to begin where each is, and we cannot afford to stand around wasting time, frozen in place like a deer looking into headlights. This is why I went into Psalm 90 just a little wee bit. We might live 70 or 80 years, but then he says we fly away.

I am 68 years old now. I can look at any portion of my life that I can remember, whether I was ten years old, or twenty years old, or thirty years old, and pick out an event, and it seems as though the time between that event and right now was nothing more than the blink of an eye. It went that fast. What I am saying is that the clock is ticking. We cannot afford to waste time justifying by blaming everybody and anybody, feeling overwhelmed because we feel that we have been victimized by life.

Brethren, everybody has been victimized by life. Everybody has been caught in the same entrapping slavery to Satan and to sin, but we have to understand that there is a far greater issue than merely improving health. We are converted. The Kingdom of God is just over the horizon for us, and we are being judged according to the way that we respond to truth, and it has three aspects to it. There is the spiritual, there is the mental, and there is the physical aspect to it. The laws of God cannot be avoided. They are going to work.

The very reason that we have been redeemed is to set us free to overcome our spiritual, mental, and physical victimization. Seriously working on our health is part of the overall picture. Please understand that I am in no way implying that this is easy, but neither was Israel's trek through the wilderness following their redemption from Egypt easy.

Coming out from the effect of wrong choices is hard enough even when we know that we are dealing with the absolutes of God's Word. But when we are looking for truth among the researches of men, it becomes exceedingly difficult. This is not because the researchers do not mean well, but rather

because they in turn have rejected the absolutes of God's Word and they are cut off from a source that would balance out and give direction for their conclusions. It is part of the victimization. But brethren, we have got Almighty God on our side and His Holy Spirit to guide and direct us.

There are absolutes in God's Word that cover in general principle the major important things in regard to good mental and physical health. This difficulty seems especially noticeable in the area of health. There are so many books and so many ideas out there it presents a formidable challenge just to keep from falling into absolute confusion.

This does not mean there is no truth out there, but it does require patient perseverance. It requires a great deal of honesty with ourselves. It does require a considerable degree of awareness of our own body's reaction to things. Unfortunately, many simply do not want to do this, to really pay attention to their own reaction, and then they pay the price because they are not following through on one of God's very first commands to mankind *to dress and keep*.

Turn now to Ephesians 4.

**Ephesians 4:1** I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the vocation with which you are called.

There is a very interesting principle here contained in the word "worthy." I do not remember whether you recall when we were going through this section on the subject of unity, but this principle contains a dimension that pertains to health issues as well. I think that it is something that we should strive for.

The Bible wordsmiths tell us that the word has two basic ideas in it, and both of them are important to this subject. The first idea is that of *equal weight*. In order to get a grasp of this, think of a scale with objects of equal weight on both sides of it so that there is no tilting. It is in balance. It cannot be lopsided. If it is lopsided and out of balance, it is not worthy. Worthy means balance.

In context, and therefore in practical application in life, Paul is saying that there must be a perfect balance between doctrine and practice in order for us to be truly walking worthy of our calling. However packed one's head may be with truth, if it is not being used, he is unbalanced. He is not walking worthy. But it is equally true that if one says his conception of Christianity is that it is no more than living a good life, and knowing other truth is of no importance so that one does not search to expand his understanding of truth, that one too is unbalanced. He is not walking worthy. In my experience in the ministry, both extremes are in the church.

**Hebrews 6:9-12** But, beloved, we are confident of better things concerning you, yes, things that accompany salvation, though we speak in this manner. For God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister. And we desire that each of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope to the end, that you do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

You are going to have to think back to my sermon on Hebrews and just remember the general theme of it, that these people were in trouble because they failed to maintain a balance in their lives. In this case, they had apparently been fairly diligent in the academic aspect, but applying things had trailed off drastically, and they had become unbalanced and were now a bad witness and were falling away from the church.

You can see how bad it was in Hebrews 5:11, where he says, "Of whom we have much to say, and hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing." Psalm 119:172 says, "A good understanding have all they that *do* His commandments." They ceased *doing*. As a result, even though they had been fairly consistent in doing things academically, now they had become unbalanced because they were not applying them. As a result, they were failing to understand and were becoming hard of hearing spiritually.

**Hebrews 5:12-14** For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you 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.

These people had become unbalanced, and they were paying the price. That is one idea that is in this word. The second idea in the word "worthy" is very interesting as well. The word "worthy" also has the sense of "becoming." The translators could have rendered that verse in Ephesians 4:1 in this way: "I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that you walk in a manner becoming of your calling wherewith you are called."

If something is becoming, it is attractive. That word is used in Philippians 1:27 as in Ephesians 4:1, and it says there, "Only let your conversation [or conduct] be as it *becomes* the gospel of Christ, that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that you stand fast in one spirit, with one mind, striving together for the faith of the gospel." [King James Version]

It has some of the same elements within it that the word "balance" does, and that is, in the idea of matching. Something is becoming if it has a matching aspect to it. It means: similar to, adorning oneself with what is suitable or matches.

Today we speak of clothing as being color-coordinated. Because the colors are coordinated, they match one another, and so each piece is becoming to the other. Each piece balances off the other one so that there is a coordinated whole in the way that a person is dressed. He is saying that there should never be a clash between our doctrine and our practice just as surely as there should not be a clash of color or patterns in our dress.

Much of modern music and art is a perversion of this principle because at the very heart of true beauty is the central idea of balance, of harmony, of congruity, of things matched rather than there being a cacophonous clash of discordance of color or of symbol or of sound.

**Titus 2:10** Not pilfering [or stealing], but showing all good fidelity, that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in all things.

The idea is that doctrine is the basic garment of this way of life, and the way it is lived is its adornment. It should match the doctrine. So then life has a match. It has to be congruous with the doctrine, making it attractive, thus causing people to admire it and to be drawn to it.

We are going to go to Mark 9. This has a connection to what we just saw there. I am going to use this as a starting point, a diving board, to go off onto something here.

**Mark 9:20-22** Then they brought him [a boy] to Him. And when he saw Him, immediately the spirit [a demon] convulsed him [the possessed boy], and he fell on the ground and wallowed, foaming at the mouth. So He asked his father, "How long has this been happening to him?" And he said, "From childhood. And often he has thrown him both into the fire and into the water to destroy him. But if You can do anything, have compassion on us and help us."

I remember once hearing Herbert Armstrong speaking about demon influence. This was at a ministerial conference many years ago, back in the early seventies. He said that demons reveal themselves by influencing people toward extremes of human behavior. He did not mean that the people were necessarily possessed, but they were certainly influenced.

I want to remind all of us that we have been affected by this to some degree. All of us have. Have you been influenced by the world? If you have been in the world, then you have been influenced by demons, and we have all been in the world. This is not God's world. Satan and his horde of minions created it, and they govern it. They are the principalities and powers that we wrestle against, and their influence permeates the entire system from top to bottom. This is why John said, "Do not love the world or the things are in the world. . . For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life . . ."

I want you to think of anything that is extreme in human behavior and understand that demons are behind it. They are constantly pulling us toward extremism and away from balance. They are pulling us toward extreme areas of human behavior and away from a conduct that would adorn or match the

truth of the doctrines of God. Demons influence people to anger, violence, depression, paranoia, schizophrenia, asceticism, being a hermit, alcoholism, drug addiction, voyeurism, fetishes, cannibalism, anorexia, bulimia, to any form of behavior that is destructive to the self and divisive of relationships. They will do anything they can to keep our life from matching the truth that we have been given in doctrinal form.

Working toward improving and maintaining our health is an adornment of the doctrine of Christ. It is a stewardship responsibility. One of the things the demons will do is to convince us to do nothing, or they put thoughts in our mind to tell ourselves that it really doesn't matter, or that there is so much information out there it's all confusion, or it causes us to think of many people who seem to violate every law of good health and live to be one hundred.

There might be scores of more arguments they will motivate human nature to think about. Every one of them is really nothing more than an influence toward accepting this world's lies, to supplant truth with the lie. Everyone of these extreme forms of behavior essentially leaves God's influence toward making our efforts prove successful completely out of the picture, and that is the whole point behind the demons' efforts.

Brethren, I believe that God's word does provide the anchors, the balancing factors, the basic truths that we need in order to walk worthy of His way of life in this area, as well as the spiritual, and that I hope to show in the next sermon.