

## Maintaining Good Health (Part 12)

### Our Relationship With God

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What I am about to propose to you is speculative. It is opinion. It is an intriguing possibility the way I see it. I am not the only one who has thought along these lines, because some of us have wondered and talked about it in the past six months or so. I want to say it out loud and pass it along to you anyway, because I think that it may very well be more than coincidental.

The deaths of Shirley MacDonald, Joanne Rye, and Carol Ford mark the latest in a fairly long line of cancer-caused deaths in the church of God. Just this week we heard of another death of a young woman, 32 years old. Her husband is a minister in the Philadelphia Church of God. She died of lymphoma, the same thing that killed both Joanne Rye and Carol Ford. What is intriguing is that a very high percentage of these deaths by cancer is to women.

There is a great deal of communication that is going on by means of email and the Internet of church of God people, regardless of which group the people communicating happen to be fellowshipping with. What I am speculating about here is not something being done in a corner, nor is it isolated in any particular group, but rather it appears to be consistent throughout the entire scattered church.

There are quite a number of institutions, structures, and inanimate objects that are used in the Bible as symbols of the church. For example, the church is symbolized as *a flock, a building, a body, a family, a household, seed, temple, vine, vineyard, Zion, Israel, virgin, bride, woman, and mother*. Have you noticed that almost all of these cancer-related deaths that have occurred these past number of months have been of women? Considering the past twenty or thirty years of the history of the church, is God giving us a message through the metaphor of the *continuing* internal state of the church as He sees it? Disease is what happens to one's body when foreign substances invade it, and its immune system is overwhelmed.

Turn to Isaiah 1. I think this section of Scripture is pretty familiar to us.

**Isaiah 1:4-6** Alas, sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a brood of evildoers, children that are corrupters! They have forsaken the LORD, they have provoked the to anger Holy One of Israel, they are turned away backward. Why should you be stricken again? You will revolt more and more. The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faints. From the sole of the foot even to the head there is no soundness in it, but wounds and bruises and putrefying sores; they have not been closed or bound up, or soothed with ointment.

He is describing there the condition of the nation, and it is a continuing problem that they are having. As we understand it, Isaiah preached to the people of Israel, primarily Judah, before they ever went into captivity. He was describing their condition as if they were one body—one human body. We know of course that it consisted of perhaps millions of people, but God saw it as one body. They were sick, diseased, from the top of the head to the soles of the feet, and the problem was ongoing.

The important thing to us first here is to understand that He is describing the condition of the nation in physical terms to you and me *before* they went into captivity. They were sick. What we are looking at here is a body of people—the nation—sick internally, and at the same time also severely beaten externally. It was in bad shape.

I think that this is generally accepted by everybody that Israel indeed is a type, a symbol, an illustration, an image of the church of God as well. We are to look back into the Old Testament and extract the spiritual aspects of it and apply it to ourselves.

Let us just leave that for a little bit now, and we will turn to Psalm 122 to another aspect of this same symbolism-imagery.

**Psalm 122:7** "Peace be within your walls, and prosperity within your palaces."

What I am beginning to draw upon here is the word *walls*. A wall is also a symbol in the Bible, and we see in this verse he appeals to God for peace of course within the city of Jerusalem.

Turn now to Ezra 9.

**Ezra 9:9** For we were slaves. Yet our God did not forsake us in our bondage; but He has extended mercy to us in the sight of the kings of Persia, to revive us, to repair the house of our God, to rebuild its ruins, and to give us a wall in Judah and in Jerusalem.

The "wall" is the imagery the Bible uses that in olden times encircled a city to protect it from invasion. It is in biblical imagery one of the Bible's symbols of a moral defensive structure.

Now the body's immune system is the body's wall. It is the body's defensive structure. While walls around a city were intended to be impenetrable, they of course were never exempt from penetration and destruction by the enemy. Thus depending upon the context the word *wall* appears in, it can also be an image of vulnerability as well as security. The enemy sought every means of penetrating a city that it could possibly think of. You will see in the Bible that some enemies scaled the walls. Others tunneled under them. Some used battering rams and went through them. Others burned them with fire.

Because walls appear to be invulnerable, they also thus become the Bible's image of misplaced trust. People risked putting confidence in themselves and their structures rather than in God. This of course is going to have a connection and a parallel between what I am saying here in terms of walls going around a city and the human body.

**Psalms 139:14** I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; marvelous are Your works, and that my soul knows very well.

There is no doubt about the truth of David's statement. We are an utterly fantastic creation fashioned from a combination of minerals, water, and spirit, and kept alive by chemical and electrical processes that work

according to the predetermined laws upheld by the Word of God, by His power.

Men may put a title on a disease and call it polio, or call it cancer, or pneumonia, and feel that we have become a helpless victim of it. But in reality what has occurred is that the immune system has become compromised, has become weakened through a series of stresses, and has been *made* unable to defend the body. In other words, the body's defensive structure—its immune system—has been scaled, or has been tunneled under, or has been battered into submission, or as we might say, it has been burned and has lost its ability to defend us.

Another truth needs to be added to this.

**Proverbs 26:2** Like a flitting sparrow, like a flying swallow, so the curse [illness] without cause shall not alight.

In other words, there are reasons why our defensive structure, our immune system, becomes compromised, becomes weakened. It has been *made* to be unable to do the job that God gave it, this fearfully and wonderfully made system to do.

I know that I am greatly simplifying the circumstances here. I also know that what I am saying is basically right on target. For example, there are at any given time cancer cells present in anyone's body, but our body's immune system makes antibodies to defend it from allowing them to gain the upper hand. Even if a brand new invader it has never faced before enters our body, our immune system will, on its own, because God designed it to do this, work to produce an entirely new antibody to fight the new invader.

This happens when one receives a transplant from another person. Even though the transplanted organ or heart may be normally healthy, the person's body receiving the transplant recognizes the transplanted organ, or heart, as an unwelcome invader and begins attacking it to destroy it. The doctors have to give the recipient anti-rejection medication.

This is a very clear example of what I mean when I say that even though we are all generally the same because we are all human and we all have been

made to follow a pattern, we are all yet specifically different because each person's genetic makeup is specifically different. But even under normal circumstances, as with the person normally having cancer cells floating around within him, the immune system can be overwhelmed because of being too weak to sufficiently fight back the invader. When that happens the body becomes diseased, and we begin feeling the symptoms of sickness.

Our basic responsibility in all of this is to balance our life in such a way, that as much that lies within us, we protect the body from the stresses that will overwhelm the system. I personally believe that stress, which does the most frequent damage to the most people, is malnourishment. Here in America we get plenty to eat. Quantity is not the problem here in the United States, but quantity is hardly an issue in *any* Israelitish country because God has so greatly blessed us fulfilling the promises that He made to Abraham. The real problem is in the *quality* of what we are consuming to supposedly keep our system fit.

Let us take these thoughts back to the church once again. "Church" is perceived in the Bible as a body—a female body—in which each of us is a cell functioning to support the whole. The church-body even has cancer cells living in it at any given time. In the Bible they are called tares, heretics, false prophets. They bear some similarity with the real cells. Most noticeably and deceptively is that they are religious folk, and sometimes quite moral, at least in following most of the commandments of God. The world has far more of these kinds of people than there are truly converted people in the church.

What I am getting at here is that these people, who *look* like church members, can overwhelm the church by coming within it. Now as long as the individual cells in the spiritual body—the church—make a strong effort to keep themselves well-nourished on the food intended to strengthen them spiritually, spiritual cancer cells cause no great danger to the well-being of the whole body.

Now notice this admonition from God that appears in Isaiah 55.

**Isaiah 55:1** "Ho! Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters, and you who have no money, come, buy and eat. Yes, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend

money for what is not bread, and your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good, and let your soul delight itself in abundance. Incline your ear, and come to Me. Hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you—even the sure mercies of David."

Before I begin to expound on this a bit, it is essential to remember who is saying this, and to whom it is addressed. It is Jesus Christ, the God of the Old Testament, who is speaking. This is not addressed to the world in general. *It is addressed to those who have made the covenant with God*; that is, you and me. Back then it was Israel. Under the Old Covenant it was Israel and Judah. Under the New Covenant it is the church. These are the ones who have made a covenant with God.

Let us look at verse 1 again.

**Isaiah 55:1** "Ho! Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters, and you who have no money, come, buy and eat. Yes, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price."

In verse one, those who have made the covenant with God are essentially invited to come and eat freely; but hidden within the translation is a tone of pity. It is a plea from Jesus Christ to His brothers and sisters to take advantage of what God has made readily available for us. These same people are also preoccupied with Babylon. Now the way you have to discover this is to look at this series of verses in a wider context than just chapter 55.

When chapter 55 is put into that context, you will begin to see the name Babylon popping up time and time again, even in some cases whole chapters of prophesy *against* Babylon. You have to understand this because Babylon was getting ready to attack Israel. It is still taking place before Israel went into captivity. This is speaking to a people who were preoccupied with Babylon.

Babylon is a type of the world, is it not? We should be preoccupied with the world too, because it is a very grave danger to the well-being, to the health,

of God's people; not physically in this sense, but is the direct sense of these scriptures here. When we look at it in a broader sense, it is a very grave danger both physically and spiritually.

Verse 2 does not carry the same tone of pity that verse 1 does, because verse 1 is a gentle appeal to the people. "Look, I have made this available to you. Come on and get it! It's here for the taking for you."

**Isaiah 55:2** "Why do you spend money for what is not bread?"

There is a tone of incredulity in this in that, "Hey! I've made this available to you for your good health spiritually and physically, but you aren't taking advantage of it. Instead the mind is on Babylon. The mind is on the world. Come and eat."

What we have in verse 2 is not a real strong chiding, but it is a mild-chiding warning that has contained within it a sense of urgency. What He is doing in verse 2 is admonishing us against spiritual food that indeed may make us feel full, but in reality does not satisfy our spiritual life's real needs. In other words in "feeling full," they in reality were malnourished, because what they were being fed spiritually was from the world. It was not food that God had made readily available to them. Rather they were imbibing things from the world.

Jesus Christ does not argue with His people. Rather He is asking, "Does all this really satisfy you? Is this what you are for, and what life is all about?" The clear implication to you and to me is that choices are going to have to be made by those invited to "come and eat freely".

We are going to have to choose what we eat, whether it is physically, or whether it is spiritually. Examine yourself. That is your responsibility. My responsibility is to preach these things to you, and then I have to in turn examine myself. I have to ask myself, "What is it that's going into *my* mind? Am I making the right choices? Is what I am getting out of the world feeding me so that I am strong spiritually?" The physical parallels right along side of it. You must ask yourself, "Is what I am choosing to put into my mouth and going into my body making me full and really strengthening me?" That is what is being examined here.

**Isaiah 55:3** "Incline your ear, and come to Me. Hear . . ."

There are some modern translations that impress that phrase. Do you know what they say? They say, "Listen! Listen!" This is something that a father and mother might say to their children. "Listen! Listen to what I say." Jesus is saying here, "Listen! Listen to what *I* say." "Listen! Listen to *Me!*" And then He exhorts them once again and says, "Eat what is good and your soul [meaning your life] shall *live!*"

We can divide this into two sections too. Live abundantly physically in good health, if we are thinking about the physical life, or live an abundant life spiritually.

Now what is it that we are to eat that is good? What is it that He made? It is what God specifically made for that purpose. "Come to Me, and hear" is saying "It is that which comes from Me that nourishes and satisfies and produces the spiritual strength and richness that fortifies all. I make it strong so that it is able to beat off darts of the enemy, whether it be a physical disease, or whether it be Satan and his demons."

Let us go back to the New Testament to John 6.

**John 6:33** "For the bread of God [the food of God] is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."

**John 6:35** And Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst."

**John 6:48** "I am the bread of life."

**John 6:53-58** Then Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. He who

eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him. As the living Father has sent Me, and I because of the Father, so he who feeds on Me will live because of Me. This is the bread which came down from heaven—not as your fathers did eat manna, and are dead. He who eats of this bread will live forever."

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

Jesus Himself is the "Word of God" personified. That is why He says, "Eat Me." He is not talking about cannibalism. He is making a spiritual parallel between Himself—the Word of God personified—and the Word of God in written form. The food that gives the nourishment, that gives spiritual life its strength and enables our spiritual wall to fight off all of the fiery darts, is *the Word of God*. It is not just the Word of God.

There is a great deal more here than the Passover symbolism of flesh and blood, unleavened bread, and wine. The Passover is only the most obvious inference. Rather these symbols are being used this time in this context to represent the whole way of life, and it strings three Scriptures together. Two of them are in the book of Romans.

Are we not to live by faith?

**Romans 10:17** So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

Or, as many modern translations say, "By hearing the word of *Christ*." They insert that. They admit that they insert it, and they insert it because of the wider context, because Christ is the subject of what Paul is writing. Using "God" is not wrong because the context is talking about the whole communication of the Gospel producing faith in a person, and that including the word *Christ* is justified because it is *His* Gospel. He is the One who brought the message of life to mankind.

Let me explain it this way. In this context "hearing" is eating. Does that make sense? It does. "Eating the word of God." Both hearing the word of Christ—hearing the Gospel—is intended to produce faith, and it is by faith

that we are to live. So in a spiritual sense *eating* is accomplished primarily by what we *hear*. We hear words, messages, and concepts that are ingested into the mind, nourishing the pattern of life to one hearing them

Let us go now to verse 16 of Romans 1. We can use this verse to understand what Paul is writing about there in Romans 10.

**Romans 1:16** For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ [or "the word of Christ" back there in Romans 10:17. Paul calls it "the gospel of Christ—oral transmission of *the good news*]., for it is the power of God to salvation.

The gospel empowers. The gospel nourishes. The gospel strengthens. What does it nourish? What does it strengthen? Faith!

**Romans 1:16-17** For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it [in the gospel of Christ] the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "The just shall live by faith."

Where do we get nourishment from? The Word of God. When we understand "gospel" in its broadest sense, it includes the entire Bible.

A third scripture that we are going to look at is in Zephaniah 3. This inserts a negative into this.

**Zephaniah 3:1** Woe to her [Here we have the female body again—Israel—and it can be interpreted to be understood as "the church" in a spiritual sense.] who is rebellious and polluted . . .

Here we come back again to the thought of Isaiah 1 where we find a badly polluted, corrupted, and sick body.

**Zephaniah 3:1-2** . . .to the oppressing city! [specifically Jerusalem] She has not obeyed His voice [Of whom? The voice that was speaking the word of God.], she has not received

correction; she has not trusted in the LORD [She did not hear, and therefore there was no faith. She did not ingest the word of God. It did not nourish her because it never got in and was not assimilated. Therefore she did not trust the Lord.], she has not drawn near to her God.

When we put these three scriptures together we find then if those words are eaten, and then if we believe, it creates a faith upon which one here bases the way of life he lives. The faith that is created is almost entirely dependent upon what we hear, and whether we will believe the words sufficiently to obey them. It is *only* the words of God, or of Christ—His gospel, His truth—that will form *the* faith that enables us to be saved, because they will form the correct beliefs and therefore the correct way of life.

This is a simple, easily understandable, and true formula. This does not mean we cannot have other words other than God's words in our mind, but it does mean that for the sons of God, everything has to be filtered through God's Word to test their validity before they are allowed to become believed firmly enough to make them a part of what forms our belief. In other words, there is faith, and there is *the* faith—faith that brings salvation. Only the Word of God will nourish that faith. Only the word of God will build or create that faith.

What we believe will determine our conduct and attitudes whether we stop to think about those beliefs or not, because what is contained in the heart will come out. It cannot be stopped. "Out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks." "Out of the abundance of the heart come adulteries, fornication, murders." And on and on Jesus goes. Only God's words truly strengthen spiritually.

It was the failure to follow this that brought about the process that set the church up for the scattering that has occurred. For quite a while things from the world were gradually corrupting the spiritual health of the sons of God, weakening them through spiritual malnourishment and thus changing the faith.

Let's go to another familiar scripture in I Corinthians 1. This was written to a congregation that was badly divided because they did not all believe the same things that are basic to spiritual unity, and Paul admonishes: . . .

**I Corinthians 1:10** Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.

What he means of course is that they all did not believe the same things in regard to salvation. The fruit of that is shown in these two letters—I and II Corinthians. The fruit was disorder, confusion, argument, and offense—some of the same things that caused the Worldwide Church of God to be blown apart.

When the Tkach group came along with their package of doctrinal changes, therein many fellowshipping with the church were sitting ducks. The spiritual wall was very easily breached, tunneled under, scaled. They were severely "compromised"—a word that doctors use today. Confusion, discouragement, accusations, and scattering was the fruit. The fruit of the church as a whole, as a single body, was not maintaining good spiritual health primarily because the minds of the individual parts were not being fed the spiritual food that will nourish the relationship with God.

You might recall that during the Presidential campaign of 1992, then-candidate Bill Clinton uttered one of his most memorable lines. When he said it, it was said in scorn and in sarcasm to then-President George Bush, whose campaign was faltering because he apparently failed to grasp the central issue in the voter's mind. President Bill Clinton said, "It's the economy, stupid!"

Let us apply the principle here. For us now, the central issue in life is the "dressing and keeping" of the relationship with God established through God revealing Himself to us, combined with the work of Jesus Christ in our behalf. Brethren, it is the relationship with God that must be nourished *at all costs*.

Please understand this simple picture. Adam and Eve sinned. They cut themselves off from God and were put out of the Garden of Eden. The relationship with God was broken, and they cut themselves off from access to the Holy Spirit which was intended to be the source of the nourishment for an abundant life and the fulfilling of God's purpose. That is not hard to understand. The relationship was broken, and the nourishment needed for good spiritual health ended. As a result of that the world was formed, and all of its diversions and spiritual approaches to God turned to scale the walls, as it were, to get back into Eden.

Nobody gets back into that relationship except through God's invitation. And once that invitation is made, it then becomes the responsibility of those who have been invited back to do everything they possibly can within their power to nourish and strengthen that relationship that has been established so that they can have access to the Spirit of God, and grow thereby.

Turn now to the book of Hebrews, because here we see again a group of people infected with a problem, and a problem that is one I feel is a major problem that we have had to face in this end time.

**Hebrews 2:1** Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard [so that we can get nourished], lest we drift away.

Do you understand what was happening to these people? I gave a sermon on the book of Hebrews not too long ago.

**Hebrews 2:2-3** For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him.

This nourishment is available only through a continuing relationship with our Creator. This spiritual relationship, like any relationship with a fellow human being, has many facets to it. But quite simply, in an overall sense, we as individuals and as a body, were neglecting our relationship with God. That is why we blew apart. That is why we are scattered today.

This world's spiritual junk food gradually became the source of our spiritual nourishment. It was invading our attitudes and conduct and systematically weakening us because it produced a spiritual disease we call "Laodiceanism." We put a title on it. It is right in the Book. Spiritual cancer is the metaphor that I am using here. It deceived us. We gave the outward appearance to ourselves of being in good health. Our judgment was that we were spiritually rich and increased with goods and had need of nothing. But the reality was, in our hearts the spiritual cancer was eroding our spiritual health. He who looks on the heart saw it, that we were "wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked," just like the woman in Isaiah 1. When the test came through the means of the false doctrines from the Tkach group, we were found lacking spiritual strength. That is why we scattered.

**Matthew 6:24** No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.

This destructive process all comes down to a simple principle. We were serving the self and the world rather than God. We have been greatly diminished by it.

Let us turn back to the Old Testament to a series of some other familiar scriptures in Jeremiah 7.

**Jeremiah 7:1-15** The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying, "Stand in the gate of the LORD'S house [the church?], and proclaim there this word, and say, 'Hear the word of the LORD, all you of Judah [Judah is another symbol of the church] who enter in at these gates to worship the LORD!' Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: "Amend your ways and your doings, and I will cause you to dwell in this place. Do not trust in lying words [words going into the mind supposedly nourishing us, supposedly building up our defensive structure] saying, 'The temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD are these.' For if you thoroughly amend your ways and your doings, if you thoroughly execute judgment between a man and his neighbor, if you do not oppress the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, and do not shed

innocent blood in this place, or walk after other gods to your hurt, then I will cause you to dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers for ever and ever [that is life eternal]. Behold, you trust in lying words [false doctrine] that cannot profit. Will you steal, murder, and commit adultery, swear falsely, and burn incense to Baal, and walk after other gods whom you do not know, and then come and stand before Me in this house which is called by My name, and say, 'We are delivered to do all these abominations?' Has this house, which is called by My name [church of God], become a den of thieves in your eyes? Behold, I, even I, have seen it," says the LORD. "But go you now to My place which was in Shiloh, where I set My name at the first, and see what I did to it because of the wickedness of My people Israel. And now, because you have done all these works," says the LORD, "and I spoke to you, rising up early and speaking, but you did not hear, and I called you, but you did not answer, therefore will I do to this house which is called by My name, in which you trust, and to this place which I gave to you and your fathers, as I have done to Shiloh. And I will cast you out of My sight, as I have cast out all your brethren—even the whole posterity of Ephraim."

This is very sobering, but there is a pattern right there for anybody who cares to look for the causes which brought about the circumstance we find ourselves in. "The curse causeless shall not come." We are reaping, as a body, what we have sown.

Let us notice the neglectful attitude expressed in verse 4. "Do not trust not in lying words, saying, 'The temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD are these.'" The people's trust was placed in the wrong things. Just as surely as walls can sometimes be a symbol of displaced trust—a faith with no reality to it—we can do that spiritually as well. These people, in a modern setting, were fellowshiping with the church, but they were not really "with it." So what is expressed here is a prideful assumption of being above correction, but has its basis in a confused understanding of God's love. That is, these people were saying, "God wouldn't hurt us. We're the church. We are immune from this kind of thing." God is saying, "Oh no you're not." He judges without respect of persons.

There was a time when virtually all of us felt (I am kind of compressing this), that all we had to be was with the church and we were guaranteed to go to the Place of Safety. But it was a careless neglectful attitude. That is what happened to those people in the book of Hebrews. They had a careless neglectful attitude. They were not building their relationship with God. They were coasting along from the past.

Brethren, we have to be prepared for the Kingdom of God. The attitude and conduct of these people, as they were expressing there in Jeremiah 7, is showing that they were just not being prepared. Fellowshiping with the church without the right attitude and conduct fosters this delusion that everything is okay, but verse 10 expresses the extent this delusion that permeated their lives. "We are delivered to do all these abominations."

It is a basic tenet of Protestantism that they are delivered from the law of God. It is this same premise that was invading the church. Now they do not believe that they need to keep the law of God. They tossed the Sabbath aside. They tossed the holy days aside. They tossed tithing aside. Tossed this aside and tossed that aside. Anything that they found they felt uncomfortable with they tossed aside. But they feel comfortable with the world, because that is what has been nourishing them. By ignoring God's moral and ethical demands they were in effect telling God that attendance of the service granted them a relief from the guilt accrued during the rest of their lives. They were ceremonially going through the motions, but a thorough dedication and devotion to God's way in every aspect of life was absolutely absent.

In verse 21 of Jeremiah 7 God makes it very clear what He requires.

**Jeremiah 7:21-23** Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: "Add your burnt offerings to your sacrifices and eat meat. For I did not speak to your fathers, or commanded them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings or sacrifices. But this is what I commanded them, saying, 'Obey My voice [obey my words] and I will be your God, and you shall be My people. Walk you in all the ways that I have commanded you, that it may be well with you.'"

We have been brought into what is intended to be a love relationship through God's calling, through the work of Jesus Christ. It is a courtship leading to marriage. That is what a love relationship leads to. It is a courtship leading to marriage. God makes it clear what He expects from us as our part in this relationship. "Keep My commandments." John 14:15 says: "If you love Me, keep My commandments." Now doing these things does not save us, brethren, but doing those things shows God that we indeed do love Him, and as we are doing these things, it prepares us for living with Him eternally.

Let us go to I John 4. We are still on the subject of "keeping His commandments." It is an aspect of the commandments that sometimes we are deficient in doing.

**I John 4:19** We love Him because He first loved us.

There is a cause, a reason, why we love Him. It is because He first loved us. That is what jump-starts us the right way. Notice the rest of this. This is strong, brethren!

**I John 4:20-21** If a someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also.

**I John 5:1 -3** Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves Him [the Father] who begot loves him also [our brothers and sisters in the church] who is begotten of Him. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep His commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome.

I want you to reflect for just a moment back on Jeremiah 7 once again. As we were reading through there God begins by saying, "Amend your ways." "Change." "Repent. You can't trust in the fact that you are fellowshiping." And then He goes on and makes it very clear what He is talking about there.

He mentions five commandments. Only one did not have to do with our relationship with each other.

Things, brethren, that we have shown God by the way we treat each other shows that our love for Him is in reality at a very low ebb. He says, "Would you lie? Would you steal? Would you commit adultery, and swear falsely?" All these are things that we do against each other, and God then says, "And you say that you love Me?"

There is something wrong with our thinking. It is interesting too that Jesus was asked, "What must I do to have eternal life?" When He responded, the commandments that He quoted all had to do with the same things that are listed in Jeremiah 7. It had to do with our interpersonal relationships with those with whom we fellowship. Those relationships were not good, because we were not feeding our spiritual bodies the kind of nourishment they needed to follow through on acts of love.

It is good to remember that in Matthew 25 Jesus separates the sheep from the goats. Who is it who are the sheep? Who is it who is going to go into the Kingdom? It is those who have served their brethren, because Christ said, "If you have done it to them, you have done it to Me." As you see, they are individual cells within the same body that we are part of. So frequently all of our attention goes to the Father in heaven, and our relationships with each other, even within the family in the church, are neglected. If we do not follow through with this aspect of our responsibility, our love for God is at a very low level.

I want to finish with this thought. What this tends to show is that Laodiceanism is an idol that certainly includes within it the concept of self-absorption indulged in at the expense of others. Meanwhile, the relationship with God, while not non-existent, is allowed to be neglected. That is what Laodiceanism is. It is brought in from the world where God is a figurehead but with whom there is no relationship.

The only way that we can truly eat Jesus Christ is through a dynamic growing relationship with Him, by seeking Him through His Word, communicating with Him through prayer, and wholeheartedly conforming to His way of life and not the world's. It takes the whole process. What is taken

in must be digested, assimilated, and used. You might be surprised to learn how close this is to the physical bodily process.