

What'S The Problem?

Understanding Physical, Spiritual, and Psychological Problems

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Problems are always rearing their ugly heads! It is not always clear why they come upon us. We do not always know what kind of problem we have, do we? Our problems are coming upon us, on and on, day after day, hour after hour. Those of us in God's church ask ourselves, "Is it a spiritual problem? Maybe it is a psychological one? Then again, could it be a physical problem?" We try to analyze these things and pinpoint where the problem is.

Worse yet, we often make excuses for our problems rather than tackling them head-on! And so, even though God has a plan, and Satan has a counterfeit plan, we may have no plan with regard to our physical or psychological health. Hopefully though, we have a plan for our spiritual health. If not, we may be in a sadder situation than we believe.

God always works on a fundamental plan, as is evident in creation and in nature. He is the most organized being in existence. There are variations, of course, in the application and operation, but there is an essential, foundational plan.

One thing is abundantly clear about the way Satan deceives the whole world. He is the great counterfeiter of God and His works. But, he is also very predictable, because he also has a fundamental scheme. His scheme begins with confusion, and ends in destruction.

Although predictable in its purpose and result, Satan's painstaking use of his scheme can vary so much, that at times, it is almost impossible to recognize. If we make the effort, and ask for God's help in doing so, we will find that it is always there. For we know that Satan walks around as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may desire. He certainly does desire to get at God's people. It is important, therefore, that we keep a close eye on God's fundamental plan, so that we are able to discard Satan's counterfeit fundamental scheme. Part of God's plan is that we become complete, and eventually, perfect. Our responsibility in this is to be constantly trying to improve ourselves in all areas, with an emphasis on 'all'.

One of Satan's methods is to create confusion in us between the physical, the psychological, and the spiritual regions of our lives.

We are wonderfully designed and created creatures, made up of body, mind and spirit;

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and these are interrelated and react upon one another. Many of our troubles in life are due to this fact, and to our failure to realize the place and function of each one of these regions.

Please keep in mind that in this sermon I am concentrating on the saints, the elect of God, the true Christians, referring to the physical, psychological, and spiritual regions of our lives. Very little of this will apply to those in the world, although some of it may.

It is very hard to define the limits of these three regions. In other words, we especially struggle with unclear borderline problems. We cannot pinpoint the exact area of our lives that is being affected or is the effect in our problems?

The condition of the church today makes it necessary for ministers to warn people of the source of their problems. The world is bombarding us with physical and psychological pollutions from its sins, from which we suffer with health problems.

It throws enticements at us constantly, to which we react in a physical way. Or, you might say, we give in to desires that are stimulated by lusting after the lures that this world dangles before us.

But, even when the ministry suggests that people change their lifestyle, giving some specific suggestions, they do not seem to relate that the effort that needs to be made to solve the problem is on their part. Many people just do not bother to look in all areas of their life for the cause.

We, as members of God's church, look for spiritual problems to solve, as well we should! But often there is something physically wrong with us that can be improved with physical effort.

Please understand me clearly at this point. I do not want to be misunderstood. I am not saying that our physical problems are never brought on by spiritual problems, of course they are. We know that the penalty for sin affects even the third and fourth generation descendents of the ancestor who committed the sin. God tells us this is in no uncertain terms.

Exodus 34:6-7 And the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children,

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unto the third and to the fourth generation.

It does little good to concentrate on a spiritual problem if we are not going to do anything about the physical mistakes that we are making. Faith without works is a dead faith. To get anointed for a sickness, and do nothing to change our poor lifestyle is irresponsible and faithless. It is not enough to ask God to heal us, if we are not willing to do our part. Most of the time, it is the works part of the faith that healing requires. The reason I say 'most of the time', is that we see examples in the New Testament where Jesus Christ and the apostles did heal people even by passing their shadow upon that person. But, we also remember that Christ told the man at the pool of Bethesda, "Now you are healed, go and sin no more." So, even though there may be a healing without the repentance of sin for somebody in the world, it is always done in a way that glorifies God. When they are healed there is still a personal responsibility and requirement that each of them has to meet to overcome any sin that may be continuing that problem. But, for those of us who are in the church, we have to begin working on the problem before. When we ask for anointing and prayer, we are asking that God will reveal to us what we should be working on, and we are asking God that He will heal us if it is according to His will.

Our human nature leads us to believe that Satan is attacking us, or God is giving us a trial. No doubt that is the case, possibly much of the time, maybe even most of the time. But, it seems we, too often, would rather blame Satan or God for our problem than to admit we caused the problem by our own foolishness, ignorance, sin, or mistake. For us to admit we made a mistake requires that we see ourselves the way we really are. And, many times it is not a very pleasant view. But we still have to beseech God and ask Him to expose and show our secret sins and to help us to work on the ones that we know that we have.

Since the reality of our flaws is not something we find pleasure in admitting, we too often cop out, by blaming our problems on outside sources. We may not say 'we have no sin,' but our actions indicate that that is just what we are thinking.

I John 1:8-10 If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.

Human nature's tendency is for us to deny that there is sin. Some Christians seem in

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absolute ignorance concerning these overlaps where the borderlines between the physical, psychological and spiritual meet. By not recognizing how Satan uses these areas, we may neglect putting on some of the armor of God.

Ephesians 6:10-13 Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.

'All' is all-encompassing, it covers everything. Some misunderstand this passage by exclusively applying it to the spiritual realm. Yes, it is primarily speaking about our spiritual battle. Our spiritual fight is against spiritual enemies. "We do not wrestle against flesh and blood" in spiritual conflicts. But we do have other battles to fight in physical and psychological areas. And, in a sense, they are often related to the spiritual battles. In fact, if you go back far enough to their source they are always related to spiritual battles.

The spiritual realm has a huge impact on our physical and psychological state. Yes, the spiritual hosts of wickedness are bombarding this world with their influence, but many times the reaction to this spiritual influence is on the physical or psychological plane.

In verse 13, "having done all" means 'having overcome'. The Greek word means, to work out, affect, or produce; and then to work up, to make an end of, to vanquish. The idea is, that we are to overcome, or vanquish, all our foes, and thus to stand firm. Sometimes, our foes can be on a psychological or a physical level, ones that we, ourselves, have caused.

The whole language here is taken from war; and the idea is, that every foe was to be subdued— no matter how numerous or formidable they might be. Safety and triumph could be looked for, only when every enemy was slain.

Paul encourages us to do "all" we can. He is speaking of personal responsibility. That includes resisting Satan, the world, and our own human nature. It includes obedience, repentance, overcoming, and producing the fruit of the Spirit. It also includes maintaining good health, working hard to provide for our families, and even something that may seem simple, keeping our homes neat and clean. All of these things work to

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compile the manifestation of good character. Why do these physical things matter? Because we are ambassadors for Christ. We live in a physical world, and therefore, we must witness with a truthful representation of God's way of life in our physical lives.

Frequently, we treat physical trouble in purely a spiritual manner. This approach can actually aggravate the problem because it may be only part of the reason for the problem; so treating it as purely spiritual may not provide a complete solution.

Let us look at the misunderstanding that we sometimes have regarding looking at physical or psychological problems as solely spiritual.

Sometimes we get in trouble because we mistake, what is nothing but a purely physical condition, for a spiritual condition. I am speaking from the premise that each human being is composed of body, mind and spirit, and that is, the physical body, thinking capacity (called 'intellect') and the spirit in man. Jesus expressed these three elements of human life as heart, soul, and mind.

Matthew 22:37 Jesus said to him, "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.'

Loving God certainly involves obedience. We must bring each one of those areas into obedience to God.

We may become sick with some diseased condition and may not even be aware of it. The only thing we know, is that we do not feel as well as we used to feel. Lethargy may overtake us, we may begin to neglect studying the Bible, we may let our prayers slip, and we find ourselves in a depressed condition.

We cannot understand what is wrong with us, and all the while Satan seeks to devour us. Looking for the back door to enter, looking for those weaknesses in us. So he suggests that it is because we are slipping in the spiritual sense that our problem totally lies. He may even raise the question as to whether we have ever been spiritual at all, and in this torments us and causes us to worry and doubt God's hand in our lives.

As a result, we are unable to concentrate as we formerly did, and we feel that we cannot be as active as we used to be. So, Satan uses this opening in the fabric of our minds, to suggest that God is somehow displeased with us, that we are being punished, or tried and tested. We may find ourselves trying to fight in the wrong battle, or maybe there is more than one battle, and we are only fighting on one front. Satan may be waging a

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battle over here and we are fighting over there. In some cases there is a physical problem that, if improved or solved, would make it easier for us to battle the spiritual problem. Physical exhaustion can keep us from performing our regular Christian duties. Physical exhaustion stems from our own personal scheduling of the demands of our lives, much of which we can change.

If a minister tries to help a Christian, who is suffering from a treatable disease, by only telling her to pull herself together and to try to think beautiful and positive thoughts, not only is he not helping her, but he may be aggravating the problem. When focusing entirely on the psychological when there may be physical problems that need to be addressed is only part of the solution. All she may need is the recognized treatment for her physical problem. Ignorance underlies this confusion, but Satan takes advantage of it.

Now, I am going to qualify my statements again, for the third time, here in this sermon. I am not saying that the minister should not give advice regarding the possible spiritual side of the problem. That is what a minister should do, and that is where our expertise is. We are not doctors, nutritionists, or chiropractors. But we, and our wives, have seen enough health problems and financial problems that we may be able, at times, to make good, helpful suggestions, or to give you possibilities of areas you might want to research more deeply in areas of health, finances, work dilemmas, and so on and so forth.

Confusion can also develop as the result of overwork and over-tiredness. We may not realize that we are doing too much in our jobs, or in our own business; but as Christians we feel that we should be working as hard, if not harder, than others. We should be working very hard and glorifying God in that way. So we may stay late every night, or take work home most nights, working many times until a late hour in a tired condition. Or, we may have so many other personal work projects that we never take time to "smell the roses". Especially in this society, we do not take the time to appreciate God's creation and meditate on it, or to relax with family and brethren.

We see that the physical problem is that we are overworking ourselves, we are working too long and too hard possibly, and it is affecting our spiritual lives, which then becomes spiritual sin. Part of the solution for that is on a physical level—it is changing our schedule, changing our lifestyle if need be. I know I found myself working late hours years ago, when I worked for Noxell Corporation. I was working to support my family and working until at least nine every night and also going to school. One day, my wife said to me, "How many days has it been since you have seen your daughter." I thought, and it was three days since I had seen my daughter. That hit me so hard, because at

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that point, I realized that I had been working so long, and so hard, that I had neglected the things that were really important to me.

It took me six months to wean myself out of that, because it was a corporation and it had become expected. But, you know, after six months I worked back to just forty hours a week and no-one noticed. I think I have told you that story before, but it had such an impact on me, a life changing impact, that I wanted to pass that on to you as well. We can change our situations, and when they are physical situations, in one sense, they are easier to solve.

The first thing we become aware of in this type of situation, is that we do not pray as we used to, we cannot think as we used to, we seem to be losing interest; and Satan comes by stealth and attacks us in the spiritual region.

A major part of the solution in this case may be that we need to take a vacation and get some rest and relaxation. And then, come back and try to use a little common sense, to realize that there is a limit to what the body can stand, and that the nervous system must not be overstretched perpetually. The body just cannot stand up to such a strain, as we see being the norm in this society.

This condition is mainly physical, but Satan may present it as a purely spiritual problem. The spiritual elements that are involved, is that we have not understood, as we should have, as Christians, that we have a physical body, and that we are to respect it and not abuse it. The result of this physical problem is that it has interfered with our prayer, Bible study and relationship with God. The cause of the physical problem is the breaking of the first commandment. We have put other gods before the God.

Our bodies are God's property——on loan from Him!

The same principle applies to old age. Many Christians get into trouble along this line as we get older, and our faculties naturally and inevitably fail. We say, 'I am not like I used to be. I seem to be losing something, I just cannot remember.' We wonder if it is a spiritual problem; but sometimes it is purely physical because we are getting old. Not to rub it in to you elderly people as I am looking forward to the senior citizen discounts at age 50 in July.

Take for example, when a woman goes through menopause. She may suffer from hot flashes, irritability, doubtfulness, insecurity, panic attacks and much more. One lady told me that she had such panic attacks that she could not make any left hand turns while driving. It is amazing how bad it can get, but it is a physical problem not a spiritual

problem.

It is not "necessarily" that she has any spiritual problems, but that her body is going through a physiological change that is affecting her, both physically and psychologically. There are certain health supplements that can improve her condition. Yes, she does need God's intervention, but there are also things she can do on a physical level. In fact, there are things she should do to try to understand her body and supply her body with what she may be deficient in.

The same is true regarding a woman's menstrual cycle. Husbands usually know when the cycle has hit, because sometimes his wife takes it out on him. Every man in this audience is smiling, I will take that as an agreement. But there are health supplements that will improve the effects of this natural periodic cleansing. Increased intake of Calcium and the B-vitamins many times show a dramatic change in attitude for the better. Both the physical and the psychological may be improved, resulting in a better quality of life.

We have to be careful we do not mistake the psychological for the spiritual. By psychological I am including emotion, personality, disposition, temperament, natural make-up that makes us what we are. There are different types of personalities. We are not all alike, and we are not meant to be alike. God does not want us all to be alike, He likes variety and that is seen in His creation.

One body in the church does not mean we are all toes. Toes are different from the nose. They look different, have a different function, and they smell differently. Even long-time members sometimes fail to realize this, and they fall into the error of thinking that the moment we become a Christian we should be identical with all other members. When we are not identical to each other, we end up thinking that a person is not as spiritual as we are, and we become self-righteous and pass judgment. We must realize that we all have different types of personalities, and different kinds of temperaments. That is how God made us, and that is how God wants us. We should appreciate all of our differences.

We have to realize, that when we are converted, our temperament remains the same as it was before. A person's temperament is not changed when he is converted. Some may have misunderstood Paul, in II Corinthians 5:17, where he said, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new." He is not saying that personalities or temperaments pass away or change. He is not saying that every Christian becomes identical in every way to every other Christian.

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The fundamental elements in our personality and temperament are not completely changed by conversion. The 'new man' means the new character, the new understanding, the new orientation, but the person himself, psychologically, is essentially what he was before.

With conversion however, bad tendencies of personality types, temperaments and dispositions, change or they should change, because of God's Holy Spirit. This is due to the fact that human nature is replaced by Godliness, and so the motivation has changed. When the motivation has changed then the bad tendencies change.

Some people, by birth, by nature, and by temperament, belong to a depressed type; some are moody; others are indifferent. Some people are lively and animated, and some are very slow. We are all aware of these differences as we run into them. There are also differences between nationalities.

Luigi Barzini, born in Milan in 1908, wrote several books, one of which was published in 1983 titled, "The Europeans". His book describes how the individual national identities have formed, the way they respond to one another, and to the rest of the world.

Each of the seven chapter titles shed light on national temperaments. I am not going to get into any details on this, I am just going to read you the chapter titles and I think that you will get the point.

1. The Elusive Europeans
2. The Imperturbable British
3. The Mutable Germans
4. The Quarrelsome French
5. The Flexible Italians
6. The Careful Dutch
7. The Baffling Americans

These are traits that he sees in these different nationalities. We can all come into conflict, and bang our heads together, and not get along, because Satan is right there

ready to cause us to misuse, or abuse, those temperaments

Again, it is a simple fact that some people are born with a depressed and melancholic type of temperament, while others are born with a smiley can-do type of temperament. Both of those temperaments irritate the other at times.

On an individual level, the apostle Paul seems to be of the personality and character type that was a mixture of melancholy and vivacity. This made him very qualified for the contemplation of either personality. We see in Paul vivacity, enthusiasm, and eloquence. But then he has indicated in passages in II Corinthians 7 and II Corinthians 12, that he was often tempted by depression. 'Outside were conflicts, inside were fears' were his words.

He was a sensitive man, a highly-strung man, but also a man who could be depressed. He was hurt by the Corinthians because they were emotionally demanding. He expected love from them, but did not always receive it and this caused him to be depressed at times.

He was once the infamous Saul of Tarsus. As a persecutor of the church he was violent beyond all others. Paul was always at the top in every sphere of activity; as a student at the feet of Gamaliel he was always head of the list. He tells us that he surpassed all his contemporaries and countrymen with regards to conformity to the details of the law, but in his zeal he persecuted the church beyond all others. When he became an apostle, the same characteristics still showed themselves, without, of course, the violent side of his temperament, which the Holy Spirit enabled him to control.

He did not suddenly become a quiet preacher. He preached with all the intensity of his mighty emotional nature. He weeps, he tells us; and at times had fears within, and was cast down.

His temperament was exactly the same as it always was; the zeal with which he persecuted, was the same zeal with which he later preached the gospel of Christ. The temperament remained constant. But it is very difficult to remember this.

And so, when for some reason or another, partly physical perhaps, or maybe due to overwork, the vivacious side slowed down, and the melancholic side tended to take over, it seemed to him that he was in bad spiritual shape. This physical exhaustion can lead to bad spiritual shape.

To deal with this, he had to recognize the facts. He had to understand what his body

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was capable of. He had to analyze when he was acting emotionally and when he was reacting to physical infirmity. We also have to do the same. We have to understand ourselves, because if we do not, Satan already understands us better than we do. He knows exactly what nerves to stimulate and what distractions he can encourage from our mental and physical anguish. He will take advantage of them quicker than anyone.

Many times people are pigeon-holed into jobs in which they are miserable. I have seen computer programmers do this in pursuit of the big money that flows through the fingers of corporations. God has not given everyone gifts in the areas of mathematics, engineering, or physics. Neither do intellectual types do well in jobs that require a lot of common sense.

All too often, people end up in the wrong profession. I have heard dozens of stories of people who are not working in the field of study that they pursued in college, because they found out that they hated the field. It was boring, it was miserable to them, they agonized through it. There are many people who have stayed in the field that they have hated for their entire lives.

I have known computer analysts and mechanical engineers who hated the isolation of a small booth, so they went into marketing, or sales, because they needed to be more physically active and they thoroughly enjoyed talking with people. They were miserable while in the wrong profession for them. Once they got into a profession that fit their personality and temperament they were so much happier.

We have to understand our own temperament, and our personality type, so that we can guard our areas of weakness and watch for Satan's attacks on them. We have to realize, that although we still have the same temperament that we always had, as a Christian we must not become its victim. When we become its victim is when sin enters in, because we are lacking in self-control.

The natural man is the victim of, and controlled by, his temperament. That is why others find it difficult to live with the natural man. He cannot control his temper, he forgives and forgets in a moment, and does not realize the damage he has done during his bouts of passion. He goes on with life not realizing the damage that he leaves behind.

As for the Christian, our temperament is not changed, but we must control it. We recognize what it is, therefore we watch it and are on guard against it.

We do not allow Satan to come in and make us think that all our problems are always purely spiritual. We must not be victims of our temperament.

Diseases like fibromyalgia or Epstein-Barr syndrome will physically and psychologically affect our energy. We think our problem is spiritual and feel at times that God had deserted us. It may be due to this diseased condition of the mind. Our lack of energy is not where the sin is, but it is a sin for a Christian to doubt God's care. That becomes faithlessness! Even if there is a physical or psychological problem, we have to guard that it does not become a spiritual problem. Physical and psychological problems can make us in a more susceptible situation to sin, in attitude or action.

It is important to draw these distinctions and to recognize them. We must make sure that we are not allowing Satan to distort our minds into over-agonizing concerning our spiritual condition, when it may be explained in terms of the physical, or the psychological.

I am going to qualify my statements again, for the fourth time, in this sermon. In no way should we neglect fighting our spiritual problems. Physical and psychological problems should never be used to excuse true spiritual problems. But, physical, psychological and spiritual problems, should be seen for what they are. We have to ask God for the discernment to be able to distinguish between them.

Spiritual problems arise when something is exalted against God's truth. That is, we sin when we allow something to take precedence over God's instruction; that something may be 'us' in the form of pride or desire. It may be something external, in the form of idolizing a person or material thing. It is anything that supersedes proper worship of, and dedication to, God.

Although the problem is primarily spiritual, certain steps may be taken to eliminate the object of desire. If we wash and wax our car several times a week because it is so important to us, we should get rid of the car. It is our idol and we should get rid of our idols. That is a physical solution to help us begin to overcome the spiritual problem. In and of itself, it is not the complete solution since the spiritual problem is idolatry. But it is a step in the right direction.

II Corinthians 10:3-5 For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ,

Even though we recognize a physical or psychological problem, we cannot let that

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overshadow that there may be a spiritual problem involved. If some people mistake the physical or psychological for the spiritual, there are others who do the exact opposite and mistake the spiritual for the physical and psychological.

Sometimes we evade spiritual problems by explaining them away in terms of the psychological or the physical. Psychology and psychiatry have been a strong trend among professing Christians in the last several decades and that influence occasionally surfaces in the church. Many, many mainstream Christian ministers are recommending that their people go to psychiatrists and psychologists for a source to their problem, and they are leaving the spiritual side out of it.

Much of the time, there is no psychological or physical problem at all. It is a simple matter of spiritual understanding and proper application of scripture. It requires a change of mind and heart to overcome the problem.

Paul explained that the change in mind and heart that must take place during our conversion is like 'putting on,' or 'becoming' a new man.

Ephesians 4:17-18 This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart;

We are not to be ignorant. If we have a problem that we go to our minister for anointing for, we should not remain ignorant on what the problem is. We should try to find out what we can do, in the way of our part, in the way of works, thus showing faith to God.

Paul is referring to the 'hardness' of the Gentiles' hearts. The reason they lived and acted as they did, and their "understanding" was blinded, is because they were incapable of perceiving the truth. They had a mind like all other human beings. There was no deficiency of brainpower. The simple reason is, "the hardness of the heart". The hardness of the heart has to be seen in a different light than general ignorance where a person does not know and does not know where to go for help.

A person who has a blind and hard heart sees no light in truth. He does not feel its force and is insensible to its impact. The truth will make you free. But the blind and hard heart is in slavery to sin.

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Ephesians 4:19-24 who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness. But you have not so learned Christ, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus: that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.

Here, we learn from Paul, that people are to blame for their own blindness of understanding. Whatever comes forth from a wicked heart is the person's own responsibility. But they are not held accountable for their own mere inferior intellect. Some have a higher intellect than others, but that has no impact on accountability. We are judged by what we are given to work with.

Everyone is under obligation to repent and obey God, and we are required to have a "better heart". A pure heart elevates understanding to wisdom. Let the heart be pure, and the understanding will be clear.

No doubt, there is a shared influence between the dark mind and the evil heart. The one acts on the other. The understanding is affected "first" through the heart, that is the will, and it is a bad heart that makes a spiritually dark mind. However, the fact remains the same that, all of our faculties, understanding, and will, have been corrupted if we have the bad spiritual heart.

Sometimes the trouble is that the troubled ones have never been Christians at all. They think they have been converted, for they have 'made a decision to join' the church. They may have been told they are Christians, but have really only acted the part to conform to a group of nice people.

But it is not long before they are in trouble. And, a little interaction reveals that they had never really surrendered or submitted themselves to God. They were either pressured into to a decision, or they had some emotional experience that they mistook for conversion. They simply enjoyed fellowshiping with the members of God's church. After all, does living God's way of life not produce extraordinarily wonderful people? It should, otherwise the group is not part of God's church.

Sometimes the trouble is due entirely to a lack of self-control. What if a person cannot control his temper? The problem is not a disease, nor something you cannot help doing. It is a spiritual problem!

It is a matter of self-control and we must control our attitudes. But it is difficult, we might argue, trying to get out of that problem. Of course it is difficult, what spiritual problem is not hard to control? We need God's help. People today seem happy to falsely conclude that they have a psychological problem that they cannot help. We see in society especially, the justification for obesity, homosexuality and the justification for any number of perversions. They are blaming it on a psychological problem that they claim they cannot help. It is a way to excuse away the fact that they have a bad temper or some other attitude problem. It is a way of excusing away the fact that they are out of control and that they have an attitude problem.

Other sins are sometimes approached in the same way: gluttony, alcoholism, homosexuality, and pornography, to name a few. All are explained away. A lot of people say, "It is not my fault, I was born this way! Or "I have a psychological imbalance." They put the blame actually on God, which is blasphemous and a horrible sin.

Granted, it is true that pain from injury, headaches from pollen, or suffering from bad health can affect our attitudes. It can make our bodies lethargic, our minds spacey, and our speech very sharp. And, as I mentioned, we should do our part by trying to improve or cure our injuries and illnesses. We have a responsibility to produce fruit worthy of repentance with the power of the Holy Spirit. Self-control is a mandatory share of the crop of the fruit of the spirit.

Faith is also an essential fruit.

Sometimes people in God's church approach their sicknesses in a way that sounds faithful and good, but they neglect the works part of faith. That is, they tend to ignore their responsibility in trusting in God to heal them. And, we know that faith without works is a dead faith.

James 2:14-26 What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, "Depart in peace, be warmed and filled," but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. But someone will say, "You have faith, and I have works." Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble! But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead? Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? Do you see that faith was

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working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect? And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." And he was called the friend of God. You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only. Likewise, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out another way? For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.

Do you think that James had a point there that he was trying to make? He said that faith without works is dead in various ways, several times, throughout those passages.

We will never find true faith without a dedicated life. We may see works of apparent generosity and goodwill without faith: but their motivation is to be seen by others, and they have people's applause as their reward.

The experience of human life shows how short-lived such works are. They last for a time, but soon fade away. Where true faith is, there is God; His Spirit gives life, and His love provides motives to righteous actions. That is the key. The love of God, and the mind of God in us, is what give us the correct motivation for righteous actions.

All Godly principles increase when used. The more we exercise faith in Christ, the more we are enabled to believe; the more we believe, the more we receive; and the more we receive the more able we are to work for God. God's way of life is dynamic and productive. And, He expects us to do our part to develop these things as part of our character.

We call upon a minister for anointing and prayer for our injuries and illnesses, as instructed in James 5:14.

James 5:13-16 Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms. Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.

We see in these four verses an emphasis on prayer. Usually, for members of God's

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church, it takes more than anointing and prayer to be healed. Not always, but most of the time, God expects us to do works as well as having faith that He will heal us. Prayer is a very important work, especially when it involves faith and healing.

God tells us, through James, that the effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much. The prayer must be in living faith together with works.

Works are performed in many forms besides prayer. Other forms of good works are: obedience, repentance, overcoming, and positive changes in physical lifestyle. The fruit of the spirit are also forms of good works of the spirit in direct contrast to the bad works of the flesh listed in Galatians 5:19-21. Works of any kind, good or bad, must be actions, achievements, efforts, and exertions. Something has to be done, or nothing is accomplished. With the use of God's Holy Spirit, and the mind of God in us, those works can be, and should be, good works.

Confessing our sins to God, and repentance of those sins is required as well. Remember what Jesus said to the scribes and Pharisees regarding the man who was paralyzed, "Which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven you,' or to say, 'Rise up and walk?'".

After being anointed some have said, "Now I will just have faith and rely on God to heal me."

That sounds faithful. But, right in their statement, we can hear the error, "Now I will just have faith. I will sit back and I will do not do anything". Sometimes we may have the attitude that that is enough. But as we just read, James said, "faith without works is dead". That is a very frank statement! It is a God inspired true statement.

So, if we have an illness and we do no more than say that we are just going to have faith that God will heal us, (when in many cases there is much that we can do to improve our situation through better care of our bodies) are we just being complacent? I cannot judge that, because I do not know the minds of everyone.

Isaiah is very pointed in what he has to say about the consequences of complacency. From verses 9-14, the desolation of Judea by the Chaldeans appears to be foretold. This chapter relates, in general, to the reign of Hezekiah. It is a prophecy for our time as well.

Isaiah 32:9-11 Rise up, you women who are at ease, Hear my voice; You complacent daughters, Give ear to my speech. In a year and some days You

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will be troubled, you complacent women; For the vintage will fail, The gathering will not come. Tremble, you women who are at ease; Be troubled, you complacent ones; Strip yourselves, make yourselves bare, And gird sackcloth on your waists.

This prophecy speaks of a time of affluence, which we are certainly in today, especially in the United States. Isaiah warns that those who live carelessly, even little troubles will be great aggravations, and will greatly bother those during this time period. They were complacent, careless, and at ease because they had a great abundance of money and food, just as we have today. Just because it says women, it can also be applied to the men as well—it is warning everyone.

An antonym for work is 'complacency.' In other words, if we are complacent, we are self-satisfied, while at the same time we are unaware of actual dangers, or deficiencies, that will eventually, and assuredly, affect us. This means we are being willfully ignorant.

Do we think God wants members of His Family who are incapable of solving problems? Certainly not! Our Heavenly Father wants problem solvers. He wants children who can figure things out for themselves—both with His help, and on our own. He wants His spiritual children to apply spiritual principles to solve all types of problems—physical, psychological, and spiritual.

Bad weather, earthquakes, terrorist attacks, and war are increasing in magnitude. Many are becoming more fearful each day. We should not be following the same trend as this present evil society, fearing the disaster that could befall us.

Think about the fact that God is our Father in heaven and that He is still on the throne. He cares for His children, and we are disgracing God when we doubt His desire, and power to protect us.

We have to seek to be a good Christian and to be worthy of God in every way, and we should not waste our time fearing the unknown. We have to stop thinking emotionally and psychologically and start thinking in a spiritual manner.

Some of us suffer from claustrophobia; others from agoraphobia (being afraid to be in groups or walk across a room that has people in it), others are frightened by thunderstorms, hail, and so on. This society's solution is to recommend psychological treatment. But such overwhelming fear may be a deeper spiritual problem.

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II Timothy 1:7 For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.

Unrealistic fear of normal things in life may be the result of a previous traumatic experience and indicate a lack of faith. We must resist Satan's attempts to cause us to blow things out of proportion. It is simply a lack of self-control when it reaches that point.

The same holds true in conflict with our enemies. We should have no fear of persecution, because God helps, and protects us, through all interactions with our persecutors. Moses' encouraging words to the Israelites regarding their enemies (from Deuteronomy 31) are also recorded in Hebrews 13.

Hebrews 13:5-6 Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." So we may boldly say: "The LORD is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?"

We must have faith that the living God who is our Father in Christ Jesus is true to His word. But we must apply our faith, the faith of Jesus Christ, so that we may face our phobias and not let Satan use them to distract us or to diminish it. Faith must be built on truth or else our faith is in vain.

There are two biblical examples that illustrate this point. The first is in the Book of Ezra. Ezra and his people were about to return to Jerusalem from captivity in Chaldea, a long and dangerous journey. They were on the verge of asking king Artaxerxes for protection, when we find Ezra saying:

Ezra 8:22 For I was ashamed to request of the king an escort of soldiers and horsemen to help us against the enemy on the road, because we had spoken to the king, saying, "The hand of our God is upon all those for good who seek Him, but His power and His wrath are against all those who forsake Him."

Ezra and the Israelites, I think primarily Judah, had just told the king that the hand of God was upon all of those that do good and seek him. Here they were about to go and ask the king for protection, and then it dawned on Ezra what he was about to do. In effect, Ezra said, 'We cannot go back on what we told the king about God's protection'.

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They were obviously in a dangerous situation; but if they asked the king for an escort of troops to protect them, they would be letting God down and giving an untrue witness of the power and glory of God.

The case of Nehemiah had similar features. Their position was urgent and delicate. Their enemies were many and active, and they schemed against Nehemiah using deceptive words.

Nehemiah 6:1-13 Now it happened when Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem the Arab, and the rest of our enemies heard that I had rebuilt the wall, and that there were no breaks left in it (though at that time I had not hung the doors in the gates), that Sanballat and Geshem sent to me, saying, "Come, let us meet together among the villages in the plain of Ono." But they thought to do me harm. (This *is Nehemiah speaking*) So I sent messengers to them, saying, "I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down. Why should the work cease while I leave it and go down to you?" But they sent me this message four times, and I answered them in the same manner. Then Sanballat sent his servant to me as before, the fifth time, with an open letter in his hand. In it was written: It is reported among the nations, and Geshem says, that you and the Jews plan to rebel; therefore, according to these rumors, you are rebuilding the wall, that you may be their king. And you have also appointed prophets to proclaim concerning you at Jerusalem, saying, "There is a king in Judah!" Now these matters will be reported to the king. So come, therefore, and let us consult together. Then I sent to him, saying, "No such things as you say are being done, but you invent them in your own heart." For they all were trying to make us afraid, saying, (*just like Ezra and his people had become afraid even though they had told the king that God would protect them*) "Their hands will be weakened in the work, and it will not be done." Now therefore, O God, strengthen my hands. Afterward I came to the house of Shemaiah the son of Delaiah, the son of Mehetabel, who was a secret informer; and he said, "Let us meet together in the house of God, within the temple, and let us close the doors of the temple, for they are coming to kill you; indeed, at night they will come to kill you." (*so these individuals tried their hardest to convince Nehemiah that he should be afraid and obviously Satan was trying to use this situation too*) And I said, "Should such a man as I flee? (*that was not out of pride but as a representative of God*) And who is there such as I who would go into the temple to save his life? I will not go in!" Then I perceived that God had not sent him at all, but that he pronounced this prophecy against me because Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him. For this reason he was hired, that I should be afraid and act

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that way and sin, so that they might have cause for an evil report, that they might reproach me.

Verse 11 contains the only possible answer for a faithful man of God—'Should such a man as I flee?' In effect, he said, 'Am I willing to escape into the temple in order to save my own skin? No! I prefer to die in open battle that God may be glorified, in and through me.'

Things are getting very bad in the world, getting worse by the day. It will come to the point where we will be tested on where we stand. We will be tested as to whether we are fearful or not, and if we are fearful then we have moved into the area of sin. It may very well be a physical situation that Satan uses to try to make us fail.

Nehemiah was an example of the faithful attitude we must have. We see here in the example of Nehemiah, not only the potential for physical and psychological problems, but more importantly, the potential for spiritual problems as well.

Nehemiah saw the spiritual principle involved here, so he discerned his enemy's intention and recognized that these men had deceived him. This inspired him to make this assessment, "that I should be afraid and act that way and sin." Nehemiah said right there, that to be afraid was sin and this is the inspired Word of God.

Whatever the specific form in which the enemy is attacking us, at that moment we must remain faithful. Paul explains in Ephesians 6:16 why this piece of armor is so important,

"Above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one."

We are the apple of God's eye, and He wants to fight our battles for us and with us. David knew this, and asked in faith that God would protect him.

Psalm 17:6-9 I have called upon You, for You will hear me, O God; Incline Your ear to me, and hear my speech. Show Your marvelous loving kindness by Your right hand, O You who save those who trust in You From those who rise up against them. Keep me as the apple of Your eye; Hide me under the shadow of Your wings, From the wicked who oppress me, From my deadly enemies who surround me.

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We cannot explain away our spiritual problems in terms of the psychological and the physical only. Satan will try to convince us to take the way of escape from our problems by blaming something other than ourselves.

We have to be to be "proactive" in tackling our problems. We cannot be complacent. That means we have to be on guard constantly against our own human nature, that so willingly wants to give in to desire, and against Satan who roams the earth seeking whom he may devour, and we are certainly at the top of his hit list. To be "proactive" we have to be practical, hands-on, down to business, positive and upbeat.

We have to realize the truth about ourselves. We must have a realistic view of our own lives. We should have the right perspective of how we really are and how our bodies work. We thank God for the knowledge, the understanding, and the wisdom of His truth that He has revealed to us.

We must get hold of it, apply it, practice it in every area of our life. Since God is not the author of confusion, but has a spirit of power, you will have orderliness, faithfulness and fearlessness based on truth in your life!