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A MALNOURISHED SOUL IN AN OVERWEIGHT BODY?

Today's text: Deut. 8: 1-20; 3 John 2

Extracts:

1. **“And He humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that He might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord doth man live” [Deut. 8:3]**
2. **“Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth” [3 Jn 2]**

*According to recent research results, over 30% of people living in the United States, the richest country in the world, are **obese** (i.e., overweight).¹ Among adults [21 years and above], the figure has jumped to almost 65% from 56% ten years ago. The problem is also growing worse among children under 20 years old. Although poor eating habits are being blamed, the underlying factor is the material affluence that makes such a life style affordable. However, research has also shown that industrialized countries tend to have a higher suicide rate than poor, developing countries. In the United States, whites commit suicide at a higher rate than African-Americans, Asians and Hispanics.² How does one explain such a paradox?*

The answer may lie in the undue emphasis that we place on the body to the detriment of the soul [the spirit-being of man]. This point is underscored by WHO statistics which show that Communist or former Communist countries [where religion is forbidden or persecuted] have on average the highest suicide rates in the world.³ That suggests that something very essential is missing from our diets and there may be the need for us to re-examine our eating habits. Do we have any menu for our souls, which will outlive our bodies? What daily routines do we follow in order to exercise our souls so as to make them healthier? How do we strike a proper balance between our bodies and our souls for our own good? These are some of the questions that we shall address in today's lesson.

¹ Gina Hill (CNN), “New Survey underscores rise in obesity,” www.cnn.com/2002/HEALTH/diet.fitness/10/08/obesity.rise/index.html

² “Facts about Suicide,” www.religioustolerance.org/sui_fact.htm

³ “Suicide rates: As of September 2002,” http://www5.who.int/mental_health/main.cfm?p=000000149

1. Background

We continue with Moses' sermon to the children of Israel as they prepared to enter the Promised Land. He reminds them of how God fed their ancestors in the wilderness for 40 years on manna from heaven. Manna means, "what is this?" and that shows that even the people did not know what it was or where it came from. In today's lesson, Moses explains to the people the significance of manna: "that He might make thee know that man doth not live by bread *only*, but by *every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord* doth man live" [Deut. 8:3]. This is the scripture that Jesus Christ quoted when Satan tempted Him to turn stones into bread [Matt. 4:4].

What is the significance of this statement? It says that bread, that is food for the body, is necessary but *not sufficient* to nourish us because we are both physical and spiritual beings combined in one [Gen. 2:7]. Our physical bodies will one day die and return to dust but the soul will live forever. We try everything we know how to keep the body healthy so that we can live long on earth. That is why we pay serious attention to what we eat (bread). However, when we die, the soul may either go back to God (in heaven) or join Satan in hell [Eccl. 12: 6-7; Matt. 25:46]. The only way we can avoid the eternal punishment in hell "which burneth with fire and brimstone" [Rev. 21:8] is to live "by every word that proceedeth from the mouth of God" [Deut. 8:3]. Of course, many people do not care where their souls go after they are dead. Even for such people, nourishing their souls with the word of God may provide better health and longevity to their bodies. We shall prove this presently.

Like the children of Israel, many of us are at the threshold of getting out of a wilderness and at the point of a significant breakthrough in our lives. Children are growing into young adults, from parental and societal control to self-determination. Students are graduating from college/university and becoming professionals with decent incomes. Some poor are becoming rich and moving away from hardship to affordability. Some are moving into retirement and old age and are beginning to re-assess their lives. Some how, we all are at a crucial decision point in our lives. Moses has advised us to pay as much attention to our bodies as to our souls. Apostle John makes it more specific by saying that without the prosperity of the soul, the body can neither prosper nor be healthy [3 Jn 2]. Therefore, whether we are interested in the hereafter or not, we cannot afford to neglect our spiritual state without hurting our physical well-being.

2. Man's typical day's menu

Let us examine what we do for and to our bodies on a daily basis:

- a) *Food and drinks*

I am yet to find out who prescribed that we must eat three times a day, named *breakfast, lunch* and *dinner*. Religiously, we have come to accept that regime! As soon as it is time for each of them, you suddenly find that you are hungry and you must eat! It is not just food alone. We also drink [water, non-alcoholic or strong drinks] and maybe also smoke. The meals/drinks may be taken in the quiet of our homes or in the restaurants or at banquets.

A good number of people may watch what they eat or drink because of the health implications. They try to avoid the so-called white foods: meat, dairy, salt, sugar and white flour. Such foods are known to contribute to cancer, obesity and heart problems. However, as nutritionists would confirm, the greatest factor contributing to people's poor eating habits is disobedience! They know that salads are good for them but the salad dressing puts more calories back! Who can resist a little ice cream or that cup of coffee or glass of wine? In the end, we do things to excess, to the point of addiction.

What then do we get for our inability to eat well? Addiction (from drug or drink), poor health, immoral conduct and an unstable life. Presumably because he could afford it, Solomon married 700 wives and 300 concubines who “turned away his heart” [1 Kgs 11:1-3]. That is why King Lemuel's mother taught him:

It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine; nor for princes strong drink; lest they drink and forget the law, and pervert the judgment of any of the afflicted. Give strong drink unto him that is ready to perish, and wine unto those that be of heavy hearts [Prov. 31:1-6].

Only God knows and understands our immune system because we are “fearfully and wonderfully made: marvelous are Thy works” [Ps. 139:14]. In the book of Leviticus, reinforced in Deuteronomy, God has set out for us what to eat and how to behave for our immune system to be able to fight off infections. In our fit of empty human arrogance, we have dismissed that as “Old Testament rituals.” Interestingly, however, many modern medical doctors and nutritionists are going back to their roots in the word of God! For example, Dr. Francisco Contreras is a cancer expert who oversees the Oasis of Hope Hospital in Mexico. He has done a book, *The Coming Cancer Cure*,⁴ which documents how following the word of God has led to the significant breakthroughs in his cancer research and treatment. Take one instance of his simple approaches. By administering oxygen therapy intravenously, the body immune system overwhelms and destroys the cancer cells. We all know that oxygen is life giving. The word of God says, “the life of the flesh is in the blood” [Lev. 17:11]. So, by

⁴ “Cancer is on the run,” www.oasisofhope.com/resources/review_ccure.htm

putting more doses of oxygen into the blood, you can then see how that helps the immune system to fight cancer! That way, Dr. Contreras is minimizing the use of chemotherapy and radical surgery. Praise God!

b) *Exercise and meditation*

The more disciplined among us exercise daily to keep the body in shape. Some even practise transcendental meditation. In most cases, such practices may not be based on our personal needs but we are merely imitating popular practices. For example, we equate “thin” with “acceptable” only to discover that “thin people” may not be happy people! We eat right and exercise and yet we are still depressed. The word of God says, “a merry heart doeth good like a medicine; but a broken spirit drieth the bones” [Prov. 17:22].

Here is God’s approach to physical exercise:

*Refuse profane and old wives’ fables, and exercise thyself rather unto godliness. For **bodily exercise profiteth little; but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come** [1 Tim. 4:7-8].*

By exercising our spiritual muscles, we are able to deal with physical and spiritual problems because “the people that do know their God shall be strong and do exploits” [Dan. 11:32].

3. God’s balanced diet!

As pointed out earlier, God made us and He is the only one who knows what we consist of. We are not only *body* but also *mind* and *soul/spirit* [1 Thes. 5:23]. Therefore, unless we cater to the needs of these three components, we are not eating a balanced diet. In fact, the starting point is nurturing the soul, our spiritual being, so that we can know the adequate measures of physical and emotional dishes to add in order to have a balanced diet [Matt. 6:33; 3 Jn 2]. God told Joshua:

*This book of the law shall not **depart out of thy mouth**, but thou shalt meditate therein **day and night**, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein; **for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success** [Josh. 1:8]*

Let us do a menu God’s way. Here, we start from the soul, followed by the mind. The body comes last!

a) *Soul*

The Psalmist says, “as the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after Thee, O God. *My soul thirsteth for God*, for the living God; when shall I come and appear before God?” [Ps. 42:1-2]. We need such an insatiable hunger for God.

This appetite cannot be physical. The Preacher says, “a wise man’s heart is at his right hand; but a fool’s heart at his left” [Eccl. 10:2]. We all know that the physical heart that pumps blood is on the left side of the human anatomy, not the right side. So, if the wise man’s heart is at his right hand, you have to accept it by faith, not by sight! Therefore, what God is telling us is that we need faith in Him to be able to thirst after Him, for “without faith it is impossible to please Him” [Heb. 11:6]. Who is a fool before God? The person that does not acknowledge Him “for the fool hath said in his heart, there is no God” [Ps. 14: 1]. On the other hand, “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” [Ps. 111:10], and “a sound heart is the life of the flesh” [Prov. 14:30]. Therefore, we cannot have a balanced diet if we do not know God.

b) *Mind*

The mind is the gateway between our physical and spiritual selves. It can be carnal [if it is worldly-minded] or spiritual [if it is God-minded]. If we are carnally minded, these are the works that we exhibit: “adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings and such like things” [Gal. 5:19-21]. On the other hand, if we are spiritually minded, we demonstrate love, joy, peace, goodness, faith and perseverance, among others [vv 22-23]. Therefore, to avoid being carnally minded which leads to death [Rom. 8:6], we need to renew our minds [Rom. 12:2] in order to have life and peace [Rom. 8:6]. Only God’s menu can give us that privilege.

c) *Body*

Once we have cultivated the habits of obedience in matters concerning God, we will also know how to nourish our body, which is the temple of the living God [2 Cor. 6:16-18]. Recognising that our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit [1 Cor. 6:19] will remind us to avoid wines and strong drinks [Lev. 10: 9; Num. 6: 3; Deut. 14: 26; Lk 1: 15], and to eat and drink with moderation [Rom. 14:17; 1 Tim. 5:23]. Even when believers eat or drink any deadly thing, by way of high calorie or cancer-causing intakes, “it shall not hurt them” [Mk 16: 18].

4. Conclusion: here is the cookbook!

God knows our immune system because He created us. Therefore, He is the only one qualified to tell us how to keep our body, mind and soul in perfect balance. The key to total health is to know God's will for us. Here is what His word has said about His will:

a) *Abstain from sexual immorality*

“For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication” [1 **Thes. 4:3**]. That is clear enough!

b) *Do good*

Peter has admonished believers not to use their freedom as a “cloke of maliciousness” but as the servants of God “for so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men” [1 **Pet. 5: 15-16**]. Helping people who are less privileged than we are can give us joy, which no sumptuous food and drink can give.

c) *The will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you*

We are to “rejoice evermore” [1 **Thes. 5: 16**]. Research has shown that laughter strengthens our immune system and actually increases our intellectual performance while boosting information retention.⁵ That is why “a merry heart doeth good like a medicine but a broken spirit drieth the bones” [Prov. 17:22]. Learn to laugh and smile and make the devil and your enemies mad!

Under the same unction, we are to “pray without ceasing” [1 **Thes. 5:17**]. The Psalmist prayed 7 times a day [Ps. 119: 164]. Apart from your morning devotional prayers, at what other times do you pray or study the word of God? Can you afford to stay only on your breakfast all day? Therefore, learn the habit of praying all the time: on waking up, over food, on leaving and returning home, on getting to or leaving your place of work or study, on starting or ending meetings, on taking any decisions, on receiving good or bad news, etc. We are to study His word day and night [Josh. 1:8].

Going with praying always is to “in everything, give thanks” [1 **Thes. 5:18**]. Some of us are so ungrateful! If the air you breathe freely were to be supplied by a state monopoly, could you afford to buy for a minute's use? So, let us learn to thank God and those people that He uses to bless us everyday.

The best way to stay healthy and live long is to offer your body as a living sacrifice to God [Rom. 12:1]. Then, His joy will become your strength [Neh. 8:10]. So, nourish your soul so that it can prosper your mind and body.

⁵ Annette Goodheart, Ph.D., MFCC, “Laughter Therapy,” www.teehee.com