

## **Bible Study on The Christian Home – Handout 9**

### ***Developing a Christian Home Environment***

**Grace Bible Chapel**

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Pastor/Teacher Jim Bryant

#### **What is our responsibility regarding physical health?**

##### **● Introduction:**

- There are three major areas of personal responsibility and accountability for any person – spiritual, social, and physical. These relate to the home because of the intertwining of family relationships. All who love others want the best for them in all aspects of their life. We have already addressed both the spiritual and social responsibilities of members of the family. Physically many of the infirmities that inflict mankind have no root in personal accountability, but there are others that are rooted in personal choices either good or poor decisions. There is therefore also a physical responsibility that each of us must be aware and personally address. What affects one member of the family, either directly or indirectly affects all members of the family. This is also true in the larger Christian family and community. For example, a dad who cannot physically work to provide for his family has a major affect on the well being of the family. The same is true within the church family. A Christian who is ill will be hampered in their ability to serve the church or its members, but instead will need to be served by others. It is for this reason John made this a part of his personal prayer in 3rd John 2.
- Many Christians focus responsibly on spiritual accountability but place little credence on the social and physical. This is because the Bible's primary focus is on the spiritual. The social has its relevance in relationships both in temporary arrangements in this life, but also in the eternal. The spiritual has temporary benefit, but more importantly eternal benefit. Therefore, the physical to a Christian is often considered a temporary lesser matter. No person familiar with the Bible can argue that the physical is relegated as of lesser value. However, the value of the physical comes as it relates to the ability it provides in service to one another, and ultimately to God (Is 40:29-31). The physical has a direct, not opposing relationship with the spiritual. Our lives require physical activity, and there is a direct relationship associated with physical ability and productivity. As the physical therefore relates and serves the social and spiritual or causes these to suffer, the significance of physical health has its value. Physical health finds its value not in itself, but as it provides the ability to serve the Lord. This is the context it will be addressed.
- The world in contradiction to the Bible is focused largely and almost exclusively on the physical (Mat 6:31-32). This is because the world is focused on the immediate, and what can be seen. The health clubs are packed with persons working out, and the neighborhood sidewalks are filled with individuals jogging. The media is ripe with physical beauty, youth, and vitality. Yet, on the other hand there are many today with self imposed physical infirmities, and problems. The doctor offices are busy, and the pharmacies active. Many Christians are caught in the midst of this confusion - aware of the world's over-emphasis on the physical, Christians tend to focus all their emphasis on the inner beauty or spiritual, and sometimes to the neglect of the physical.
- Christians should constantly be aware they are under assault (1 Pet 5:8; Eph 6:11). The strategy of Satan's assault is not limited to doctrines and theology. Satan is an accuser (Rev 12:10). If he can destroy Christian testimony, by getting Christians to be mastered by food, drink, smoking, or an undisciplined physical life that will ruin health and negatively effect testimony, he will do whatever it takes. This is why Paul made an issue of not being "mastered" by anything (1 Cor 6:12). In the same context, Paul stated that our bodies are the Temple of God. We belong to God. Therefore it is inappropriate for a Christian to do anything with their body that is dishonoring or brings a reproach to the Lord, or is otherwise destructive of that which belongs to Him (1 Cor 6:19-20). This must include known behavior that is destructive to health and the ability to serve, and or behavior that causes a loss of testimony. Christians therefore have a direct responsibility related to physical well-being (1 Cor 3:16-17). The physical with any person has a direct correlation to the spiritual of that person.

- **The Physical in relation to the fall:**

- The world of creatures around us, under the curse (Gen 3:19), are in a constant state of decay. At any studied direction or level there is occurring a continuing degenerative change. The rate of degenerative change is different for different creatures, but the degenerative process cannot ultimately be stopped or defeated. Degeneration and death occurs to every living thing. The fact that some die before others is ultimately based in the sovereignty of God, but always associated in that sovereignty is human actions and personal responsibility and accountability (Ecc 7:17).
- Within the bounds of the degenerative change there are degrees of health and strength, and these are to some extent maintained or improved by the wise or foolish actions of each person (Prov 3:1-2). This can affect not only the quality of life, but certainly has some relationship with the length of life (Ps 90:10). As with the spiritual, there is a management responsibility that each person has in relation to their own body.

- **Three major physical areas of responsibility: eating, exercise, and rest.**

- Eating as an aspect of physical health:
  - Eating before the fall shows that the accountability factor has always been present. It was present even before the curse in the form of God's command for the best interest of Adam and Eve. God has always had laws in place to guide and protect. It is also interesting that what we eat continues to have some relation to the preserving of life in the eternal order (Gen 3:22; Rev 22:2).
  - Eating under the theocracy of Israel consisted of dietary laws given by God. The Scriptures emphatically associate these laws with the holiness of God, and the purity of service and obedience to Him. The Law of Purity (Lev.11-16) was placed side by side with the Law of Holiness (Lev.17-26). The regulations regarding uncleanness set Israel apart from other nations. These were physical object lessons of God's holiness which could not co-exist with the uncleanness of Sin. It is also obvious that these laws were also beneficial physically to Israel. For example, God made clear distinctions between clean and unclean animals to Israel at a time when germs, bacteria, and disease were not understood. Some creatures carry more disease and have more potential for harm when eaten than do other creatures. A careful study of Leviticus 11 and Deut 14 show these same creature distinctions and characteristics today under the knowledge of 21<sup>st</sup> century understanding of disease. The practical meaning behind this – man must be considerate, thoughtful, and wise about eating habits. Food can keep a person healthy or make them sick. It is not unreasonable to suggest that many people during history have died from what they have eaten (2 Kings 4:40). A lack of appropriate nutrition in any area can also lead to weakness and illness (1 Tim 5:23). One of the blessings of our time is the availability of information on nutrition as well as supplements to aid in health.
  - Proverbs 25:16; 27 gives warning about eating honey (sugar or sweets) in excess. The affect of eating sweets excessively is generally not immediate. Over time the affect is shown in excess weight, and increased potential for harmful diseases such as diabetes, kidney, liver, and heart damage. This is also true in drinking alcohol to excess, or to any form of smoking. With alcohol there are immediate effects of drunkenness, but also long term effects on the body that may lead to premature death. The same long term detrimental affects are true with smoking.
  - The process of death is slow - there is a spiritual reality given in Ecclesiastes 8:11 which states that because a penalty against disobeying a law or principle is not immediate, the attitude of man is not affected so that he continues in the disobedience. This principle holds true in the realm of physical health. Disease processes do not appear over night. For example, cancer symptoms can take 5-20 years to develop. Atherosclerosis (hardening of the arteries) doesn't produce a heart attack or high blood pressure the minute it began forming years back. Nor does obesity which leads to many physical problems appear over night. The bottom line is this. We have a responsibility to take care of the temple of God by practicing wisdom regarding the practices we engage for our physical well-being.
  - Although obesity is more accepted today because of the affluence of our society, there is within the Word of God a clear reference to those noted for overeating (gluttony) in a non-flattering context (Deut 21:20; Prov 23:20-21; 28:7; Titus 1:12). This overeating is

associated with both health (Ecc 7:17), activity (Prov 23:20-21; Titus 1:12), and testimony (Duet 21:20; Prov 28:7; Phil 3:19). The word “sensible” in Titus 1:8 (describing the qualifications of an elder) and Titus 2:2 (describing what older men should be like as men of God) is the Greek word *sophron* meaning self-controlled or moderate, and the word “self-controlled” *egkrates* has a similar idea with its meaning - masterful, with the idea that one is not to be mastered by anything. The references in both are to physical living. So the Word states that the testimony of the man of God should be one of not being mastered by anything but Jesus Christ (compare Rom 16:18 with Rom 1:1). Therefore in everything, including eating, the person should be using moderation even for the sake of testimony.

- In 1 Sam 4:18 we read of the conclusion of Eli’s life. He was an unusual man. On the one side his love of God is demonstrated even by His love and concern for the things of God (in the context the “Ark of the Covenant”), but on the other side his life was characterized by a lack of discipline in regard to his own sons, and also it is seen in his personal habits (he was heavy, or well overweight). This condition of his lack of personal discipline with his son’s fed God’s actions against Israel, and his overweight condition also contributed to Eli’s death when he fell. Our lives must be consistent in our service and testimony in all areas.
- In summary - we must not function without carefully considering what and how much we eat or drink as if there are no consequences. God has included within the course of life many blessings, but also has included penalties or effects from man’s abuse or unwise actions. These penalties are shown from eating that which should not be eaten or consumed, or which is poorly prepared, and or eating and drinking things in excess. For those of us who have those tendencies, this should serve as a thoughtful admonition.
- Exercise as an aspect of physical health:
  - 1<sup>st</sup> Timothy 4:8 informs us “bodily discipline is only of little profit.” Some translations (including the KJ) translate the term “bodily discipline” into the word “exercise.” Bodily discipline here must be understood in the context to refer to abstaining from certain foods (see verse 4:3, also Col 2:21-23). The discipline described is denying the body in order to be more religious. Paul states that true godliness is far more profitable. True godliness is defined in verse 4:12-13 and centers around knowing God and living the life of faith. It is misleading in today’s language to translate “discipline” into the word “exercise” as some translations have done. However, even if it is translated exercise, as being in a similar category with fasting, it does not state one should not do it. In fact it states it has some value as indicated by the statement “since it holds promise for the present life.” Paul is making a contrast of values. Paul says (1 Tim 4:7b) the greater value is to “discipline yourself for the purpose of Godliness.”
  - A better understanding of exercise is in 1 Cor 9:24-27. Paul here makes the analogy of his service to God as similar to an athlete in competition – what does an athlete do? He trains his body to be prepared to compete in the rigors of the competition. In verse 24 he states “run in such a way that you may win.” The idea is that thought, planning, emphasis, and effort must be put into what is the goal to be accomplished. In verse 25 he uses the metaphor that “everyone who competes in the games exercises self control in all things.” They do whatever is known and necessary to keep their body prepared to meet the goal of winning. In verse 26 he indicates that the hardship of personal discipline is specific to the overall purpose of service to God, and in verse 27 he seeks to make his body subservient to meeting the requirements of service to God. This shows a clear need for you and I to do whatever we can to serve God to the fullest. In order to do the spiritual, we must also have a physical body that is up to the task – just as the athlete competing to win. In Titus 3:8 (also a pastoral epistle) God wants us to be engaged in good deeds. We cannot be engaged in good deeds to the fullest measure if our bodies are not up to the task to perform the deeds.
  - Anyone with a yard or garden knows it takes constant attention, maintenance and effort to keep things either looking good or producing the best result (Prov 12:11; 28:19; 2 Tim 2:5-6; Heb 6:7-8). A good example is fruit trees. If you were to compare two trees, one which you simply do nothing with, the other you pruned, fertilized, kept insects away, etc.; the neglected tree may grow fruit, but the fruit will not be as large and nourishing, or the tree as

healthy. The human body and human health is no different, and needs a certain care and attention that cannot be ignored without problems developing.

- In the physical world under the curse every matter needs attention, if we do too little, we pay the price of poor products, lousy service, lost business and lost productivity. In the same manner neither will our bodies provide us with good health without a wise and consistent effort. Any person experiencing the loss of use of a limb will see their muscle atrophy and shrink in six weeks. Unless there is purposeful attention in our otherwise sedentary society the person will experience the full measure of the process of degeneration at a rapid pace (2 Cor 4:16; 1 Pet 1:24). What every Christian should desire to do, as much as it is possible for them to do, is live out their days in high service to God (Deut 34:7; Joshua 14:11). In the day of Moses and Caleb, the requirement of daily chores and travel as a way of life provided significant physical exercise. Their environment for most of us cannot be measured against the sedentary lives most live today, and thus the need for a regimen of maintenance exercise. Fitness is maintenance of the human body through enough activity to stimulate the systems of the body to maintain optimum health.
- In summary – Exercise is important to help ward off the effects of aging and degeneration. Our goal in exercise should not be to improve the quality of our bodies for vanity (1 Sam 16:7; Prov 31:30; 1 Pet 3:3-4). Rather, the goal of exercising should be to improve our physical health so we will possess more physical ability that we can devote to living for Christ.
- Rest as an aspect of physical health:
  - Living, working, and serving are exhausting. We are finite creatures, easy to tire out. Our physical condition has a strong impact on relationships and our ability to be a blessing to one another. It takes physical energy to listen to others, and to put their needs first. Everyone at some time has gone through the motions of attempting to pay attention, and yet they were simply too tired. Think of the disciples who could not even stay awake with Christ before the cross (Mat 26:41), or the young man who went to sleep during Paul's preaching and fell out of the window (Acts 20:9). In Luke 8:23 even our Lord in His humanity fell asleep on Lake Galilee during a mighty storm. We are creatures who must have rest.
  - The physical body has significant limitations. When we do not rest, we cannot think clearly, cannot function appropriately, are prone to be cranky, defensive, and critical. When our bodies are weak from exhaustion, we are susceptible to disease, infection, and illness. The short term symptoms are easy to observe, but the long term wear on a body not receiving adequate rest is a factor related to aging and degeneration.
  - God knew that many men would drive themselves beyond the point of exhaustion to attempt to "get ahead," and therefore under the theocracy of Israel He established the seventh day rest, as well as other resting laws for the land, and even slaves on the seventh year (Ex 23:11-12). To show the absolute necessity of this rest, He established the death penalty for its violation (Ex 31:15). God established this as a physical metaphor for trust in Him, and this rest association as a metaphor for trust is expounded in Hebrews 3 and 4. Today, there are many trying to get ahead by physically doing more than they are capable, because they do not rest. They drink products specifically designed to boost energy. This has led to many a late night auto wreck and death, as well as many other tragic situations. In Mark 6:31 the Lord insisted His disciples come away with Him from the crowds that they might find rest.
  - In summary – God intended for man to work hard, but also to rest. It is part of living wisely. Rest is a physical blessing, and within the boundaries of wisdom is essential for health both in the short term, and long term. The Christian should live a wise and disciplined life in every area including rest.
- **Conclusion:** Let us in all things remember that we are "ambassadors for Christ" (2 Cor 5:20), and that we are not our own (1 Cor 6:20). We are to "make the most of our time" (Eph 5:16). These admonitions are both spiritual and physical, and are important for anyone professing Christ. For married couples and parents, physical health is essential both in the marriage and for the ability to rear children. For any Christian, your ability to serve is directly affected by your physical strength, and therefore your personal health is important, and you should be making health choices so that as much as it depends on you – you can "present your body a living sacrifice" (Rom 12:1). This like all aspects of the Christian life must be worked out with "fear and trembling" (Phil 2:12).