



FEED MY SHEEP

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Heart Problems

For the past several months we have been studying about the heart and its connection with the mind. We have learned that the mind is not limited to the gray matter in our skulls but is in fact literally in our hearts as well. Medical science has been gradually acknowledging and proving that our mental and spiritual condition is often reflected in conditions in our physical bodies. With that in view, it seemed appropriate to take an analogical look at the physical heart.

We shall identify some physical heart problems and then relate them to the soul (the mind, will and emotions) and the spiritual aspects of life. What we shall set forth in this issue is not meant to be taken as scientific or medical facts. We are merely making analogies between various heart problems and what we see as their spiritual counterparts — all of this for the purpose of encouraging all Christians to grow beyond their current level of maturity and to guard against these problems.

Everyone has a physical heart problem. It is called mortality. Eventually, each and every person will suffer heart failure in one form or another. That is to say, we are cursed with death. As sons of Adam, we are all doomed to die. We will all reach a stage in life where the old ticker just quits ticking. Why? Because of sin. Not your personal sins, but because of Adam's sin. We inherited mortality from Adam. Thus we all inherit the type of heart that is described in the book of Jeremiah.

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

Many of us have probably thought that this deceitfulness of our hearts referred to our natural and carnal proclivities to deceive others. But who is deceived above all others by our hearts? Do not our hearts deceive our *selves* more than anyone else? This deception is accomplished by the mechanism described in Proverbs, chapter 14.

Proverbs 14:12 There is a way which seemeth right [feels right, by the carnal thinking, by the carnal desires and by the carnal emotions] **unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.**

Look again at that pregnant verse in Jeremiah as we emphasize another aspect.

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

Curiously, this is the only instance in the Scriptures where this Hebrew word is translated as “desperately wicked.” Five times it is translated as “incurable” and several other times as “sick.” It also means “weak” and “frail.” Our hearts are weak, frail and incurably sick. That is the proper meaning of this particular phrase. Nonetheless, there are numerous other references in the Bible to the wicked heart or to the evil heart of man so that this mistranslation does no damage to the doctrine of the innate, fallen nature of man. If we were not fallen creatures, we would not die; we would have no heart problems. The three leading types of heart disease are arteriosclerosis, hypertension and rheumatic fever.

Rheumatic fever

Let's examine these heart problems from a spiritual perspective. Rheumatic fever affects the heart valves and occurs most often in children. Spiritually, think of babes in Christ...new Christians. Rheumatic fever is responsible for much serious heart disease later on in their adult lives. It is caused by the common streptococcus bacteria, the same group of bacteria that causes blood poisoning and scarlet fever. The damage sometimes done by the strep bacteria is to the heart valves so that the blood cannot flow through them normally.

Spiritually speaking, bacterial poisoning can be likened to false doctrine. This bacterial poisoning affects the blood (the spiritual life/soul) of the victim. The life/soul is in the blood. (Lev. 17:11). As an example, let's relate this to the false doctrine that the laws of God are no longer in effect. When a babe in Christ is taught that pernicious doctrine, he is being infected with a spiritual bacteria which can greatly hinder the flow of blood (greater spiritual truths, greater spiritual nourishment) and this can stunt his spiritual growth for the rest of his life.

The antinomian Christian is left in a weakened spiritual state. He cannot be a strong and bold Christian soldier because he has had spiritual rheumatic fever, a serious and usually permanent heart condition. If he were to get too strenuous in his warfare activities against the forces of evil, he just might have a spiritual heart attack and expire on the spot. Consequently, this spiritual streptococcus bacteria leaves a path of weak and neutralized Christians in its wake. Jesus was referring to Christians like these when he taught the parable of the salt that has lost its saltiness. Such Christians are good for nothing in spiritual warfare. They are not even qualified for the initial muster into Gideon's army.

Arteriosclerosis

A second and much more common heart disease is arteriosclerosis which simply means hardening of the arteries. We noted in FMS #27 the mind-boggling fact that the adult human body has more than 100,000 miles of veins, arteries and capillaries.

Ideally, the inner walls of the arteries are smooth, but when arteriosclerosis develops, the smooth linings are disrupted and roughened by deposits of fatty material and calcium. These deposits are

called plaque. The plaque causes the cells in the arterial walls to break down. Scar tissue forms on the inside of the arteries as they attempt to continue functioning. Eventually the artery becomes hard, rough and narrow.

The rough surface of the wall, together with the sluggish flow of blood through the narrow channels may cause a blood clot to form. A blood clot may break away from the place where it was formed and be carried in the blood stream elsewhere where it can totally block an artery, thereby causing major problems. A blocked artery in the brain causes a *stroke* which can either kill the victim or impair his mental and/or physical faculties to a greater or lesser degree. A blockage in the coronary artery is called a heart attack.

Although a heart failure or a heart attack is a sudden event, the arteriosclerosis which caused it was not sudden, but grew gradually worse over many years until it finally reaches a breaking point. Two of the primary causes of hardening of the arteries are improper diet and lack of exercise.

In the improper diet category, special blame is placed on a buildup of insoluble fats and too much milk and dairy products. (We are not here to debate the merits of natural, non-pasteurized, non-homogenized milk and dairy products; our purpose is to make spiritual analogies.) We think of the milk of the word. As the apostle Peter wrote, there is certainly a place for milk in the life of Christian.

1 Peter 2:1 Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings,

2 As newborn babes, desire the sincere [pure] milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby:

Milk is for newborn babes. After a year or two, babies are normally weaned off their mother's milk and they will grow much better by ingesting solid food. Thus, a baby Christian needs to grow beyond the milk, the elementary doctrines of the word of God, if he is ever to grow into a mature Christian, a soldier who is able to do battle "against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high *places*." (Ephesians 6:12).

What happens then to a Christian who is constantly fed from the pulpit a spiritual diet of milk,

milk, milk? For example, the Sunday serving of “get saved, get saved, get saved” which is heard in so many churches year after year after year. Consequently, we find in those churches people who have been Christians for decades but have now developed spiritual hardening of the arteries due to the decades-long diet which consisted of spiritual milk products and virtually nothing else. They are prime candidates for spiritual arteriosclerosis and heart failure.

We have identified the spiritual milk above. But in reality, the “get saved, get saved, get saved” preaching is more akin to skim milk. Other spiritual milk products would include butter, cheese and ice cream. Butter is the fat or “richness” (riches) of the milk. Some churches go beyond skim milk and serve up this richness of the milk in the form of spiritual butter and cheese. We would liken these to the name-it-and-claim-it type of churches that preach a false prosperity gospel.

Understand that we are not saying that God does not want us to be rich; indeed, He does want us to be both prosperous and healthy (3 John 1:2). We’re referring to those who distort and abuse this truth into conveying the idea that once you become a Christian, your life will be a bed of roses... if you just have enough faith, brother or sister. “Just believe that God is going to give you that Rolls-Royce, brother, and He will give it to you. Oh, and don’t forget to plant a ‘faith seed’ with your offering, brother.”

Then there is ice cream — the spiritual dessert doctrine. This is the sweet milk product laced with lots of poisonous white sugar and what would fit that description better than the teaching that any day now all the Christians will be raptured into the sweet by-and-by. Again, understand that we are not denying the catching up of saints described by Paul in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17; but we are referring to the perversion of this doctrine as is commonly taught in so many fundamental and evangelical churches.¹

A bad diet is not the only contributor to arteriosclerosis. Proper elimination and exercise are no doubt equally important in its prevention. Our bodies must regularly eliminate accumulated toxins and waste material. Theoretically, we could handle a lot more milk and fat products without nearly so much harm if we also added sufficient exercise to our lifestyle, along with proper elimination. Exercise not only strengthens our muscles and immune systems,

but good exercise will cause us to sweat, which is also part of the elimination process. In the spiritual analogy, exercise and elimination also go hand-in-hand. Ponder carefully the following passage. Here, the writer of the letter to the Hebrews was castigating them for having slacked off, for having become spiritually dull of hearing.

NKJ Hebrews 5: 12 For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need *someone* to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food.

13 For everyone who partakes *only* of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe.

14 But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, *that is*, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

Hear that well! Those Christians who subsist primarily on milk (including butter, cheese and ice cream) are incompetent (unskilled) in the Word. In verse 14, the writer talks about senses being “exercised.” While there is certainly a physical application to the senses of sight, hearing, etc.; the primary reference is to our spiritual senses, which is our spiritual perception and ability to discern and recognize the difference between good and evil. This ability grows with Christian maturity, being of full age, and explicitly refers to those who have moved from the milk of the word to regularly ingesting solid food.

The Greek word translated “exercised” is *gumnazo* which means to practice, to train. We derive our word gymnasium from this. One does not become skilled at recognizing good and evil unless one trains. Our training manual is the Bible. But more specifically, it is God’s commandments, statutes and judgments which give us his righteous standards for discerning between good and evil. But if God’s law has essentially been done away with, as so many churches teach; then how in the world can any Christian train his spiritual senses to discern between good and evil?!

It is easy to see now why most Christians are so useless in the battle against evil today. It is because they do not exercise (therefore they cannot discern). Moreover, they have a very poor spiritual diet, and consequently, they have very little ability to eliminate false doctrine. They are prime candidates for spiritual heart failure.

Coronary arteriosclerosis

A buildup of plaque on the coronary artery is a leading type of heart attack. The coronary artery is that artery which feeds the heart itself. Thus it is part of the heart. When one has a hardening of the coronary artery, we could say that person actually has a condition of hardening of the heart. Presumably, we are all familiar with the case of pharaoh's hard heart (Exodus 4:21 *et al.*). But let's ignore the "bad guys," and focus on our own hearts and those of our forefathers. God sent the prophet Ezekiel to warn the house of Israel. It was a futile mission and God had told Ezekiel in advance why they would not listen.

Ezekiel 3:7 But the house of Israel will not hearken unto thee; for they will not hearken unto me: for all the house of Israel are impudent and hardhearted.

Another general warning about hard heartedness is given in the book of Proverbs.

Proverbs 28:14 Happy is the man that feareth alway: but he that hardeneth his heart shall fall into mischief.

The apostle Paul in his missionary journeys encountered many people with cases of spiritual coronary arteriosclerosis, as related in the book of Acts.

Acts 19:9 But when divers [many] were hardened, and believed not, but spake evil of that way before the multitude, he departed from them, and separated the disciples, disputing daily in the school of one Tyrannus.

The writer of the book of Hebrews gives us an excellent reason to encourage each other daily in the faith.

Hebrews 3:13 But exhort one another daily, while it is called Today; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.

Oh! — what was it again that Jeremiah told us was deceitful above all else? Our hearts! What leads us to sin? Our carnal hearts! More specifically, it is the *thoughts*, the *desires* and the *emotions* of our heart! That is, the *mind* within our heart. And lest we think that this does not apply to people like ourselves who are trying earnestly to follow Christ, we need to

remember the example of the twelve men who were closest to him in his earthly ministry. In the sixth chapter of the gospel of Mark, we remember the story of how Jesus fed the 5,000 men. The apostles all witnessed this amazing miracle, all of them having participated in gathering the twelve baskets full of leftovers. Yet, notice what happens immediately after this amazing event.

Mark 6:45 And straightway he constrained his disciples to get into the ship, and to go to the other side before unto Bethsaida, while he sent away the people.

46 And when he had sent them away, he departed into a mountain to pray.

47 And when even was come, the ship was in the midst of the sea, and he alone on the land.

48 And he saw them toiling in rowing; for the wind was contrary unto them: and about the fourth watch of the night he cometh unto them, walking upon the sea, and would have passed by them.

49 But when they saw him walking upon the sea, they supposed it had been a spirit, and cried out:

50 For they all saw him, and were troubled. And immediately he talked with them, and saith unto them, Be of good cheer: it is I; be not afraid.

51 And he went up unto them into the ship; and the wind ceased: and they were sore amazed in themselves beyond measure, and wondered.

52 For they considered not *the miracle* of the loaves: for their heart was hardened.

If spiritual coronary arteriosclerosis could happen to the closest followers of Jesus, it can certainly happen to us as well. We will present the biblical solution to these spiritual heart problems after we have discussed spiritual hypertension among other things in the next FMS.

ENDNOTES

1. We have a C-90 tape of a radio interview of James Bruggeman on the rapture. \$6 suggested gift. Tape #308.

Feed My Sheep is a part of the teaching ministry of James W. Bruggeman and is sent out freely upon request. The tithes and gifts of those who are fed by it make it possible for us to continue in ministry. Gifts may be sent to P.O. Box 6388, Asheville, NC 28816.