



God's Laws of Vibrant Health

The Bible has a surprising number of things to say about your health. In recent years researchers are discovering that its health advice is sound—and far ahead of its time.

Many people are surprised to learn that the Bible is filled with good and practical advice for mankind concerning his health. God created the human body and he really knows best how to keep it maintained at peak performance.

Good health is something most of us take for granted until we start to lose it. Often it is only after something happens or we begin to see deterioration in our health that we begin to question our habits or our diet. And, for some, the “wake up call” comes too late.

The human body is a wonder. It is probably the most resilient instrument on the earth. It can endure a lot of abuse—pain, fractures, stress, wounds, a mirade of diseases—and still recover. At the same time, it is the most fragile instrument on earth. It can be struck down in an instant. There are some diseases that can stop it in a very short span of time. It also can be stopped by excesses of toxins and harmful elements added to it over a length of time. Poor diet can weaken it to the point that a normally recoverable disease can stop it.

When God created man he didn't send him into the world with no instructions for how to maintain his body. God gave mankind many principles for health that, if adhered to, would keep the body fit throughout its natural life span. Today, most people are unaware that these instructions have all been compiled in one place—the Bible.

Most of the health instructions are found in the

Old Testament, but not all. It is for this reason that most people today do not look on them as relevant to their lives. They think that God's instructions were just for an ancient people and they confuse practical health advice with religious observances and practices.

Interestingly, today's researchers and medical doctors are stunned and amazed to discover that the laws God gave to Moses contain remarkably accurate and effective provisions for public health. Upon closer inspection they even find the same rules were applied long before Moses by those men who “walked with God.” The issues that public health officers deal with today—food, water, contamination, sewage disposal, infectious diseases, and health education—all are addressed by God in the early pages of the Bible.

Rather than writing off God's instructions as just rules and regulations that he gave to a peculiar people, we need to take a new look at those rules and see them for what they are—practical advice for all people. Let's take a closer look.

Basic Sanitation

God emphasized physical cleanliness to his people. No educated person today doubts the connection between hygiene and health, yet few recognize that God gave detailed instructions for washings and cleansings that promote the type of hygiene we take for granted today. Most people see these instructions in the Bible as just more of the religious re-

strictions God placed on his people—and many view them as ritualistic parts of religious ceremonies.

Yet history records many events down through the ages that could have been controlled or prevented if the laws of basic sanitation had not been compromised. Major plagues and epidemics that killed millions of people were often the result of, and spread by, poor sanitation.

For example, cholera has been one of the major killer diseases throughout history. It breaks out when sanitation principles are violated, especially the improper disposal of sewage. Cholera is one of the major diseases health officials worry about today among the third world countries and in the wake of natural disasters involving flooding. But it is not restricted to only the third world countries any more. Because of our modern methods of travel, an epidemic of cholera anywhere in the world could quickly spread all around the globe.

Cholera is endemic in many parts of the world today just waiting for the right unsanitary conditions

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to prevail for it to flare up again. A pandemic of cholera in India in 1817 was spread to China, Sri Lanka, East Africa, the Philippines, Japan, Persia, Arabia, and Russia before it was brought under control. Another wave begun in India in 1826 followed a similar course, but also spread to mainland Europe and the British Isles. From there it crossed the Atlantic to Canada and into the United States. By 1836 cholera was present in most of the U.S. and was not brought under control until 1838 (*Encyclopedia Britannica*, 1961, “Cholera”).

Cholera is a disease that quickly appears where improper disposal of sewage is present. This is why public health officials are concerned when flooding and natural disasters happen in third world countries because their disposal of human feces is often substandard.

Yet thousands of years ago God gave instructions that would prevent cholera and other similar epidemics. In Deuteronomy 23:12-13 we read “*Designate a place outside the camp where you can go to relieve yourself. As part of your equipment have something to dig with, and when you relieve yourself, dig a hole and cover up your excrement*” (New International Version).

God directed that raw human sewage must be

disposed of in a manner that keeps people and animals from direct contact with it.

He also gave detailed instructions for hand washings and purifications that have often been written off as mere religious rituals. Scientific discoveries have proven that these principles had a lot more to them than just a religious observance or, as they later came to be called, “a burden” on the people.

Nineteenth century Europe knew nothing about bacteria. In a hospital in Vienna, Dr. Ignaz Semmelweis was appalled at the death rate of pregnant women who came to the hospital to give birth. He began to study what was going on. What he observed was medical students who would remove the dead bodies of women who had died from what they called “labor fever.” The students would perform autopsies on the dead women and then immediately go back to treating live patients.

Semmelweis came to the revolutionary conclusion that perhaps contaminants on the medical student’s hands might be spreading death from one patient to another. He ordered all the interns to begin washing their hands in chlorinated water. The results were staggering. The death rate dropped from 18 percent to one percent almost immediately (S.I. McMillen, M.D., and David Stern, M.D., *None of These Diseases*, 2000, p. 20).

Yet more than 3,000 years earlier God had revealed to Moses the sanitary measures people were to take if they came in contact with a dead body. First, they were considered “unclean” for seven days and had to wash with water immediately and again on the third and seventh day (Numbers 19:12-13). As long as a person was unclean, he was to avoid contact with others—he must stay outside the camp. While these instructions may sound ritualistic, the purpose was to protect others from exposure to harmful bacteria, even though people didn’t know at that time that bacteria even existed. The washings cleansed the person of germs and the exposure to fresh air and sunlight between the washings assisted in the person’s purification.

God gave other instructions for times when people were declared “unclean” and were instructed to stay outside the camp. We might look upon those instructions today as coming from a cruel God. But the truth is they were instructions for quarantine—a way to prevent communicable diseases from passing from one person to another.

If we observed God’s biblical law of quarantine today, many of the diseases that run rampant in our



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The argument against quarantine stems from our modern lifestyle. When we become ill, no one is willing to make the sacrifice of losing a day or two of income to stay away from the workplace. Employers are just as much at fault, as they often will not allow ill employees to stay at home.

This is often the condition found in the lower income brackets of employment more so than in the higher levels. It isn't only just the employee who can't afford to lose the income, but often the employers operate on skeleton crews where there is no one to replace the ill employee. During the so-called "flu and cold season," many restaurant kitchens are serving up a "heaping helping" of germs and viruses with every plate delivered to the dining room by either waitresses or cooks who should be at home instead of spreading the germs around.

God's laws of quarantine are just as much a part of basic sanitation as are washings and sewage disposal. If the world lived by God's laws of health, the world would be a safer place all round.

Sexual Purity

God also gave laws of sexual purity. Many see these instructions as just more of the restrictive practices of an ancient people. But God had a very definite reason why he said that sexual behavior should always be monogamous and always within the context of marriage.

In our sexually permissive world today the im-

perative is to practice "safe sex." There is no such thing when people are sleeping around with whoever they want and whenever they want. The only real safe sex is that defined by the laws God gave in the Bible.

The rates of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and sexually transmitted infections (STIs) are surging worldwide. The use of condoms has been proven as an unreliable method of controlling these diseases and infections. According to the *John Hopkins Family Health Book*, 1999, "estimates hold that there are more than 300 million cases of STIs annually worldwide" (p. 861). McMillen and Stern say "worldwide in the next few decades AIDS is expected to kill almost 300 million—more than the population of the entire United States" (p. 116). With these figures, where is the "safe sex" to be found?

Huge numbers of people have lost their health, their reproductive capacity and sometimes their lives because of sexual promiscuity. Sexual permissiveness can also cause psychological problems. Adultery causes guilt and destroys marriages. Sexual activity before marriage often detracts from happiness after marriage.

The seventh commandment— "*You shall not commit adultery*"— is God's way of preventing epidemics of STDs as well as showing us how to achieve happiness in marriage and in other areas of our life.

The laws of circumcision that God gave to the Hebrew people is also a very misunderstood instruction. Most people view

it as a religious practice that was only given to an ancient people and only really applies to Jews today. Circumcision was a sign given between God and his



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people, but it has more practical application than just to identify a people.

Among the medical reasons for circumcision, for starters, is that uncircumcised boys and men are ten times more likely to suffer urinary tract infections than are those who are circumcised. It also appears that circumcision impedes the spread of AIDS and other STDs. The foreskin of uncircumcised males provides a warm, moist environment for the multiplication of bacteria. This is a threat, not only to men, but to their wives and sexual partners as well.

Even God's instructions for circumcising infants on the eighth day has been proven as a solid physiological command. Rather than just being a religious ritual given to an ancient people, doctors have discovered that new born infants have a low supply of vitamin K, the vitamin that provides the blood's clotting capability. By the eighth day, infants have been found to have built up enough vitamin K to allow blood clotting. Infants, routinely circumcised soon after birth today, often suffer from prolonged bleeding because the blood won't clot. When doctors wait until the eighth day, the bleeding problem goes away (Rex Russell, M.D., *What the Bible Says About Healthy Living*, 1999, p. 11). So once again, modern science proves the wisdom of the Bible given by God thousands of years ago.

Proper Diet

One of the areas of most controversy today arises over the food laws that God gave his people. Once again, the assumption is that these rules were just given to the Hebrew people as a form of testing their obedience and that they no longer apply today. Most people believe that the instructions about "clean" and "unclean" meats were part of the old covenant with Israel and were done away with the new covenant.

What most fail to recognize is that the laws about "clean" and "unclean" meats were all in place nearly 1,000 years before God gave them to Moses on Mt. Sinai. When Noah was instructed to bring the animals into the ark in Genesis 7 he was instructed to bring seven pairs of "clean" animals and only one pair of "unclean" animals. Evidently Noah knew exactly what that meant. He didn't have to ask God which were which as he already knew.

It is probable that God's laws of clean and unclean meats goes all the way back to when Adam gave the animals names in the Garden of Eden. The de-



If we use the Bible as our model on what to eat or not to eat, our overall health will be benefitted. God created man's body. Shouldn't we listen to what he tells us to put into it?

termination of what is "clean" or what is "unclean" has nothing to do with religion or religious practices.

God created all life. He designed the human body, but he also designed the animal bodies. If he says that an animal is "unclean" he is saying that it's flesh is not fit for human consumption. The animal was not designed as food. There is something about the flesh of that animal that is not good for man.

God created the most balanced system for life that we can possibly imagine. The purpose of the creation was man. Everything else was created to support man. In nature, there is always something that cleans up the earth. The plant and vegetable life functions in a cycle from life through deterioration that feeds nutrients back into the soil from which new vegetable life comes forth. Nearly all forms of life function in a similar pattern.

But in the process there are certain elements left that could be harmful or toxic to humans and other life if allowed to collect in too large of quantities. God created creatures whose sole function is to clean up these elements from nature. These creatures were designed for that purpose and their survival depends on the presence of these elements just as much as we depend on oxygen and water. We often think of these creatures as "scavengers" and they are found at every level of life form.

The "unclean" meats that God has declared, very often fall in the "scavenger" category. Since he created all the animals with a specific purpose in mind he knows what is contained in each one's flesh and

whether consuming that flesh would be beneficial or harmful to man.

We all recognize that buzzards eat the flesh of other dead creatures. God designed the buzzard for that very purpose—to clean up the earth. We would no more think of killing and eating a buzzard than we would of eating the decaying flesh that the buzzard consumes. So it should come as no surprise to find the buzzard on the list of “unclean” meats—flesh that man should not eat.

While this might be an extreme example, it gets the point across. If God has declared something “unclean,” he had a very good reason for doing so. His designations are not random or designed for any type of religious test or observation. They are simply good advice and rules for the health and maintenance of man’s body. Since he created the body, shouldn’t we listen to what he tells us to put into it?



Eating natural foods that God created and designed to feed man still remains the best practice to maintain optimum health.

The instructions on pork and shellfish seem to create the biggest controversy today. Thousands of pounds of both are consumed each year and every argument imaginable has been brought forth to defend the practice. What are these creatures and why were they created?

Shellfish—oysters, clams, shrimp, snails, scallops, etc.—are the scavengers of the sea. They are the creatures that God designed to clean up the sea floor and harbors and shorelines. It doesn’t matter how good they taste, their flesh is loaded with toxins that, over time, are harmful to the human body. And it is even worse today than in earlier eras of mankind. All of the pesticides and other harmful elements man has introduced to farmland leaches into the rivers and

eventually ends up in the harbors, shorelines and sea floor. So the argument that shellfish are cleaner than animals who today are injected with growth hormones and other unnecessary products or who consume those same pesticides in their feed, will just not hold up.

The pig is probably the hardest for people to understand because pigs don’t consume what we normally look upon as carrion or toxic elements. Yet the pig is truly the scavenger of the barn yard. Pigs have been known to eat just about anything. Whatever the farmer can’t get rid of in other ways can usually be fed to the pig. They are not terribly discerning in what they consume.

What makes the pig unfit for human consumption is the amount of fat in pig flesh. Unlike the other animals on the list of “clean” meats, the flesh of the pig is marbled with fat throughout. It is impossible to trim off the fat from pork because it often isn’t visible to the eyes. Even when it is, as in bacon, what’s left if you remove all the fat? Ham appears to have little fat, but in truth, the ham steak is marbled throughout with fat. It is just not of the kind you can see with the naked eye and it doesn’t break down so you can see it in the frying pan.

Another of God’s instructions is to avoid eating fat (Leviticus 3:17). God didn’t place an injunction on animal fat for the same reasons that we do today. God was not as much concerned about obesity and clogged arteries as he was with what is contained in the fat. Once again, he designed the bodies of all animals. The fat serves a function just as does every other element of the body. The fat’s function is to absorb all the toxins and pull it from the muscles and organs of the body. So when we eat animal fat, we are getting all the toxic elements that have been leached out of the flesh. And these toxic elements exist in all bodies, including our own.

God’s injunction against eating the fat applies to all animals on the list of clean meats as well. While most of the fat in lean, range-fattened clean animals is isolated from the meat and easily trimmed off, the fat in pork is dispersed throughout the meat and is rarely isolated so it can be removed.

Fruits and vegetables, along with whole grains, constituted the bulk of the biblical diet. Red meats were eaten in moderation and usually for special oc-

casions and on special feast days. More fowls and fish of the “clean” meat category were consumed than red meats. Even lamb, which we usually think of as a biblical meat, was eaten sparingly.

Proper eating habits are necessary for good health. If we stuff our bodies with food lacking in nutritional value, we’ll eventually pay the price. We’ll do another article in more detail on proper eating habits in a future issue. But, once again, we find that the Bible is the best source for learning what we ought to eat for maximum health. God’s wisdom on the subject is still greater than man’s.

Other health instructions

We find many other elements of good health addressed in God’s Word. In Proverbs 12:25 we read “*an anxious heart weighs a man down.*” In the New Testament we find Jesus telling Martha that she is “*worried and troubled about many things,*” and he urges her to reorder her priorities as her sister Mary has done (Luke 10:41).

There are many other examples but the basic message is that stress levels are not always beneficial. We need some stress in order to keep moving, but excessive stress levels are bad for our health. We are instructed to manage our stress levels and to rearrange our priorities in order to do it.

One of the keys to stress management that the Bible reveals is developing a relationship with God and an understanding of his purpose for life. God clearly says that he can lighten the stress of life so we can deal with it.

Psalms 55:22 says “*Cast your burdens on the Lord, and he shall sustain you.*” One of the ways we can do this is to observe the Sabbath God gave us and in the way he said to do it—by taking a complete, 24-hour rest. Neither our bodies or our minds are designed to go days on end without a break in our routine.

The Bible doesn’t directly address the subject of getting sufficient exercise. But it does point out that the sluggard or the ones who sleep all day will suffer. In Bible times it was not necessary to exhort people to exercise regularly. The people of the Bible—except for the severely physically disabled or elderly—were not sedentary, as much of the world is today. Their

primary means of travel was walking. Men’s work was usually physically demanding. Even the women usually had to draw and carry water from distant wells back to their homes.

It is often hard for us to imagine in our world today with vehicles to take us wherever we need to go, water available at the turn of a tap inside our homes, and many jobs that involve sitting behind a desk. Our need for exercise is great in comparison to those earlier eras.

Many people get exercise through participation in sports and other activities of their pastimes, but even more get virtually no exercise at all . . . even through walking.

The Bible even addresses the emotional needs of man. Proverbs 17:22 says “*A merry heart does good, like medicine . . .*” We’ve all read about the benefits of laughter on our physical health and few doubt the practicality of it.

There are many references to anger and how an-



Our modern lifestyles make the need for exercise more important than it was for the people of the Bible, whose lives were naturally more physically demanding.

ger causes harm to the physical man. Manifestations of anger are part of what Paul calls the “*acts of the sinful nature*” (Galatians 5:19). The list includes “*hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy*” (verse 20). The point is that if these emotions are a part of our emotional nature, we are setting ourselves up for serious future health problems.

We are instructed to seek the attributes of the fruits of the spirit instead. These are “*love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control*” (Galatians 5:22-23). We can begin eradicating the other emotions from our lives by starting the process of emulating these fruits. Even



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is—the most practical instruction manual for mankind that has ever been penned. 