

Hebrews 13:7-17: ⁷Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith. ⁸Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. ⁹Do not be led away by diverse and strange teachings, for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by foods, which have not benefited those devoted to them. ¹⁰We have an altar from which those who serve the tent have no right to eat. ¹¹For the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the holy places by the high priest as a sacrifice for sin are burned outside the camp. ¹²So Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood. ¹³Therefore let us go to him outside the camp and bear the reproach he endured. ¹⁴For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come. ¹⁵Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name. ¹⁶Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.

¹⁷Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.

“Diet and Exercise”

INTRODUCTION

There was a time when having a large waistline was a sign of wealth or success. European kings were often quite rotund. And the term “fat cat” was at one time used to describe the well-to-do bankers and businessmen who had the money to eat their fill of fine, rich foods.

But my, how things have changed! Thanks to lots of scientific research into diet and exercise, we now know the importance of eating the right kinds of foods in the right amounts—and getting the right kind of exercise in order to live a healthy lifestyle.

Diet and exercise are important to your spiritual life, too. Your faith in Christ Jesus needs a healthy diet and it needs exercise in order to grow strong and endure unto eternal life.

OUR LORD PROVIDES THE BEST DIET FOR OUR CHRISTIAN FAITH THROUGH HIS WORD AND SACRAMENTS—AND OUR LORD EXERCISES OUR FAITH THROUGH OUR WORKS OF LOVE DONE IN HIS NAME.

I. Healthy “Food” and “Exercise”

Your doctor will tell you that a diet rich in healthy, natural foods, like fruits and vegetables, and lean meats—and low in unhealthy, processed foods, like fatty foods, cholesterol and sugar—is good for your bodies.

Last fall’s E. coli food poisoning outbreak at Chipotle restaurants and last May’s recall of 47 million pounds of meat and poultry products contaminated with listeria reminds us that not only is a good diet important, but a pure diet is important, too. What good are healthy foods and drinks if they’re contaminated with bacteria or adulterated with chemicals? After all, you wouldn’t want drink a bottle of water if you knew it was adulterated with even the smallest amount of contaminants, would you?

The FDA tries to keep the food supply safe, but in truth, it’s impossible—the government can’t keep track of everything. So, we ourselves need to be vigilant—washing fruits and vegetables thoroughly, checking packaged foods for content and expiration dates, and cooking foods like chicken, beef and pork, thoroughly. My 6th grade science teacher was fond of telling us to wash fruit before we ate it. He would say, “You never know where that hand was that touched that piece of fruit before you did.”

A safe and nutritious diet is important for our bodies. However, Jesus said, “For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?” (Matt. 16:26). Jesus values you—body and soul. But with these words from Matthew, Jesus reminds us that your soul is more important than your body. No matter what we

do to keep our bodies healthy and vigorous, they eventual die. But the soul lives for eternity. Your souls have been redeemed by the blood of Jesus to live with Him forever and ever through the gift of faith. That faith must be fed a nutritious diet rich in the truth of God’s Word, so that it will grow and strengthen—and endure.

Diverse and strange teachings that don’t come from God poison God’s gift of faith by leading the soul astray. So, the writer to the Hebrews says, “Do not be led away by diverse and strange teachings, for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by foods, which have not benefited those devoted to them.”

Throughout Scripture, God urges His people to listen to His Word and to those preachers and teachers who teach that Word in it’s truth and purity. The Holy Spirit speaks of the importance of a healthy diet for your spiritual welfare when the apostle Paul tells Timothy: “¹I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: ²preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. ³For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, ⁴and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.”

What Paul urges Timothy to do is to teach sound doctrine. Like healthy and nutritious food for your body, your faith needs Biblically true and faithful teaching. And God wants us to gather in worship—not for His sake, but for ours, for in worship, God gives us His gifts of Word and Sacraments for our spiritual health and growth.

Yet, we live in a world that questions the existence of truth—a world that rejects especially the truth of God’s Word. Like children who grumble about eating their vegetables, we sinners

often grumble about the difficult teachings of God’s Word—especially the teachings that make it difficult to be a Christian in this fallen world. We would certainly like to change God’s Word to suit the times, but Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever—and so is His Word.

And then there are those Christians who abstain from the Word of God. They may claim to believe in Jesus, but they’re not in His Word, nor do they take the time to worship Him and receive His Sacrament. They are quite literally starving their faith to death.

For this we need to repent of both our mistrust and our neglect of God’s Word. No one can ever say that they know their Bibles enough not to read or study God’s Holy Word everyday—even Jesus devoted Himself to the Word of God! We need to ask our Lord to give us a hunger and thirst for righteousness—and allow Him to satisfy that hunger and thirst through our faithfulness to worship and Bible Study. We need to do this for the sake of our soul’s salvation.

II. Healthy Food Come from Faithful Preachers and Teachers.

Because there are diverse and strange teachings out there, contaminating the pure teachings of God’s Word, we ourselves need to be vigilant about the kind of food we put into our faith, just as we are with what we put into our bodies.

Diverse and strange teachings are like mercury in the food chain—they can sneak up on you. While they may not seem so bad at first—a little bit here and a little bit there—they accumulate until they poison the life out of your faith. So, throughout Scripture, our Lord is concerned about what is taught to His people and also who does the teaching. As He says through the prophet Hosea (Hosea 4:6a) “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge; because you [the priests] have rejected knowledge.”

The false prophets and fake priests of Israel were feeding God’s people a steady diet of lies and false doctrine. Such teaching wasn’t leading the people to God, but away from God. The

result was that the faith of God's people was being destroyed, and thus God's people were being destroyed.

Throughout the Bible, God calls His teachers and preachers to teach and preach faithfully in accordance with His Word. Good teachers bring good food to their people—both in what they say, and in the example of their lives, so, the writer to the Hebrews says, “⁷Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith.” Because people tend to follow their leaders, God charges that His preachers and teachers will be held accountable for the souls in their care.

But, even preachers and teachers are sinners. And just as you are careful about the food you buy—where it comes from and what's in it—you must be discerning and vigilant about what you hear from the mouths of preachers and teachers, for not all who claim to be teachers of God's Word come from God. And the Word that they proclaim isn't always God's Word, but man's word. Thus, God charges His people to know His Word so they can test what they hear and who they hear it from.

III. The Exercise part of faith.

Finally, You need a good diet to be healthy—but you need exercise, too. You could eat the right kinds of food, but if you never get off the couch, good nutrition isn't going to help you much! You need exercise to be healthy.

In the same way, your faith needs to be exercised—it needs to be put to work, tested and disciplined. While your Jazzercise instructor tells you to, “Move that body!” God says, “Move that faith—get out and help people.” Show them how much God loves them by what you do for them. And publicly confess your faith in Jesus Christ—let the world know who your Savior is! Thus, the writer to the Hebrews says in our text: ¹⁵Through [Jesus] then let us continually offer

up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name. ¹⁶Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.

When you get that body moving, it often hurts—aching muscles and bruised feet—but it's all for our the body's good. You may have to suffer the insults of those who reject God's Word and hate Jesus—but persecution is evidence that you are active in God's love, that your are putting your faith into action.

And sometimes, God exercises your faith by putting you through difficult times—what I call divine discipline. God does this because He loves you and desires to save you from your sins. Often, when faith if faltering, suffering draws us back to God—back to His Word, back to the very thing that gives us faith and life in Christ.

CONCLUSION

Jesus died to redeem both body and soul from sin, death and the devil. But where our souls spend eternity is where our bodies will one day spend eternity. Your soul needs the best diet and the finest exercise. And Jesus gives you the best diet—His Word and Sacraments. Into these gifts Jesus has poured His own body and blood so that you may feast and live.

And into you He pours His love through which He empowers you to exercise your faith in love, and so fulfill your calling as Children of God.

In Jesus' Name. Amen.