

Our Spiritual Mental Health

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November 17, 2012

Good afternoon to all of you and I'll extend my greetings to everyone on the "other side" wherever you might be.

To begin this message, please turn to 3 John. In the New King James; there's only one chapter.

3 John 2. *Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers. (NKJV)*

The Holman Christian Bible puts that verse like this:

3 John 2. *Dear friend (John is expressing great affection for this individual), I pray that you may prosper in every way and be in good health physically, just as you are spiritually.*

He's talking about several elements here that make up each one of us as human beings. It talks about the spirit, soul, physical health and the body. The Greek for spirit, soul and body are: For spirit it's *pneuma*; for soul it's *psuche* and for body it's *soma*. In fact, Paul talks about those and references all three over in 1 Thessalonians in chapter 5. Remember here in 1 Thessalonians, chapter 5, these are Paul's closing words to these folks. He says in verse 23:

1 Thessalonians 5:23. *Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul and body be preserved blameless ...*

In fact he is referencing the entire state of the person is without fault. That's what the word "blameless" means.

23b) ... at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. (NKJV)

Some commentators say, "Well, 3 John here, that's just a common greeting, 'be in health.'" If we get the entire tone of the context here of 3 John, what he is doing is commending this individual, Gaius. I pronounced that wrong. I believe Strong's says it's Gah'-yus. Maybe like Strong's I should have assigned a number to it like a prisoner (just kidding!) But he's commending this individual, Gaius, for the way that he lives his life. Some commentators say, "Well, he was sick and John is just wishing him well and wishing him good health," but there is more to it than that. In fact as far as commending this individual, the Living Bible for 3 John, verse 3 says:

3 John 3. *Some of the brothers travelling by ...*

This individual evidently had the means to support, give housing and food and often-times money to these apostles and others that would travel from church area to church area. He was able to do that. These individuals stayed with him and they knew this man. It goes on to say ...

3 John 3b. *... have made me very happy by telling me that your life stays clean and true and that you are living by the standards of the gospel.*

So here we have an account of this person who is obviously in good spiritual health. We would say today that he had his head on straight, by the way he is conducting his life. He's actually doing what God tells him to do. He is living like he should be living.

If we look back at that Greek word *psyche*, that's where we get our word "psychic" which is of the mind. We have the science of psychology which deals with the mind and the mental processes. We can be mentally healthy or mentally ill. Actually, that's what I'm going to title my message today, Our Spiritual Mental Health.

I appreciate the sermonette because we were reminded of the fruits of the spirit. If we think about that a little, somewhere in between in Galatians 5 where it talks about the works of the flesh and the fruit of God's Holy Spirit, somewhere in between that is our state of mind, if you think about that. We are in the process of being converted to God's thinking. But this all has to do with the way we do things because our mental health (where our minds are) is reflected in the way we live our lives, just like this individual John was commending in 3 John.

We all remember that verse; we heard it many times in Proverbs 23 where it says, "*As a man thinks, so he is.*" That's only part of that verse, but you get the point. We kind of respond and live our lives the way we think. We can get the pulse of our spiritual health by asking ourselves some questions. What we will try to do is honestly answer those questions for ourselves. Furthermore, if we do answer those questions truthfully, it will give us an indication of where our spiritual state and our mental health is. Hopefully this will help us make some adjustments.

One of the first questions we can ask ourselves and I know this might be a little bit sensitive and I'll try to be careful, but how do we feel about the recent elections? Of course the conservative minded people don't like the outcomes of the recent election. We know the country is going to be split over it culturally, morally and every other way. We know that there are a number of issues that were approved and then, sorry to say for our own state, we approved same-sex marriage and the recreational use of marijuana, evidently without any consideration for the consequences of all that. We can all see the trend, the downward spiral of our values and all of that. We know that this election is going to affect all of us. We're going to live with it for the next four years. I think we all understand too, and this was indirectly pointed out in the sermonette, that we don't let

politicians make our moral decisions for us. We should consider, do we get all depressed and demoralized over it? Should we get our boxers all in a bunch because of it?

Let's turn to Philippians 3. We do have scriptural help that will soothe over all of this for us. Here in Philippians, just as John was doing to this individual back there in 3 John, he's commending these Philippians. He's saying that they're doing the things they should. It's a very positive epistle. In Philippians 3:17-21, from the NIV it says ...

Philippians 3:17. *Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you. (NIV)*

Just referring, 3 John 1:3-4, where John kind of goes along with this, he says:

3 John 1:3. *For I rejoiced greatly, when the brethren came and testified of the truth that is in you, even as you walk in the truth.*

4) *I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth. (KJV)*

If we look at that term and analyze "walking in the truth," that's kind of a technical term for people who are truly living God's way of life, the way the apostles exemplified and the way they were taught by Christ. That's what they passed along and that's what Paul is commending them for in Philippians.

Continuing in the book of Philippians 3:18 ...

Philippians 3:18. *For, as I have often told you before and now say again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. (NIV)*

That's probably referring to some brethren that have left the Church but it also applies, in principle, to this Godless world that we find ourselves in.

19) *Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. ... (NIV)*

Just like Sodom and Gomorrah.

19b) *Their mind is on earthly things.*

The Greek just means that their minds are mentally disposed. They are concerned with earthly things.

20) *But our citizenship (this is where we should have our minds) is in heaven,*
...

The Greek there means that we behave like a citizen of heaven; walking in the truth. As a reference scripture, over in Matthew 12:19, it says something about Christ.

Matthew 12:19. *He will not quarrel or cry out; no one will hear his voice in the streets. (NIV)*

Of course, that's quoting Isaiah 42:2, the point being that he was non-political. If we're walking and following in Christ's footsteps, that's the way we'll be thinking too. Of course we can be concerned for our country, but again where is our focus? Where is our mind at on that? Because it can affect us mentally in the way we conduct our lives. In fact, it can distract us and make us forget what we should be doing. Continuing the last part of that verse ...

Philippians 3:20b) *... and we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ,
21) ... who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control
... (NIV)*

And remember this, God the Father and Jesus Christ have never lost control of anything. Never have. Continuing on ...

21b) *... will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.
(NIV)*

He never ever loses control and we don't need to fret about that. God knows exactly what is going on. Don't forget 1 Samuel 8. Who chose to have human governments over them? It was us as human beings; we chose that. 1 Samuel 8, just as a reminder ...

1 Samuel 8:18. *When that day comes, you will cry out for relief from the king you have chosen, and the Lord will not answer you in that day. (NIV)*

We don't want it to happen that God won't hear us, and God gives us an out here. We should keep our focus. That's where it needs to be, not necessarily on the political scene going on in the world. Some people do get pretty uptight. We were as upset as anyone Wednesday morning. Colossians 3 and again, we have a lot of scriptures that can help us mentally refocus on that, set it aside and get it out of our thinking.

Colossians 3:1. *If then you were raised with Christ (and we were at baptism) seek those things which are above ...*

The Greek for "above" means *higher up*. In other words, it's on a Godly plane, not an earthly plane. If we have our mind on earthly things, where is our plane of thought? It's not where it should be.

1b) *... where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God.*

That's where our focus should be. We don't need to be too unduly concerned or focused on political shenanigans because that's mostly what they are and we know that.

2) *Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.*

3) *For you died ... (NKJV)*

And we did at baptism. When we came up out of that baptismal water, everything else moved to second priority, or third or fourth or whatever it was. We changed the entire way we thought. Our mental processes began to change from that point.

3b) *... and your life is hidden with Christ in God.*

Actually, we are on file for the Book of Life. That's our new state and where our mental state should be.

4) *When Christ [who is] our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.*

That's not going to happen if we're earthlier than we are spiritual. It just isn't going to happen. 1 John 3, verses 1 and 2 gives us a little more along this line.

1 John 3:1. *Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! ... (NKJV)*

The sermonette talked about this, being thankful for that.

1b) *... Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him.*

We're supposed to be different. We're supposed to have a different mental process. From that we conduct our lives. That's what motivates us, our mind and thoughts.

2) *Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him (we will be composed of Spirit) for we shall see Him as He is.*

3) *And everyone who has this hope in Him ...*

Again, as was pointed out in the sermonette.

3b) *... purifies himself, just as He is pure. (NKJV)*

We know what purity means; it just means that we're as far away from the mixture of impurities of this world as is possible. That's what we should be doing and that's where our focus should be. Continuing in Colossians 3; it's continuing the thought from before.

Colossians 3:5. *Therefore (because you set your mind on things above) put to death your members which are on the earth ...*

All that stuff we should have left in that watery grave at baptism.

5b) ... fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire and covetousness, which is idolatry.

6) Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience, ...

There's nothing for us to gloat about. We should be sighing and crying for the things that we see going on in the world, for these downward trends, because that's what we're faced with.

Do you remember the mentality we had years ago? We had an apocalyptic mentality. We couldn't wait for the end to come. We would sometimes get depressed, "Boy, I know the end is coming from the things that are going on. I know the end is going to be here like next week!" We couldn't wait to use the rod of iron. Some of us just couldn't wait for that. We had some spiritually unhealthy mindsets if we think back on that. We were somewhat spiritually immature.

There was a study done once on the unhealthy characteristics of church members and they mentioned three characteristics in that regard. In just looking at that study, I had to reflect on the idea that we had a lot of those characteristics. In fact, I think we had all of them to some degree or another in the Church of God. One of the first things was that we had an unhealthy obsession with dogmatic prophecies. If you think about that, it doesn't just affect the Church of God. Prophecy is a big deal in many religious persuasions. All you have to do is look at television evangelists. Sometimes there will be specials and seminars and it's about prophecy, about things that are going to happen. That brings in a lot of bucks frankly. It instills a fear in people and because the individual is making these pronouncements, they say, "That's where we want to be. That's the carriage we want to hook our horse to, because he has all the answers."

I was watching a special on the History Channel recently. It had to do with the Mayan calendar. The prediction is that December 21 of this year is going to be the end of the world. You have to think about that a bit. The Mayan culture was a pretty powerful culture at that time. It's funny they didn't see the Spanish invasion, but they didn't see that. Someone dug up some tablets or something and saw these inscriptions and that's the way they interpreted it. It's going to be the end on December 21.

Part of the point there is that we too have an obsession with these dogmatic prognostications, these interpretations of prophecy. It's dogmatic in the sense that, "this is the way it's going to happen and this is when it's going to happen." We made charts when all of this was going to take place. One thing we kind of ignored and forgot there was that God is the keeper of the timetable, not us, not any man. We set dates. A lot of times we said we didn't, but we did. We ran these scenarios and said, "This is how it's

going to play out.” We mostly had it all figured out, and again we would plot that. We could do all kinds of things with charts; pretty convincing.

Don't get me wrong, I'm not saying that prophecy isn't important because as we know, a third of the Bible is prophecy. Look at all the things that are happening; look at all the things that happened to Christ that Christ fulfilled (all those prophecies) and we know a lot of prophetic events that are going to happen. So I'm not saying it's unimportant. What I'm saying is if we have an unhealthy focus on prophecy, it can get our minds off, which it certainly did. I know it did mine. If we look back, we have to admit a lot of that was speculation, it was opinion, it was theories, but we put a lot of stock in it. I know we did. I remember it got so bad for a while that some of the ministers were poking fun at us as an organization. They said we had “prediction addiction.” Remember some of that?

I don't think we have to look around too hard today to see some of the leaders of the Churches of God (different groups) that are using prophecy to intimidate and manipulate people with their interpretations of end-time prophecy.

One thing that we always need to keep in mind, the most important thing in all this: What is the purpose of prophecy? What is the purpose of it? God gives us some scriptures to help us with that.

Turn to Deuteronomy 18, so we won't be seduced by these kinds of interpretations. It shows here that any of these who made proclamations and their interpretation were wrong, and it didn't come to pass, they were killed. If it didn't come true, you die. That's what happened.

Deuteronomy 18:20. *But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in My name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die.*

22) when a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, if the thing does not happen or come to pass, that [is] the thing which the Lord has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously (arrogantly); you shall not be afraid of him. (NKJV)

Don't let them influence you with fear tactics because of the prophecies and interpretations they are making. If we keep our minds on the purpose of prophecy, we can see these controlling, manipulating tactics that are used by some of these folks. God **never** uses prophecy to deceive or manipulate people or to instill fear. We can't kill them today. We have a different administration of God's law, but if we did do that, we would need a pretty big pile of rocks just to get started today. But the point is that whenever we hear those kinds of prophecies, we just should not listen to them. We should avoid those things.

What if prophecies do come true? Back in Deuteronomy, chapter 13 gives us some direction out of God's law.

Deuteronomy 13:1. *If there arises among you a prophet or a dreamer of dreams, and he gives you a sign or a wonder*

2) *and the sign or the wonder comes to pass, of which he spoke to you, saying, "Let us go after other gods - which you have not known - and let us serve them,"*

Remember that because that's a key phrase there.

3) *"you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams, for the Lord your God is testing you to know whether you love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul. (NKJV)*

It means that we have our heart and our head in the right place and we're not easily swayed by those things.

4) *"You shall walk after the Lord your God and fear Him ...*

Be in awe of God, not some charismatic leader with a convincing scenario.

4b) *"... and keep His commandments and obey His voice; you shall serve Him and hold fast to Him.*

5) *"But that prophet or that dreamer of dreams shall be put to death because he has spoken in order to turn [you] away from the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt and redeemed you from the house of bondage, to entice you from the way in which the Lord your God commanded you to walk. So you shall put away the evil from your midst. (NKJV)*

Let's go to the New Testament because we have perfect New Testament scriptures that support this in Matthew 24. Never been there, have we? It tells us this is going to happen.

Matthew 24:24. *For false Christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. (NKJV)*

The Greek for "deceived" just means to *mislead or seduce*. Again, it's never within the purpose of prophecy to deceive people. Lies control and intimidate and manipulate people. That's what politicians do. You need a score card to keep track of the lies that we hear today on the political scene, even to keep track of the liars. Someone said once that lies are like cockroaches; if you see one there are more there. God's not the author of lies. We know that.

Let's look at Revelation 13. It talks about this and warns us about these things.

Revelation 13:11. *Then I saw another beast (different from the other beast; a multi-headed beast here) coming up out of the earth, and he had two horns like a*

lamb (looked like a peacemaker, but he's a false prophet, an imposter.) *and spoke like a dragon.*

Who is the dragon? Well Revelation 20:2, just as a reference.

Revelation 20:2. *He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is [the] devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; (NKJV)*

Revelation 13:13. *He performs great signs, so that he even makes fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men.*

14) And he deceives those who dwell on the earth by those signs which he was granted to do ...

God is allowing a test once again to see where our focus is and where our minds are, if we truly love and serve Him; if we live the way of life that we are supposed to be living.

14b) ... in the sight of the beast, telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast who was wounded by the sword and lived.

We know all the things that pertain to that.

So the point is, just because a proclamation comes true doesn't mean it's from God; it doesn't mean that God gave it to that individual to say. The key question for us is (considering all of these things), if it's a successful proclamation, does it bring us closer to God or not? That is the question we need to ask ourselves. We just saw here in God's law in Deuteronomy that it takes us to other gods. It's not from God. We shouldn't listen to that at all. It's breaking God's law and it's going to take us farther away from God, not closer to God. But again, a lot of people just want to follow him and know that some exciting scenarios just work. We've seen that in and out of God's Church. Again, we need to be reminded of the purpose of prophecy.

Prophecy buffs just love the Olivet Prophecy in Matthew 24, but the chapter breaks are added. That prophecy continues in chapter 25. We don't need to turn there. We've been there so many times. It's like re-plowing the field again and again. If we think of the context of Matthew 24 and 25, Matthew 25 can be kind of a barometer where our mental/spiritual state is. What does it talk about there in Matthew 25? It talks about the Groom. Are we focused on the Groom? It talks about having oil in your lamps. Are we putting oil in our lamps? Are we doing the things we need to be doing? We have the Parable of the Talents in Matthew 25. What are we doing with our talents? We can be malnourished spiritually and mentally if we don't use the talents we have. The way we use them is to serve the brethren. When we do that, we are serving Christ.

Spiritually healthy Churches support one another and bear one another's burdens. That was also brought out in the sermonette. So the purpose of prophecy should be to influence you to get closer to God. That's what it should do. It should help us understand

that, with the events and things we see going on in the world, Jesus Christ's return is imminent. Again a couple of bullets:

- It should influence you to repent. Whenever we see impending events, we should take a look at our lives. Maybe there is something we need to change if we are not answering honestly some of these questions we see in Matthew 24 and 25.
- Prophetically, the events that are taking place in the world, if they are true, should help us in our Christian walk, how we live. Like John was talking about and like Paul was talking about. Are we awake mentally to coming events?

Going back to that study, another unhealthy characteristic that was borne out, and I think we can relate to this, is it can affect the mental health of the Church and members if you have an authoritative Church government. We've all wrestled with that one, haven't we? We talked about the different kinds of Church government.

I gave a sermon one time on just the different types of Church government, not that anyone would remember that. I can't even remember it; I'd have to dig it up to remember what I said. Anyhow it talked about servant leadership. But do we understand how the leadership that we have will affect us mentally, affect us as a Church? We have to realize too that any organization whether it's a club (years ago I belonged to a union), whether it's a corporate organization, anything that's formed by human beings, people are going to rise to leadership and a hierarchy is going to develop. That's the way things run. I know that bothers some. It bothers people that anyone would have any kind of authority or there would be any kind of hierarchy.

Sometimes we are fortunate enough to have natural leaders; most of us are not. But God uses us anyway. Look at all the scriptures we have where God says that He is going to use human instruments for different functions. He gives us scriptures that describe different functions. We always have to remember that in that hierarchy, the head of the Church is the Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ. Everyone under that is under shepherds (elders, ministers, whoever we might be). We are under shepherds because Christ demands that if we have that kind of government/structure and again it's a natural thing and has to happen, someone has to lead. But according to the Head of the Church, Jesus Christ, He demands that it is done in a certain way.

In Matthew 20, again it's a natural thing for that to happen and it happened with the disciples; "Who is the greatest? Which one of us will be the top dog?" It's a very natural thing. Christ gave some instruction and some commands for us.

Matthew 20:25. *But Jesus called them to [Himself] and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them."*

It's a natural development.

26) *“Yet it [the way they do that, and more often than not, it’s self-serving] shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant.” (NKJV)*

That word just means servant. If you look it up in the Greek, it’s going to say that the term is kind of vague and has some different nuances, but it’s like a waiter. A waiter isn’t head over anything. If you go into a restaurant and order something, the waiter doesn’t tell you what you’re going to have for the meal; it doesn’t work that way. There are several different meanings for that word “servant” and it never means anything heavy-handed, but it also means a common laborer. It means that you work in the dust of the earth. It kind of gives you that in the Greek if you look it up in a word study.

Let’s go over to 2 Corinthians because Paul practiced and taught this to elders and leaders in other groups. If we think about the early Churches of God, there were many groups. They were household churches basically at that point. Some people want to revert back to that, but that was because of the society they lived in. They didn’t have airlines or bus lines, none of that.

In 2 Corinthians, chapter 1, Paul is about to tell them to forgive the individual who was in the incestuous relationship. He’s referring to the ministry and again, he’s following what Christ taught.

2 Corinthians 1:24. *Not that we (the ministry) have dominion over your faith, but are fellow workers for your joy; for by faith you stand. (NKJV)*

You can destroy that faith. We have examples and maybe I’ll touch on one of those later, but there were individuals historically that destroyed the faith of God’s people.

Back over in 2 Thessalonians, chapter 3 beginning in verse 6.

2 Thessalonians 3:6. *But we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us. (NKJV)*

That Greek word “disorderly” just means like militarily you were walking out of step, you were deviating from the prescribed order. Some commentators like to plug in here, “Well, this was the tradition of the Jews.” Well, it was not. It was the tradition passed along by the disciples and other teachers which they received from Jesus Christ.

7) *For you yourselves know how you ought to follow us, for we were not disorderly among you (NKJV)*

The apostles didn't deviate from that teaching, not at all. That's what they taught, how the authority should work in the Church.

8) nor did we eat anyone's bread free of charge, but worked with labor and toil night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you

9) not because we do not have authority, but to make ourselves an example of how you should follow us. (NKJV)

It isn't about tithing. Some people try to say that it is, but it is not. It's about how the authority should be administered.

10) For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat.

And the reason he said that is in the next verse.

11) For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies. (NKJV)

Again, these were small group churches. The individuals, the teachers, the apostles, the ministers, the elders, whoever, would go from group to group and evidently it was fairly easy for individuals to infiltrate this whole process. They could do the same thing and they were bringing in heresy. Maybe they were preaching prophecies and getting a following. They had the idea that they could extract money from the brethren. That's what they were doing. That's why they had the reference that they should work. They should do something honest for a change.

12) Now those who are such we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ (the source of how this should be done properly) that they work in quietness and eat their own bread. (NKJV)

In other words, stop what they are doing. These were members, or for the most part could have been members.

13) But [as for] you, brethren, do not grow weary [in] doing good. (NKJV)

Just keep on doing what you know is right to do.

14) And if anyone does not obey our word in this epistle, note that person and do not keep company with him, that he may be ashamed.

15) Yet do not count [him] as an enemy, but admonish [him] as a brother. (NKJV)

He just mentioned that. Don't drive them away if you can help them. We know that many times in the past, Church leaders have misused 2 Thessalonians in an attempt to

control the flock. That's the way it has been done. They interpret this to say that the ministry has the authority to disfellowship people that walk disorderly. Of course, they will subjectively define what disorderly means. Usually it just means whoever might disagree with them.

Diotrephes back in 3 John; we won't go back there, but we know the story of him. He was the individual that when these people that would come through, we know that he cast John out. That whole story just means that he stopped people from coming through the area. Gaius was supporting and helping them and John was commending that. However, Diotrephes was preventing that. He would stop that. John goes on to call him evil. Some commentators try to say, "Well, he wasn't that bad a guy." Well, he was that bad because he was preventing fellowship within the Church. We'll touch on fellowship a little later, but that's what he was doing. He was thwarting all that and slandering John plus any of the brethren that might be of the groups there. There could have been several groups or one main group that Diotrephes was over. We don't know. We don't even know if he was an elder; it doesn't say. But evidently, he had some social standing in the Church and probably the community. But he was preventing that and any of the brethren that wanted to continue to support the people traveling through; he would disfellowship them. So he was compounding his abuse of authority that he did have. So that's his story.

We know in 2 Thessalonians 3, it's not about Church leadership disfellowshipping, it's disfellowshipping anyone that disagreed with them. It's about anyone, even us the members and it's about not listening to and not following anyone including leaders that do this. Those that place too much emphasis on control and money and things like that. Again, I hope we realize that it's spiritually unhealthy to want leaders to exercise that kind of authority over us. Some still do that. It's also very unhealthy for us if we have a position where we have any kind of authority over people to abuse that. We don't want to do that.

As an aside, another aspect of that is sometimes someone will come along and have a different opinion of what the Church would generally have. Too often people will run to the minister and say, "Well, you've got to squash that." Well, maybe it's just an opinion. It depends. We've dealt with some of that. Obviously if there is blatant heresy being taught or promoted within the Church of God, the minister has the responsibility to deal with that. The point I'm trying to make is if we're mentally healthy and spiritually mature, we shouldn't get all rattled because someone has a different opinion. Again, Paul teaches us something there. In Romans 14, Paul says:

Romans 14:1. *Receive one who is weak in the faith, [but] not to disputes over doubtful things. (NKJV)*

The Revised says:

Romans 14:1. *As for the man who is weak in faith, welcome him but not for disputes over opinions. (Revised)*

That's all it may be. The point there again is a mature, healthy person understands that there's a difference between opinions and something that's being promoted. But again, an unhealthy leadership and membership wants to squash that kind of thing. They want to use a heavy-handed rule. I think we've all experienced that.

The third characteristic from this study was (and we've experienced this too, we've been there as fellow travelers); exclusiveness along with isolation. We've done that. Of course, we're called the elect. We're called peculiar people. We're supposed to be the light of the world. We're supposed to be the salt of the earth, but it becomes unhealthy whenever we begin thinking very highly of ourselves. Where does it say, "Don't think more highly of ourselves than we ought to"? We kind of get this "bunker in" mentality where we've got all the answers. Some groups do that and it's not mentally healthy at all. Some groups say, "We're the only ones who have all the answers and you need to be with us. We're going in the right direction. If you agree with us, come on over and join us. We'll circle the wagons, and by the way, we need your support." You have to wonder if they've forgotten who and where the Church is. We need to remind ourselves occasionally where the Church is. We have to realize and admit even though we think sometimes that we're very special and exclusive, we have to admit that the Church of God is connected spiritually. It's a spiritual organism. I know we've heard that over and over, but it's not a certain religious belief system or a particular leader. It's not that at all. You know the umbrella we are under is spiritual. It's not organizational or anything else.

Some supporting scriptures here are over in Romans 8. God is not confused. God doesn't give us the label of being exclusive. He doesn't do that. In Romans 8, Paul points out some things that he knew very well.

Romans 8:11. *But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit which dwells in you. (NKJV)*

God very graciously shares His power. He gives us a little bit of that. Again, that was brought out in the sermonette. We should be very thankful for that.

12) Therefore, brethren, we are debtors - not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. (NKJV)

Again that was also brought out in the sermonette by Neil, what we should be thankful for. It says here that we are debtors, not to the flesh or to fleshly things or worldly things or earthly things. We are in debt to God. What if you were in abject poverty; you were a homeless person. What was that old program where somebody came along and gave you a check for a million dollars? If somebody did that and gave you a million dollars and you were very poor, would you continue to live that way? Would you have to be out of your mind? There's the point; we are in debt to God. We should live like that.

13) *For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body (motivated by carnality) you will live.*

14) *For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. (NKJV)*

The ecclesia, the called-out body of believers.

15) *For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by which we cry out, "Abba, Father."*

16) *The Spirit Itself bears witness with our spirit (the spirit of man that gives us intelligence, given by God by the way) that we are children of God. (NKJV)*

The ecclesia, the called-out body of believers.

17) *And if children then heirs - heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with [Him], that we may also be glorified together. (NKJV)*

There are more supporting scriptures in 1 Corinthians 3.

1 Corinthians 3:16. *Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?*

Ecclesia, the called out body of believers.

17) *If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which [temple] you are. (NKJV)*

Ecclesia: that's us.

Turn to Mark 7. Mark 7 is interesting because in using this as kind of a contrast, Christ is giving the example of people that should have known better but they didn't make the connection of what comprises God's people. They didn't do that. If we remember here in Mark 7, they actually invented their own religion and some do that today. They come up with their own ideas.

Mark 7:7. *And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men. (NKJV)*

Quoting Isaiah 9:13.

8) *For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men - the washing of pitchers and cups and many other such things you do. (NKJV)*

They buried people in do's and don'ts. If you think about it, that's a cult practice. They keep people really busy. That's a control mechanism. I have several books on cults and studied that at one point. It's scary.

9) *He said to them, "All too well you reject the commandments of God, that you may keep your tradition." (NKJV)*

Then it goes on to say what they're doing, the way they are doing that.

10) *"For Moses said, 'Honor your father and your mother,' and, 'He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death.'"*

That's quoting Exodus 20; God's law, not tradition.

11) *"But you say, 'If a man says to his father or mother, "Whatever profit you might have received from me (financial help or whatever it might have been) is Corban" – ' (that is, a gift to God) ...*

12) *"and you no longer let him do anything for his father or his mother*

13) *"making the word of God of no effect through your tradition ...*

In fact, dishonoring God as well as the parents.

13b) *...which you have handed down. Any many such things you do."*

So these individuals had no idea who God was. They weren't serving God, they were serving themselves. So there's the difference.

Over in Mark 9 (I know we were there in Mark 7), in verses 38 and 40, this is where the disciples were discussing who is the greatest. It was an ego problem and that hasn't changed. Ego and ambition is alive and well today. Diotrepthes taught us that in 3 John.

Mark 9:38. *Now John answered Him, saying, "Teacher (talking to Christ) we saw someone who does not follow us casting out demons in Your name, and we forbade him because he does not follow us."*

Again, the mentality here is that they were vey exclusive. No one else could be doing this stuff. They had all the answers.

39) *But Jesus said, "Do not forbid him, for no one who works a miracle in My name can soon afterward speak evil of Me." (NKJV)*

40) *"For he who is not against us is on our side."*

He's telling them, "They're not hurting anyone. Don't think God is your exclusive God. Leave him alone." In John 10 we have that metaphor of the sheep pen and of the true shepherd. Christ says,

John 10:16. *"And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock [and] one shepherd. (NKJV)*

In 2 Timothy 2:19 as a reference, it's talking here of who are the approved and the unapproved.

2 Timothy 2:19. *Nevertheless the solid foundation of God stands (and it is a solid foundation) having this seal: "The Lord knows those who are His," and, "Let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity." (NKJV)*

So anyone could do that. We don't have exclusive rights to that. Like it was pointed out in the sermonette, we should be thankful that we were called and do have this privilege now because we do. We used to love to think we were exclusive, didn't we? We had exclusive rights to God. We had all the knowledge and understanding and we had the exclusive authority to go along with that. We were really special.

I have a little poem. I heard this once in a sermon. I thought it was really good. I don't know the author, but here's the poem. Again, keep in mind the mentally and thinking that we're really special.

I was shocked, confused, bewildered, as I entered the Kingdom's door,
Not by the beauty of it all, nor the lights of its décor.
But it was the folks in the Kingdom who made me sputter and gasp,
The thieves, the liars, the sinners, the alcoholics, the trash.
There stood the kid from seventh grade who swiped my lunch money twice;
Next to him was my old neighbor, he never was very nice.
Stan, who I always thought was awaiting the fire of hell
Was sitting pretty on a throne looking incredibly well.
I nudged Jesus, "What's the deal? I would love to hear your take.
How did all these sinners get here? God must have made a mistake.
And why is everyone so quiet? Would you please give me a clue?"
Jesus replied, "They're all in shock. No one thought they would ever see you."

I hope you realize that was unhealthy. It closed us off to everything. God never does that. God never closes off people in the world. They just don't have their opportunity yet. We have had that opportunity.

A related point there is that sometimes, even within the body, people will decide to isolate themselves because they again think they are exclusive. They have some exclusive knowledge or something and they choose to forgo fellowship with other brethren. They just don't do that. If we think about it from the election and the things we've seen, and this was really driven home in this recent election (especially in this state),

that the values of the world are different than ours. Hopefully they're 180 degrees out and different than ours. The point there is that we need the support and encouragement of other brethren. When things were breaking up in the past in Worldwide, we kind of isolated ourselves. We didn't stop keeping the Sabbath or anything like that, but we chose to isolate ourselves. That was not a good thing and it was not a healthy thing, because usually as you get lonely, you get lonelier. It gets worse mentally for us. It is distressing when folks do that.

I know we've heard that scripture many times about not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together. Let's go over to Hebrews 10 and look at that more closely. To me there's a lot more emphasis here than just the one scripture that tells us to not forsake the assembling of ourselves together. The entire context tells us that. Keep in mind the message of the sermonette and what we should be thankful for; for the privilege and the things we have and have been given.

Hebrews 10:19. *Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus,*

20) by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh (NKJV)

Now we can come directly to God's throne. The symbol there, the Holy of Holies, is in the temple, when the veil was rent because of Christ's blood because of the shedding of His blood.

21) and [having] a High Priest over the house of God,

That's over all of us, the ecclesia, the Church, the body of believers. Let's note the following verses. There are three "let us"; more than one in these statements.

22) let us [collectively as a group, Church body] draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. (NKJV)

Now what does that mean? How do we do that? It's because of the infusion of God's Holy Spirit which He has very graciously granted to us, washes us, cleanses us spiritually, cleanses our minds. Do we really appreciate that?

Maybe I'm nuts, but can't you feel at the Feast the concentration of God's Spirit when we're all together? We get a little taste of that at Sabbath services, on holy days and all that, but that's what that means. Our hearts and minds are being sprinkled, cleansed and changed. We are becoming more spiritually, mentally stable, shall we say, as we go along. Part of that is due to the fellowship. We have to remember who we are fellowshiping with when we do that. We're fellowshiping with the Head of the Church, Jesus Christ. He is the High Priest of the Church. He's the Good Shepherd.

23) *Let us hold fast the confession of [our] hope without wavering, for He who promised [is] faithful.*

24) *And let us consider one another [more than one again] in order to stir up love and good works,*

25) *not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, ... (NKJV)*

It will go on and show here in the context, in fact in verse 33. We heard that taken out of context so many times, I used to wonder, "Well, why weren't people assembling?" It was because of the persecution that was happening to the Church at that time. It goes on and actually tells us this farther down in the context.

25b) *... but exhorting [one another], and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.*

26) *For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins (NKJV)*

That kind of relates to our spiritual mental health.

27) *... but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries. (NKJV)*

We don't want to be included in that, do we?

28) *Anyone who has rejected Moses' law dies without mercy on [the testimony of] two or three witnesses. (NKJV)*

That's the way it worked under the Old Testament administration.

29) *Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot ...*

Rejected Christ because, again, when we fellowship together, we fellowship with Jesus Christ. We don't want to be in a position where we are even remotely rejecting Christ by choosing not to fellowship with Him. There are legitimate reasons for people not being able to attend sometimes, health reasons, etc. I'm not referring to that at all. But we've done it, I've done it, made a conscious choice not to fellowship. It's not spiritually healthy at all. We can't be in a bad church; we don't want to do that either. I think you get the point there. It goes on in verse 32 because it said back there that some were choosing not to assemble and here's part of the reason why I believe.

32) *But recall the former days in which, after you were illuminated, you endured a great struggle with sufferings*

That word “sufferings” in the Greek just means *hardship and pain*. That’s what was happening to them.

33) partly while you were made a spectacle both by reproaches and tribulations, and partly while you became companions of those who were so treated; (NKJV)

So that was the condition then of the Church of God and that really hasn’t changed. We just haven’t experienced a whole lot of it now, but that hasn’t changed. The point there is that people were giving up because of that. They were choosing not to assemble together. You can see that in the context. They were forsaking each other. Again, what was pointed out in the sermonette. Verse 34,

34) for you had compassion on me in my chains (one of Paul’s many trials), and joyfully accepted the plundering of your goods, knowing that you have a better and an enduring possession for yourselves in heaven. (NKJV)

Knowing that it is something way beyond any of the persecution, the pain or suffering in this life. We know that. Let’s go to verses 35 and 36.

35) Therefore do not cast away your confidence (There’s a certain confidence, a certain freedom in that hope, that understanding we have), which has great reward.

36) For you have need of endurance (patience), so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise:

And all that has to do with our mental, spiritual condition, our health.

39) But we are not of those who draw back to perdition (that would include those who forsake assembling together), but of those who believe to the saving of the soul. (NKJV)

In other words, they stay the course. They finish it. In the whole picture there are a lot of other things that relate to our spiritual health and wellbeing; tons of distractions in our daily lives. We all know that. A lot of things compete for our attention. It happens all the time. Sometimes it’s just our lifestyle choices, the choices we make distract us. Then a lot of times we wonder how come we’re just spiritually empty. We’re dried up and sick. That is a mental state and that’s what is happening to us.

We’re not called to be theoretical Christians at all. We’re called to be people who put into practice what we believe and we know that’s what we should be doing. A lot of times that requires some mental discipline on our part. It brings us to the basic tools. I will briefly touch on those because we know we have basic tools that we’ve always known about and have served God’s people down through the centuries. They kind of

boost our spiritual mental health because they help us to focus on God and not on our own problems. On this short list is:

Prayer

Referring back to the sermonette, how often do we consider what a privilege it is to be able to come before God's throne? We can come into the Holy of Holies now. We can go directly to God's throne. Some people find it helpful to keep a journal.

Back when things were really bad, I used to keep a journal. It helped me keep my head screwed on straight because there were a lot of depressing things going on. Depression is not healthy.

Bible Study

Just meditating on God's word. Again, it helps to get our focus off ourselves and our own problems.

Obeying God's Commands

Again, we need to put into practice what we are doing.

Stepping Out On Faith

Just trusting God. We learn that when we do this, God is a lot more powerful than all of our anxieties and fears and all the things that do affect us mentally.

Fasting From Time To Time

Don't get me wrong here; I'm not trying to start a new doctrine, but sometimes we may need to fast from TV. These things absorb enormous amounts of time and energy. They crowd out God in our lives. We need to guard our time as well as our minds. I think we all know that, but just as a reminder.

Serving Others

When we do that, we reorient our attitude and our whole spiritual thinking away from self. I saw a cartoon recently that I thought was kind of funny. It hit my funny button. The cartoon showed a meeting going on and there was a tripod showing what the meeting was about. It said, "The Narcissist Club." Here's a guy standing at the microphone and he is all dressed up in a suit. He says, "Hi, my name is Jim. I don't care what your name is." All about self; we need to get our minds off self.

My opinion when it talks about serving others is, the most underutilized resource in the Church of God are the brethren. But that has always been squashed because much of it had to do with that authoritarian structure we had. That hierarchy was not conducive to helping us develop as members. There's nothing stopping us from doing that.

So here are some of the things we've talked about:

We talked about the issue of spiritual health and wellbeing.

We covered a little about the elections outcome and how we really don't need to keep our minds focused on that. There are a lot more important things to think about. If we do that, we will have a healthier outlook.

We spent some time on those unhealthy characteristics which we have all experienced. I think we can all relate to these to one degree or another. Those are lingering mindsets; obsession with prophecy and how things are going to work out. You remember the way it went; well, here's prophecy. Here's a really neat scenario and if I listen to this and follow this guy who is promoting this, it's going to be my ticket to the place of safety. He's going to punch that ticket for me. If I make it to the place of safety, I'm going to make it to God's Kingdom. That's the way the process worked in our minds. That wasn't spiritually healthy. It just wasn't. It's alright to hope for those things and we do, but I think you see what I mean.

We talked about being exclusivist and especially fellowshipping with other believers. We should do that as much as possible. Again, that reflects our mental state whenever we choose not to do that, if we don't want to be with others who have God's Spirit. Think about that for a second.

We covered a little bit about the basics: prayer, Bible study, obeying God, stepping out on faith, fasting and serving others.

Just wrapping it up here, it's important to remember that all these things are not ends to themselves. They're just means to help us to be closer to God and more deeply involved in the things of God. Isaiah 55, a closing scripture. I won't take you anywhere else from here.

Isaiah 55:6. *Seek the Lord while He may be found. Call upon Him while He is near.*

7) Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts ...

That's the only real cure for mental illness.

7b) ... Let him return to the Lord, and He will have mercy on him; and to our God, For He will abundantly pardon.

8) "For My thoughts [are] not your thoughts, Nor [are] your ways My ways," says the Lord. (NKJV)

God doesn't have any mental hang-ups.

9) "For [as] the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.

So if we seek God, we will find Him because He wants to be found. He is interested in our entire lives and He is highly interested in our spiritual mental state of mind. He is very much interested in that.

We cannot earn salvation by doing all these things, folks. Let's make an effort to stay close to God and that way we will have a healthy spiritual mental outlook.