

The Relation of Diet to Health and Morals

Part 1

by Ellen White

ONLY one lease of life is granted us; and the inquiry with everyone should be, "How can I invest my powers so that they may yield the greatest profit? How can I do most for the glory of God and the benefit of my fellow men?" For life is valuable only as it is used for the attainment of these ends.

Self-Development a Duty

Our first duty toward God and our fellow beings is that of self-development. Every faculty with which the Creator has endowed us should be cultivated to the highest degree of perfection, that we may be able to do the greatest amount of good of which we are capable. Hence that time is spent to good account which is used in the establishment and preservation of physical and mental health. We cannot afford to dwarf or cripple any function of body or mind. As surely as we do this, we must suffer the consequences.

Every man has the opportunity, to a great extent, of making himself whatever he chooses to be. The blessings of this life, and also of the immortal state, are within his reach. He may build up a character of solid worth, gaining new strength at every step. He may advance daily in knowledge and wisdom, conscious of new delights as he progresses, adding virtue to virtue, grace to grace. His faculties will improve by use; the more wisdom he gains, the greater will be his capacity for acquiring. His intelligence, knowledge, and virtue will thus develop into greater strength and more perfect symmetry.

On the other hand, he may allow his powers to rust out, for want of use, or to be perverted through evil habits, lack of self-control or moral and religious stamina. His course then tends downward; he is disobedient to the law of God and to the laws of health. Appetite conquers him; inclination carries him away. It is easier for him to allow the powers of evil, which are always active, to drag him backward, than to struggle against them, and go forward. Dissipation, disease, and death follow. This is the history of many lives that might have been useful in the cause of God and humanity.

Temptation through Appetite

One of the strongest temptations that man has to meet is upon the point of appetite. In the beginning the Lord made man upright. He was created with a perfectly balanced mind, the size and strength of all his organs being fully and harmoniously developed. But, through the seductions of the wily foe, the prohibition of God was disregarded, and the laws of nature wrought out their full penalty.

Adam and Eve were permitted to eat of all the trees in their Eden home, save one. The Lord said to the holy pair, In the day that ye eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, ye shall surely die. See Genesis 2:16-17. Eve was beguiled by the serpent and made to believe that God would not do as He had said. She ate, and, thinking she felt the sensation of a new and more exalted life, she bore the fruit to her husband. The serpent had said that she should not die, and she felt no ill effects from eating the fruit, nothing which could be interpreted to mean death, but, instead, a pleasurable sensation, which she imagined was as the angels felt. Her experience stood arrayed against the positive command of Jehovah, yet Adam permitted himself to be seduced by it.

Thus we often find it, even in the religious world. God's expressed commands are transgressed; and "because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men

is fully set in them to do evil." Ecclesiastes 8:11. In the face of the most positive commands of God, men and women will follow their own inclinations, and then dare to pray over the matter, to prevail upon God to allow them to go contrary to His expressed will. Satan comes to the side of such persons, as he did to Eve in Eden, and impresses them. They have an exercise of mind, and this they relate as a most wonderful experience which the Lord has given them. But true experience will be in harmony with natural and divine law; false experience arrays itself against the laws of life and the precepts of Jehovah.

Appetite Ruled Antediluvians

Since the first surrender to appetite, mankind have been growing more and more self-indulgent, until health has been sacrificed on the altar of appetite. The inhabitants of the antediluvian world were intemperate in eating and drinking. They would have flesh meats, although God had at that time given man no permission to eat animal food. They ate and drank till the indulgence of their depraved appetite knew no bounds, and they became so corrupt that God could bear with them no longer. Their cup of iniquity was full, and He cleansed the earth of its moral pollution by a flood.

Intemperance after the Flood

As men multiplied upon the earth after the Flood, they again forgot God and corrupted their ways before Him. Intemperance in every form increased, until almost the whole world was given up to its sway. Entire cities have been swept from the face of the earth because of the debasing crimes and revolting iniquity that made them a blot upon the fair field of God's created works. The gratification of unnatural appetite led to the sins that caused the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. God ascribes the fall of Babylon to her gluttony and drunkenness. Indulgence of appetite and passion was the foundation of all their sins.

Esau's Experience

Esau had a strong desire for a particular article of food, and he had so long gratified himself that he did not feel the necessity of turning from the tempting, coveted dish. He allowed his imagination to dwell upon it until the power of appetite bore down every other consideration and controlled him. He thought he would suffer great inconvenience, and even death, if he could not have that particular dish. The more he reflected upon it, the more his desire strengthened, until his birthright lost its value and sacredness in his sight, and he bartered it away. He flattered himself that he could dispose of his birthright at will and buy it back at pleasure; but when he sought to regain it, even at a great sacrifice, he was not able to do so. He then bitterly repented of his rashness, his folly, his madness, but it was all in vain. He had despised the blessing, and the Lord had removed it from him forever.

Israel Desired the Fleshpots of Egypt

When the God of Israel brought His people out of Egypt, He withheld flesh meats from them in a great measure, but gave them bread from heaven and water from the flinty rock. With this they were not satisfied. They loathed the food given them and wished themselves back in Egypt, where they could sit by the fleshpots. They preferred to endure slavery, and even death, rather than to be deprived of flesh. God granted their desire, giving them flesh, and leaving them to eat till their gluttony produced a plague, from which many of them died.

Example after example might be cited to show the effects of yielding to appetite. It seemed a small matter to our first parents to transgress the command of God in that one act--the eating from a tree

that was so beautiful to the sight and so pleasant to the taste--but it broke their allegiance to God and opened the gates to a flood of guilt and woe that has deluged the world.

Intemperance and Crime

Crime and disease have increased with every succeeding generation. Intemperance in eating and drinking, and the indulgence of the baser passions, have benumbed the nobler faculties of man. Reason, instead of being the ruler, has come to be the slave of appetite to an alarming extent. An increasing desire for rich food has been indulged, until it has become the fashion to crowd all the delicacies possible into the stomach. Especially at parties of pleasure is the appetite indulged with but little restraint. Rich dinners and late suppers are served, consisting of highly seasoned meats, with rich sauces, cakes, pies, ices, tea, coffee, and so forth. No wonder that with such a diet people have sallow complexions and suffer untold agonies from dyspepsia.

Against every transgression of the laws of life, nature will utter her protest. She bears abuse as long as she can; but finally the retribution comes, and it falls upon the mental as well as the physical powers. Nor does it end with the transgressor; the effects of his indulgence are seen in his offspring, and thus the evil is passed down from generation to generation.

Our Youth Lack Self-Control

The youth of today are a sure index to the future of society; and as we view them, what can we hope for that future? The majority are fond of amusement, and averse to work. They lack moral courage to deny self and to respond to the claims of duty. They have but little self-control, and become excited and angry on the slightest occasion. Very many in every age and station of life are without principle or conscience; and with their idle, spendthrift habits they are rushing into vice, and are corrupting society, until our world is becoming a second Sodom. If the appetites and passions were under the control of reason and religion, society would present a widely different aspect. God never designed that the present woeful condition of things should exist; it has been brought about through the gross violation of nature's laws.

The character is formed, to a great extent, in early years. The habits then established have more influence than any natural endowment, in making them either giants or dwarfs in intellect; for the very best talents may, through wrong habits, become warped and enfeebled. The earlier in life one contracts hurtful habits, the more firmly will they hold their victim in slavery, and the more certainly will they lower his standard of spirituality. On the other hand, if correct and virtuous habits are formed in youth, they will generally mark the course of the possessor through life. In most cases, it will be found that those who in later life reverence God and honour the right, learned that lesson before there was time for the world to stamp its image of sin upon the soul. Those of mature age are generally as insensible to new impressions as is the hardened rock; but youth is impressible. Youth is the time to acquire knowledge for daily practice through life; a right character may then be easily formed. It is the time to establish good habits, to gain and to hold the power of self-control. Youth is the sowing time, and the seed sown determines the harvest, both for this life and the life to come.

Responsibility of Parents

Parents should make it their first object to become intelligent in regard to the proper manner of dealing with their children, that they may secure to them sound minds in sound bodies. The principles of temperance should be carried out in all the details of home life. Self-denial should be taught to children and enforced upon them, so far as is consistent, from babyhood. Teach the little ones that they should

eat to live, not live to eat; that appetite must be held in abeyance to the will; and that the will must be governed by calm, intelligent reason.

If parents have transmitted to their children tendencies which will make more difficult the work of educating them to be strictly temperate, and of cultivating pure and virtuous habits, what a solemn responsibility rests upon the parents to counteract that influence by every means in their power! How diligently and earnestly should they strive to do their duty by their unfortunate offspring! To parents is committed the sacred trust of guarding the physical and moral constitution of their children. Those who indulge a child's appetite and do not teach him to control his passions may afterward see, in the tobacco-loving, liquor-drinking slave, whose senses are benumbed, and whose lips utter falsehood and profanity, the terrible mistake they have made.

It is impossible for those who give the reins to appetite to attain to Christian perfection. The moral sensibilities of your children cannot be easily aroused unless you are careful in the selection of their food. Many a mother sets a table that is a snare to her family. Flesh meats, butter, cheese, rich pastry, spiced foods, and condiments are freely partaken of by both old and young. These things do their work in deranging the stomach, exciting the nerves, and enfeebling the intellect. The blood-making organs cannot convert such things into good blood. The grease cooked in the food renders it difficult of digestion. The effect of cheese is deleterious. Fine-flour bread does not impart to the system the nourishment that is to be found in unbolted wheat bread. Its common use will not keep the system in the best condition. Spices at first irritate the tender coating of the stomach, but finally destroy the natural sensitiveness of this delicate membrane. The blood becomes fevered, the animal propensities are aroused, while the moral and intellectual powers are weakened and become servants to the baser passions.

The mother should study to set a simple yet nutritious diet before her family. God has furnished man with abundant means for the gratification of an unperverted appetite. He has spread before him the products of the earth--a bountiful variety of food that is palatable to the taste and nutritious to the system. Of these our benevolent heavenly Father says we may freely eat. Fruits, grains, and vegetables, prepared in a simple way, free from spice and grease of all kinds, make, with milk or cream, the most healthful diet. They impart nourishment to the body and give a power of endurance and vigour of intellect that are not produced by a stimulating diet. Counsels on Health, 107-115

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Part 2

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Evils of Meat Eating

THOSE who use flesh meats freely do not always have an unclouded brain and an active intellect, because the use of the flesh of animals tends to cause a grossness of body and to benumb the finer sensibilities of the mind. The liability to disease is increased by flesh eating. We do not hesitate to say that meat is not essential to the maintenance of health and strength.

Those who subsist largely upon meat cannot avoid sometimes eating flesh which is more or less diseased. In many cases the process of fitting animals for market produces an unhealthy condition. Shut away from light and pure air, inhaling the atmosphere of filthy stables, the entire body soon becomes contaminated with foul matter; and when such flesh is received into the human body it corrupts the blood, and disease is produced. If the person already has impure blood, this unhealthy condition will

be greatly aggravated. But few can be made to believe that it is the meat they have eaten which has poisoned their blood and caused their suffering. Many die of diseases wholly due to meat eating, when the real cause is scarcely suspected by themselves or others. Some do not immediately feel its effects, but this is no evidence that it does not hurt them. It may be doing its work surely upon the system, yet for the time being the victim may realise nothing of it.

Pork, although one of the most common articles of diet, is one of the most injurious. God did not prohibit the Hebrew from eating swine's flesh merely to show His authority, but because it is not a proper article of food for man. God never created the swine to be eaten under any circumstances. It is impossible for the flesh of any living creature to be healthful when filth is its natural element, and when it feeds upon every detestable thing.

It is not the chief end of man to gratify his appetite. There are physical wants to be supplied; but, because of this, is it necessary that man shall be controlled by appetite? Will the people who are seeking to become holy, pure, refined, that they may be introduced into the society of heavenly angels, continue to take the life of God's creatures, and enjoy their flesh as a luxury? From what the Lord has shown me, this order of things will be changed, and God's peculiar people will exercise temperance in all things.

Proper Preparation of Food a Duty

There is a class who seem to think that whatever is eaten is lost, that anything tossed into the stomach to fill it, will do as well as food prepared with intelligence and care. But it is important that we relish the food we eat. If we cannot, and have to eat mechanically, we fail to receive the proper nourishment. Our bodies are constructed from what we eat; and in order to make tissues of good quality, we must have the right kind of food, and it must be prepared with such skill as will best adapt it to the wants of the system. It is a religious duty for those who cook, to learn how to prepare healthful food in a variety of ways, so that it may be both palatable and healthful. Poor cookery is wearing away the life energies of thousands. More souls are lost from this cause than many realise. It deranges the system and produces disease. In the condition thus induced, heavenly things cannot be readily discerned.

Some do not feel that it is a religious duty to prepare food properly; hence they do not try to learn how. They let the bread sour before baking, and the saleratus [baking soda] added to remedy the cook's carelessness makes it totally unfit for the human stomach. It requires thought and care to make good bread. But there is more religion in a good loaf of bread than many think. Food can be prepared simply and healthfully, but it requires skill to make it both palatable and nourishing. In order to learn how to cook, women should study, then patiently reduce what they learn to practice. People are suffering because they will not take the trouble to do this. I say to such, It is time for you to rouse your dormant energies and inform yourselves. Do not think the time wasted which is devoted to obtaining a thorough knowledge and experience in the preparation of healthful, palatable food. No matter how long an experience you have had in cooking, if you still have the responsibilities of a family, it is your duty to learn how to care for them properly. If necessary, go to some good cook and put yourself under her instruction until you are mistress of the art.

Wrong Eating Destroys Health

A wrong course of eating or drinking destroys health, and with it the sweetness of life. Oh, how many times has a good meal, as it is called, been purchased at the expense of sleep and quiet rest! Thousands, by indulging a perverted appetite, have brought on fever or some other acute disease, which has resulted in death. That was enjoyment purchased at an immense cost.

Because it is wrong to eat merely to gratify perverted taste, it does not follow that we should be indifferent in regard to our food. It is a matter of the highest importance. No one should adopt an impoverished diet. Many are debilitated from disease and need nourishing, well-cooked food. Health reformers, above all others, should be careful to avoid extremes. The body must have sufficient nourishment. The God who gives His beloved sleep has furnished them also suitable food to sustain the physical system in a healthy condition.

Many turn from light and knowledge, and sacrifice principle to taste. They eat when the system needs no food and at irregular intervals, because they have no moral stamina to resist inclination. As the result, the abused stomach rebels and suffering follows. Regularity in eating is very important for health of body and serenity of mind. Never should a morsel of food pass the lips between meals.

Eating Too Frequently

Many indulge in the pernicious habit of eating just before retiring. They may have taken their regular meals, yet because they feel a sense of faintness they think they must have a lunch. By indulging this wrong practice it becomes a habit, and they feel as though they could not sleep without food. In many cases this faintness comes because the digestive organs have been too severely taxed through the day in disposing of the great quantity of food forced upon them. These organs need a period of entire rest from labour, to recover their exhausted energies. A second meal should never be eaten until the stomach has had time to recover from the labour of digesting the preceding meal. When we lie down at night, the stomach should have its work all done, that it, as well as other portions of the body, may enjoy rest. But if more food is forced upon it, the digestive organs are put in motion again, to perform the same round of labour through the sleeping hours. The sleep of such is often disturbed with unpleasant dreams, and in the morning they awake unrefreshed. When this practice is followed, the digestive organs lose their natural vigour, and the person finds himself a miserable dyspeptic. And not only does the transgression of nature's laws affect the individual unfavourably, but others suffer more or less with him. Let anyone take a course that irritates him in any way, and see how quickly he manifests impatience. He cannot, without special grace, speak or act calmly. He casts a shadow wherever he goes. How can anyone say, then, "It is nobody's business what I eat or drink"?

Evils to Be Avoided

It is possible to eat immoderately, even of wholesome food. It does not follow that because one has discarded the use of hurtful articles of diet, he can eat just as much as he pleases. Overeating, no matter what the quality of the food, clogs the living machine and thus hinders it in its work.

Many make a mistake in drinking cold water with their meals. Food should not be washed down. Taken with meals, water diminishes the flow of the saliva; and the colder the water, the greater the injury to the stomach. Ice water or ice lemonade, taken with meals, will arrest digestion until the system has imparted sufficient warmth to the stomach to enable it to take up its work again. Masticate slowly, and allow the saliva to mingle with the food.

The more liquid there is taken into the stomach with the meals, the more difficult it is for the food to digest, for the liquid must first be absorbed. Do not eat largely of salt; give up spiced pickles; keep fiery food out of the stomach; eat fruit with the meals, and the irritation that calls for so much drink will cease to exist. But if anything is needed to quench the thirst, pure water is all that nature requires. Never take tea, coffee, beer, wine, or any spirituous liquor.

Eat Slowly

In order to secure healthy digestion, food should be eaten slowly. Those who wish to avoid dyspepsia, and those who realise their obligation to keep all their powers in a condition which will enable them to render the best service to God, will do well to remember this. If your time to eat is limited, do not bolt your food, but eat less, and masticate slowly. The benefit derived from food does not depend so much on the quantity eaten, as on its thorough digestion; nor the gratification of taste so much on the amount of food swallowed, as on the length of time it remains in the mouth. Those who are excited, anxious, or in a hurry would do well not to eat until they have found rest or relief, for the vital powers, already severely taxed, cannot supply the necessary digestive fluids. When travelling, some are almost constantly nibbling, if there is anything in their reach. This is a most pernicious practice. If travellers would eat regularly of the simplest and most nutritious kinds of food, they would not experience so great weariness, nor suffer so much from sickness.

In order to preserve health, temperance in all things is necessary--temperance in labour, temperance in eating and drinking. Our heavenly Father sent the light of health reform to guard against the evils resulting from a debased appetite, that those who love purity and holiness may know how to use with discretion the good things He has provided for them, and that by exercising temperance in daily life, they may be sanctified through the truth.

At general meetings and camp meetings we should have good, wholesome, nourishing food, prepared in a simple manner. We should not turn these seasons into occasions for feasting. If we appreciate the blessings of God, if we are feeding on the Bread of Life, we will not be much concerned about gratifying the appetite. The great burden of our thoughts will be, How is it with my soul? There will be such a longing for spiritual food--something which will impart spiritual strength--that we will not complain if the diet is plain and simple.

God requires the body to be rendered a living sacrifice to Him, not a dead or a dying sacrifice. The offerings of the ancient Hebrews were to be without blemish, and will it be pleasing to God to accept a human offering that is filled with disease and corruption? He tells us that our body is the temple of the Holy Ghost; and He requires us to take care of this temple, that it may be a fit habitation for His Spirit. The apostle Paul gives us this admonition: "Ye are not your own; for ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's." 1 Corinthians 6:19-20. All should be very careful to preserve the body in the best condition of health, that they may render to God perfect service and do their duty in the family and in society. *Counsels on Health*, 115-121.