



AUGUST 1986

Volume 26 Number 8

Do You Have A Spiritual Fitness Program?

Edward O. Bragwell, Sr.

"... Exercise yourself rather to godliness. For bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come." - 1 Tim. 4:7,8.

Half the people I know (hyperbolically speaking, of course) are on a physical fitness kick. The exercise equipment business is booming. Individuals, families, businesses, schools and various organizations are putting physical fitness programs into their budgets and schedules.

This awakening to the value of regular physical exercise is good. In fact, I am going to get on some kind of regular physical fitness agenda. I just want be sure that the procedure that I choose is best suited for me. I don't want to waste time, energy and money on some routine that is not right for me. I am now methodically gathering information on all possible plans in alphabetical order. Hopefully I will complete my research on AEROBICS this year so that I can begin studying BADMINTON. Who says I am not interested in getting into shape? I just don't like to stampede into anything

without having all the facts at hand.

Seriously, A Christian should try to keep his body in shape. His body belongs to God. (1 Cor. 6:19,20) It should be an instrument for His service. A physically fit person has more energy to devote to the service of God.

Paul, in our text, acknowledges that bodily exercise profits. He is just warning against an over emphasis on it. Perhaps even to the neglect of spiritual health. John splendidly complimented Gaius by writing, "Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers." (3 John 2) All too often, we must wish that a brother's (or sister's) soul would prosper even as he prospers in all things and is in health. Wouldn't be great if we could get brethren as enthused about spiritual fitness as they are about physical fitness? The Hebrews needed to get into shape spiritually: "For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

FITNESS PROGRAM

have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil."

They had jeopardized their souls by neglecting spiritual exercise (cf. chapter 2:3). They could not apply the word of righteousness to distinguish between good and evil because they had neglected spiritual exercise.

Many good Christians strike a proper balance in attending to both physical and spiritual health. They conscientiously maintain a good diet and proper exercise in both realms. They are to be commended.

I have been watching my aerobics, running, walking, jogging, tennis, ball playing, other exercising brethren as I investigate fitness programs. I am learning several things from the really dedicated ones:

1. They get the best equipment they can afford. They tell me that without good equipment one not only reduces the benefits from the program, he has good chance of getting hurt.

2. They regularly eat a nutritious diet.

3. They find a time and a way for eating and exercising. They do it at home and regularly get with others who share their interest in their chosen fitness program.

4. They don't let a few bruises, scratches, sore muscles, or a broken limb or two stop them. They even tell me that the best way to recover is to work the soreness out. Such setbacks may stop the faint of heart but not real dedicated enthusiasts.

5. They, especially those that I know well, are constantly telling folks like me why we ought to get into a program for our own good. Frankly, I am almost persuaded.

Do you think that we might profit from observing these bodily exercise zealots? Could we apply some of these observations to our spiritual fitness program? I am beginning think so.

1. We need to be properly equipped lest we, in our zeal, get hurt spiritually. The scriptures are given so "that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly

equipped for every good work." (2 Tim. 3:17). The work of the apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers is designed for "equipping of the saints for the work ministry" and to keep them from being "tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine". (Eph. 4:11-16). The godliness revealed to the apostles and prophets (cf. Eph. 2:19-3:7); taught by them along with evangelists, pastors and teachers; practiced by saints "skilful in the word of righteousness" indeed "is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come".

2. If we have a good spiritual diet we will become spiritually fit. What is best for us may not be that which tastes good at the time. Many are weaker than they otherwise would be because of their eating habits. They live on a junk and/or fast food diet. These may be the most convenient and tasty for the moment, but are not best in the long run. Many brethren think that they are really feeding their souls by a quick superficial reading of a verse or two at some convenient moment. They may wish to be fed by evangelists, pastors and teachers who will give them a warmed over sermonettes so they can grab a quick bite on their way to activities and exercises of lesser importance.

3. Real spiritual fitness devotees will find a time and way to eat, digest and enjoy solid spiritual food. They will find times and places to for prayer, study, worship and spiritual work -- alone and with others. They will welcome any opportunity to get together with others of like precious faith. (cf. Heb. 10:25; Acts 20:7)

4. They will not let spiritual setbacks stop them. They may suffer some bruises, etc. because of their diligent spiritual exercise. Does it stop them. No. They work out the soreness by "rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name". (Acts 5:41).

5. They are not too timid about talking to others about spiritual fitness.

CONTINUED NEAR END OF PAGE 4

SHORT-HAIRED WOMEN

Donnie V. Rader

Maybe it's the influence of the women's liberation movement or maybe it's just apathy, but I'm seeing more and more women who act like men, dress like men, look like men, wear their hair like men, talk like men and who leave their responsibilities at home and to the children for a career. It may be later than we think. The liberation movement is no doubt having its impact upon the church.

Among some I see little or no distinction in men and women. As I shop in the mall or drive through the streets I see beings that make me wonder, "Is it man, woman or even beast?" I've taken notice of late to the growing number of short-haired women who have their hair as short (in some cases shorter) than most men. A few even in the church have had their hair chopped off like a man's.

While such practices may not fit the taste of a few of us more conservatives, the real question is what does God think about short-haired women?

A Distinction Between Men And Women

Since the very beginning of time God has ordained that men be men and women be women. Under Moses' law God said, "The woman shall not wear that which pertaineth unto a man, neither shall a man put on a woman's garment: for all that do so are an abomination unto the Lord thy God" (Duet. 22:5). Then under the New Testament the apostle Paul instructs that men are not to be "effeminate" (like a woman) (I Cor. 6:9). There most certainly is a distinction between men and women in how they are to look, dress and act.

I wonder what happened to the days when men looked and acted like men and women looked and acted like women. How repulsive it is to see a man with hair to his shoulders who has the mannerisms and the voice of a woman. How disgusting to see a woman who has her hair cut well above her ears and walks (as one brother put it) like she's plowing corn.

Even a casual reading of I Cor. 11 will

reveal that men and women are to be different. Men are to be men and women, women. One is to have short hair and not long while the other is to have long and not short.

Is There A Double Standard?

I am made to wonder if maybe we live by a double standard. I hear preaching and teaching and expression of disapproval about men's long hair. If one of our own number were to let his hair grow to his shoulders he would be rebuked, condemned and make a public spectacle and rightly so. But, who even says a word if one of the sisters trims her hair an inch above her ear?

I have heard I Cor. 11:14 quoted a number of times with reference to men and their long hair (and I may add "Amen"). But, how often is verse 15 quoted with reference to women and their short hair? Why is the sin worse for the man than for the woman?

This reminds me of the problems over immodesty. We preach our hearts out to women about wearing their bathing suits to the beach when it is just as wrong for a man to wear his swimming trunks and go without a shirt. The point is that sin is sin when committed by man or woman.

Long Hair Is For Her Glory

The apostle Paul wrote, "Doth not even nature itself teach you, that, if a man have long hair, it is a shame unto him? But if a woman have long hair, it is a glory for her: for her hair is given her for a covering" (I Cor. 11:14,15). The man is not to have long hair, but the woman is. This is taught by "nature itself".

There is a question among scholars and commentators concerning the meaning of the term "nature". Vincent says it refers to the "recognized constitution of things" (Word Studies, Vol. III, p. 248). Varying a little from Vincent, A. T. Robertson says it is "native sense of propriety in addition to mere custom, but one that rests on the objective difference

in the constitution of things" (Word Pictures, Vol. IV, p. 162). Mike Willis analyzes it well by saying, "In regard to 'nature' (Phusis - mw), the question arises whether the word is to be taken in the objective sense, as denoting the order and law of nature, or in the subjective sense, as denoting the instinctive feelings and sentiments, the native sense of propriety existing in every individual, and which may have been more or less affected by custom and habit. The latter interpretation cannot be altogether established from the meaning of the word. But the former yields good sense, as we understand by it here to denote the natural constitution of the sexes, and the richer growth of hair in women.' The exact manner in which nature has distinguished between man and woman's hair is not clear; men can grow long hair and some men can grow it in abundance. However, I have never known of large numbers of women becoming bald as is frequently the case with men. Whether by chance or something else, however, women have always worn their hair longer than men; cases in which a man's hair is longer than that of a woman have been the exception and not the rule. Thus, nature has distinguished between the sexes so far as the hair is concerned" (A Commentary On Paul's First Epistle To The Corinthians, p. 375).

Thus I Cor. 11:14-15 rest upon a God given distinction between men and women which "nature itself" teaches. We conclude then that it is a shame if a man has long hair and a dishonor if a woman has short hair.

Paul says that the woman's hair is given for her glory. She should be proud that she is a woman and thus want to look and act like one. Her long hair should be the object of her pride. Thus when she cuts her hair so as to look like a man she must care little about her appearance.

How Long Is Long?

When we've preached to the men about short hair they've responded, "Well, how short is short?" Now the women ask, "How long is long?" Apparently the question is to offset the force of the passage. If no one can tell them (in

inches) how long or short their hair ought to be, then there should be no restrictions at all.

The terms "long" and "short" are relative terms that cannot be given a specific measurement. Though that be the case, I Cor. 11:14-15 show that there is a point at which a man's hair becomes "long" and woman's becomes "short" and is thus a shame for both of them. While we would have to admit that there is an area of judgment in how long or short hair ought to be, anyone who has any respect for the word of God would have to admit that there is a point at which we must say a man's hair is definitely too long and the woman's absolutely too short.

"Long" and "short" are not so much measured in inches, but used in comparison. Read again I Cor. 11:14-15 and see. The comparison is not men with men or women with women, but between men and women. A woman is to have long hair in comparison to the length of men's hair. And the man is to have short hair in comparison to the length of women's hair.

Maybe you think the length of your hair is nobody's business but yours. And to some degree you're right. However, God has spoken and we must take heed.

FITNESS FROM PAGE 2

They tell others about the gospel. What it really is and why others should get involved.

Brother or Sister, how spiritually fit are you? What are you doing to maintain and improve upon it?

The Reflector is a monthly publication of the Church of Christ meeting at 2005 Elkwood Drive, Fultondale, AL 35068. USPS 606-140. Our mailing address: 3004 Brakefield Drive, Fultondale, AL 35068

Second Class Postage Paid at Fultondale, AL 35068