

CHRISTIAN STRESS MANAGEMENT
"Part I: Overcoming Errant Opinions That Generate Stress"
(1 John 1:1-7a; 2:3-4, 6)

Introduction: (To show the need for the message . . .)

- (1) This is New Year's Day, a day when we can wish one another a Happy New Year in the Lord! After the service, we can all go home and enjoy the start of 1995, right?!
- (2) A number of people in our Church Family have told me that this season is not that easy!
- (a) Several women have shared with Nadine and me that they feel really pressured: cookie baking, the loss of electricity on Christmas Eve, several locations to visit on Christmas Day, presents to open, let alone **football game after football game** that they have to put up with not only on New Year's Day, but since New Year's is Sunday, they have to listen to the Rose Bowl on January **2nd** -- these all make this season a challenge! Something happens between Thanksgiving and New Years that wears a woman out!
- (b) Our family saw the challenge of stress this Christmas. On Christmas Eve, not only did we face the prospect of a Church without electricity, but our tree we use as a clothesline to the house fell over! I called my folks on Christmas Day, the day grandpa Shell died in 1977, and Mom reported on a relative that had been murdered by a co-worker while at work! Stress-producing events -- we all face them!
- (2) Not only can negative things produce stress -- positive changes can do it as well! Dr. Frank B. Minirth, a Christian psychiatrist, reports in his book, You Can Measure Your Mental Health , p. 6, the following positive events that can bother us: Marriage, marital reconciliation, pregnancy, the gain of a new family member, a change in a financial state, changing to a different line of work, the change in responsibilities at work, outstanding personal achievement, a revision of personal habits (due to a New Year's resolution), a change in eating habits, a vacation, Christmas -- all of these can put us under stress!

Where, then, do we begin to handle stress?!

Need: "I know that it is spiritually unacceptable for me to be so stressed out, for 'good Christians' are supposed to be 'victorious,' but knowing this does little to relieve the pressure! Any ideas?!"

- I. **The Apostle John indirectly addresses the problem of stress for the Christian in 1 John: he wrote this Epistle to lead believers into fullness of joy which contrasts with their being stressed, 1 John 1:4.**
- II. **John relates that the first step in managing stress is to overcome errant opinions that generate stress in the first place!**
- A. When the believer holds to correct beliefs, the Holy Spirit subjectively convinces him that he holds to the truth, 1 Jn. 2:20,27.
- B. However, a believer can be deceived into adapting wrong views. When he applies these views to life, he becomes stressed! We can **trace** how using errant views will generate great stress:
1. For example, one may (erroneously) fear that he can lose his salvation when he sees apostates leaving the Church, 1 J. 2:19f!
 2. For example, one may not discern legalism from God's mild rules, and errantly feel unsettled by adopting a wrong view, 1 J. 5:3.
 3. By adopting such **unsettling** ideas, the Spirit's work to assure the believer of the truth also ceases , yielding **unrest**, 1 J. 2:27!
 4. In this **restless** state, the afflicted believer knows he has a problem, but he doesn't know **WHAT** has caused it nor **HOW** to approach it! So as he ponders his problem, he progresses from **restless** stress unto **aggravated** stress in his life, 1 Jn. 2:11 & Mtt. 15:14b.
- C. Therefore, John's first message of countering stress addresses the believer's countering **errant viewpoints** that **hatch** stress:
1. The stressed believer needs to know that God is **light**, and that **light** exists **WITHOUT ANY** darkness, 1 Jn. 1:5!
 2. This "light" symbol depicts God's **reality** for man:
 - a. In place of sinful Israel that sought guidance through finite, evil spirit mediums, God said that if they did not go to **Scripture** for insight, that there was **no** "light" in them, Isa. 8:19-20.
 - b. Thus, they who sat in darkness saw God's **light**, Christ, who exposed God's **truth**, Is. 9:1-2,6.

- c. John's Gospel adopts God's Isaiah 8-9 theme to relay that Jesus, God's Light, revealed the truth, Jn. 1:1, 9, 18.
3. Since this light is **totally without darkness**, and this entity is God's truth, the truth of Scripture is absolute truth!
4. Thus, 1 John 1:5 paves the way for the believer to manage stress:
 - a. The believer starts his stress management by believing that Scripture is absolutely true, 1 Jn. 1:5 with Isa. 8:19f.
 - b. Thus, he realizes that Scripture offers him the **luxury** of an exposure to the absolute yardstick of reality!
 - c. He also believes Scripture's claim to equip him with all the right opinions he needs to live well in all of life, 2 T. 3:16f!
 - d. Armed with such confidences, he sees the need to judge all human viewpoints by Scripture alone, 1 John 1:5!
 - e. The believer **then** can test all of the views involved in the issue(s) where he is stressed so that he may reject errant ones in favor of God's Scripture truths! (Ps. 119:165)
 - f. He may wonder **where** to turn in Scripture to address a given stressful issue. The Spirit of God will guide him into the appropriate passage **as he uses** the Word, cf. John 14:26 with 1 Cor. 2:10 and Gal. 5:16, 18!
 - g. He then sees the Holy Spirit subjectively signal His peace-bearing approval of God's correct viewpoint (1 Jn. 2:20,27) while also enjoying inner peace by applying the Scripture to his stressful experience, Gal. 5:22.

Application: *To begin to handle stress, (1) one must become a Christian to be equipped to discern truth from error, 1 Jn. 1:1-4, 5! This is accomplished by believing on Christ for salvation from sin, John 1:11-12; 3:16. (2) As BELIEVERS who yet experience stress, (a) realize that we lack peace since we have not used the absolute truth of Scripture to test some errant opinion(s) we have accepted as truth, and we are feeling the painful results of failure from applying the erroneous opinion(s) to life! (c) So, believing the Scriptural statement that God's Word contains only the truth, and nothing but it, and that Scripture is adequate to address all of life, use Scripture alone to evaluate all of the concepts in the stressful situation! (d) Next, discard the errant view(s) in favor of Scripture's opinion(s) and apply this to life to gain peace!*

Lesson: *Stress is the result of unwittingly applying erroneous views to life only to be burned when they don't work out! The Christian can test all viewpoints through the absolute revelation of Scripture in order to reject stress-producing views and adopt God's correct ones!*

Conclusion: (To illustrate the point of the message . . .)

Dr. Frank Minirth, the psychiatrist who authored, You Can Measure Your Mental Health, wrote on page 14 of his book the following report of a psychological research project: "Psychological tests were obtained on a group of Christians to determine if time spent with the Word of God made any difference in the maturity level of the people. The group was initially divided into those who had been Christians for more than three years and those who had been Christians for a shorter period of time. In general, there was no difference in maturity levels. Next, the group was divided according to those who spent time daily with the Word, those who spend time with the Word a few times per week, and those who hardly ever spent time with the Word. The maturity level was found to be consistently and proportionately related to the time spent with the Word. The first group, those who spent time daily with the word, were found to be more mature, more mentally healthy, and to show no significant pathology."

We need to expose ourselves to the Word of God and apply its thinking to our thinking and lifestyles in order to overcome the pitfalls of painful stress!