

P.S.

**O**BESITY is one of the biggest health risks facing the West. The annual UK health bill for obesity-related disease is £7.4 billion, with around one in five adults considered clinically overweight. In the US the situation is even more serious.

As with any problem, blame abounds. There was a court case in the US, for instance, which was brought by customers against the world's largest fast-food chain. Confectionary businesses are being blamed for marketing to children. Food companies take the rap for insufficiently clear product labelling.

Slowly, the food industry is beginning to move to address the issue, both to provide more information for consumers and to protect themselves from lawsuits. But I was particularly struck (not to say amused) by the recently announced pilot scheme of the UK's leading supermarket chain: to print traffic light symbols on food wrappers according to their obesity risk factor.

A red traffic light would indicate a particularly high calorie or cholesterol content, a green light a 'healthy' food, with amber representing a happy medium between the two.

The whole thing can be read as a parable. The problem of incorrect diet fuelling obesity is, of course, an issue about *intake*—you are what you eat', and other such maxims. But, however concerned one might be about one's physical body, there is a far greater duty to look after one's spiritual health, and to remain fit and in shape. The issue of spiritual intake cannot be bypassed.

The problem is that the things we imbibe into our minds do not generally come with labels indicating their danger. Sometimes we can be too lazy to really search the Scriptures to understand what the godly principles are that govern our decision on whether we should take in this or that.

A traffic light on what we read (or what we watch, what we see, what we discuss) would be an incredibly useful mechanism, in a sense; something that would make us stop, look and listen before continuing—or abandoning—that activity or course of action. Films have certifi-

## Stop, look and listen

cates, of course, and DVD containers display little boxes that indicate the amount of nudity, violence or profanity that might be involved in a given screening.

But the traffic lights of the world might not be stringent or disciplined enough for the standards of our Lord. What was a Certificate 15 film only a few years ago might pass as a Certificate 12 today—and this is not a comment that applies just to films.

God's standards do not shift in this way. They remain constant, so that principles that were once true in ancient times remain unshaken today. But the contexts in which they need to be applied *do* change. That is why we need to read the small print of God's Word so that we are really aware of the principles that must apply.

The reason why the food industry is considering traffic lights is because people cannot be bothered to read the small print or do not take the trouble to understand it. People have a sense of what might be healthy or fattening which they tend to rely on, but sometimes they are mistaken; a food considered healthy turns out to have a high calorie content.

In spiritual matters it can be similarly tempting to rely on a gut feeling of what seems 'obviously' right or wrong, healthy or not. But this is not sufficient. Spiritual food does not always come with health warnings plastered across it. The small print of God's Word must be writ large in our minds.

We need to develop our own internal traffic lights within our consciences which warn us of the dangers inherent in the intake we allow ourselves. This is something that involves our internalising the principles of God's Word—and then having the discipline to remember to apply them before we expose ourselves to something that might cause us spiritual bloat.

The very process of searching for the Scriptural principles and striving to put them into practice in our decision-making (and indeed the process of decision-making itself) can be incredibly powerful in our development.

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