

Thoughts on Ministry of Healing

(11) Working for the Intemperate (pages 171-182)

Summary:

This chapter comes as close as anywhere in the book to describing what we would call addictions. The key in working with the intemperate is to arouse in them the necessity of making an effort for themselves. They are all too ready to let others do the work for them, which will be in vain.

Thoughts:

We need to be careful in using this chapter today. The language of some parts might play differently today than the author intended. Ellen White modified her language when circumstances changed (for example, there is a lot of war language in the chapter, reflecting the Civil War context of her original health vision). There is also an American “can-do” tone to the chapter. But today, it may be best to read this chapter as the language of aspiration rather than obligation. To the addicted, the language of obligation often discourages and makes things worse. A sobering reality is that while Christians are more likely to point people to Jesus as the answer to addictions, they also suffer a disproportionate share of addictive behaviors compared to the secular mainstream (according to statistical surveys).

A general observation from the last several chapters: it may be surprising to many readers how much of an emphasis on grace there is in nearly every chapter of Ministry of Healing.

According to this chapter, avoiding addictive behavior is rooted in temperance. When people are young they tend to develop intemperate habits, when indulged these lead to a form of slavery. When dealing with the intemperate we are not dealing with sane people, it is as if they are under the power of a demon. (171-172) Keep in mind that temperance back then did not mean moderation, it was more like abstinence in our terms.

When dealing with addictions today, the most helpful thing is grace. In the context of grace, addicts may be able to make an effort for themselves

With the intemperate it is critical to speak no word of censure or reproach, they are usually reproaching themselves. Rather speak words that encourage faith and positive traits of character. One must stay especially close to this class and they are likely to fall over and over again. Their will power has been weakened. (173)

The key is to arouse in them the necessity of making an effort for themselves. All efforts from outside will be in vain unless they take part in the battle. Everything depends on the right action of the will. There is a sense in which this is impossible for the addicted, yet if they will *choose* to serve God, He will work in them to re-orient the whole nature over time. (174-176) While this paragraph could be misused, it is supported in principle by recent research in brain plasticity (the brain’s ability to change in response to behavior).

When addicted it is even more critical to live in obedience all the principles of health. These will reduce the craving for unnatural stimulants. The intemperate also should be provided employment. None who are able to labor should be taught to expect food and clothing and shelter free of cost. For their sake as well as others, a way must be found where they can provide an equivalent for what they receive. The best kind of work for them is working to help others in some way. (176-178)

On pages 180-182 come some very strong statements about perfect obedience that have struck many as discouraging and impossible to fulfill (see last quote). These need to be read in light of two things. First, they cannot be understood apart from the grace of God that both accepts the erring (whole previous chapters make that point) and can work in us what we could not do on our own. Second, her definition of perfection is a practical one, a *doable* one. It means “be all that you can be,” to live in complete willingness to please God. Why would a Christian want to live any other way?

In our work with addictions today, we have moved from a moral model to an illness model. Current research, however, shows the issue is more complex than simply one or the other. It may be more of a blend between biology and personal choices.

Quotable Quotes:

“You must hold fast to those whom you are trying to help, else victory will never be yours. They will be continually tempted to evil. Again and again they will be almost overcome by the craving for strong drink; again and again they may fall; but do not, because of this, cease your efforts.” (173)

“The victims of evil habit must be aroused to the necessity of making an effort for themselves. Others may put forth the most earnest endeavor to uplift them, the grace of God may be freely offered, Christ may entreat, His angels may minister; but all will be in vain unless they themselves are roused to fight the battle in their own behalf.” (174)

“Those who put their trust in Christ are not to be enslaved by any hereditary or cultivated habit or tendency. Instead of being held in bondage to the lower nature, they are to rule every appetite and passion. God has not left us to battle with evil in our own finite strength. Whatever may be our inherited or cultivated tendencies to wrong, we can overcome through the power that He is ready to impart.” (175-176)

“The tempted one needs to understand the true force of the will. This is the governing power in the nature of man--the power of decision, of choice. Everything depends on the right action of the will. Desires for goodness and purity are right, so far as they go; but if we stop here, they avail nothing.” (176)

“When light flashes into the soul, some who appeared to be most fully given to sin will become successful workers for just such sinners as they themselves once were. . . . They see where their own weakness lies, they realize the depravity of their nature. They know the strength of sin, the power of evil habit. They realize their inability to overcome without the help of Christ. . . . These can help others.” (179)

“Christ lived a life of perfect obedience to God’s law, and in this He set an example for every human being. The life that He lived in this world we are to live through His power and under His instruction. . . . Nothing less than perfect obedience can meet the standard of God’s requirement. He has not left His requirements indefinite. He has enjoined nothing that is not necessary in order to bring man into harmony with Him. We are to point sinners to His ideal of character and to lead them to Christ, by whose grace only can this ideal be reached.” (180)

Tweets of Healing:

The addicted must be aroused to the necessity of making an effort for themselves. (174)

Those who put their trust in Christ are not to be enslaved by any hereditary or cultivated habit or tendency. (175)

Everything depends on the right action of the will. (176)

Through the right exercise of the will, an entire change may be made in the life, we ally ourselves with divine power. (176)

None who are able to labor should be taught to expect food and clothing and shelter free of cost. (177)

Nothing less than perfect obedience can meet the standard of God's requirement. (180)

Humanity, combined with divinity, does not commit sin. (180)

Those whom Christ has forgiven most will love Him most. (182)