

Thoughts on Ministry of Healing

(8) The Physician, an Educator (pages 125-136)

Summary:

The true physician is an educator. But it is the practice of the principles the physician teaches that gives them weight. True physicians recognize their responsibility, not only to the sick under their care, but also to the community in which they live. The responsibility of the physician to patients not only for this life, but also for eternity.

Thoughts:

The godly physician has the responsibility not only to educate the patient but also the community in which he/she lives. The education involves prevention as well as treatment. (125)

In educating to healthful principles, physicians will find themselves battling the artificiality of civilization, custom, fashion, laziness and the desire for short-term comfort over long-term health. (126)

How should we best relate to statements like “drugs do not cure disease” and “health is recovered in spite of the drug?” Is that still true today or have “drugs” changed? (126) Drugs certainly have changed over the last 100 years. Later in her life, Ellen White did accept some pharmaceutical drugs. But in Ellen White’s day, especially early on, drugs were often poisons (smoking and arsenic are examples of common remedies back then). We use hardly any of the nineteenth-century drugs today. Today’s pharmaceuticals work better and we understand their working better. Some of them are absolutely amazing in their life-saving and life-enhancing ability (insulin and antibiotics are excellent examples). At the same time, we should not replace the principles of healthy living with the promises of “Big Pharma.” Negative interactions among drugs and between drugs and natural remedies (like vitamin supplements) suggest taking as few as possible of both in the context of a healthy diet and lifestyle.

Ellen White says that health does not depend on chance but is the result of obedience to law. (128) Is this always true or is there a qualifier we need to add today?

An important reason for healthful living is that the lessening of physical vigor has repercussion in the moral and spiritual realm, making it harder to discriminate between right and wrong and more difficult to resist evil. (128) The body is the only medium through which God can communicate to build up the character. The passions are to be controlled by the will, which itself is under the control of God. (130) Interestingly, the ideas summarized in this paragraph were very common in the writings of Wesley (with whom EW was very familiar) and before him, Thomas Aquinas.

Physicians can only have the strength to meet their arduous responsibilities if they take care of their own health first and also rely on God’s presence and power. (135-136)

One point that is often missed today is that Ellen White strongly identified with the social reform movements of her day. Language from those social reforms permeates this chapter and a true application of the chapter will also consider the social implications of her writings in today’s world.

Quotable Quotes:

“The true physician is an educator. He recognizes his responsibility, not only to the sick who are under his direct care, but also to the community in which he lives.” (125)

“Our artificial civilization is encouraging evils destructive of sound principles. Custom and fashion are at war with nature.” (125)

“Many transgress the laws of health through ignorance, and they need instruction. But the greater number know better than they do. They need to be impressed with the importance of making their knowledge a guide of life.” (126)

“When attacked by disease, many will not take the trouble to search out the cause of their illness. Their chief anxiety is to rid themselves of pain and inconvenience.” (126)

“Pure air, sunlight, abstemiousness, rest, exercise, proper diet, the use of water, trust in divine power--these are the true remedies. Every person should have a knowledge of nature’s remedial agencies and how to apply them.” (127)

“The use of natural remedies requires an amount of care and effort that many are not willing to give. Nature’s process of healing and upbuilding is gradual, and to the impatient it seems slow. The surrender of hurtful indulgences requires sacrifice. But in the end it will be found that nature, untrammelled, does her work wisely and well. Those who persevere in obedience to her laws will reap the reward in health of body and health of mind.” (127)

“Too little attention is generally given to the preservation of health. It is far better to prevent disease than to know how to treat it when contracted. It is the duty of every person, for his own sake, and for the sake of humanity, to inform himself in regard to the laws of life and conscientiously to obey them.” (128)

“Whatever injures the health, not only lessens physical vigor, but tends to weaken the mental and moral powers. Indulgence in any unhealthful practice makes it more difficult for one to discriminate between right and wrong, and hence more difficult to resist evil. It increases the danger of failure and defeat.” (128)

“Nothing with which we have to do is small. Every act casts its weight into the scale that determines life’s victory or defeat.” (129)

“While, on the one hand, danger lurks in a narrow philosophy and a hard, cold orthodoxy, on the other hand there is great danger in a careless liberalism.” (129)

“The physician who ministers in the homes of the people, watching at the bedside of the sick, relieving their distress, bringing them back from the borders of the grave, speaking hope to the dying, wins a place in their confidence and affection, such as is granted to few others. Not even to the minister of the gospel are committed possibilities so great or an influence so far-reaching. The physician’s example, no less than his teaching, should be a positive power on the right side. The cause of reform calls for men and women whose life practice is an illustration of self-control. It is our practice of the principles we inculcate that gives them weight.” (132)