

Can A Christian Take Medicine?

THE use of medicine, provided it has not a taint of anything superstitious, idolatrous or devilish, is lawful according to the Scriptures. It does not in the least rule out the exercise of genuine faith in God if it is done with good understanding. Total abstinence from or objection to medicine when its use is vitally necessary may be attributed to spiritual ignorance or to an excessive and mistaken zeal in matters of faith.

In the Funk and Wagnalls Standard Dictionary (International Edition), medicine is defined as “a substance possessing, or reputed to possess, curative or remedial properties”. A medicine may be made to take the form of a pill, tablet, powder, liquid or some other preparation. It may be taken internally, that is, through the mouth, or used externally.

The history of medicine as a profession is as old as that of civilization itself. There is no doubt that in recent years much advance or improvement has been made in this field.

Today, there are the scientific type of medicines and those commonly called “native medicines”.

No one can gainsay the fact that medicines have proved to be beneficial to humankind.

“Medicines rightly used can be of immense aid and comfort to the afflicted; wrongly used, they may cause serious damage to the human body.” (Illustrated Medical and Health Encyclopedia, Vol. 5 and 6, page 1389.) Faith Sects

Some people hold the view as of faith that it is wrong for a Christian to take medicine in any form. And these people themselves do profess to be Christians. The sects belonging to this school of faith abound in the United States of America; and many of them have now spread to other parts of the world including this country. If any of their adherents is sick of fever, or suffers from headache, constipation or any other form of ailment, all they do is to pray. They do not apply any kind of medicine because they believe that it is a sin to do so.

That faith and prayer are of great importance in the life of a Christian cannot be argued. But to depend on them without discretion and in complete disregard to certain provisions in the law of God is tantamount to over-righteousness or fanaticism which can even lead to untimely death. It was King Solomon who said: “Be not righteous over much; neither make thyself over wise: why shouldest thou destroy thyself?” – Ecclesiastes 7:16.

We can recall the case of a certain woman who died at Port Harcourt in the early fifties. Both the woman and her husband belonged to one of the “Faith” sects. The woman who was pregnant developed stomach trouble, and the pain became so acute that their neighbours urged the husband to take her to hospital. He bluntly refused, and the wife too was unwilling to go to hospital or even take any medicine at home. Members of their faith always came to their house in the mornings and evenings for prayers while the poor woman groaned and writhed in agony. At last, she gave up the spirit.

Well, if it can be established in the Scriptures that a Christian should not take medicine, the husband and others of that faith must be absolved from blame but if not, then they are inexcusable for being fanatical. Some may say that people who take medicines and receive expert medical care also die. We agree. But then there is the satisfaction that all avenues, both spiritual and physical, have been explored and there is no point of negligence.

There was also an instance of a young man who had a sore but who because of his faith refused to apply medicine for its treatment. Despite his prayers and those of his friends in faith, the sore continued to expand and to grow worse with secretion of pus and so on. Flies pestered him a lot and the foul odour from the ulcer became a cause for offence to his co-tenants. He started to apply palm oil to it. Instead of getting people's sympathy, he was derisively asked whether the oil

was not medicine. But in the long run he was forced by circumstances when he was nearly deformed to go to hospital!

Misconceptions

One of the sects in America that object to the use of medicine is the "Holiness Church of God in Jesus' Name". In their religious worship they handle snakes – a practice based on Jesus' words in Mark 16:17,18: "In my name shall they cast out devils, they shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them."

But an incident happened in that Church; and the TIME Magazine (Nov. 1, 1968) reported: "Last August, during an evening service at the white frame Holiness Church of God in Jesus' Name at Big Stone Gap, Va., Oscar Pelfrey, 65, stood before the congregation holding a pair of writhing timber rattlesnakes. 'I believe, Jesus. O Jesus, I believe – thank you, Jesus!' cried Pelfrey, a lay minister of the Church. Suddenly, one of the rattlers struck him on the left temple. Taken home, he refused medical attention and died six hours later." – Page 35.

There are certain things some people do in the name of Christ and which are based on misconceptions or wrong understanding of his truth.

The text often cited by professed Christians who frown upon the use of medicine is at James chapter 5, verses 13 to 16, to wit: "Is any among you afflicted, let him pray. Is any merry? Let him sing psalms. Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: and the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much."

We must say with all sincerity that this text just quoted does not condemn the administration of medicine neither does it in actual fact show that medicine and faith cum prayer are opposites. But it does emphasise the power of prayer and the importance of faith which gives a true Christian hope as an anchor of the soul. So when a Christian takes medicine, he believes it cannot be effective UNLESS God, by His grace, blesses it with His healing power.

It is this dependence on God that calls for prayer and faith. And Jesus says, "If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth." – Mark 9:23.

When the apostle James stated that anyone who was merry should sing psalms, he did not mean that in such merriment one must not sing other spiritual songs or that one could not eat and drink, or clap and dance to the glory of God. So too, when he stated that a Christian who was afflicted or sick should pray and let the elders of the Church pray over him, the apostle did not mean that one could not take a good medicine to help oneself in a lawful manner.

However, there are some kinds of sickness that are of a spiritual nature for which physical medicines are of no use. In such cases, which are not matters of sores, constipation and such like, restoration can only come from God through prayer and faith. Usefulness

According to Newnes Family Health Encyclopaedia, "Medicines are given for many reasons: to increase appetite, to aid digestion, to ease pain, to induce sleep, as tonics, etc." (Page 403) And in Proverbs 17:22, it is written: "A merry heart doeth good LIKE A MEDICINE: but a broken spirit drieth the bones." This shows that medicine is good, and it will be wrong therefore to ignore its usefulness.

When Hezekiah, the king of Judah, was sick he wept sore and prayed to God for his recovery. His prayer was heard and Isaiah the prophet who was sent by God to him, said: "Thus saith the LORD, the God of David thy father, I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy tears: behold, I will heal thee." (2 Kings 20:1-6) But how was Hezekiah healed? The record states: "And Isaiah said, Take a lump of figs. And they took and laid it on the boil, and he recovered." (2 Kings 20:7) The

lump of figs used to cure the boil was medicine pure and simple.

In a vision, Ezekiel the prophet saw a river and trees and so forth, and he said: "And by the river upon the bank thereof, on this side and on that side, shall grow all trees for meat, whose leaf shall not fade, neither shall the fruit thereof be consumed: it shall bring forth new fruit according to his months, because their waters they issued out of the sanctuary: and the fruit thereof shall be for meat, and the leaf thereof for medicine." (Ezekiel 47:12) We know that this was a vision but if medicine were an abomination to God, it would not have been used to depict a thing of value.

God made the herbs to meet the needs of men, and so we can use them to our advantage as food or medicine provided we do not indulge in any heathenish ceremony. In Psalm 104:14, it is written: "He causeth the grass to grow for the cattle, and herb for the service of man: that he may bring forth food out of the earth".

The nutritious and efficacious healing properties in the herbs are divine, and to know how to make use of these herbs and to apply them properly for the service of man is a gift. Many drugs are extracted from plants and some other medicines are food. The Modern Medical Counselor has this to say: – "It is quite true that opium, cocaine, strychnine, and many other drugs are extracted or prepared from plants that grow naturally. It should be clearly understood that not all so-called medicines are properly classed as drugs. Preparations of vitamins, calcium, and several other substances, while they may be put up in tablet, capsule, or liquid form, are in reality foods, and may quite properly be given to make up for a lack of vitamins or minerals in the diet." (Pages 151-154).

New Testament

In the New Testament, the use of medicine is not condemned. Jesus Christ himself pointed out that it is sick people that need a doctor. Said he: "They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick." (Matthew 9:12) A physician is a man trained in the science and study of diseases and the ways to treat or cure them.

The popular parable of Christ concerning the good Samaritan shows vividly that a Christian can take medicine. When a certain lawyer asked him as to who was his neighbour, he answered with an illustration of a Jew who went on a trip from Jerusalem to Jericho and was attacked by thieves. They stripped him of his clothes and wounded him and left him lying half dead beside the road. Jesus said that a certain priest by chance was going down the same road; but when he saw the victim of the bandits he went past on the other side of the road. So too a Levite came to the place and did the same thing. – Luke 10:25-32.

Christ went on: "But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him, and went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee." (Verses 33-35). And Kenneth N. Taylor in his Living Gospels states: "The Samaritan soothed his wounds with medicine and bandaged them."

Jesus then asked the question: "Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves?" The man replied that it was the one who showed the wounded man pity. Then Christ said: "Yes, now go and do the same." – Read verses 36-37, Living Gospels.

If it were a sin to use medicine, Jesus Christ would not have taught people by the illustration of the good Samaritan who compounded oil and wine to treat wounds neither would he have charged anyone to follow that example.

There is also the instance of what Jesus did to restore sight to a man who was born blind. Christ

could just utter a word and the sick person would be healed instantly but on this occasion, what did he do? "He spat on the ground, and made clay of the spittle, and he anointed the eyes of the blind man with the clay, and said unto him, Go, wash in the pool of Siloam, (which is by interpretation, Sent.) He went his way therefore, and washed, and came seeing." (John 9:6, 7) This, though a miracle, was analogous to the use of medicine.

Luke who was one of the ardent disciples of Jesus Christ and who was also a fellow labourer with St. Paul in the gospel was a physician according to Colossians chapter 4, verse 14. And when Timothy who was also a fellow labourer with St. Paul had stomach trouble, the apostle did not ask him to be content with prayer alone but he advised him: "Drink no longer water, but use a little wine for thy stomach's sake and thine often infirmities." (1 Timothy 5:23) Obviously, that "little wine" was medicine.

We are not saying that prayer is not good but that it must be said with understanding. Having known that a kind of herb or leaf is good for healing a sore, it will be stupid for anyone to begin to cry to God to cure his sore while he ignores the herb that is at his disposal. It is like a child who received money from his father before he (the father) set out on a journey. And when the child was hungry instead of using the money to help himself he began to send messages to the father for food.

Ju-Ju Worship

A Christian can take medicine but he must guard, we repeat, against any act or ceremony that is based on superstition or ju-ju worship. A certain member of the GKS some time ago has a sore and his mother showed him a kind of leaf for its treatment. She directed that while plucking the leaf, her son must not talk and should not look backward. But this our member did the very opposite – he sang and talked and purposely looked backward while plucking the leaf because he knew all those were superstitious formalities. And when he used the leaf it was efficacious. Anything that is fetish is a sin. Pouring of libations, burying of animals or medicines in the ground, talismans, magic charms in form of rings, neck-chains or amulets for protection or for passing examinations, love potions and other things like these are all abominations and Christians must keep far away from them.

When a Christian is in trouble, he must not consult oracle, witches and wizards or seek aid from idols. King Ahaziah did so in his days and God punished him with death. (2 Kings 1:1-18; see also Deuteronomy 18:10-12 and Isaiah 8:19.) It is God, and God alone, Christians must look to in faith with prayer when in trouble, or when sick they must pray to God in faith first to invoke His mercy and help before taking medicine. This is perfectly in order.