

Modern Medicine and Modern Religion

We're told that antibiotics have been vastly overprescribed, and that opioid addiction is a major health problem. The reasons may indeed be vast and complicated, but seem to boil down to a couple of general (and probably over-simplified) factors:

- We want to *feel better*, and we have been conditioned to think that a pill or potion is the answer to just about anything that causes us to feel otherwise. We may have a problem the solution to which involves major lifestyle changes. But such changes can be hard, and taking a pill is much easier. So, we opt for a pill that may make us feel better, but does not really correct or solve the actual problem.
- We don't want to *hurt*- ever, and if a pain prescription replaces that hurt with something that makes us feel even unnaturally better, and/or has its own set of complications or dangers attached, that's what we want regardless. We prefer to mask the pain rather than deal with the cause(s).
- And lastly, modern medicine is sometimes more about dollars rather than health. So, if we go into our doctor's office wanting a prescription, we're likely to get it, even if it is not really what we need to correct whatever problem we have (or think we have). Why? Because if we don't get it, we may take our money elsewhere to a doctor that will give us what we want.

Obviously, there are at least a couple of major "flies in the ointment" of such objectives and the means utilized to treat them. 1) Treating symptoms rather than causes is only a short-term solution to what can then become a long-term problem. 2) Pain is an indicator that something is wrong- just masking the pain doesn't address, let alone correct, its source. And 3), when the goal becomes a "successful practice" based on giving the "customers what they want" rather than what years of medical training and knowledge has determined is needed (but perhaps not desired) for them be healthy, well... we kind of wind up exactly where we are now.

But it seems modern religion has followed modern medicine into this downwardly spiraling abyss. **Denominations, churches, leaders, preachers, and teachers seem to have decided that:**

- **It is necessary for congregants *feel better about themselves above all else.*** So, sermons and teachings identifying sin and describing its devastating effects have been replaced with lessons that make us feel better ourselves- even if/when we're still living in sin(s). If so, we've just given a placebo to spiritual cancer. Don't get me wrong, Christians *should* feel good about themselves when they are faithful, healthy, and strong. But applying "feel good ointment" to one that is infected with a spiritual disease of immaturity, carnality, selfishness, immorality, or etc. simply doesn't produce faith and fidelity to God. Please read 1 & 2 Timothy in these regards, but especially note passages such as 1 Timothy 1:3-11; 4:1-11; and 2 Timothy 3:1-7; 4:1-5.
- **We shouldn't *hurt*- ever.** The elimination of pain and suffering seems to have become the goal of modern religion. But we need to remember that Cain *felt bad* after his faithless *sacrifice* was rejected by God, "*but for Cain and his offering He had no regard. So Cain became very angry and his countenance fell,*" Genesis 4:5. Did God say, "Cain, its OK- I know you meant well, and you did sacrifice something."? No, God said, "*If you do well, will not your countenance be lifted up?*" Genesis 4:7. Please note two very important factors from this: 1) The key to *feeling better* about ourselves is *doing better*, i.e. doing *what* God says, *how* God says!

And, 2) Cain's *hurt* (his *fallen countenance*) was an indicator of a problem. By it he was given the opportunity for correction, and thereby to feel better. His pain was not soothed or masked by a "feel better" prescription of self-esteem building, by ignoring his sin, or accentuating the positives. Instead, he was simply told to go back and do it again *as God had commanded*, cp. v.7 with Romans 10:17 and Hebrews 11:4. The point is that Cain's *pain/hurt* alerted him to a problem, and thus provided him an opportunity to correct it and return to fellowship with God. THEN he could feel good about himself in the right way and for the right reason. Simply *dulling his senses* to this pain with a "feel better about yourself" pill of any sort would not have accomplished anything but the further *searing* of his conscience, cf. 1Timothy 4:2ff.

- **"Success" is measured by the multiplication of happy customers/adherents.** That's a "business" model, not a "spiritual" one. In medicine- either *physical* or *spiritual*, the "customer" is not always right. Consider how many times "customers" came to Jesus wanting their *physical* lives improved through healing, wealth, food, carnal expectations of a kingdom, or even validation of their current lives and how they wanted to live them, but "*went away grieved*" when given *spiritual truth*. Was Jesus "unsuccessful" on these occasions? No, truth was taught; opportunities for spiritual understanding and growth were presented; and fellowship with God was offered through repentance and commitment. His "customers" did not always get what they *wanted*, but they always got what they *needed*. Often, they didn't like it, thought it tasted bad, and "*withdrew, and were not walking with Him any more,*" John 6:66ff. But the truth He taught did not *return empty, without accomplishing what He desired, or without succeeding in the matter for which He sent it*, cf. Isaiah 55:11. "Success," therefore, has to be defined as: the truth of God's word being taught; opportunities for spiritual understanding and growth being presented; and, salvation (fellowship with God) being offered through repentance and commitment. The *results* of such are up to the recipients, no doubt. But let's not make the mistake of judging God's "success" by the "results" we may want, cf. Matthew 7:13-14.

Does God want you to "feel good about yourself"? Of course, but for the right reasons, 1John 4:13-21. Does God want us to "hurt"? Only if it is necessary to draw our attention to a matter that needs correcting in our lives so that can we be healthy, happy, and strong in fellowship with Him again, Genesis 4:7. Is doing the "right thing" always going to produce the results we want? No, but it will produce the results God wants, 1Peter 3:13-17. Please think on these things. (Philip C. Strong; Southport Church of Christ; 7202 Madison Ave, Indianapolis, IN 46227; online at southportcofc.org; email to mrpcstrong@hotmail.com)