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**Some Comments on Healing
re/ Faith Tabernacle Congregation
3620 N. Fifth St., Philadelphia, PA 19140**

Introduction

Looking at the tracts published by this congregation that I have been given, the group appears to be basically orthodox, with a strong emphasis on divine healing. They do not seem to be into the "gifted healer" mode. All this is good.

The major problems I see with their views on healing are not whether God can choose to heal miraculously today (He can), nor whether we should exercise faith and depend on Him to do so (we should), but rather (1) their claim that God will and must heal you if you exercise enough faith, and (2) that it is a sin of unbelief to make use of physicians and medicine as a part of healing.

Is it a sin to use physicians and medicine?

First consider (2) above. The Bible nowhere forbids the use of medicine or doctors. The reference to Asa in 2 Chron 16:12-13 used by Faith Tabernacle in their tract #1, p 2, is not about some "sin" of seeking the help of physicians, but about Asa's stubborn unwillingness to seek God even in his disease, because he was angry with God and his prophet and in rebellion against Him (see vv 7-10). We see here the importance of looking at the surrounding story before we grab a verse and use it.

On the contrary, Jesus in Matthew 9:12 states: "It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick." Here Jesus assumes (and expects his audience to assume) that people will naturally go to a physician when they are sick. And He doesn't rebuke the practice.

Luke, one of Paul's associates in his missionary service, was himself a physician and is nowhere rebuked for this. In fact he is called the "beloved physician" in Col 4:14. Luke was called upon by God to write one of the four Gospels, and his Gospel is filled with medical terminology which Luke presumably learned when he was being trained to be a physician. At least, he uses the same terminology the better doctors used in those days. See William K. Hobart's book, *The Medical Language of St. Luke* (1882; reprint Baker, 1954) for detailed examples of this.

In 1 Tim 5:23, Paul tells his associate Timothy "No longer drink water exclusively, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments." This is basically dismissed with ridicule in the Faith Tabernacle tract "Objections to Divine Healing" (#26), pp. 6-7, where the author implies that those who oppose the Faith Tabernacle position think we should stop drinking water and drink medicine instead! The passage as translated by the NASB, above, shows what Paul meant: that Timothy's stomach problems (and perhaps other ailments) would be helped by a medicinal use of a *little* wine in addition to the water he drank, a common medical practice in antiquity. See Robert H. Stein, *Difficult Passages in the Epistles* (Baker, 1988), pp 21-26, and the article on wine in the *Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible* (1975). This is clearly an example of the apostle Paul prescribing medicine to his friend Timothy.

In Luke 10:30-37, Jesus gives us the Good Samaritan as an example to imitate. He found an injured man abandoned by the side of the road, used such medicine as he had in order to clean up his wounds, and then took him to an inn where he could recover. In modern culture, this would be comparable to using our first aid kit to fix up a person who had been mugged, and then taking him to the emergency room.

Paul's "thorn in the flesh" mentioned in 2 Cor 12:7-10 is not explained, so we cannot be sure in detail what this involved. It *is* a little surprising that the tract "Objections to Divine Healing," pp 1-2, makes such a big point that this is a "messenger of Satan" and *not* disease, since in the Faith Tabernacle view, disease is only caused by Satan and could quite reasonably be called a "messenger" from him. In fact, however, the word three times translated "weakness(es)" in vv 9-10 is commonly translated "sickness" in many passages (and "infirmities" in KJV), especially when Jesus is healing diseases. In any case, the writer of the Faith Tabernacle tract misses the whole point of Paul's remark, which is that God would not take away this "thorn in the flesh" (whether it was buffeting or temptation by a demon, or whether it was a disease), because God wanted Paul to trust in His grace in the midst of suffering rather than by escaping suffering.

Does God always heal?

This is, in fact, the main weakness of the various varieties of the "health and wealth gospel," whether they claim that Christians should never be sick or poor, or whether it's OK to be poor but not to be sick. It brings us to the Faith Tabernacle claim (I) mentioned in the "Introduction" above. The Bible tells us that God may allow us as Christians to be either poor or sick (or both) for a limited time here on earth (which might, however, be our whole lifetime). God may take these problems away in this life in answer to our prayers, or He may not. If we are counted among His children, He will certainly take them away when we die.

It is true, in any case, that God loves those who trust in Him, and He will not let anything happen to us that is not ultimately for our benefit (Rom 8:28). As to the question of whether God directly causes us to suffer and be poor, it may be that He always uses Satan to inflict the poverty or sickness. While God sometimes uses poverty and sickness as a punishment for sin or a rebuke to His children, this is not the only use God makes of these.

The book of Job is especially instructive here, and its main point is not to be escaped by claiming that somehow all this happened to Job because he did not have enough faith (as in tract #22, p 5-6). Clearly, one of the main themes of Job is that Satan claims Job serves God because of all the good things he gets from God in return, not because Job is really blameless and upright (Job 1:9-11). The book of Job shows us that Satan is wrong, that Job (imperfect as he is) loves God because of who God is. And because God is truth, Job loves truth enough to suffer for it; he will not confess to sins he hasn't committed (nor curse God) in order to be put out of his misery.

Consider also the example of poor Lazarus the beggar (not Mary and Martha's brother) in Luke 16:19-31. He is clearly the righteous person in this story, and is nowhere rebuked for his lack of faith. He dies as he lived, poor and sick, but is immediately carried to Abraham's bosom (to feast at a banquet with Abraham; compare the expression here to that in John 13:23, where John is feasting next to Jesus). Lazarus gets special comfort in the world beyond to make up for what he suffered here (Lk 16:25). In fact, the transition from this life to the next is often one of great reversal: in this life, the rich man is feasting grandly and Lazarus is begging outside his door; in the life to come, Lazarus is feasting grandly and the (former) rich man is begging outside his door.

Job was vindicated in this life, and his former friends trooped back to console him when the disasters were safely over. Lazarus, by contrast, was not vindicated until he died.

For us as Christians, the situation is similar. We have been called to suffer for Christ's sake (1 Pet 2:20-21; Php 1:29), to know Him by sharing in His sufferings (Php 3:10), to do our part in filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions (Col 1:24). Thus we can expect persecution in this world.

But one of the important lessons of the book of Job is that sickness and poverty may be persecution from the unseen enemy of our souls. Thus, Christians may face poverty and sickness that is a persecution from Satan, rather as Job and Paul (and Lazarus?) did. We should certainly pray that the Lord would help us to see if these troubles are a result of our sins, confess our sins,

and ask God to deliver from these troubles. But just as Jesus in Gethsemane was more concerned to do God's will than to escape from trouble, so should we be, being ready to accept poverty and sickness if that should be the path along which we must walk to serve Him faithfully.