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Money, Horses, and Spouses: A Practical Guide to Christian Pharmacist Sanctification

By David M. Peters Jr.

Every skill in life must be carefully mastered over time through consistent practice. Great athletes can be seen developing strength and motor skills in gymnasiums across the country, while talented musicians spend hours training their hands, voices, and ears to hit notes. Astute pharmacists will practice interpersonal skills, assessment and interpretation of medical literature, and counseling of our beloved patients. In our daily Christian walk, one area that is occasionally forgotten but must be intentionally fostered is sanctification: that process by which we ought to draw nearer to Christ each day, striving to look more like our perfect Savior and less like our sinful self (“Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new,” 2 Corinthians 5:17, KJV). While our salvation rests alone in the work of the Cross, the blessings of this lifetime come through a devoted and heartfelt pursuit of righteousness. We should not separate our Christianity from our profession, and the call to sanctification extends into our practice of pharmacy.

Despite the intuitive nature of the need for sanctification, the practical development of it can be a challenge. Our sin nature derived from Adam and Eve drives us to intrinsically seek self-fulfillment and immediate gratification in a broken world. But the scriptures are sufficient in all things and provide very fruitful advice for our sanctification (“All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works,” 2 Timothy 3:16-17, KJV). An interesting example from the Old Testament comes to mind as a simple picture of this principle: Money, Horses, and Spouses. This passage has far-reaching application to the Christian in need of encouragement, as well as a particular devotional application among pharmacists.

In Deuteronomy, the Lord through Moses outlined multiple principles regarding the Israelite political system, including instructions for kings. Kings were to hand-write their own copy of the law – a task which, if completed earnestly, would have undoubtedly cemented the teachings of the Old Testament to that leader (Deuteronomy 17:18-20). Unfortunately, a short survey of the books of Kings and Chronicles reveals that many of the Israelite kings did not take this instruction to heart. Interestingly, just prior to that imperative falls a very interesting pair of verses in Deuteronomy 17: 16-17 (KJV):

- 16- “But he shall not multiply horses to himself, nor cause the people to return to Egypt, to the end that he should multiply horses: forasmuch as the LORD hath said unto you, Ye shall henceforth return no more that way.
- 17- Neither shall he multiply wives to himself, that his heart turn not away: neither shall he greatly multiply to himself silver and gold.”

Money, Horses, and Spouses. A strange combination of items, yet rich with application for Christian men and women when studied in light of the revelation of the New Testament.

Why does God combine these three items? I believe that alongside practical wisdom for a king circa 800 B.C., these three particular items parallel the sins of this world that can separate the Christian from living out the fullness of God. Compare the mandate in Deuteronomy to the instruction we receive in 1 John 2:15-17 (KJV):

- 15- *“Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.*
- 16- *For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.*
- 17- *And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.”*

From this text, there are three key desires from the world that are in direct opposition to doing the “will of God”: 1) the lust of the flesh, 2) the lust of the eyes, and 3) the pride of life. There is a correlation between Deuteronomy’s list of three and First John’s list of three. First, consider money or physical wealth. The sinful struggles most commonly associated with wealth are greed and covetousness (1 Timothy 6:6-10). A life filled with covetousness is a life filled with fantasies of having more possessions, all of which will ultimately be corrupted (Matthew 6:19). This struggle aligns with the worldly lust of the eyes, which desires more “stuff” to be quenched. Those who seek after this lifestyle ultimately never fill the void, regardless of the wealth they accumulate.

Next, we consider horses. This may be the most abstract of the items, and questions arise as to why God limits horse ownership in the first place. Remember that at the time this passage was written, horses were a key component of war, and were an indication of a nation’s military power and control. In this case, the concept of horses aligns with the pride of life. Pride is a devastating sin that can sow seeds of narcissism, superiority, racism, and hatred (Proverbs 16:18, Jeremiah 48:29). In addition, it can also blind the sinner to their faults and remove their compassion (Psalm 10:2). Ultimately pride drives both the non-believer and the Christian away from their need for the Father and instead leads them to self-gratification (Hosea 7:10).

Finally, Israeli kings were not to pursue the accumulation of wives. God had already outlined clear instructions for how Israelites were supposed to conduct their relationships in the Levitical law, but this special directive for kings is highlighted again in Deuteronomy 17. Perhaps it would have been wise for David to consider this, as he viewed Bathsheba and initiated a sinful relationship that would mar his kingdom (2 Samuel 11). The lust of the flesh is always highlighted by carnal fulfillment, and is evident in sins of sexual nature, gluttony, and vengeance, and can be a struggle for men and women alike (Matthew 5:28, Philippians 4:5). In today’s context, accumulating spouses would be equivalent to succumbing to any nature of sin

related to fleshly gratification. The New Testament warns of the detriments of the lust of the flesh, particularly due to the impact it can have on our personal walk with Christ through the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:5-6, Galatians 5:16-17).

As pharmacists, we have a calling to serve other people, which is a charge by God to fulfill a humanitarian need. However, our obligation to the Lord does not stop at simply serving patients. Every single action in our lives is an opportunity to walk closer with the Lord and mirror his Son, though our sinful nature often gets in the way. We must, therefore, practice sanctification. This entails a mindset that seeks to be in the world but not of it, drawing nearer to God daily (Romans 12:2, James 4:8). There are key devotional aspects regarding the three hindrances of sanctification from Deuteronomy.

First, a pharmacist can easily be tempted with the allure of money. According to the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, the median annual income for a pharmacist in May 2019 was \$128,090.¹ Compared to a vast majority of employed individuals, pharmacists are noticeably wealthy. Ultimately, our wages are fair and allow for a very comfortable living, and we should be thankful that the Lord never condemns having wealth. Instead, the condemnation in 1 Timothy 6:10 (KJV) states that “the love of money is the root of all evil.” We need to remind ourselves of this principle and seek contentment in Christ rather than wealth. Developing a dependence on the Lord rather than our money should be a key component. We need to reject the humanistic worldview to “keep up with” our neighbors and instead to live within our means. In addition, Christians ought to practice generous giving to our churches and Christian organizations while remembering the principles that Jesus outlined in Matthew 6:1-4 regarding humble gifts. Finally, the relatively secure income that we enjoy may subconsciously suppress our need for God. This must be aggressively countered by consistent reminders of our need for the Lord as our only sufficient provider.

The lust of the flesh (spouses) attacks from a multitude of angles and can easily defeat us when we fail to strengthen our Spirit through daily devotions. One of the most prominent attacks to pharmacists is through addiction and abuse of prescription medications. Substance use disorder is a rampant issue in America today, and up to 10 to 15% of healthcare workers struggle with substance abuse.² Pharmacists are at particular risk due to the high exposure and accessibility of controlled substances, stressful work environments, and lack of education of our personal risk.³ While current practice guidelines recommend medication-assisted therapy alongside psychotherapy, the Christian pharmacist should be equipped with the knowledge that addiction stems from our sinful desires, and the only true solution for sin rests with our Savior, Jesus Christ.⁴ Since pharmacists are at high risk for developing addiction, those who struggle with such temptations need to guard their thoughts and hearts using wisdom from 2 Corinthians 10:5 (KJV), *“Casting down imaginations, and*

every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.”

Lastly, pride is a common temptation faced by those in privileged positions. Pharmacists may encounter prideful thoughts when working with pharmacy technicians, other healthcare professionals, or even the patients we vow to serve. As my pastor always said, “You can’t spell pride without ‘I’ in the middle.” A focus on our skills, our abilities, or our particular authority can quickly undermine the compassion we need to perform our job with excellence. This may lead us to devalue others around us for any number of reasons, despite the fact that they have equal standing with us before God. Ultimately, this pride may lead to a lack of collaboration with our peers in the field, negatively impacting patient care. Though we have an expertise in medication therapy, our prayer ought to be to approach each situation humbly, seeking what we can learn from others around us. Proverbs 16:18 KJV lends the ominous reminder that “*pride goeth before destruction...*” and pride can easily fuel struggles with either the lust of the eyes or the lust of the flesh.

In conclusion, there is a very practical truth for Christian pharmacists found in the wisdom of Deuteronomy. As pharmacists, we need to be wary of “money, horses, and

spouses” as each of these categories apply in our individual walk with the Lord. We must strive for sanctification: turning away from the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, and turning toward our loving Father. These issues apply to pharmacists, because we should not be separating our job from our faith. When we go into our workplaces, we represent our Savior in all our interactions. Thankfully, we serve a God Who often uses parables and illustrations to help us relate to and remember these truths each day.

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Morality and Ethics versus Profit: Health Fraud and the Christian Pharmacist

By Virgil Van Dusen, John R. Barnett, and W. Steven Pray

Introduction

The book of Mark poses a question relevant to community pharmacy. Mark 8:36 (KJV) asks “For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?” Should the community pharmacist pursue profit when it means sacrificing one’s morals and ethics? Pharmacists are often forced to make these moral choices, especially when counseling patients on self-care.¹ The reason for this dilemma is that pharmacy shelves are filled with highly profitable nonprescription products of

unknown efficacy and safety.² They include herbs, “dietary supplements,” homeopathic products, and “essential” oils. It would seem to be unethical and immoral to sell these products to a patient with a medical condition when that product lacks evidence that it will safely treat the condition, even though that sale would result in a profit to the pharmacy.^{3,4}

Why are fraudulent nonprescription products allowed?

Nonprescription product ingredients fall into two broad