

God Wants You Sick

The title of this message will raise eyebrows, but the shock factor is necessary to counteract the constant barrage of teaching we hear from faith-healers. “God wants you well” has been their mantra for many years. A careful examination of the Scriptures will reveal that God does indeed send sickness, and He does so for our spiritual profit.

I do not speak lightly of sickness. Good health is a blessing never to be taken for granted. Bodily pain is a very great trial. Those who suffer have all my sympathy. My desire is to free them from the needless guilt that the healers have cruelly put upon them. I want to give true comfort.

I. Sickness is the common experience of mankind.

When Adam sinned, the world came under God’s curse of death (Rom. 5:12). Sickness and disease are perhaps the most common means by which death comes to Adam’s race. We can all expect, if we live long enough, to experience at least some sickness. We likely will develop some disease that will prove fatal.

In fact, none of us is ever in perfect health in this life. We are all dying physically. No diet or medication can reverse the effects of the curse. We are all headed for the dust! Certainly we ought to be good stewards of our body, which is the temple of the Holy Spirit (1Cor. 6:19). But at best, *Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble* (Job 14:1).

II. God is sovereign over sickness.

The common assumption today is, “If it hurts me, it is not from God, because God only gives what is good and enjoyable. If it hurts, it comes from the Devil, and is a judgment for some sin or betrays a lack of faith.” But several problems arise with this assumption. First, who determines what is “good”? Only God can rightly determine such a thing. Man is a poor judge. What feels good may be far from good for us in the long run.

Second, the supposed unbreakable link between faith and healing, which makes a man totally in charge of his own health, is simply not taught in the Word of God.

Third, if God is not in control of everything including sickness, then who is? Is it you...or the Devil? That means that you—or the Devil—are really God! No, God is God! He sends sickness, as the following verses from both the Old and New Testaments show.

(1) Genesis 32:25. As Jacob wrestled with God, God touched the hollow of his thigh, dislocating the joint. Jacob walked with a limp. But none of this was a judgment against Jacob. Rather, Jacob was commended for prevailing, and he received a blessing (v. 28-29).

(2) Leviticus 14:34 says that God would put the plague of leprosy in a house. There is no indication in the context of any sin having brought leprosy as a judgment.

(3) 2Samuel 12:15. *The LORD struck the child that Uriah’s wife bare unto David, and it was very sick.* Note first that God Himself did it. Second, He did it through no fault of the baby!

(4) Job 2:5-7. Satan challenges God to touch the flesh and bones of Job. God in turn gives permission to Satan to so touch Job, but with the restriction that Job will not die. Here is God’s perfect sovereign control in every detail of Job’s ordeal.

(5) Daniel 8:27. At the vision of future things he received, Daniel *fainted and was sick.* He was overwhelmed at what he had seen. But no sin is attached to this incident.

(6) Matthew 25:36. *I was sick, and ye visited me.* Christ foretells that his followers would indeed be sick. He also tells what is the duty for those who are well: they should visit the sick, offering help, comfort and encouragement. Is it not instructive that He did not say, “I was never sick, because I had lots of faith” or “I was sick, and ye healed me”? God’s overall purpose includes man’s sickness.

(7) John 9:1-3. Upon seeing a man born blind, the disciples question Jesus, *Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?* What a typically wrong perspective! Jesus corrects their superstition by answering, *Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him.* Obviously, it was God who made him sick from birth.

(8) John 11:3. Martha and Mary sent word to Jesus, *Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick.* This statement appears as a contradiction in today’s theology of sickness. It should read, “He who has sinned, or lacks faith, is sick.” But Jesus said that *this sickness was for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby* (v. 4). God is glorified in sickness, whether He heals it, or whether He makes it to continue.

(9) 1Timothy 5:23, *Drink no longer water, but use a little wine for thy stomach’s sake and thine often infirmities.* Paul did not scold Timothy for some lapse of faith or some hidden sin (as did Job’s friends). Nor does he tell him to claim his healing, or to find a healer. He sympathetically tells him to take his “medicine”.

(10) 2Timothy 4:20, *Trophimus have I left at Miletum sick.* Here was a case that even Paul himself did not heal. Evidently, God had a higher purpose in the sickness of Trophimus and kept Paul from healing him.

(11) James 5:14-16. James’ prescription for sickness is two-fold. The Greek indicates the order. First, anoint him with oil, which is probably a use of whatever medicine or means are available. Second, pray over the sick person. As with all praying, God is never obligated to give what we ask, but if it is according to His will, He will hear and grant the petition (1Jn. 5:14-15). We are to pray in faith, trusting God to do what is best. If it is God’s will, He will answer the prayers and raise up the sick. *If he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him.* Note the “if”. We must never assume that sickness is a judgment on sin. Sometimes it is, but not always.

These texts (and others) prove conclusively that God is in absolute control of all sickness. Let us now turn our attention to His purposes in sickness.

III. Sickness is one of God’s primary teaching methods.

Sometimes, God sends sickness as a judgment on sin. Because of their disorder at the Lord’s table, some at Corinth were smitten by God with sickness and even death (1Cor. 11:30). The sickness was remedial, to correct the offenders. The death was preventive, to keep them from sinning more. Furthermore, all who observe such a phenomenon should hear and fear!

Some cases of church discipline involve being *delivered unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus* (1Cor. 5:5). The church that takes this action has a good purpose in view: the ultimate salvation of the soul. God may teach saving lessons through the curriculum of suffering in the flesh.

The case of Paul’s thorn in the flesh is especially important for believers walking in the fear of the Lord (2Cor. 12:7-10). Satan was the instrument through which this physical sickness came. However, the fact that Paul prayed to God for the removal of the thorn demonstrates that Paul knew full well who was in control. Satan meant the thorn for evil, but God meant it for good. If there was ever a “prayer of faith” by a man with a clear conscience toward God, it was this prayer of Paul’s, which he prayed repeatedly. But God had a better plan! Rather than remove the thorn and give Paul relief in his body, God left the thorn but gave Paul more grace to bear it. This combination kept Paul humble, and at the

same time proved God's strength in the face of Paul's weakness. Listen to sick and suffering Paul, empowered by Almighty God—*I take pleasure in infirmities...for when I am weak, then am I strong.* While Paul was on this earth, the body and soul were moving in opposite directions. The outward man was perishing, but the inward man was renewed day by day (2Cor. 4:16). What great lessons he learned through sickness! Every true Christian would gladly endure the pain in order to gain the grace.

By means of sickness, God gets our attention. We recognize our frailty and our dependence on God. We learn humility. We taste a little of what Christ endured on Calvary. We prepare for death. We anticipate heaven and a glorified body at the resurrection. If you are sick, God has some purpose in it. He has some lesson(s) for you or others to learn. Perhaps it is simply to draw you nearer to Him. C.H. Spurgeon said, "A life-long sickness may by divine grace prove to be a life-long blessing. Better suffer from childhood to old age than be let alone to find pleasure in sin." Whatever the case, do not let your sickness be wasted. If God gets your attention through sickness, He has done you a favor!

We should not fail to mention that sickness also draws earthly friends close. It provides those who are well with opportunities to show mercy. It provides those who are sick with opportunities to sympathize with their fellow-sufferers.

Above all, God is glorified in some way in your sickness, otherwise He would not have you sick.

IV. Objections.

(1) "But didn't Christ take all our sickness for us, according to Isaiah 53:4-5, *Surely he hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows...and with his stripes we are healed?*"

Answer: This text is twice quoted in the New Testament, Matthew 8:17 and 1Peter 2:24. In the first case, the prophecy of Isaiah is said to be fulfilled in the earthly ministry of Christ as He wrought miracles of healing. In the second case, the context demands a spiritual application of the healing; it therefore applies spiritually to every believer in Christ, regardless of his physical health.

I affirm that the redemption accomplished by Christ involves the total man, soul and body. Nevertheless, not all of redemption is applied in this life. The healing of the soul takes place here, in great measure. But the healing of the body takes place at the resurrection, at the second coming of Christ, when this mortal puts on immortality (1Cor. 15), when this vile body is changed and made like Christ's glorious body (Php. 3:21). We yet await the redemption of our body (Rom. 8:23).

(2) "Isn't 3John 2 proof positive that God wants you well? *Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth.*"

Answer: First, this was a common greeting, a pleasantry. It should not be forced into a different use as a foundation for the prosperity gospel. Second, the priority of spiritual health over physical is plainly evident in v. 3-4. That Gaius was walking in truth brought the greatest joy to John. The remainder of the letter shows no preoccupation with physical health. Third, there is no causal link expressed here between soul prosperity and bodily prosperity. Fourth, John's desire for the health of Gaius was in order that he might continue to show love to the church (v. 5-6). It is not unlikely that John had heard of some sickness on the part of Gaius, which would tend to hinder him from works like the entertaining of guests.

Conclusion

Christian friend, if after clearing your conscience, praying and using the means God has provided for the improvement of health, you remain sick, then take your sickness as a gift from God for your good and His glory. It must be that He wants you sick. Be at peace with His providence. Heaven will

only be the sweeter for those who suffer more. *Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory* (2Cor. 4:17). Be comforted with the assurance that “A few more rolling suns at most, will land me safe on Canaan’s coast.”