

DEATH AND AFTER

Sickness and Death

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. Every person must face sickness sometime in his life, and the human body as it grows older must sicken and die. Sickness is not longed for by any person, but it is the inevitable for all. We must all get prepared for sickness as we must get prepared for death.
- B. Sickness is not a respecter of persons. Even grace does not lift the true Christian out of it. Sickness comes to saved and unsaved alike. Kings, masters, slaves, rich men and poor, learned and unlearned, teachers, scholars, doctors and patients, ministers, scientists, mechanics, janitors and housewives must one day go down before this great foe. There are no bars or doors that can keep away sickness and death. Riches cannot buy health and rank cannot command sickness to go away. Science may prolong life but it cannot completely eliminate sickness. The body is liable to disease and every Christian must have a right attitude towards sickness when it stalks his path.
- C. Sickness is not welcomed by anyone and is dreaded by most. Humanly speaking, there is very little good to say about sickness. However, divinely speaking (looking at life from a divine viewpoint), there are many causes, cures and benefits of sickness. The purpose of this lesson is to cause the healthy Christian to get ready for sickness and to help the sick Christian live with sickness.

II. THE CAUSES OF SICKNESS

- A. Introduction: The final cause of all sickness from our human understanding is sin (Rom. 5:12). Sin is the original cause of all sickness, disease, pain and suffering on the planet earth. The human body, weak and frail, is in this state because of sin that entered into God's perfect creation when Adam and Eve sinned. There are many secondary causes for sickness (weak organs, poor blood, genetic defects, etc.) but all these second causes and the final human cause of sin are under the sovereign control of God, for nothing happens by accident. NOTE: There are some divine causes for sickness in the life of a true believer that belong only to God's secret counsels, but are made partially known to the Christian to encourage and strengthen him.
- B. Sickness to Glorify God: God brings sickness into a Christian's life that God may be glorified through the believers faith and through the carrying out of His own purposes.
 - 1. God permitted a man to be born blind that the works of God might be displayed in him (John 9:3). This defect was not because of any sin he or his parents did, but was brought by God.
 - 2. Job is another example of one who suffered for the glory of God with horrible boils on his body (Job 1:1-2:13). Job was a faithful and prosperous believer who pleased the Lord. He had done no sin, but God permitted Satan to attack him with sickness so that God could prove that true believers will glorify God in the midst of the most adverse circumstances.

- C. Sickness to Teach Dependence Upon God (II Cor. 12:7-9): Paul had been given a direct revelation from God and in order to keep him humble and minimize the natural pride of man, God permitted Satan to bring a disease to Paul. We cannot be sure what that disease was, but we think it was an eye problem. Paul sought the Lord three times in prayer to remove this illness but God's answer was "no". There was a divine purpose behind this sickness and that was to teach Paul humility and dependence upon God (II Cor. 12:9).
- D. Sickness to Discipline the Believer: When a Christian disobeys God by falling into sin, often the means of discipline God uses is sickness. The end of this sickness is to bring him to repentance whether the sickness is taken away or not.
1. When Miriam challenged the authority of Moses, her brother, she was struck with leprosy (Num. 12:9-10).
 2. Some of the Corinthians were guilty of partaking of the Lord's Table in an unworthy manner and Paul says, "For this many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep."

III. CURES FOR SICKNESS

- A. Pray For a Divine Healing: In God's sovereignty, He can heal whom He pleases and it does please God to supernaturally heal some. NOTE: However, God does not heal everyone for good reasons unknown to us. He did not heal the Apostle Paul of his illness even though he prayed three times for God to do so (II Cor. 12:7-9). Paul could have healed Trophimus but did not, for it was not God's will for Trophimus to be healed (II Tim. 4:20).
- B. Call the Elders to Pray: (James 5:20): There is always the possibility that the anointing of oil and the prayers of the elders collectively may be used by God to heal a sick Christian. However, the person will be healed only if God wills it.
- C. Call a Doctor: God can use all kinds of means to heal from sickness and one of those means may be the knowledge and skill of a qualified doctor. NOTE: However, just because we go to a doctor does not mean we will be healed. Healing takes place only when God wills it.

IV. BENEFITS FROM SICKNESS FOR THE UNSAVED

- A. Introduction: There are benefits to sickness, for it is permitted in the sovereign plan of God, and God uses it for His own glory and for the good of people.

"Once more I repeat, that I speak of the "benefits" of sickness on purpose and advisedly. I know the suffering and pain which sickness entails. I admit the misery and wretchedness which it often brings in its train. But I cannot regard it as an unmixed evil. I see in it a wise permission of God. I see in it a useful provision to check the ravages of sin and the devil among men's souls. If man had never sinned I should have been at a loss to discern the benefit of sickness. But since sin is in the world, I can see that sickness is good. It is a blessing quite as much as a curse. It is a rough schoolmaster, I grant. But it is a real friend to man's soul."
(J.C. Ryle, Sickness)

- B. Sickness Helps Remind Men of Death: Most people are so wrapped up in themselves and the pursuits of life (business, pleasure, politics, etc.) that they live as if they were never going to die. When sickness comes, it destroys their fantasies and makes them face to the fact that they are going to die.

- C. Sickness Helps Men to Think of God: When everything is going well and a man has his health, he thinks very little, if any, about God. Natural man hates to think seriously about God because he hates the law of God. But if a serious disease comes to him, he turns his thoughts toward God who alone can help him.
- D. Sickness Helps Men to Think of Judgment: Sickness is a reminder of death. Death is the door through which we must all pass to judgment before God. Sickness may well be used by God to prepare a man to meet his God.
- E. Sickness Helps to Soften Men's Hearts: The natural man's heart is hardened to God. Sickness shows a person how little value material things really are, and is used by God to show the hollowness and emptiness of life apart from God.
- F. Sickness Helps to Humble Men: All men by nature are proud and high-minded, and think of themselves as quite important. A sick bed is a tamer of these kinds of thoughts. In the sight of a sick bed and grave, it is not easy to be proud.
- G. Sickness Helps Test a Man's Faith: Sickness is used by God to see if a professing believer in Christ has genuine faith or a false faith. If a man has only an outward form of religion, a hearty sickness will expose his spiritual condition.

“Many a creed looks well on the smooth waters of health, which turns out utterly unsound and useless on the rough waves of the sick-bed. The storms of winter often bring out the defects in a man's dwelling, and sickness often exposes the gracelessness of a man's soul. Surely anything that makes us find out the real character of our faith is good.” (Ryle)

- H. Conclusion: Sickness does not always work grace in every man's heart. Many a person passes through sickness to the grave without the least softening of the heart. While they live and when they die, they have no feelings towards Christ. In the providence of God, however, sickness has been used by God to save many needy sinners.

V. ATTITUDES TOWARD SICKNESS BY THE SAVED

- A. Introduction: No man, not even a Christian, has any control over illness when it comes. Christians are not responsible for sickness but they are responsible for their attitude when sickness does come to them (Phil. 4:11-13).
- B. Accept God's Will: A Christian must accept sickness as part of the divine plan for him (Phil. 1:29). He may not understand “why” but by faith he can rest back in God who has all things under control and know that all will work out for good (Rom. 8:28). We can only find inward peace in sickness as we say, “Even so, Lord, it seemed good in your sight” (Matt. 11:26).
- C. Thank God for the Sickness (I Thess. 5:18): It is one thing to passively accept God's will and quite another to actively thank Him for it. Only when we can thank God for disease do we really understand that this thing is happening for our own good.
- D. Remember that God Loves You (John 11:1-4): God loves the Christian when his body is racked with pain, his frame is burning up with fever and his outward man is decaying because of age. God loves the sick Christian because he is an elect child of God for whom Christ died, and any sickness may be the last sickness the Christian experiences before seeing Jesus Christ face to face (I Cor. 13:12).
- E. Bear the Pain as Well as Possible: Sickness is a trying thing to the body which affects a person emotionally, mentally and spiritually.

“Sickness is no doubt a trying thing to flesh and blood. To feel out nerves unstrung and our natural force abated, to be obliged to sit still and be cut off from all our usual vocations, to see our plans broken off and our purposes disappointed, to endure long hours, and days and nights of weariness and pain – all this is a severe strain on poor sinful human nature. What wonder if peevishness and impatience are brought out by disease! Surely in such a dying world as this we should study patience.” (Ryle)

NOTE: Sickness can be used by God so as to make a believer a strong testimony for Christ. When others see the fruit of the Spirit (Eph. 5:22-23) flowing from a sick Christian, they know that God is in their lives. Never do the graces of the Spirit shine so brightly as in the sick-room. A sick person can preach a silent sermon (II Tim. 2:10). NOTE: Now is the time to learn patience and longsuffering so that when sickness comes these graces will be established. We must lay up stores of graces in time of health to meet the crisis of sickness.

- F. Remember Others Who are Sick if God Heals You: Wherever there is sickness there is a call to duty. A little timely help, a short visit, a friendly inquiry, a note of sympathy, a mere expression of concern may do a great deal of good. We, as Christians, are to “bear one another’s burdens” (Gal. 6:2) and be “kind one to another (Eph. 4:32). The Christian has the example of Jesus Christ Himself as He went about caring for and healing the sick (Acts 10:38). Men actually demonstrate the reality of their Christian faith by their concern for the sick (Matt. 25:36). NOTE: Those who care for the sick when healthy will never lack for help when they are sick.