

# Free Grace Broadcaster

ISSUE 252

## SICKNESS

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*Behold, he whom thou  
lovest is sick.*

John 11:3

### Our Purpose

*“To humble the pride of man,  
to exalt the grace of God in salvation,  
and to promote real holiness in heart and life.”*

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## SICKNESS

# 252

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Published by Chapel Library • 2603 West Wright St. • Pensacola, Florida 32505 USA

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# SICKNESS IS UNIVERSAL

J. C. Ryle (1816-1900)

**S**ICKNESS is everywhere. In Europe, in Asia, in Africa, in America; in hot countries and in cold; in civilized nations and in savage tribes, men, women, and children sicken and die.

Sickness is among all classes. Grace does not lift a believer above the reach of it. Riches will not buy exemption from it. Rank cannot prevent its assaults. Kings and their subjects, masters and servants, rich men and poor, learned and unlearned, teachers and scholars, doctors and patients, ministers and hearers, alike go down before this great foe. "The rich man's wealth is his strong city" (Pro 18:11). The Englishman's house is called his castle; but there are no doors and bars that can keep out disease and death.

Sickness is of every sort and description. From the crown of our head to the sole of our foot, we are liable to disease. Our capacity of suffering is something fearful to contemplate. Who can count the ailments by which our bodily frame may be assailed? Who ever visited a museum of morbid anatomy without a shudder? "Strange that a harp of thousand strings should keep in tune so long." It is not, to my mind, so wonderful that men should die so soon, as it is that they should live so long.

Sickness is often one of the most humbling and distressing trials that can come upon man. It can turn the strongest into a little child and make him feel "the grasshopper...a burden" (Ecc 12:5). It can unnerve the boldest and make him tremble at the fall of a pin. We are "fearfully and wonderfully made" (Psa 139:14). The connection between body and mind is curiously close. The influence that some diseases can exercise upon the temper and spirits is immensely great. There are ailments of brain and liver and nerves, which can bring down a Solomon in mind to a state little better than that of a babe. He that would know to what depths of humiliation poor man can fall has only to attend for a short time on sick beds.

Sickness is not preventable by anything that man can do. The average duration of life may doubtless be somewhat lengthened. The skill of doctors may continually discover new remedies and effect surprising cures. The enforcement of wise sanitary regulations may greatly lower the death rate in a land. But, after all, whether in healthy or

unhealthy localities, whether in mild climates or in cold, whether treated by homeopathy or allopathy,<sup>1</sup> men will sicken and die. “The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away” (Psa 90:10). That witness is indeed true. It was true 3300 years ago. It is true still.

Now, what can we make of this great fact—the universal prevalence of sickness? How shall we account for it? What explanation can we give of it? What answer shall we give to our inquiring children when they ask us, “Father, why do people get ill and die?” These are grave questions. A few words upon them will not be out of place.

Can we suppose for a moment that God created sickness and disease at the beginning? Can we imagine that He Who formed our world in such perfect order was the Former of needless suffering and pain? Can we think that He Who made all things “very good” (Gen 1:31) made Adam’s race to sicken and to die? The idea is, to my mind, revolting. It introduces a grand imperfection into the midst of God’s perfect works. I must find another solution to satisfy my mind.

The only explanation that satisfies me is that which the Bible gives. Something has come into the world that has dethroned man from his original position and stripped him of his original privileges. Something has come in, which, like a handful of gravel thrown into the midst of machinery, has marred the perfect order of God’s creation. And what is that *something*? I answer in one word—sin. “Sin [has] entered into the world, and death by sin” (Rom 5:12). Sin is the cause of all the sickness and disease and pain and suffering that prevail on the earth. They are all a part of that curse that came into the world when Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit and fell. There would have been no sickness if there had been no Fall. There would have been no disease if there had been no sin.

I pause for a moment at this point, and yet in pausing I do not depart from my subject. I pause to remind my readers that there is no ground so untenable as that which is occupied by the atheist, the deist,<sup>2</sup> or the unbeliever in the Bible. I advise every young reader of this paper, who is puzzled by the bold and specious arguments of the infi-

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<sup>1</sup> **homeopathy or allopathy** – treatment of disease by minute doses of natural substances that in a healthy person would produce symptoms of the disease; or the treatment of disease by conventional means, i.e., with drugs having opposite effects to the symptoms.

<sup>2</sup> **deist** – one who believes that God is distant, i.e., He created the universe but then left it to run its course on its own, following certain “laws of nature” that He had built into the universe.

del, to study well that most important subject—the *difficulties of infidelity*.<sup>3</sup> I say boldly that it requires far more credulity to be an infidel than to be a Christian. I say boldly that there are great broad patent facts in the condition of mankind, which nothing but the Bible can explain, and that one of the most striking of these facts is the universal prevalence of pain, sickness, and disease. In short, one of the mightiest difficulties in the way of atheists and deists is the body of man.

You have doubtless heard of atheists. An atheist is one who professes to believe that there is no God, no Creator, no First Cause, and that all things came together in this world by mere chance. Now, shall we listen to such a doctrine as this? Go, take an atheist to one of the excellent surgical schools of our land, and ask him to study the wonderful structure of the human body. Show him the matchless skill with which every joint, vein, valve, muscle, sinew, nerve, bone, and limb has been formed. Show him the perfect adaptation of every part of the human frame to the purpose that it serves. Show him the thousand delicate contrivances for meeting wear and tear and supplying daily waste of vigor. And then ask this man who denies the being of a God and a great First Cause, if all this wonderful mechanism is the result of chance? Ask him if it came together at first by luck and accident? Ask him if he so thinks about the watch he looks at, the bread he eats, or the coat he wears? Oh, no! Design is an insuperable difficulty in the atheist's way. *There is a God.*

You have doubtless heard of deists. A deist is one who professes to believe that there is a God Who made the world and all things therein. But he does not believe the Bible. "A God, but no Bible! A Creator, but no Christianity!" This is the deist's creed. Now, shall we listen to this doctrine? Go again, I say, and take a deist to a hospital and show him some of the awful handiwork of disease. Take him to the bed where lies some tender child, scarce knowing good from evil, with an incurable cancer. Send him to the ward where there is a loving mother of a large family in the last stage of some excruciating disease. Show him some of the racking pains and agonies to which flesh is heir and ask him to account for them. Ask this man, who believes there is a great and wise God Who made the world but cannot believe the Bible. Ask him how he accounts for these traces of disorder and imperfection in his God's creation. Ask this man, who sneers at Christian theology and is too wise to believe the fall of Adam—ask

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<sup>3</sup> **infidelity** – attitude of one who has no religious belief, especially of Christianity.

him upon his theory to explain the universal prevalence of pain and disease in the world. You may ask in vain! You will get no satisfactory answer. Sickness and suffering are insuperable difficulties in the deist's way. Man has sinned, and therefore man suffers. Adam fell from his first estate, and therefore Adam's children sicken and die.

The universal prevalence of sickness is one of the indirect evidences that the Bible is true. The Bible explains it. The Bible answers the questions about it that will arise in every inquiring mind. No other systems of religion can do this. They all fail here. They are silent. They are confounded. The Bible alone looks the subject in the face. It boldly proclaims the fact that man is a fallen creature, and with equal boldness proclaims a vast remedial system to meet his wants. I feel shut up to the conclusion that the Bible is from God. Christianity is a revelation from heaven: "Thy word is truth" (Joh 17:17).

Let us stand fast on the old ground: The Bible, and the Bible only, is God's revelation of Himself to man. Be not moved by the many new assaults that modern skepticism<sup>4</sup> is making on the inspired volume. Heed not the hard questions that the enemies of the faith are fond of putting about Bible difficulties, and to which perhaps you often feel unable to give an answer. Anchor your soul firmly on this safe principle—that the whole book is God's truth. Tell the enemies of the Bible that, in spite of all their arguments, there is no book in the world that will bear comparison with the Bible—none that so thoroughly meets man's wants—none that explains so much of the state of mankind. As to the hard things in the Bible, tell them you are content to wait. You find enough plain truth in the Book to satisfy your conscience and save your soul. The hard things will be cleared up one day. What you know not now, you will know hereafter.

From *Sickness*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

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**J. C. Ryle (1816-1900):** Anglican bishop; born at Macclesfield, Cheshire County, England, UK.



Restoration from sickness should always be ascribed to God. Whatever part the physician may play—and he often plays a very important part—yet to God,  
Who gives the physician wisdom and skill, must the gracious  
result be ascribed.—*Charles Spurgeon*

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<sup>4</sup> **skepticism** – doubt of the truth of revelation; denial of the divine origin of Christianity, or of the being, perfections, or truth of God.

# THE PRICELESS GIFT OF HEALTH

Arthur W. Pink (1886-1952)

**O**H, what a priceless boon is a sound body and good health—a boon that is denied to some from birth and that few really appreciate until it be taken from them. It has long impressed the writer what a remarkable thing it is that any of us enjoy any health at all, seeing that we have six thousand years of sinful heredity behind us!

It is due alone to the goodness and kindness of God that the great majority enter this world with more or less sound bodies and reach youth in the bloom of health. But sin and folly then take heavy toll and the constitutions of millions are wrecked before middle life is reached. Nor is it always brought about by wicked intemperance<sup>1</sup> and dissipation.<sup>2</sup> Often it is the outcome of ignorance, through failure to heed some of the most elementary laws of hygiene. Alas, the majority of people will learn in no other school than that of hard and bitter experience, and consequently most of them only discover how to live when the time comes for them to die. True, we cannot put old heads on young shoulders; yet if the inexperienced are too proud to heed the counsels of the mature, then they must reap the consequences.

Now surely, other things being equal, the Christian ought to enjoy better health than the non-Christian. Why so? Why, because if his walk be regulated by God's Word, he will at least be preserved from those diseases that are the fruit of certain transgressions. The English word *holiness* means "wholeness, soundness." The more we are kept from sinning, the more shall we escape its consequences. "Godliness is profitable unto all things [the body as well as the soul], having promise of the life that *now is*, and of that which is to come" (1Ti 4:8). One of the basic laws of health is the Sabbath statute.<sup>3</sup> "The sabbath was made for man" (Mar 2:27), for his good because he needed it. It was made for man that he might be a *man*—something more than a beast of burden or a human treadmill. His body needs it as truly as does his soul. This has been unmistakably demonstrated in this country. When France collapsed and the British Isles faced the most des-

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<sup>1</sup> **intemperance** – lack of moderation and self-restraint.

<sup>2</sup> **dissipation** – wasteful yielding to vices that impair or ruin both health and fortune.

<sup>3</sup> See FGB 233, *The Lord's Day*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

perate crisis of their long history, the government foolishly ordered that those in the coal mines and munitions factories must work seven days a week, but they soon learned that the workmen produced *less* than they did in six days—they could not stand up to the additional strain.

By resting from manual toil on the Sabbath, man is enabled to recuperate his strength for the labors of the week lying ahead. Yet that cannot be accomplished by attending one meeting after another on that day nor by exhausting one's strength through lengthy walks to and from the services—moving the tent nearer the altar is the remedy—still less by profaning the Sabbath in carnal recreation.

Another divine precept that promotes health is, “He that believeth shall not make haste” (Isa 28:16). Side by side with the speeding tempo of modern life, we behold the multiplying nervous disorders and those who are murdered or maimed on the highway. For many years, we have avoided motor cars, buses, and trains whenever the distance to be covered was not too great to walk, not using them more than two or three times in a twelve-month period. Rushing around, hurrying, and scurrying hither and thither, is not only injurious but a violation of the divine rule: “He that hasteth with his feet sinneth” (Pro 19:2), which means exactly what it says.<sup>4</sup>

“Take therefore no thought for the morrow” (Mat 6:34). How good health is promoted by obedience to this precept scarcely needs pointing out. It is carking<sup>5</sup> care and worry that disturb the mind, affect circulation, impair digestion, and prevent restful sleep. If the Christian would cast all his care on the Lord (1Pe 5:7), what freedom from anxiety would be his. “The joy of the LORD is your strength” (Neh 8:10)—physically as well as spiritually. What a touch to a wearied body and tired mind it is to delight ourselves in the Lord: “A merry heart doeth good like a medicine” (Pro 17:22). “My son, attend to my words...For they are life unto those that find them, and health to all their flesh” (Pro 4:20, 22). Do we really believe this? “Fear the LORD and depart from evil. It shall be health to thy navel,<sup>6</sup> and marrow to thy bones” (Pro 3:7-8).

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<sup>4</sup> While the author's suggestions may not be realistic for modern readers, his primary notion of slowing down the pace of our lives is vital.

<sup>5</sup> **carking** – anxious.

<sup>6</sup> It should follow that righteous living will have a positive effect upon the body. The Hebrew term here translated “body” [in some translations] literally refers to the umbilical cord. The only other uses of this word are found in Song of Solomon 7:2 and Ezekiel 16:4. Such language seems odd to us. How would righteous living bring healing to one's



Godly living is conducive to<sup>7</sup> healthiness of mind and body; and other things being equal, that will be one of its biproducts. By “other things being equal” we mean: as in the case of one who is not suffering for the sins of his father; who did not ruin his constitution by debauchery<sup>8</sup> before conversion; and who exercises ordinary common sense in attending to the elementary rules of hygiene. One who is “temperate<sup>9</sup> in all things” (1Co 9:25) will escape many or all those ills, which are the price that must be paid for intemperance. Scripture does not require us to be either Spartans or Epicureans<sup>10</sup> but to “let [our] moderation be known unto all” (Phi 4:5). God “giveth...richly all things to enjoy” (1Ti 6:17), yet not to abuse. “Every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused” (1Ti 4:4), providing it is used aright; but His choicest creations prove harmful if used to excess. God has provided great variety in nature, and each one must learn for himself what best suits him and deny himself of that which disagrees.

From *Diving Healing: Is It Biblical?*<sup>2</sup> available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

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**Arthur W. Pink (1886-1952):** Pastor, itinerate Bible teacher, author; born in Nottingham, England, UK.



Christ is a physician. It is one of his titles: “I am the Lord that healeth thee” (Exo 15:26). He is a physician for the *body*: He anointed the blind, cleansed the lepers, healed the sick, raised the dead (Mat 8:16). He it is that puts virtue into physic [medicine] and makes it healing. And He is a physician for the *soul*: “He healeth the broken in heart” (Psa 147:3). We are all as so many impotent, diseased persons: one man hath a fever, another a dead palsy, another hath a bloody issue—he is under the power of some hereditary corruption. Now Christ is a soul-physician; He healeth these diseases.—*Thomas Watson*

It is well to praise the Lord for His mercy when you are in health, but make sure that you do it when you are sick; for then your praise is more likely to be genuine.—*Charles Spurgeon*

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umbilical cord? It is possible that the navel is chosen because it harkens back to the original health of a newborn, when its first moments of independent life are experienced. It is more likely, however, that this is an example of synecdoche. This figure of speech employs a part of something to refer to the whole of which it is a part. So, “body” may not be a literal translation, but it captures the intent of the original language. (John A. Kitchen, *Proverbs: A Mentor Commentary*, 78)

<sup>7</sup> **is conducive to** – tends to bring about; leads to.

<sup>8</sup> **debauchery** – excessive indulgence in sensual pleasures.

<sup>9</sup> **temperate** – showing moderation or self-restraint.

<sup>10</sup> **Spartans or Epicureans** – those who are overly strict in self-discipline or devoted to sensual pleasures.

# GOD'S COMFORT IN SICKNESS

Philip Bennett Power (1822-1899)

**W**E must keep close to thoughts of God. We must meet Satan's dark thoughts and suggestions about God with bright thoughts about Him. For if we do not, he will always be able to bring God up terribly against us. However we may divert our minds, the evil one will always keep saying, "But ah, what about God? All is not right with Him; and what is more, all never can be."

But if we have gone to God and have well-assured thoughts of Him, then God can never come before us as a dark shadow, but as light. We shall know Him as a Father indeed; and if Satan comes to vex us with thoughts about Him, we shall say, "We know Who He is—our Father Who is in heaven." I consider, then, God's character as my great help to believing Him to be a God of comfort. And first of all, from the mere fact of His being generous, we may judge that He is very likely to be a God of comfort. Everywhere in Scripture, He is represented to us as a large-hearted God. He is One that hath no pleasure in the death of a sinner but would rather that he turned from his iniquity and lived. He says, "Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it...Their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more" (Psa 81:10; Heb 8:12; 10:17). How much more generous God is than man we have remarkably set before us in what He says to the prophet Jeremiah: "Hast thou seen that which backsliding Israel hath done? she is gone up upon every high mountain and under every green tree, and there hath played the harlot. And I said after she had done all these things, Turn thou unto me" (Jer 3:6-7). Others would have said, "Begone," but God said, "Return!" That was generosity indeed. In the first verse of this chapter, God shows that man's way of treating a person under similar circumstances would be very different; but then He is God and not man, and His ways and thoughts are not like our ways and thoughts. His generosity is altogether beyond ours. Happening to open the concordance this moment, I came upon five texts, one after another, where God is spoken of as being [earnestly asked] with success. "After that God was intreated for the land" (2Sa 21:14). "The LORD was intreated for the land, and the plague was stayed" (2Sa 24:25). "They cried...and he was intreated of them" (1Ch 5:20). Manasseh "prayed...and he was intreated of him" (2Ch 33:13). "We...besought our God...and he was intreated of us" (Ezr 8:23). God

is “longsuffering, and plenteous in mercy and truth” (Psa 86:15). And in the parable of the prodigal son, generous dealing is shown to the very full: the father receives the wretched sinner just as he is; and reproaching him not, restores him to favor, and clothes him in the best robe and kills for him the fatted calf. Now, if I need anything, it is a great encouragement to me in going to ask for it that I know I [will] deal with a generous person. I feel He will be predisposed to help me, to deal liberally with me, and to do me good. And let this thought comfort you: There is not one miserly word about God in all the Bible. You will be sure to get from Him simply because He is what He is, whatever He has promised to bestow. And if God be generous, then He will be self-communicative—that is, He will be always outputting good. God is not content with simply having His goodness and keeping it to Himself. He spared not His only Son, but freely gave Him up for us all, and “how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?” (Rom 8:32). If we had to go to a person for anything, who is actually wanting to give away the very things we needed, what wonderful spirit it would put into us to go to him for what we required. Now, can God have all that would make us happy and comfortable and never bestow a taste on us? Certainly not! Therefore, if you lack, He will communicate Himself to you, and what He communicates must be Himself, must be like Himself, and therefore it must be good! It will be the giving of Himself to you as you are and with your particular need. He will pour His streams into all your hollow places, all your dry wells, on your parched lands and empty water courses; where you are driest and most in need is the place where He will most surely come. Then, we may take great comfort from considering that God stands to us in the relation of a Father; and forasmuch as He must from His very nature do everything in the best and most perfect manner, and to the fullest extent also, we may be *sure* He will be to us better than ever any earthly father has been to a son!...We have a Father in heaven, and He will not come short in the fulfilment of even *one* of the functions of a parent.

Comfort yourself, then, with the thought that the One with Whom you have to do is in every way One Whose very relationship to you secures your getting what you need. If your Father will not comfort you, who will? He is the most likely person to get comfort from—therefore, the proper person to go to for it. And because He is a Father, you may expect all tender comfort. It is “through the tender mercy of our God” that “the dayspring from on high hath visited us” (Luk 1:78). James tells us that “the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender

mercy” (Jam 5:11). The command to be kind one to another, to be tender-hearted, and to forgive one another, is all grounded on such things in God: “Even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you” (Eph 4:32). Now, if instead of thus looking at God and at all that is to spring forth from Him because He is what He is, we look at ourselves and at all that we deserve, we shall have no comfort at all. Comfort will never travel to us by this latter path. We are to look at ourselves, expecting to find all emptiness and not wanting to make the matter one whit better than it is. We must not be surprised, startled, or downhearted at realizing this emptiness: it simply arises from our being what we are...But all the discoveries of God will be of fullness, and in putting the two together must lie our comfort. Bathe your thoughts, then, in God. Be rich in God—poor in yourselves, but rich in Him. You see what He is. All His nature, all His sayings, all His doings argue comfort. Not comfort for the unrepentant, the independent, and those who think they have no need; but for all who wish to be humble, in need, and to be supplied from a source outside themselves. Say then thus, in your communings with yourselves: Who knows so well what God is as Himself? All that He has told me leads toward comfort. I will not give God a bad character by expecting only gloom from Him. I will not take Satan’s opinion about God. What interest can he have but to malign Him? I will not take my own deceitful, suspicious, and ignorant heart’s speculation about Him; for from my poor fallen nature, they are sure to be warped. I will throw myself upon God, as He has revealed Himself. I will keep my eyes fixed on Him, and I will shut them to everything else. I will keep to what He has revealed. I can only be what I am—empty; and He can only be what He is—the Supplier of that emptiness. Out of His fullness, then, shall I receive; and because He is what He is, I shall have grace to help in every time of need.

From *The Sick Man’s Comfort Book*, in the public domain.

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**Philip Bennett Power (1822-1899):** Anglican clergyman and author; born in Waterford, Ireland, UK.



I venture to say that the greatest earthly blessing that God can give to any of us is health, with the exception of sickness. Sickness has frequently been of more use to the saints of God than health has.

—Charles Spurgeon

# USING TIME WISELY IN SICKNESS

Thomas Boston (1676-1732)

*So teach us to number our days, that we may apply  
our hearts unto wisdom.—Psalm 90:12*

**T**HE Lord is putting particular persons and families among us, yes, all of us, to the school of affliction, since the hand of God gone out against some concerns all. And it is necessary that we learn our lesson aright and become wise thereby...

I am to show what that *wisdom* is that we are to learn by a time of bodily sickness and mortality: it is serious *godliness* or true religion.<sup>1</sup> When one becomes seriously godly, leaving the way of sin and entering on the way of faith and holiness, then he has learned the lesson that God is teaching us this day: “And unto man he said, Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding” (Job 28:28). This is the only true wisdom. They continue arrant<sup>2</sup> fools who do not arrive at it, whatever other wisdom they be masters of. This is the wisdom taught at God’s school of affliction (Heb 12:10). The voice of the rod is, “Be wise for your souls.” That this is the true wisdom appears in that,

**It is practical wisdom—wisdom for regulating a man’s life in the way to happiness** (Hos 14:9). How many there are accounted wise, who betray their folly in quite shooting by the mark in the way of life they choose (Jer 22:13-16). Surely it is wisdom that sets men in the true way to happiness, which is faith and holiness (Mar 16:16; Heb 12:14). What avail carnal worldly wit, the profound speculations of natural men in the learned sciences, and the dry and sapless notions of religion in formal professors? All these are but laborious trifling<sup>3</sup> and making a noise, doing nothing, while they never make them better men [though it makes them more knowledgeable].

**It is wisdom for one’s self** (Pro 9:12). There is a set of men whose wisdom is noted to be for others, but not for themselves. They resemble boatmen who ferry others over; but during the whole time of their rowing, they have their eyes fixed on the place whence they came.

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<sup>1</sup> **true religion** – biblical Christianity.

<sup>2</sup> **arrant** – downright; notorious; mere.

<sup>3</sup> **trifling** – things of little value or importance.

Immediately after landing their passengers, they return to where they set out. Such is the wisdom of all ungodly men: their wisdom may profit other men's souls or bodies, but, alas, it profits not themselves (1Co 9:27; Mat 6:19-20). But this is the excellency of real godliness: it "giveth life to them that have it" (Ecc 7:12). It casts the soul into the mold of truth, sanctifies the heart and life in conformity to the divine nature and will, and so perfects human nature, raising up a glorious fabric out of the ruins in which it was laid by the Fall.

**It is wisdom for one's latter end** (Deu 32:29). The fool in the Gospel had wit enough to provide for many years' life. But here lay his folly: he had nothing provided for his latter end—for a dying hour (Luk 12:20). Many such fools are among us. It was one of the dying expressions of a learned man of the last age (Grotius<sup>4</sup>), "I have lost my life, alas, in laboriously doing nothing!"

**It is wisdom for the better part** (Luk 10:41-42). The wisdom of the world is but for the baser part of man—the body. It makes him useful in business and civil conversation. But this reaches only the outworks,<sup>5</sup> while in the meantime the soul's concerns lie by neglected. But this wisdom advanceth the life and interests of the soul, insures one's title to heaven, and sets him on the way to eternal happiness (Pro 8:35).

**Lastly, it is wisdom for the better world** (Heb 11:14-16). Our projects for this world, as to ourselves, must die with ourselves (Psa 146:4); but they who are wise for that better world, by being religious<sup>6</sup> indeed, will find their measures wisely laid in time to take and have their effect happily in eternity (Rev 14:13). What they now sow, they shall then joyfully reap.

I proceed to condescend on some particulars of wisdom that such a time calls us to apply our hearts to.

**1. To inquire seriously into the causes of the Lord's controversy with us (Job 10:2).** When God's hand is stretched out, it will be our wisdom to search why it is so (Lam 3:39). Surely there is a cause. He does not smite without good reason; and unless our eyes see it, our hearts cannot rue<sup>7</sup> it.

God has a controversy with the congregation and countryside. It [would be] good to lay it to heart. Two things seem to have the main

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<sup>4</sup> **Hugo Grotius** (1583-1645) – Dutch legal scholar, the "father of international law."

<sup>5</sup> **outworks** – exterior works of anything.

<sup>6</sup> **religious** – godly; devoted to the practice of true religion (Jam 1:27).

<sup>7</sup> **rue** – grieve for; lament.

hand in it:

(1) **Abuse and misuse of spiritual mercies and privileges.** Thus, the Lord threatened the Old Testament church: “If thou wilt not observe to do all the words of this law that are written in this book, that thou mayest fear this glorious and fearful name, THE LORD THY GOD; then the LORD will make thy plagues wonderful,<sup>8</sup> and the plagues of thy seed, even great plagues, and of long continuance, and sore sicknesses, and of long continuance” (Deu 28:58-59). This brought a sore sickness upon the church of Corinth (1Co 11:30). The noted divisions and deserting of ordinances in the country are the judgment and the sin of the corner, whereby contempt is poured on precious gospel ordinances, and the success of the gospel is marred by so many hindrances laid in the way of souls getting good from it. Thus, gnats are strained at, and camels swallowed down, in respect of the deep-dyed guilt in what it does to hinder the spiritual good of perishing souls. Men will not see it, but they shall see. And alas!—how evident is our unfruitfulness under means of grace? How few are bettered now by a preached gospel? God’s Word is slighted and ineffectual for our reformation: His holy name is profaned, His Sabbaths are violated, sacraments are neglected by some and profaned by others with their unholy and untender<sup>9</sup> lives. What wonder that for this cause “many are weak and sickly among [us], and many sleep”? (1Co 11:30). Warnings and reproofs prevail not, conviction is rare, and conversion is rarer. Many have not a form of godliness left them, and few have anything but a form of it. Many are crying out against the sins of others, while the visible blots in their own lives do not make them smite on their own breasts and say, “What have I done!” God grant that the contempt and abuse of gospel privileges bring not a removal of the kingdom of God from us.

(2) **Abuse and misuse of temporal mercies.** It is observable that with the promise of plenty<sup>10</sup> to the church, using their plenty in a holy becoming manner, the promise of the taking away of sickness is joined (Exo 23:25; Deu 7:12-14). This says that God punisheth abuse of plenty with sickness. God has given the country plenteous years; and what has been the issue of it, but contempt of God and the rules of righteousness, increase of pride and vanity, and drunkenness with an unusual abuse of that fiery liquor [that was] never ordained for ordinary drinking; masters breaking the yoke, undermining and un-

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<sup>8</sup> **wonderful** – astounding; extraordinary.

<sup>9</sup> **untender** – unaffected by Christian principles.

<sup>10</sup> **plenty** – full supply of the necessities of life.

dergoing one another through the country; servants bursting all bonds and turned quite unmanageable and undutiful? The last year, a little before this time, I gave warning from the Lord's Word against these things particularly; but I think there was never more of them in my time than followed upon the back of it. No wonder, then, that God has shaped us out another piece of work this year.

Let these things be weighed in an even balance, as in the sight of God, by us all. And let individual persons and families, especially those who have been or are under the rod, inquire into the causes of God's quarrel with them that they may see why the Lord contendeth.<sup>11</sup>

**2. To be humbled under the causes of the Lord's anger and to turn to a smiting God in Christ.** This would be our wisdom (Lev 26:41-42; Mic 6:9). It is not time to stand in the way of sinners<sup>12</sup> when God is risen up to plead! It is high time to fall down before Him in humiliation and to fall off from God-provoking courses by reformation. Hear the voice of the rod! It is crying two things loudly this day.

(1) **Improve a season of the gospel.**<sup>13</sup> Some sermons have of late been the last to them that heard them. Some heard the sermon on the Lord's Day in health that were in eternity ere the next Sabbath! This says, "Hear ye every day as if it were to be your last."

(2) **Improve temporal mercies lest God be provoked to take them from you.** Health, strength, and other temporal conveniences are to be wisely managed, for you see we have no tack of<sup>14</sup> them (Ecc 9:10).

**3. To be upon your guard and make sure for eternity while you live.** Remember the parable of the wise and foolish builder, and how apt ye are to play the fool in these matters while health and strength last.

(1) **Beware ye be not cheated out of your most valuable interests by a deceitful heart, a treacherous world, and a wily devil.** Satan goes about many poor simple ones until they are tricked out of their souls, their part of Christ and heaven, and all the happiness of another world (Mat 16:26). And wherefore do they part with them but for the gratifying of a lust, which is a practice more foolish than if one should part with an estate for a childish toy. So did Esau. Wherefore be wise in time.

(2) **Beware that the best bargain slips not through your fingers while**

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<sup>11</sup> **contendeth** – opposes [us]; fights against us.

<sup>12</sup> **to stand in the way of sinners** – live like sinful people (Psa 1:1).

<sup>13</sup> **Improve...gospel** – make the best use of this time of hearing the gospel.

<sup>14</sup> **tack of** – hold on.



**ye are pursuing vanities (Pro 17:16).** Alas! There are not a few who, being busied with vanities of this world that pass away with the using, miss the opportunity of making the treasure hid in the field of the gospel their own. Therefore, be wise.

**(3) Beware of feeding yourselves with dreams and fancies wherein there is no reality.** There are many foolish virgins with lamps without oil and foolish builders on the sand. There are many whose life is but one continued dream wherein they judge aright of nothing—neither God, heaven, hell, nor the world—so that their awakening cannot be but terrible. But be ye wise.

**4. To prepare [in a timely way] for death and judgment (Mat 24:44).** It is certain that naturally we are quite out of case<sup>15</sup> for that great change. And, alas, we are naturally unwilling to think of it or provide for it. But necessity has no law. We must die, and we must either be [prepared] for death or we are ruined. If we be not timely [prepared], our candle may be put out before our work is done.

**(1) Get habitual preparation for death in a gracious state (Rom 8:1).** Be sure to get out of the state of nature into the state of grace. And then come death when it will, it will but transport you into the state of glory. And there are two things here to be secured. [1] Get your title to heaven fixed.<sup>16</sup> None will get there but those who have a right to it (Mat 25:34; 2Co 5:1). To others the door will be cast in their face. “But,” ye may say, “how may we get a title to heaven?” *Answer:* Marry the Heir, and heaven will be your dowry. The everlasting covenant is [set before] you in the gospel: God to be your God in Christ and Christ to be yours in all His offices.<sup>17</sup> Therefore, make a solemn, deliberate transaction with God this night, embracing Christ in the covenant and consenting to it with an eye to death and eternity. [2] Get a fitness for heaven wrought in you (Col 1:12). For ye cannot be meet for it until your nature be changed. “How may we get that fitness?” may ye say. *Answer:* Believe and embrace Jesus Christ for His Spirit of sanctification (1Co 1:30). There is a fullness of the Spirit in Him to be communicated, and faith must eye Christ for His sanctifying Spirit. Put off the old man and put on the new man: be new creatures, and let old things pass away and all things become new. In vain do men pretend to faith without this (2Co 5:17), and in vain will men look for heaven without it (Joh 3:3).

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<sup>15</sup> **out of case** – not prepared.

<sup>16</sup> **fixed** – securely established.

<sup>17</sup> See FGB, *Christ the Mediator*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

This is habitual preparation, which whoso have, if they should be struck dead in a moment or immediately seized with deliriousness and die raving, yet they are safe: “for there is...no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus” (Rom 8:1).

**(2) Get actual preparation for death in a gracious frame for dying that ye may die comfortably.** [1] Make speed with the work given you to do. Whatever piece of work is put into your hand, for God’s honor, dispatch it with all expedition<sup>18</sup> (Mat 24:46); for if ye delay it, ye may lose the opportunity forever. [2] Be habitually tender<sup>19</sup> in your life (Act 24:16). And beware of any standing controversy betwixt God and you: for if there be any such, it will readily stare you [down] in a dying hour. [3] Be weaned from the world and hold a loose grip of all you have in it, that it might drop like Joseph’s mantle. [4] Keep waking and watchful (Luk 12:36). Be much in the thoughts of death and the life to come that ye be not surprised. [5] Lastly, prepare for more public and general trials and calamities. This is a piece of wisdom to be learned from such a dispensation. For lesser strokes are usually the forerunners of greater ones. Sodom and Gomorrah were tried with a lesser stroke, ere they were destroyed by fire from heaven (Gen 14:10). And our Lord told the Jews that unless they repented, they should perish (Luk 13:5), which threatening was accomplished in the destruction of Jerusalem. The day may yet come wherein men shall praise the dead that are already dead; and they may miss this stroke, who are reserved for a worse, and shall meet with it ere all be done. In a time when the cup of God’s anger is going through a land, they that drink first usually fare best. “How are we to prepare?” may ye say. *Answer:* Keep your garments clean from the sins and snares of the day and place where ye live, and take up your lodging in the sure and unalterable Covenant of Grace,<sup>20</sup> and then no evil shall befall you.

From *The Complete Works of Thomas Boston*, Vol. 2 (London: William Tegg & Co., 1853), 665-670; in the public domain.

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**Thomas Boston (1676-1732):** Scottish Presbyterian minister and theologian; born in Duns, Berwickshire, UK.




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<sup>18</sup> **expedition** – speed.

<sup>19</sup> **tender** – careful; cautious.

<sup>20</sup> **Covenant of Grace** – God’s gracious, eternal purpose of redemption, conceived before the creation of the world, first announced in Genesis 3:15, progressively revealed in history, accomplished in the Person and work of Jesus Christ, and appropriated by faith in Him.

# GOD'S MEDICINE: PRAYER

Christopher W. Bogosh

**G**OD planned everything before time began, and He is in control of all things in time.<sup>1</sup> In light of this fundamental truth of the Christian faith, some may wonder why we should pray. What effect could our prayers possibly have if God has established His unchanging plan for what will happen in our lives? In this chapter, we will consider this important paradox in light of the book of Job and seek to develop a theology for prayer in the midst of illness, disease, and death.

The popular conception of prayer is that we ask and receive, or, in the context of illness, disease, and death, we pray for healing, a variation of asking and receiving. Although this is a part of prayer, it is really a morsel in the Christian life. At its core, prayer is a communal activity with the triune God under the influence of the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:26-27). The Holy Spirit is communing within us, inspiring us to remember the Father's promises in Christ, moving us to understand His will in light of these promises and our present situation, and enabling us to make requests according to His will in our lives. Through the exercise of prayer, the Spirit leads us into the heavenly recesses of communion with the triune God and His redemptive purposes in the midst of our present circumstances. Prayer is so much more than asking and receiving; it includes reflecting, remembering, thanking, discerning, dialoguing, fellowshiping, groaning, complaining, interceding, depending, meditating,<sup>2</sup> and desiring those things the triune God wants us to have at present, in light of His redemptive purposes...

Our concept of prayer is often limited to asking and receiving; thus, we tend to focus on asking for healing when we pray regarding sickness. Sometimes Christians assume God wants them to experience physical healing in this life, so they pray to this end. One problem with this assumption is that it misunderstands what Jesus came to do during His incarnate ministry and what He has yet to do at His second coming. While it is not wrong to pray for physical healing, the

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<sup>1</sup> See FGB 236, *God's Eternal Purpose*, and FGB 237, *God's Decrees*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

<sup>2</sup> See FGB 245, *Meditation*.

focus of our prayers at this point in redemptive history should be on spiritual restoration in Christ and on the promises of physical healing yet to come. This was Job's focus, and it should be ours.

**Why We Should Pray:** At the beginning of this [article], I raised the question of why we should pray if God has already planned for everything and if He is going to accomplish His will regardless of what we say. There are at least three reasons we should pray. First, the Bible commands us to pray. Paul tells us to “pray without ceasing” (1Th 5:17). When Jesus taught His disciples to pray, He said “*when* thou prayest” (Mat 6:5, emphasis added), demonstrating His expectation that prayer would be ongoing in a believer's life. Second, prayer reminds us of our dependence on God. Jesus told us to ask God that His “will be done” and to request “daily bread” (Mat 6:10-11). Finally, prayer is the means God has appointed to allow us to express our desires to Him. Paul tells us to “let [our] requests be made known unto God” (Phi 4:6). We think primarily of this third aspect when we consider prayer, but equally important is remembering our duty to and dependence on God. The Bible reminds us that we are completely dependent on God in the act of praying itself. When we pray rightly, we do not pray alone; the indwelling Holy Spirit prays with and for us. Paul writes, “For we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God” (Rom 8:26-27). The Holy Spirit is at work in us, enabling us to pray, and He is interceding for us according to God's will. True prayer is Spirit-dependent prayer, so when we pray for others or ourselves in the midst of illness, disease, tragedy, or dying, we need to pray in the Holy Spirit. This means that our prayers must be rooted in Scripture, which is our touchstone for certainty concerning God's will. Holy Scripture teaches us about spiritual, historical, redemptive, ethical, and moral truths. It provides us with promises to comfort and warn us, advice to direct and lead us, and instruction about the triune God Who loved and redeemed us. As important as the confidence Scripture provides is its testimony to our subjective experiences by the Holy Spirit.

Scripture must be applied to our souls. It is important to express our thoughts, feelings, and desires in prayer, but they must be subservient to Scripture; and the indwelling Spirit helps to keep us from being led astray. When we are afflicted, our prayers should include

three important areas, recognizing the fuller revelation of Scripture we enjoy. First, we need to pray for clear evidence of salvation in Christ, our Redeemer and the rock on which our unshaken faith is fixed. Second, we should pray for the renewal of the inner man, even as the outer man is dying. Our body may be dying and heading to the grave, but we should pray for inward renewal to occur as the Spirit prepares us for a glorious resurrection body on the day of vengeance of our God. Third, we need to pray that the Holy Spirit will equip us to face illness, disease, and death without fear as we believe in the all-sufficient mercy of Christ without doubting, by tightly embracing the end of our faith—the person of Jesus—and by resting in the merits of His righteousness alone for our salvation, just as Job did.

**Pray for the Holy Spirit to Strengthen Our Union to Christ:** Our faith unites us to Christ. It is no surprise, then, that the assurance of this salvation may be an area of great battle for the believer faced with illness, disease, and death. Our bodies are sinful and therefore affected by biochemical imbalances that may cause nervousness, excitability, agitation, and lethargy. Our thinking is sinful and therefore plagued with psychological anomalies<sup>3</sup> that give rise to a whole host of inappropriate thoughts, feelings, and emotions. Our volition<sup>4</sup> is sinful and therefore full of idolatry, immorality, and rebellion toward God. We also face an enemy, Satan, who is seeking to devour us by preying on this deep-rooted depravity. It is not surprising that when affliction strikes, the body and soul become vulnerable, and Satan ramps up his attacks. The impairments that come because of sickness may cloud our mental clarity and obscure clear evidences of our salvation in Christ. Faith operates in the realm of abstract thought, which pain, anxiety, fear, depression, and neurological and psychological instability can obscure; therefore, we can be hindered in our exercise of faith in the revealed knowledge of Christ. Medications and other medical and surgical means to treat symptoms may help to assist bodily stability and mental clarity, so we should ask God to bless these means, but we should pray, most importantly, for the Holy Spirit to act directly on our souls to confirm clear evidences of our salvation in Christ. Jesus said, “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me” (Mat 16:24). This mandate is no less authoritative when we are facing illness, disease, or death. We need to pray that we will not make illness, bodily pain and

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<sup>3</sup> **anomalies** – deviations from what is normal.

<sup>4</sup> **volition** – will; ability to make conscious choices or decisions.

suffering, and the alleviation<sup>5</sup> of them the focus of our devotion. Christ must be the focus, and any medical, pharmaceutical, or surgical intervention should help us direct our attention to Him. We need to pray that self-pity will not consume us. Self-pity is never justified in the Christian life; only acts of self-denial are, and these will help us see Christ more clearly, use medical and surgical treatment more wisely, and enable us to embrace our salvation in Christ much more tightly. The ultimate enemy is Satan...He is the great deceiver, liar, and murderer. Satan is seeking to devour us, and he does so by preying on bodily, mental, and spiritual weaknesses. He is a master at using human depravity and this fallen world to accomplish his ends. Satan's goal is to obscure the evidences of our salvation in Christ so that we will feel forsaken by God or question His authority over our life. Today, Satan still asks believers, "Hath God said?" (Gen 3:1), and when we are suffering from bodily, mental, and spiritual assaults on every side and death is front and center, he will use this question, or some variant of it, like a crowbar to pry us from our reliance on Christ. In the area of bodily affliction, Satan will attempt to focus our attention on our suffering. Satan may say things such as, "This suffering is useless; put an end to it! You can commit suicide legally in Oregon and Washington. Overmedicate yourself so that nothing matters. What kind of God would allow you to suffer like this?" On the other hand, he might say, "Do you really think you will be free from this bodily suffering after you die? This is it! Heaven is fiction. You must live for the here and now. Go after one more treatment. There is another research drug to try. Go after it! Live strong! Spend your life savings on that miracle cure in New Mexico. God wants you to be healed at all costs." In our mental and spiritual life, Satan will attempt to cause doubt and despair. He will say things such as, "My friend, you have reason to be anxious and fearful. You are dying, and everything you believe is utterly false. Jesus, salvation—this is nonsense! Look, my friend, if God really existed, He would never allow you to go through this. Your hope is built on empty promises from an outdated book." On the other hand, he might say, "Hell is a reality, and that is where you are going! Come on, if you really believed in Jesus, you would not fear death. But look at you! You are afraid, depressed, anxious, sick, sinful—and you call yourself a Christian! God will never accept somebody like you; in fact, He hates you!" We need to pray passionately that the Holy Spirit will empower us to see through Satan's smoke screen so that we may clearly see the evidence

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<sup>5</sup> **alleviation** – relief; lessening of severity.

of our unbreakable union with Christ.

**Pray for the Holy Spirit to Renew the Inner Man:** Having prayed that we might clearly perceive the evidences for salvation in Christ, we must pray that we may experience renewal in the inward man, even as the outward man dies. Through the new birth, we are free spiritually from bondage to sin, idolatry, Satan, and death. A process of spiritual renewal began in the whole person. Outwardly, our material bodies are perishing, writes Paul, yet inwardly our immaterial souls are being “renewed day by day,” even as the grave draws near (2Co 4:16). Illness, disease, trauma, decay, death, and all the evils of this present world will take their inevitable toll on us, but we can take heart because inwardly the Holy Spirit is renewing us. It is important to note that the spiritual renewal we experience does not conclude at death, but rather at the second coming of Christ—the day of vengeance of our God. Therefore, we should pray as John did: “Come, Lord Jesus” (Rev 22:20)! The consummation of redemption is the goal for us, and this will occur when Jesus returns. On that great day, we will possess a body like the resurrected Christ’s, and we will be healed physically. Our prayers, like Job’s, must reach past the sufferings of the present to the future hope of peace, rest, bliss, complete healing, and glorification. They must not be nearsighted, looking only to death and our disembodied souls entering heaven; rather, they must be farsighted, looking beyond death and the disembodied existence to the end of the world as we know it, the second coming of Christ, the day of redemption, and the reunification<sup>6</sup> and glorification of our bodies and souls. Our prayers span the annals of time to the end of time, and they need to place our present sufferings within their proper eternal context of redemption, physical healing, restoration, and glorification.

**Pray for the Holy Spirit to Embolden Our Claim to Christ’s Victory:** Finally, we are to pray that we will be able to persevere without fear in the face of death. There is a proper fear of death that helps us avoid situations that may harm us, but there is also a slavish fear of death that compels us to recoil from it at all costs. It is against this slavish fear we are to pray. Our supplication is threefold in this regard. First, we pray for the Holy Spirit to grant us greater trust in the all-sufficient mercy of Christ. Second, we pray for the Holy Spirit to enable us to embrace more tightly the end of our faith—namely, the person of Christ. Third, we pray for the Holy Spirit to help us rest in

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<sup>6</sup> **reunification** – rejoining.

Christ's merits alone for salvation. Ultimately, we pray for the Holy Spirit to empower us to persevere by confessing unflinchingly, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1Co 15:55-57). Jesus gained the victory over death, and this is our confidence as we endure illness, disease, and death, empowered by the Holy Spirit. Doubts may assail us, so we pray for stronger faith, which is the antidote to doubt. Jesus said to Thomas, who doubted that the Lord rose from the dead, "Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed" (Joh 20:29). The blessed ones, according to Jesus, are those who have not seen Him physically but who see Him spiritually by faith. We pray for a rock-hard trust in the promises declaring Christ's mercy. The mercies of the triune God promised in Jesus cast doubt away; and as the Holy Spirit empowers us to embrace them, they strengthen our faith in the person of Jesus. Jesus is a real, living person Who feels, loves, and cares. He shows compassion to us (Joh 1:14), and He is our family member (Rom 8:15-17) and friend (Joh 15:14). We need to pray that we will be able to cling to these truths more tightly, but our prayer should not stop there. Jesus is also unique in His person. He is not only a man, but He is also the perfect God-man, Christ (1Ti 2:5). Therefore, we pray we will be able to hold onto Christ as mediator, Who neutralized our death by His death and resurrection (1Co 15:55-57), opened the way to heaven (Heb 9:24), and is eagerly waiting to receive us on the other side of the grave (Rev 21:4). When we are in the throes of illness, disease, and dying, biochemical, neurological, and psychological changes may occur that will cause us to have evil thoughts, harsh words, or ungodly behaviors. Although remorseful and repentant, we may still feel as if we are not good enough to enter God's presence. Therefore, we need to pray the Holy Spirit will enable us to rest in Christ's impeccable obedience to the Law of God on our behalf. Paul never tired of remembering this truth. He wrote, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me. I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain" (Gal 2:20-21). Jesus holds us securely, even when we sin against Him (2Ti 2:13), for He is the one Who kept the Law for us, promises us forgiveness, and says to us that we "shall never perish" (Joh 10:28).



**Praying for Healing:** Having prayed for the Holy Spirit's work in us, we may ask God to add to our days—if He is willing. When I use the phrase *healing prayer*, I am not thinking of miraculous healing, although God may be inclined to perform a miraculous healing, and sometimes they do occur. It is not special healing prayers, anointing with oil, or laying on of hands that causes these miracles, however; rather, it is the predetermined will of God. If healings coincide with prayer, praise God for His will to heal! Today, for the most part, God is pleased to work through the ordinary means of medical science and healthcare professionals to provide us with healing. Therefore, we should pray for God to bless and use these means, and we should not overly concern ourselves with miracles. We should desire to live on in this life, provided it is the will of God for us to do so, and our living on will enable us to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. There are three considerations when we pray for physical healing. First, we should ask God to heal the injury, illness, or disease we are experiencing by blessing the application of medical, surgical, or pharmaceutical treatments. Next, we should ask the Holy Spirit to help us recover, rehabilitate, or maintain our present state of health with the treatment and renew our physical strength in the process. Finally, we should pray to the Holy Spirit to remind us of God's deliverance from our affliction and to give thanks for it. Prayer is God's medicine for us in the midst of illness, disease, trauma, tragedy, and dying. It is through the exercise of prayer that we speak God's words back to Him under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and enter the depths of communion with Him like Job. He, in turn, brings comfort, hope, guidance, assurance, and spiritual healing to our souls. Prayer is so much more than asking God for physical healing. It is a spiritual act of worship and communal activity with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, where we recognize our utter dependence upon the triune God, His indwelling Spirit, His will, and His redemptive and restorative purposes for our lives. Prayer in the midst of dying keeps our hopes centered on Jesus; and in light of the hopeless answers modern medicine offers at [the] end of life, this is crucial.

From *Compassionate Jesus: Rethinking the Christian's Approach to Modern Medicine*, Reformation Heritage Books, 97-118; used by permission; [heritagebooks.org](http://heritagebooks.org).

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# THE SICKBED NOT FAVORABLE FOR FINDING ETERNAL LIFE

John D. Wells (1815-1903)

**I** firmly and gladly believe that many sinners are called and justified and saved on beds of death. In the fond hope that the number may be largely increased by God's blessing on wise and earnest efforts of Christian ministers and others, I ask to be heard here...

Whatever may be the nature of sickness, the hand of God is in it. Second causes, with which we and others have so much to do, are not beyond the control of the Great First Cause. Malarial and all other diseases with calamities of every kind are subject to the divine will. And the living, exalted Christ is given to be "head over all things to the church" (Eph 1:22). This great truth ought to be recognized and prized more than it is. What can be more comforting when sickness or peril comes to ourselves? So, too, it is our encouragement in efforts for the salvation of others who are or seem to be not far from death. Yet truth requires me to say that a sickbed is a most unfavorable place for laying hold on eternal life. To the proof of this, I ask your earnest attention:

**The invitations and promises of the Bible are addressed mainly to persons supposed to be in health.** The young are expected to remember their Creator in the days of their youth while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh when they shall severally say, "I have no pleasure in them" (Ecc 12:1). These evil days come sooner or later with bodily weakness and mental distress. If greatly delayed, they come at last, in many if not most cases, with the decay and depression of old age. It is a fact abundantly verified that few turn to the Lord and find the strong consolations of good hope after the high meridian<sup>1</sup> of life. "I love them that love me; and those that seek me early shall find me" (Pro 8:17). This sweet assurance of personal Wisdom is in perfect keeping with what Jesus said long after, taking little children to His arms: "Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God" (Mar 10:14).

**The revealed plan for saving the lost supposes them, for the most part, gathered in places where the word of salvation is publicly her-**

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<sup>1</sup> **high meridian** – midday; highest point.

added. So it was on the day of Pentecost, when three thousand were added to the church; and a little after, when other thousands swelled the number of disciples. God's true ministers are "ambassadors for Christ" (2Co 5:20). They are messengers, heralds, authorized and commanded to make known the terms of peace, to publish the glad tidings of great joy. Of course, they are required to preach the gospel from house to house as well as in public places—to single individuals, young and old, as they have opportunity. Yet their great commission supposes them to have access to the multitudes where they are gathered—not chiefly in rooms darkened by sickness. It is true that large numbers of the unsaved gather on funeral occasions in private houses or places of public worship out of respect for their fellows whose bodies are about to be buried, from sympathy with the afflicted, or from a morbid curiosity, and on these occasions the gospel may be faithfully and earnestly preached. But I believe that saving benefits rarely follow. A pastor of great devotion and large experience has left his testimony that he never knew a sinner to be awakened and brought to Christ as the result of attendance upon a funeral service. His explanation is this: While it is ever true that God waits to be gracious and has no pleasure in the death of the wicked, it is also true that He will not suffer Himself to be dishonored, and the gospel of His grace neglected, by those who do not meet Him in His house on ordinary occasions, but who are not willing to absent themselves from services for the burial of the dead for reasons already given.

It has been my aim throughout my ministry to make funeral services helpful to the living for the consolation of the bereaved and the salvation of the lost. In a single case, conducting the service for the burial of a merchant who had taken his own life, I had reason to hope that one of his salesmen was savingly impressed by the words spoken and the awful solemnity of the occasion. He was received into the communion of our church on confession of Christ, but after some years of consistent living in connection with us he disappeared, and we know not where he is, if he is still among the living.<sup>2</sup>

**Persons to whom the gospel comes with saving power are supposed to be in circumstances favorable to active and grateful service to their new Master.** Thus, standing idle in the marketplace at any hour, they are called to work in the vineyard of the Lord and receive the wages that He never fails to give to those who serve Him. Entrusted with

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<sup>2</sup> Since delivering this lecture I have heard of an eminent pastor, whose name I do not feel at liberty to give, who thinks that under his ministry many have been won to Christ by the gospel preached on funeral occasions.

talents one or many, they are to use them for increase that they may give account with joy and not with grief and have rule over cities according to their several<sup>3</sup> ability (Mat 20:1-16).

Engaged in the lawful work of their farms or merchandise, or even satisfied with social delights in their families, they are called to a feast, “a great supper” (Luk 14:16), by One Who puts no hindrance in the way of honorable pursuits and domestic happiness, but by His gracious feasts of love prepares His guests for active service and large rewards. In this and other parables of our Lord, there is no suggestion of sickness and the interruption of the work of life.

It is a historical fact that the family of God on earth has its chief increase from those who are strong and in health. Under the ministry of Christ and those who served Him in the early years of this ministration of the Spirit, there were many instances of individuals, whose names are preserved in the Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles, turning to the Lord. But they were not persons subdued to sobriety and unworldliness by sickness, possibly with death in near prospect. The miracles of healing wrought by Jesus were largely meant to show that the Son of Man had power on earth to forgive sins and to prepare witnesses who would show forth the praises of Him Who had not merely healed their sickness but called them from death unto life.

When the Holy Ghost was given to the eleven and their associates, godly men and women, a way was soon made for them to the people of Samaria and Caesarea, of Antioch and the cities of Asia, of Macedonia and Achaia and other parts of Europe.

To this day, as the so-called “sacramental host,” under the commission and command of our Lord, we are required to put on the panoply<sup>4</sup> of God, to fight our enemies, which are also His, and to go forth, taking possession of villages, cities, continents, and the world in the name of our Master.

In a large view, it seems almost as if the God of salvation lost sight of the sickbed in seeking children for His household on the earth.

**In further proof that the bed of sickness and death is not a favorable place for finding the salvation of God, we should keep in mind the nature of the gospel.** It is the good news of salvation by faith in Jesus Christ. But it is also a collection of precious truths to be learned, believed, and lived. They relate to the being, the character, and the per-

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<sup>3</sup> **several** – distinct; particular.

<sup>4</sup> **panoply** – complete armor.

fections of God; to the spirituality of His Law; to the person, offices, and redemptive work of God's dear Son, our Lord Jesus Christ; to the person and work of the Holy Spirit, to Whom it belongs to convict us of sin, to quicken us together with Christ, and to persuade and enable us to embrace Him as He is offered to us in the gospel.

Here, therefore, is a call for sinful man to hear, learn, believe, and practice the truth. Happily, his doing this does not depend on the strength of his intellect. I knew a young man, hardly half-witted, whose whole nature seemed to be demoralized, if not demonized, who was brought to the Savior's feet and service under the ministry of young Mr. Malcom, a student of this seminary while I was here, and made eminently helpful in a great revival that resulted in the salvation of many souls.

Still, it remains obviously true that persons weakened, confused, and sometimes demented by diseases of the body or tortured by severe pains are not in a favorable condition to receive instruction, even to listen to the most winsome<sup>5</sup> invitations that can be breathed into their ears.

**A word should be added here about the connection of the body and the mind.** They constitute one person. Death parts them, but only for a season. Whatever the change, they will be reunited in the resurrection at the last day. Until death, they are held together by a tie never laid bare by the surgeon's scalpel. Loosen the "silver cord" and the body returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns unto God Who gave it (Ecc 12:6-7). Still, personality is not destroyed, although it is not what it will be when the body is raised and suited to its new conditions—in light or darkness, with Christ where He is or severed from Him by choice and by His righteous judgment.

How profound, therefore, [is] the mystery of the union of body and spirit during this mortal life! "A sound mind in a sound body" has grown into a proverb. Its truth should arrest and hold the attention of everyone who watches for souls and of all who are yet to find the eternal life in Jesus Christ or die in their sins.

There are some sicknesses and hurts by which the nerves of sensation are so tortured that the sufferer cries out in his agony and cannot order his thoughts as he would. The tenderest ministry of kindred<sup>6</sup> and pastor utterly fails to find in such a time a convenient season for urging or giving heed to the claims of the Savior. The patient Job ex-

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<sup>5</sup> **winsome** – agreeable; pleasant.

<sup>6</sup> **kindred** – relatives; family.

claimed, “He breaketh me with breach upon breach, he runneth upon me like a giant” (Job 16:14).

There are depressing diseases by which the powers of life are weakened almost to extinction. The blood flows with feeble current through arteries and veins. It may be vitiated<sup>7</sup> by unhealthful secretions from within or by poisons from without. The lips lose their color and the eyes their luster. The incubus<sup>8</sup> of unnatural sleep falls upon the patient, and his soul dwells in darkness. He forgets to eat his daily bread. You try in vain to rouse him by the good news of salvation or by any other tidings, and in this condition his body may sleep its last sleep.

Supposing him to live, it is well if the shadow of an oppressive melancholy does not fall upon him. In his brightest moments, the hope of any change for the better may die in his heart. I have known Christians of large experience in these trying circumstances compelled to say that if their salvation depended upon the putting forth of any effort to receive the gospel, they must perish. They could only await the issue of their sickness without fear, knowing Whom they had believed, and persuaded that He was able to keep that which they had committed unto Him against the day of their departure and the time of His second coming (2Ti 1:12). Indeed, I have been in this condition myself.

Some diseases excite and exhilarate. Pulmonary affections<sup>9</sup> and many fevers are apt to do this. The circulation is quickened. The brain and the whole nervous system are roused to unwonted<sup>10</sup> activity. The mind may be surcharged with thoughts that do not obey the laws of reason. The wildest delirium often follows, and the patient lives for the time in a world to which the most intimate friends can gain no access. It is painful to witness the wanderings of the mind even when you have reason to believe that the life is hid with Christ in God, for sometimes they seem to indicate a character the very opposite of that which you supposed belonged to the sufferer. It is more than painful—even appalling—to know that in these circumstances persons who have shown no signs of an interest in the Savior apparently become His loving disciples, and yet with returning health re-

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<sup>7</sup> **vitiated** – injured; impaired.

<sup>8</sup> **incubus** – nightmare; oppression of the breast in sleep, or sense of weight, with an almost total loss of the power of moving the body, while the imagination is frightened or astonished.

<sup>9</sup> **affections** – diseases.

<sup>10</sup> **unwonted** – unusual.

tain no recollection of their thoughts, emotions, or words. Many instances have been related to me by pastors and physicians of persons in sickness passing through all the stages of awakening, conviction, conversion, and the joyful confession of Christ as their Savior. And yet, on recovering, they have been unable to recall the facts of the most recent past and have proved by their manner of living afterward that no saving change had been wrought in them.

In one case, related by the Rev. Benjamin Holt Rice, D. D., then pastor of the Presbyterian church in Princeton, a young lady [who was] the belle<sup>11</sup> of the place (not Princeton), a gay<sup>12</sup> and worldly person, was stricken with typhoid fever. Dr. Rice was a young pastor then, and having been called to visit her, did so from day to day. At last it was thought she must die. Believing herself that the end was near, she called to her bedside the members of her family, who knew the vain life she had lived. She told them that she had found peace in believing; that she believed her sins were forgiven for Jesus' sake, and that she was about to depart to be forever with Him. Bidding them all goodbye, she begged them to meet her in heaven, and then quietly waited for the change.

Her pastor had no doubt that she was a sinner moved by grace. He parted with her in the glad hope of finding her at last and forever among the redeemed in heaven. Calling the day after, supposing that she had passed away, he found to his surprise that the crisis of her disease had passed and that she was convalescent.<sup>13</sup> He thought it wise, therefore, to discontinue his daily visits for a while. When at last he called and made reference to the change in her views and feelings, he was appalled to hear from her own lips that she had not the slightest recollection of his visits or of anything she had said leading him and her family to hope that she was a child of God. She returned to her old ways of living, and not until many years had passed did she earnestly seek and, as she hoped, find the Savior.

**I may not pass without notice in this connection a fact which every pastor knows to his sorrow:** some persons, falling sick and very anxious to recover, are unwilling to have a word spoken to them on the subject of religion or prayer offered in their presence because in such services there is a suggestion that they may not recover. They do not consider that a pastor who is wise and faithful knows much of the

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<sup>11</sup> **belle** – lady of superior beauty and much admired.

<sup>12</sup> **gay** – lively; animated; jovial; *sometimes* wanton; lewd; lascivious.

<sup>13</sup> **convalescent** – recovering.

sickroom and comes to them, if not hindered, only for their help. And they may have yet to learn that a good hope of eternal life is a wonderful remedial agent for the suffering body. I am sorry to add that some physicians do not seem to know this and would even exclude pastors from the rooms of their patients if they could.

So, we have this anomaly<sup>14</sup>—it is worse: I believe it is a wile of the devil—men wait for sickness, proposing then to give earnest heed to the truth of God’s Word and the salvation of their souls. Then, when sickness comes, they shrink from hearing the message of salvation or the prayer of faith, lest they should be compelled to think that they may die and that they are not prepared for the great change. So they rob themselves of all opportunities of salvation. If they recover, they are in danger of being hardened in impenitence and unbelief. Dying, they go unprepared into the presence of God.

From *The Pastor in the Sick Room* (Vestavia Hills, AL: Solid Ground Christian Books, 2004), 17-30, [www.solid-ground-books.com](http://www.solid-ground-books.com).

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**John D. Wells (1815-1903):** American Presbyterian pastor; born in Whitesboro, NY, USA.



Sicknesses come not by chance or fortune but from the hand of God. This we must learn to believe, and it will cause us to make better use of sicknesses than usually we do. If men did believe this, it would make the hardest heart to repent in time of sickness. For this they would say, “Has God cast me down with sickness? No doubt it is to humble me for some of my sins, to make me know them, to leave them, and to turn unto Him.” This use the servants of God have made hereof, when the prophet came to Hezekiah “and told him he should die, he turned his face to the wall and wept” (Isa 38:2), as for other things, so for his sins especially. And Jacob, being ready to die, “leaned on his staff, and by faith worshipped toward the beds head” (Heb 11:21), lifting up his body to do reverence unto God, thereby testifying his humility, faith, and hope. And the like ought we to do, which, if we could, we should find our sickness would become a blessing unto us.—*William Perkins*

Sickness is one means that God useth to work repentance. God can work repentance even upon a sickbed; and it is God that must do it even in health; and, to speak truly and strictly, although the means of repentance be more probable and the truth of repentance more discernible in health than in sickness, yet the practice of repentance is as hard a work in health as in sickness, seeing in both cases it is the great work of the omnipotent God.—*Matthew Poole*

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<sup>14</sup> **anomaly** – abnormality; irregularity.



# VISITING THE SICK

George Swinnock (1627-1673)

**T**HY duty is to exercise thyself in visiting the sick. The visitation of the sick is a work of as great weight as any enjoined<sup>1</sup> us relating to others, and as much neglected and slighted in its management as almost any duty commanded. Sickness is so common and death so ordinary that with most their frequency takes away the sense of them, and charity in many sickens and dieth as fast as others' bodies.

The generality of pretended Christians, like the priest and the Levite, if they see a man wounded both in his body and soul, though it be to death, pass on the other side of the way, not caring to meddle with any that are in misery...Many on their dying beds, whose souls are worse and more dangerously sick than their bodies, may speak to their minister or neighbor (for the duty belongs to the people as well as the pastor) almost in the words of Martha to Christ: "Sir, if thou hadst been here, my soul had not died" (see Joh 11:32). Some visit the sick, but rather out of a compliment than out of conscience, or to profit themselves more than their neighbors...The discourse of these is chiefly about worldly affairs and nothing about the great concerns of eternity. Others sometimes go about the work but perform it so ill, administering cordials<sup>2</sup> when there is need of corrosives, sewing pillows under their sick friends' heads that they may die easily. Or if they tell them of their danger, they do it so coldly and carelessly...there is more danger from the medicine than the disease. Their soul-sickness is curable, but the unsuitable medicines they take make it incurable...Ah! How dreadful it is, when unskillful and unfaithful [quacks] undertake to tamper and trifle with immortal souls that are just entering into their eternal estates! "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luk 23:34). Galen<sup>3</sup> saith, in respect of bodily medicines, "There is nothing small in physic;<sup>4</sup> everything in it is of great consequence; a little mistake may cause death." I may upon greater reason say, "There is nothing little in spiritual physic; a small error in our prescriptions to sick souls may cause dreadful mischief." Instead of curing,

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<sup>1</sup> **enjoined** – commanded.

<sup>2</sup> **cordials** – comforts.

<sup>3</sup> **Galen** (AD 129-c. AD 216) – Roman physician, surgeon, and philosopher.

<sup>4</sup> **physic** – practice of medicine.

we may kill the patient. Hazael's wet cloth was not more deadly to his master's body than the discourse of most is to their sick neighbors' souls (2Ki 8:9-15). Fear of displeasing and a natural propensity to flatter prevail with too many to soothe their dying friends into unquenchable flames. But surely there is more love (as well as more faithfulness) in frightening a sick person out of his spiritual lethargy than in fawning<sup>5</sup> him into the eternal lake that burneth with fire and brimstone. Some venomous creatures tickle a man until he laughs, even when they sting him to death; so doth the flattering minister or neighbor—he raiseth a sick man, void of grace, to the pinnacle of joy and highest hopes of heaven and thereby throweth him down into the gulf of irrecoverable sorrows and leaves him to undeceive himself in hell.

I shall first lay down two or three motives to stir up the reader to this work, and then direct him about it.

**First, it is a duty commanded thee by God.** Men are apt to think the visitation of the sick to be only an act of courtesy and civility, which they may omit or perform at their pleasure. [But] it is an act of charity and Christianity, which every Christian is bound to by a divine precept. The ministers of Christ are especially enjoined this task; but every member of Christ also, when God gives him opportunity, oweth this debt to his neighbor: “Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him” (Jam 5:14-15). The same word that commandeth the sick man to send commandeth the elder to go. Indeed, it is a gross fault in many sick persons (and therein they are exceedingly their own enemies) that they either send not at all for the minister, or if they do, not until they have done with the physician; when their bodies are past all hope, then they look after some hope for their souls. But without question, it is a duty for the elder sometimes to go uncalled. It is good manners to be an unbidden guest at a house of mourning. Our Master was found of them that asked not for Him, and so should His servants. There are those that can invite themselves to their neighbors' tables, who withdraw themselves from their chambers. Some are drunk so often with their parishioners whilst they are in health that they are afraid or ashamed to discourse seriously with them when they are sick. God may speak to many, as to the shepherds of Israel, Woe be to the shepherds of England, “that do feed themselves! should not the shepherds feed the flocks? Ye eat the fat, and ye clothe you with the wool, ye kill them that are fed: but ye feed not the flock. The diseased

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<sup>5</sup> **fawning** – soothing; flattering in a servile manner.

have ye not strengthened, neither have ye healed that which was sick, neither have ye bound up that which was broken...but with force and with cruelty have ye ruled them” (Eze 34:3-4). None are more cruel to the flock than those that are most covetous of the fleece.

Oleaster,<sup>6</sup> on Leviticus 14:44—“Then the priest shall come and look, and, behold, if the plague be spread...” (that being the third time the priest was to visit the infected house)—hath this useful observation: “If the priest were commanded so often to visit the leprous *house*, why dost not thou visit the sick *person*? The plague in the heart calls for more pity and help than the plague in the house.”

This duty also belongs to private members as well as to public officers. Every Christian should love his neighbor as himself, which he cannot do unless he has a sense of his sickness and endeavor to improve such an opportunity for his neighbor’s salvation. True love, like fire, burns hottest when the weather is coldest...

It is our duty to assist them that die naturally, as well as those that die violent deaths. To visit persons in their affliction is one testimony of the truth of our religion at this day. Holiness and charity are like father and child. “Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction” (Jam 1:27). The fatherless and widows are expressed, but the sick, strangers, and captives are included because these are usually most afflicted and most neglected. Those that have received mercy cannot but shew mercy. As visiting the distressed is a sign of it now, so it will be the test of Christianity at the Great Day: “Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: For I was an hungry, and ye gave me meat...Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me” (Mat 25:34-36). Works of mercy fill up the whole bill, as the evidence of the saints’ right to heaven. Whereof Luther<sup>7</sup> gives this reason: the consciences of the wicked shall justify Christ as well in the absolution<sup>8</sup> of the godly, as in their own condemnation. Though Christians do not give their alms or visit the sick to be seen of men, yet in doing many offices of love and acts of charity, they are seen of men. So, they who can witness the truth of Christians’ mercy will be forced to acknowledge the equity of Christ’s sentence.

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<sup>6</sup> **Jerome Olivier or de Oleastro** (d. 1563) – Dominican monk known for his abilities in Greek and Hebrew and his intimate knowledge of Scriptures.

<sup>7</sup> **Martin Luther (1483-1546)** – German leader of the Protestant Reformation.

<sup>8</sup> **absolution** – forgiveness of sins.

**Secondly, it is a special opportunity of doing and receiving good.**

**1. Of doing good.** I think it the more necessary to speak to this motive because many are apt to judge all pains with sick persons to be to no purpose. They are discouraged from endeavoring the conversion of profane men upon sickbeds, supposing that such men's repentance will be as unsound as their bodies, even when they are sick unto death. Though I would not give the least encouragement to any men to defer their turning to God, believing him worse than mad who puts off the weighty business of his soul because peradventure God may grant him repentance hereafter; yet I must obviate<sup>9</sup> this suggestion of the devil, which hinders men from doing their duty—God may shew mercy to a soul at last. There is one example in Scripture [so] that none might despair. Sickness is with some men the tide-time of devotion. They who scorned godly men and made a mock of godliness in their health will prize the saint and desire his sanctity above all the world when they lie upon sickbeds and consider what a holy God they are going to appear before. Sickness, as one saith, is “the shop of virtue, and the school of manners.” Therefore King Alfred was wont to say, “I ever find myself best when worst: best in soul when worst in body; the sickness of my body is physic<sup>10</sup> to my soul.” Experience daily informeth us that the swaggerers and gallants<sup>11</sup> of the world (whose consciences are not seared with a hot iron) though they gave themselves up to drunkenness, gluttony, gaming, whoredom, and all manner of wickedness in their youth and strength, yet when they are weakened much with a disease and have no hopes of continuing longer on earth, begin to wish that they had spent their time to more purpose. [They] are sensible of their neglect of God and Christ, their souls, and eternity. Then many of them will desire the company of those that fear God, beg their prayers, hearken to their counsels, and would give all they are worth for a little of their grace and holiness. Even Benhadad, the king of Syria, an enemy to the prophets and people of God in his health, will send a prince to Elisha with a large present and most submissive expressions—“thy son Benhadad”—in his sickness (2Ki 8:9). Sickness gives men a double advantage for holiness.

**(1) It takes off their hearts from creatures by teaching them experimentally what a poor, weak cordial the whole creation is to sick or dying men.** When men are strong and lusty,<sup>12</sup> they can taste and savor

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<sup>9</sup> **obviate** – go against; oppose.

<sup>10</sup> **physic** – medicine.

<sup>11</sup> **gallants** – men of fashion and pleasure, who are attentive to women.

<sup>12</sup> **lusty** – stout; vigorous; robust.

earthly things; carnal comforts hinder their endeavors after spiritual. They take up with creatures, as Esau did, and say they have enough; but sickness makes them know the emptiness of all sublunary<sup>13</sup> things. When men are sick, they cannot relish the world's dainties and delicacies. The preferments and riches and pleasures of the earth are all unsavory and uncomfortable to them. They now see the vanity of those things...they so much idolized; how unable they are to revive their fainting spirits, to allay their pain, [to] purchase them the least ease, or [to] procure them the least acceptance in the other world; and hence the price of the world's market falls abundantly in their judgments. Bernard<sup>14</sup> tells us of a brother of his, that when he gave him many good instructions, and he being a soldier regarded them not, he put his finger to his side and told his brother, "One day a spear shall make way to this heart of thine, for admonition and instruction to enter."

**(2) In sickness, conscience is usually allowed more liberty to speak its mind, and men are then more at leisure to hear it.** In health, their callings, friends, lusts, sports, or some carnal comfort or other, take up their hearts and time. Conscience must be silenced, as too bold a preacher, for offering to disturb them in their pleasures. If it will use its authority and continue to speak in God's name [to] forbid their foolishness, atheism, sensuality, and profaneness, they are deaf to its calls and commands, and drown its voice with the noise of their brutish delights. But in sickness they are taken off from their trades and pastimes and merry meetings and jovial companions; when their bodies are weak, their fleshly lusts are not so strong as formerly, whereby conscience hath a greater opportunity to tell them of their miscarriages<sup>15</sup> and wickedness, and they themselves are more attentive to its words and warning.

Reader, it is a special piece of wisdom to improve<sup>16</sup> such a season for the good of thy neighbor's soul.

From George Swinnock, *The Works of George Swinnock*, Vol. 3 (Edinburgh; London; Dublin: James Nichol, 1868), 3-24; in the public domain.

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**George Swinnock (1627-1673):** Puritan preacher educated at Cambridge and Oxford; born in Maidstone, Kent, England, UK.




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<sup>13</sup> **sublunary** – earthly.

<sup>14</sup> **Bernard of Clairvaux** (1090-1153) – French monastic reformer known for his devotion.

<sup>15</sup> **miscarriages** – evil conduct or behavior.

<sup>16</sup> **improve** – make good use of.

# ARE YOU PREPARED FOR SICKNESS?

J. C. Ryle (1816-1900)

**I** hold it to be of cardinal<sup>1</sup> importance not to be content with generalities in delivering God's message to souls. I am anxious to impress on each one into whose hands this [article] may fall his own personal responsibility in connection with the subject. I would fain<sup>2</sup> have no one lay down this [article] unable to answer the questions, "What practical lesson have I learned? What, in a world of disease and death, what ought I to do?"

One paramount duty that the prevalence<sup>3</sup> of sickness entails on man is that of *living habitually prepared to meet God*. Sickness is a remembrancer of death. Death is the door through which we must all pass to judgment. Judgment is the time when we must at last see God face to face. Surely the first lesson that the inhabitant of a sick and dying world should learn should be to prepare to meet his God.

When are you prepared to meet God? Never until your iniquities are forgiven, and your sin covered! Never until your heart is renewed, and your will taught to delight in the will of God! You have many sins. If you go to church, your own mouth is taught to confess this every Sunday. The blood of Jesus Christ alone can cleanse those sins away. The righteousness of Christ alone can make you acceptable in the sight of God. Faith, simple childlike faith, alone can give you an interest in Christ and His benefits. Would you know whether you are prepared to meet God? Then, where is your faith? Your heart is naturally unmeet<sup>4</sup> for God's company. You have no real pleasure in doing His will. The Holy Ghost must transform you after the image of Christ. Old things must pass away. All things must become new. Would you know whether you are prepared to meet God? Then, where is your grace? Where are the evidences of your conversion and sanctification?

I believe that this, and nothing less than this, is preparedness to meet God. Pardon of sin and meekness for God's presence, justification by faith and sanctification of the heart, the blood of Christ

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<sup>1</sup> **cardinal** – main; first.

<sup>2</sup> **fain** – willingly.

<sup>3</sup> **prevalence** – widespread presence.

<sup>4</sup> **unmeet** – unfit.

sprinkled on us and the Spirit of Christ dwelling in us—these are the grand essentials of the Christian religion. These are no mere words and names to furnish bones of contention for wrangling theologians. These are sober, solid, substantial realities. To live in the actual possession of these things in a world full of sickness and death is the first duty that I press home upon your soul.

**Another paramount duty that the prevalence of sickness entails on you is that of *living habitually ready to bear it patiently*.** Sickness is no doubt a trying thing to flesh and blood. To feel our nerves unstrung and our natural force abated, to be obliged to sit still and be cut off from all our usual avocations, 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.

How shall we learn to bear sickness patiently when sickness comes to our turn? We must lay up stores of grace in the time of health. We must seek for the sanctifying influence of the Holy Ghost over our unruly tempers and dispositions. We must make a real business of our prayers, and regularly ask for strength to endure God's will as well as to do it. Such strength is to be had for the asking: "If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it" (Joh 14:14).

I cannot think it needless to dwell on this point. I believe the passive graces of Christianity receive far less notice than they deserve. Meekness, gentleness, longsuffering, faith, [and] patience are all mentioned in the Word of God as fruits of the Spirit. They are passive graces that specially glorify God. They often make men think, who despise the active side of the Christian character. Never do these graces shine so brightly as they do in the sick room. They enable many a sick person to preach a silent sermon, which those around him never forget. Would you adorn the doctrine you profess? Would you make your Christianity beautiful in the eyes of others? Then take the hint I give you this day. Lay up a store of patience against the time of illness. Then, though your sickness be not to death, it shall be "for the glory of God" (Joh 11:4).

**One more paramount duty that the prevalence of sickness entails on you is that of *habitual readiness to feel with and help your fellowmen*.** Sickness is never very far from us. Few are the families who have not some sick relative. Few are the parishes where you will not find someone ill. But wherever there is sickness, there is a call to duty. A

little timely assistance in some cases, a kindly visit in others, a friendly inquiry, or a mere expression of sympathy may do vast good. These are the sort of things that soften asperities,<sup>5</sup> bring men together, and promote good feeling. These are ways by which you may ultimately lead men to Christ and save their souls. These are good works to which every professing Christian should be ready. In a world full of sickness and disease, we ought to “bear...one another’s burdens” and “be...kind one to another” (Gal 6:2; Eph 4:32).

These things, I dare say, may appear to some little and trifling. They must needs be doing something great and grand and striking and heroic! I take leave to say that conscientious attention to these little acts of brotherly kindness is one of the clearest evidences of having “the mind of Christ” (1Co 2:16). They are acts in which our blessed Master Himself was abundant. He was ever going about doing good to the sick and sorrowful (Act 10:38). They are acts to which He attaches great importance in that most solemn passage of Scripture, the description of the last judgment. He says there: “I was sick, and ye visited me” (Mat 25:36).

Have you any desire to prove the reality of your charity—the blessed grace that so many talk of and so few practice? If you have, beware of unfeeling selfishness and neglect of your sick brethren. Search them out. Assist them if they need aid. Show your sympathy with them. Try to lighten their burdens. Above all, strive to do good to their souls. It will do you good if it does no good to them. It will keep your heart from murmuring. It may prove a blessing to your own soul. I firmly believe that God is testing and proving us by every case of sickness within our reach. By permitting suffering, He tries whether Christians have any feeling. Beware, lest you be “weighed in the balances, and...found wanting”<sup>6</sup> (Dan 5:27). If you can live in a sick and dying world and not feel for others, you have yet much to learn.

I leave this branch of my subject here. I throw out the points I have named as suggestions, and I pray God that they may work in many minds. I repeat that habitual preparedness to meet God, habitual readiness to suffer patiently, [and] habitual willingness to sympathize heartily are plain duties that sickness entails on all. They are duties within the reach of everyone. In naming them I ask nothing extravagant or unreasonable. I bid no man retire into a monastery and ignore the duties of his station. I only want men to realize that they live in a

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<sup>5</sup> **asperities** – harsh, embittered feelings.

<sup>6</sup> **wanting** – lacking.



sick and dying world, and to live accordingly. And I say boldly that the man who lives the life of faith and holiness and patience and charity is not only the most true Christian, but the most wise and reasonable man.

And now, I conclude all with four words of practical application. I want the subject of this paper to be turned to some spiritual use. My heart's desire and prayer to God...is to do good to souls.

**In the first place, I offer a *question* to all who read this [article], to which, as God's ambassador, I entreat their serious attention.** It is a question that grows naturally out of the subject on which I have been writing. It is a question that concerns all of every rank, class, and condition. I ask you, "What will you do when you are ill?"

The time must come when you, as well as others, must go down the dark valley of the shadow of death. The hour must come when you, like all your forefathers, must sicken and die. The time may be near or far off. God only knows. But whenever the time may be, I ask again, "What are you going to do?" Where do you mean to turn for comfort? On what do you mean to rest your soul? On what do you mean to build your hope? From whence will you fetch your consolations?

I do entreat you not to put these questions away; suffer them to work on your conscience, and rest not until you can give them a satisfactory answer. Trifle not with that precious gift, an immortal soul. Defer not the consideration of the matter to a more convenient season. Presume not on a deathbed repentance. The greatest business ought surely not to be left to the last. One dying thief was saved that men might not despair, but only one that none might presume. I repeat the question. I am sure it deserves an answer. "What will you do when you are ill?"

If you were going to live forever in this world, I would not address you as I do. But it cannot be. There is no escaping the common lot of all mankind. Nobody can die in our stead. The day must come when we must each go to our long home. Against that day, I want you to be prepared. The body that now takes up so much of your attention—the body that you now clothe, feed, and warm with so much care—that body must return to the dust. Oh, think what an awful thing it would prove at last to have provided for everything except the one thing needful—to have provided for the body, but to have neglected the

soul—to die, in fact, like Cardinal Beaufort<sup>7</sup> and give no sign of being saved! Once more I press my question on your conscience: “What will you do when you are ill?”

**In the next place, I offer *counsel* to all who [think] they need it and are willing to take it—to all who [think] they are not yet prepared to meet God. That counsel is short and simple: acquaint yourself with the Lord Jesus Christ without delay. Repent, be converted, flee to Christ, and be saved.**

Either you have a soul, or you have not. You will surely never deny that you have. Then, if you have a soul, seek that soul’s salvation. Of all gambling in the world, there is none so reckless as that of the man who lives unprepared to meet God, and yet puts off repentance. Either you have sins, or you have none. If you have (and who will dare to deny it?), break off from those sins, cast away your transgressions, and turn away from them without delay. Either you need a Savior, or you do not. If you do, flee to the only Savior this very day and cry mightily to Him to save your soul. Apply to Christ at once. Seek Him by faith. Commit your soul into His keeping. Cry mightily to Him for pardon and peace with God. Ask Him to pour down the Holy Spirit upon you and make you a thorough Christian. He will hear you. No matter what you have been, He will not refuse your prayer. He has said, “Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out” (Joh 6:37).

Beware, I beseech you, of a vague and indefinite Christianity. Be not content with a general hope that all is right because you belong to [a church], and that all will be well at last because God is merciful. Rest not, rest not without personal union with Christ Himself. Rest not, rest not until you have the witness of the Spirit in your heart that you are washed, sanctified, and justified, and one with Christ and Christ in you. Rest not until you can say with the apostle, “I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day” (2Ti 1:12).

Vague, indefinite, and indistinct religion may do very well in time of health. It will never do in the day of sickness. A mere formal, perfunctory<sup>8</sup> church membership may carry a man through the sunshine of youth and prosperity. It will break down entirely when death is in sight. Nothing will do then but real heart-union with Christ. Christ interceding for us at God’s right hand; Christ known and believed as our Priest, our Physician, our Friend—Christ alone can rob death of

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<sup>7</sup> **Cardinal Henry Beaufort** (c. 1375-1447) – English Roman Catholic Bishop of Winchester.

<sup>8</sup> **perfunctory** – done routinely and with little interest or care.

its sting and enable us to face sickness without fear. He alone can deliver those who through fear of death are in bondage. I say to everyone who wants advice, "Be acquainted with Christ." As ever you would have hope and comfort on the bed of sickness, be acquainted with Christ. Seek Christ. Apply to Christ.

Take every care and trouble to Him when you are acquainted with Him. He will keep you and carry you through all. Pour out your heart before Him when your conscience is burdened. He is the true Confessor. He alone can absolve<sup>9</sup> you and take the burden away. Turn to Him first in the day of sickness, like Martha and Mary. Keep on looking to Him to the last breath of your life. Christ is worth knowing. The more you know Him, the better you will love Him. Then, be acquainted with Jesus Christ.

**In the third place, I exhort all true Christians who read this paper to remember how much they may glorify God in the time of sickness and to *lie quiet in God's hand when they are ill*.** I [think] it very important to touch on this point. I know how ready the heart of a believer is to faint and how busy Satan is in suggesting doubts and questionings when the body of a Christian is weak. I have seen something of the depression and melancholy that sometimes comes upon the children of God when they are suddenly laid aside by disease and obliged to sit still. I have marked how prone some good people are to torment themselves with morbid thoughts at such seasons and to say in their hearts, "God has forsaken me: I am cast out of His sight."

I earnestly entreat all sick believers to remember that they may honor God as much by patient suffering as they can by active work. It often shows more grace to sit still than it does to go to and fro and perform great exploits. I entreat them to remember that Christ cares for them as much when they are sick as He does when they are well, and that the very chastisement they feel so acutely is sent in love and not in anger. Above all, I entreat them to recollect the sympathy of Jesus for all His weak members. They are always tenderly cared for by Him, but never so much as in their time of need. Christ has had great experience of sickness. He knows the heart of a sick man. He used to see "all manner of sickness and all manner of disease" when He was upon earth (Mat 4:23). He felt especially for the sick in the days of His flesh. He feels for them especially still. Sickness and suffering, I often think, make believers more like their Lord in experience than health. "Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses" (Mat

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<sup>9</sup> **absolve** – pronounce clear of guilt or blame.

8:17). The Lord Jesus was a “man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief” (Isa 53:3). None have such an opportunity of learning the mind of a suffering Savior as suffering disciples.

**I conclude with a word of *exhortation* to all believers, which I heartily pray God to impress upon their souls.** I exhort you to keep up a habit of close communion with Christ,<sup>10</sup> and never to be afraid of “going too far” in your religion. Remember this, if you wish to have great peace in your times of sickness.

I observe with regret a tendency in some quarters to lower the standard of practical Christianity and to denounce what are called “extreme views” about a Christian’s daily walk in life. I remark with pain that even religious people will sometimes look coldly on those who withdraw from worldly society, and will censure them as “exclusive, narrow-minded, illiberal, uncharitable, sour-spirited,” and the like. I warn every believer in Christ who reads this paper to beware of being influenced by such censures. I entreat him, if he wants light in the valley of death, to “keep himself unspotted from the world,” to follow the Lord very fully, and to walk very closely with God (Jam 1:27; Num 14:24).

I believe that the want of thoroughness about many people’s Christianity is one secret of their little comfort, both in health and sickness. I believe that the “half-and-half,” “keep-in-with-everybody” religion, which satisfies many in the present day, is offensive to God, and sows thorns in dying pillows, which hundreds never discover until too late. I believe that the weakness and feebleness of such a religion never comes out so much as it does upon a sick bed.

If you and I want “strong consolation” in our time of need, we must not be content with a bare union with Christ (Heb 6:18). We must seek to know something of heartfelt, experimental *communion* with Him. Never, never let us forget, that “union” is one thing, and “communion” another. Thousands, I fear, who know what “union” with Christ is, know nothing of “communion.”

The day may come when, after a long fight with disease, we shall feel that medicine can do no more, and that nothing remains but to die. Friends will be standing by, unable to help us. Hearing, eyesight, even the power of praying, will be fast failing us. The world and its shadows will be melting beneath our feet. Eternity, with its realities, will be looming large before our minds. What shall support us in that

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<sup>10</sup> See FGB 248, *Communion with God*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

trying hour? What shall enable us to feel, “I...fear no evil” (Psa 23:4)? Nothing, nothing can do it but close communion with Christ. Christ dwelling in our hearts by faith, Christ putting His right arm under our heads, Christ felt to be sitting by our side, Christ alone can give us the complete victory in the last struggle.

Let us cleave to Christ more closely, love Him more heartily, live to Him more thoroughly, copy Him more exactly, confess Him more boldly, follow Him more fully. Religion like this will always bring its own reward. Worldly people may laugh at it. Weak brethren may think it extreme. But it will wear well. At even time, it will bring us light. In sickness, it will bring us peace. In the world to come, it will give us “a crown of glory that fadeth not away” (1Pe 5:4).

The time is short. The fashion of this world passeth away. A few more sicknesses, and all will be over. A few more funerals, and our own funeral will take place. A few more storms and tossings, and we shall be safe in harbor. We travel towards a world where there is no more sickness, where parting, pain, crying, and mourning are done with forevermore. Heaven is becoming every year fuller and earth emptier. The friends ahead are becoming more numerous than the friends astern. “Yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry” (Heb 10:37). In His presence shall be fulness of joy! Christ shall wipe away all tears from His people’s eyes. “The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death” (1Co 15:26). But he shall be destroyed. Death himself shall one day die (Rev 20:14).

In the meantime, let us live the life of faith in the Son of God. Let us lean all our weight on Christ and rejoice in the thought that He lives for evermore.

Yes, blessed be God! Christ lives, though we may die. Christ lives, though friends and families are carried to the grave. He lives Who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light by the gospel. He lives Who said, “O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy destruction” (Hos 13:14). He lives Who will one day change our vile body and make it like unto His glorious body. In sickness and in health, in life and in death, let us lean confidently on Him. Surely, we ought to say daily with one of old, “Blessed be God for Jesus Christ!”

From *Sickness*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.



# THE ONE YOU LOVE IS SICK

Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-1892)

*Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick.—John 11:3*

JESUS loved Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. It is a happy thing where a whole family live in the love of Jesus. They were a favored trio; and yet, as the serpent came into Paradise, so did sorrow enter their quiet household at Bethany. Lazarus was sick. They all felt that if Jesus were there, disease would flee at His presence; what then should they do but let Him know of their trial? Lazarus was near to death's door, and so his tender sisters at once reported the fact to Jesus, saying, "Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick." Many a time since then has that same message been sent to our Lord, for in full many a case He has chosen His people "in the furnace of affliction" (Isa 48:10). Of the Master it is said, "Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses" (Mat 8:17); and it is therefore no extraordinary thing for the members to be in this matter conformed to their Head.

Notice, first, a fact mentioned in the text: "Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick." The sisters were somewhat astonished that it should be so, for the word *behold* implies a measure of surprise. "We love him and would make him well directly. *Thou* lovest him, and yet he remains sick. Thou canst heal him with a word. Why, then, is Thy loved one sick?" Have not you, dear sick friend, often wondered how your painful or lingering disease could be consistent with your being chosen and called and made one with Christ? I dare say this has greatly perplexed you; and yet in very truth it is by no means strange, but a thing to be expected.

We need not be astonished that the man whom the Lord loves is sick, for *he is only a man*. The love of Jesus does not separate us from the common necessities and infirmities of human life. Men of God are still men. The Covenant of Grace<sup>1</sup> is not a charter of exemption from consumption<sup>2</sup> or rheumatism or asthma. The bodily ills, which come upon us because of our flesh, will attend us to the tomb, for Paul saith, "We that are in this tabernacle do groan" (2Co 5:4).

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<sup>1</sup> **Covenant of Grace** – God's gracious, eternal purpose of redemption, conceived before the creation of the world, first announced in Genesis 3:15, progressively revealed in history, accomplished in the Person and work of Jesus Christ, and appropriated by faith in Him.

<sup>2</sup> **consumption** – an early name for pulmonary tuberculosis.

Those whom the Lord loves are the more likely to be sick, since they are *under a peculiar discipline*. It is written, “Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth” (Heb 12:6). Affliction of some sort is one of the marks of the true-born child of God, and it frequently happens that the trial takes the form of illness. Shall we therefore wonder that we have to take our turn in the sick chamber? If Job and David and Hezekiah must each one smart, who are we that we should be amazed because we are in ill-health?

Nor is it remarkable that we are sick if we reflect upon the great *benefit which often flows from it to ourselves*. I do not know what peculiar improvement may have been wrought in Lazarus, but many a disciple of Jesus would have been of small use if he had not been afflicted. Strong men are apt to be harsh, imperious, and unsympathetic, and therefore they need to be put into the furnace and melted down. I have known Christian women who would never have been so gentle, tender, wise, experienced, and holy if they had not been mellowed by physical pain. There are fruits in God’s garden as well as in man’s which never ripen till they are bruised. Young women who are apt to be volatile, conceited, or talkative are often trained to be full of sweetness and light by sickness after sickness, by which they are taught to sit at Jesus’ feet. Many have been able to say with the psalmist, “It is good for me to have been afflicted, that I might learn thy statutes” (Psa 119:71). For this reason, even such as are highly favored and blessed among women may feel a sword piercing through their hearts (Luk 1:28; 2:35).

Oftentimes this sickness of the Lord’s loved ones is *for the good of others*. Lazarus was permitted to be sick and to die, that by his death and resurrection the apostles might be benefited. His sickness was “for the glory of God” (Joh 11:4). Throughout these nineteen hundred years which have succeeded Lazarus’ sickness, all believers have been getting good out of it, and this afternoon we are all the better because he languished and died. The church and the world may derive immense advantage through the sorrows of good men. The careless may be awakened, the doubting may be convinced, the ungodly may be converted, the mourner may be comforted through our testimony in sickness; and if so, would we wish to avoid pain and weakness? Are we not quite willing that our friends should say of us also, “Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick”?

**Our text, however, not only records a fact, but mentions a report of that fact.** The sisters sent and told Jesus. Let us keep up a constant correspondence with our Lord about everything...Jesus knows all

about us, but *it is a great relief to pour out our hearts before Him*. When John the Baptist's brokenhearted disciples saw their leader beheaded, "they took up the body...and went and told Jesus" (Mat 14:12). They could not have done better. In all trouble send a message to Jesus, and do not keep your misery to yourself. In His case there is no need of reserve, there is no fear of His treating you with cold pride, heartless indifference, or cruel treachery. He is a confidant Who never can betray us, a friend Who never will refuse us.

There is this fair hope about telling Jesus, that *He is sure to support us under it*. If you go to Jesus and ask, "Most gracious Lord, why am I sick? I thought I was useful while in health, and now I can do nothing. Why is this?"—He may be pleased to show you why; if not, He will make you willing to bear His will with patience without knowing why. He can bring His truth to your mind to cheer you, strengthen your heart by His presence, send you unexpected comforts, and give you to glory in your afflictions. "Ye people, pour out your heart before him: God is a refuge for us" (Psa 62:8). Not in vain did Mary and Martha send to tell Jesus, and not in vain do any seek His face.

Remember, too, that *Jesus may give healing*. It would not be wise to live by a supposed faith and cast off the physician and his medicines, any more than to discharge the butcher and the tailor and expect to be fed and clothed by faith; but this would be far better than forgetting the Lord altogether and trusting to man only. Healing for both body and soul must be sought from God. We make use of medicines, but these can do nothing apart from the Lord, "who healeth all [our] diseases" (Psa 103:3). We may tell Jesus about our aches and pains, and gradual declinings, and hacking coughs. Some persons are afraid to go to God about their health. They pray for the pardon of sin, but dare not ask the Lord to remove a headache; and yet, surely, if the hairs outside our head are all numbered by God, it is not much more of a condescension for Him to relieve throbs and pressures inside the head. Our big things must be very little to the great God, and our little things cannot be much less. It is a proof of the greatness of the mind of God that while ruling the heavens and the earth, He is not so absorbed by these great concerns as to be forgetful of the least pain or want<sup>3</sup> of any one of His poor children. We may go to Him about our failing breath, for He first gave us lungs and life. We may tell Him about the eye which grows dim, and the ear which loses hearing, for He made them both. We may mention the swollen knee, and the gathering finger, the stiff neck, and

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<sup>3</sup> want – need.



the sprained foot, for He made all these our members, redeemed them all, and will raise them all from the grave. Go at once, and say, “Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick.”

**Thirdly, let us notice in the case of Lazarus a result that we should not have expected.** No doubt when Mary and Martha sent to tell Jesus, they looked to see Lazarus recover as soon as the messenger reached the Master; but they were not gratified. For two days the Lord remained in the same place, and not till He knew that Lazarus was dead did He speak of going to Judea. This teaches us that Jesus may be informed of our trouble, and yet may act as if He were indifferent to it. We must not expect in every case that prayer for recovery will be answered, for if so, nobody would die who had chick or child, friend or acquaintance to pray for him. In our prayers for the lives of beloved children of God, we must not forget that there is one prayer which may be crossing ours: for Jesus prays, “Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory” (Joh 17:24). We pray that they may remain with us, but when we recognize that Jesus wants them above, what can we do but admit His larger claim and say, “Not as I will, but as thou wilt” (Mat 26:39)? In our own case, we may pray the Lord to raise us up, and yet though He loves us He may permit us to grow worse and worse, and at last to die. Hezekiah had fifteen years added to his life, but we may not gain the reprieve of a single day. Never set such store by the life of anyone dear to you, or even by your own life, as to be rebellious against the Lord. If you hold the life of any dear one with too tight a hand, you are making a rod for your own back; and if you love your own earthly life too well, you are making a thorny pillow for your dying bed. Children are often idols, and in such cases their too ardent lovers are idolaters. We might as well make a god of clay and worship it, as the Hindus are said to do, as worship our fellow creatures—for what are they but clay? Shall dust be so dear to us that we quarrel with our God about it? If our Lord leaves us to suffer, let us not repine. He must do that for us, which is kindest and best, for He loves us better than we love ourselves.

Did I hear you say, “Yes, Jesus allowed Lazarus to die, *but He raised him up again*”? I answer, He is the resurrection and the life to us also. Be comforted concerning the departed: “Thy brother shall rise again” (Joh 11:23), and all of us whose hope is in Jesus shall partake in our Lord’s resurrection. Not only shall our souls live, but our bodies too shall be raised incorruptible. The grave will serve as a refining pot, and this vile body shall come forth vile no longer. Some Christians are greatly cheered by the thought of living till the Lord comes, and

so escaping death. I confess that I think this no great gain, for so far from having any preference over them that are asleep, those who are alive and remain at His coming will miss one point of fellowship—in not dying and rising like their Lord (1Th 4:15-17). Beloved, “all things are yours,” and death is expressly mentioned in the list (1Co 3:21-22); therefore, do not dread it, but rather “long for evening to undress, that you may rest with God.”

I will close with a question—“Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus” (Joh 11:5)—does Jesus in a special sense love you? Alas, many sick ones have no evidence of any special love of Jesus towards them, for they have never sought His face nor trusted in Him. Jesus might say to them, “I never knew you,” for they have turned their backs upon His blood and His cross. Answer, dear friend, to your own heart this question: “Do you love Jesus?” If so, you love Him because He first loved you. Are you trusting Him? If so, that faith of yours is the proof that He has loved you from before the foundation of the world, for faith is the token by which He plights His troth<sup>4</sup> to His beloved.

If Jesus loves you, and you are sick, let all the world see how you glorify God in your sickness. Let friends and nurses see how the beloved of the Lord are cheered and comforted by Him. Let your holy resignation astonish them and set them admiring your Beloved, Who is so gracious to you that He makes you happy in pain and joyful at the gates of the grave. If your religion is worth anything, it ought to support you now, and it will compel unbelievers to see that he whom the Lord loveth is in better case when he is sick than the ungodly when full of health and vigor.

If you do not know that Jesus loves you, you lack the brightest star that can cheer the night of sickness. I hope you will not die as you now are and pass into another world without enjoying the love of Jesus. That would be a terrible calamity indeed. Seek His face at once, and it may be that your present sickness is a part of the way of love by which Jesus would bring you to Himself. Lord, heal all these sick ones in soul and in body. Amen.

From a sermon preached before an audience of invalid ladies at Mentone.

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**Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-1892):** Influential English Baptist preacher; born at Kelvedon, Essex, England, UK.



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<sup>4</sup> **plights His troth** – pledges His faithfulness; becomes betrothed to be married.