

QUESTIONS WE WANT ANSWERED

85.4 What Is the Christian View of Sickness and Healing?

Part IV

Scripture: Romans 8:22-23; II Corinthians 4:17-18, 12:7-10; James 5:13-16

INTRODUCTION

The human body is very important to God. He created it in the first place and with the passing of time has chosen to make it His dwelling place. It was necessary for early Christians to be informed of the way God viewed their bodies. Centuries before Christ a Greek philosopher by the name of Plato conceived of the idea that the stuff of the universe, what we call matter, was both defective and evil. His statement was, "There is something the matter with matter." Plato also viewed matter as eternal, just as God is eternal. The conclusion was that everything exists in a state of imperfection because the material God used to shape His universe was defective to begin with. Even the human body was considered to be evil. It followed that Christians were strongly influenced by this concept.

The Scriptures teach that evil does not reside in things. When God made the world He pronounced that it was good. The first Christians were thus faced with teaching that drove a wedge between the natural and the spiritual. It was necessary that they be taught evil did not inhere in physical objects, their bodies were not to be thought of as evil. This was the reason for the instruction of Paul in Romans 12:1, "*I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.*" He was saying that it is important what you do with your bodies and it is important to God what happens to your bodies. In Romans 6:13 Paul wrote, "*Neither yield your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those who are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God.*" It is the use of the member that introduces the thought of evil. Now, why this digression having to do with Plato? The reason is that I don't want to give the faintest suggestion to the notion that what happens to our bodies is not really a concern of God, that it is all down hill once a certain point is reached, and that the Christian faith doesn't have much to offer when sickness strikes. God is concerned about the house in which we

live and the temple He inhabits. (I Corinthians 6:19) Consider the following observations and suggestions with me.

I. THERE IS A CLOSE CONNECTION BETWEEN FAITH AND DIVINE HEALING IN SCRIPTURE:

The healing ministry of Jesus may be described as His response to the appeal of faith in conjunction with purpose and power. We have examples of this in Luke 7:1-10 and Mark 2:1-5. We can even point to an incident when the Lord demanded faith. (Mark 9:23) The cripple at the gate Beautiful had faith in the name of Christ according to Acts 3:16. Paul discerned faith in the impotent man at Lystra. (Acts 14:8-10) The well known passage in James 5:13-16 further indicates the relationship between faith and healing.

However, an unscriptural line of reasoning often follows a recitation of passages which relate faith and healing. I believe that it is a most unfortunate distortion which arises when we come to believe that healing depends on the amount of faith one brings to a needy situation. Twice in the gospels we read that seed faith is sufficient to bring about the accomplishment of God's purposes. The Lord intentionally selected to illustrate this truth when He spoke of the mustard seed. (Matthew 17:20; Luke 17:6) I feel that it is a great misunderstanding to assume that when healing does not come the dilemma must be viewed in terms of a lack of faith or sin in the life. This conclusion only compounds the problem and often results in bitterness, guilt and despair. After all, if my faith is not strong enough to heal my body, how could I ever be sure that it is adequate to insure my salvation.

There is one passage of Scripture which we can allow to represent all others in regard to the working of miracles and faith. It is Mark 9:23 and it says, "*All things are possible to him who believes.*" There is a way in which we can destroy that beautiful promise and in effect turn it into a lie. This is done by confusing our **presumptions** with God's **intentions**. There is no way we can take upon ourselves to assume that our "all things" are identical to God's "all things." To do so is to invite disaster when God does not appear to respond the way we have programmed him to respond even though we have met all the requirements. No, my friend, the absent miracle demands that we go deeper into the unknown ways of God. If all things are possible let us be certain that we keep in mind the many possibilities which may be included in those words. It is therefore possible that healing might not come without offending the greater promises of Scripture that

Christians will share in the triumph of Christ. Whatever the possibilities may be we may be certain that God will be there even though He hasn't been reduced to our way of handling the situation nor has He done an injustice to His promises in the face of unavoidable realities. According to II Timothy 2:13, He cannot deny Himself. His word will always square with His responses. Faith and healing are closely related, but the former neither necessitates nor pressures the latter into happening. We must be careful not to mistake our presumptions for God's intentions.

In this regard I am reminded of that giant of faith, George Mueller. His life will continue to challenge the unbelieving world and to inspire the people of God in all generations. The responses he received to prayers offered in faith are incredible. Yet, George Mueller knew a great deal of sickness in his life and was moved often to ask, "Lord, why am I afflicted like this?" Never was he deceived into thinking his faith was not adequate. He accepted, rather, the wisdom of God's hidden strategy realizing it was for the best for him.

II. WHEN SICKNESS COMES WE SHOULD BE DISCERNING IN OUR TRUST:

The Christian life is greatly influenced by the way we think. Lives therefore can be rendered joyless and fruitless by a poor theology or understanding of truth. It is consequently very important we be most discerning in handling of God's Word. Simplistic sermons and the random use of Bible promises can be most harmful. We have as a case in point the experience of Jesus as He was tempted in the wilderness. Satan approached Him with the words, *"If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, He will give His angels charge concerning you; and in their hands they will bear you up lest you strike your foot against a stone."* (Matthew 4:5-6NAS)

Satan evidently has available to himself various means of temptation he can employ. Having already mentioned the danger of presumption, it is the very way he approached Christ. It is fascinating the way he quoted Scripture. Carefully he selects a promise from Psalm 91:11-12. His claim to Jesus is that, *"He will give His angels charge concerning you."* *"Jump Jesus: It is in the Scripture!"* He slyly omits the phrase which qualifies the promise, *"...to guard you in all your ways."* What he did was to try and convince the Lord that He could expect the Father's protection at all times and under all circumstances. He turned the promise into an absolute never realizing that God is going to protect such a promise with checks and balances. Claim the Scripture and you claim deliverance was his ploy.

The response of Jesus was most important. Jesus parried this thrust of Satan by quoting from Deuteronomy 6:16. *“You shall not tempt the Lord your God.”* It seems to me the following lessons can be learned from this incident.

1. We Need More than One Scripture Verse:

The reason why Satan came at Christ from Scripture was because he knew it was His strong point. Likewise, Christians are people who desire to square their beliefs with the Bible. It is rather alarming to realize that Satan can get to us even through a promise out of the Word. Is it possible to misuse the Word? Of course it is. Satan did. That is why it is so important to search the Word for all that God has to say about a subject before making or coming to any conclusions.

2. We Can Put Our Beliefs Above the Word of God:

It is possible for us to see what we want to see. Satan wanted Jesus to believe that God's protection applied in all situations. Jesus' response was that by casting himself off of the temple he would be guilty of presumption. Knowing the whole counsel of God Jesus quoted more Scripture. There are people today who want to believe more than Scripture allows. Great damage is brought to the name of Christ by persuading people to jump off temple tops by neglecting medical treatment when it is needed. They will live or die with the results.

3. We Can Discern the Difference Between Faith and Presumption:

I want to introduce you to two Greek words translated “word” in your Bibles. One is the word “logos” and the other is the word “rayma.” The word “logos” has to do with the Word of God in its universal application, and the word “rayma” suggests the Word of God in its individual association.

In John 1:14 we read that the logos became flesh. Here was the visible manifestation of God to all men, the Word in a universal setting, whether believed in or not. In Romans 10:17 we read that faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word (rayma) of Christ. It is the word of God to you. People often hear the gospel many times without believing it. It is the truth of God in its universal appeal. Then one day something happens. The “logos” makes for their heart being energized by the Holy Spirit. It becomes “rayma,” truth to them individually and they come to the faith. This truth can be applied to difficult questions we face in the Christian life. People have often said upon

leaving a place where the Word of God was taught that the Lord spoke to them. That word of the Lord to them was not the same word of the Lord spoken to everyone. It was “logos” and “rayma” truth which was shared. We have two examples of this in the Gospel record. One is in **Matthew 14:22-33**. It was a “rayma” word for Peter only. Neither the other disciples in the boat nor believers ever since have taken it otherwise. The other incident is recorded in **John 21:18-22** where again there is a special ‘rayma” for Peter. In regard to this matter of healing we may say that it is God Word (logos), but we ought to ask if it is God's Word (rayma) to me?

III. THERE IS A WAY FOR CHRISTIANS TO GO WHEN SICKNESS COMES:

For the past several weeks we have thought about a Christian approach to sickness and healing. Were I to summarize these many pages I would make the following suggestions as to the believer's response to sickness when it comes.

1. When We Are Sick We Ought to Bring the Matter to the Lord:

The real measure of belief is trust. In that trust we are admonished to acknowledge the Lord in all our ways. (Proverbs 3:5-6) As we decide upon ways to treat our illness the Lord should be included. We would want to pray for healing as did the leper in Matthew 8:1. Perhaps we should judge ourselves before the Lord lest the sickness has come as chastisement for some unconfessed and unforsaken sin in our lives. This seems to me to be the first step if the nature of the illness allows; otherwise our self judgment should follow as soon as we are able.

2. We Should Seek Competent Medical Help:

Indifference toward this source is unscriptural. Medicines come from God. Without His creative wisdom they could not be fashioned. In Acts 28:8-9 Paul and Luke engaged in a ministry of healing on Melita. One laid on hands while the other practiced medicine. Here is a God ordained means through which He brings healing.

3. We May Call for the Elders of the Church for Anointing and Prayer:

This seems to be the pattern for today according James 5:14-16. I say “seems” because some hold this is a misused text, that it is not a divine instruction to be applied in all cases because the sickness in this case **is recognized as** the chastening hand of the Lord for some sin. (5:15) But not all sickness is because of sin. In these cases confession with the helpful

counsel of the elders will result in forgiveness. Note particularly that the initiative is to be taken by the sick and the elders respond. I might say that this is the pattern which we follow at Hope Church.

4. We Should Be Willing to Accept God's Sovereign Purposes:

The Lord is able to heal. The Lord does heal. The Lord has healed. The Lord may not heal. If healing does not come we should ask the Lord for grace to accept our indisposition as His will. We must be open to all possibilities. We must not confuse wishful thinking with faith nor predetermine what God has to do. Very often, I am told, there is the temptation to bargain with God. It is our Father with whom we have to do, it is His nature to provide as he will. (Matthew 7:7-11)

5. When it Is Not God's Will to Heal then He Would Be Glorified by Our Illness:

We are to bear our infirmity in a way which goes beyond enduring. We should recognize that God has a purpose in what happens in our lives and He is able to use this weakness to honor His name in someone's life. It is sometimes possible to have a more moving influence in weakness than in strength. It is at this point that we shall have to constantly draw upon the grace of God. This was Paul's experience according to II Corinthians 12. Grace can be known as God doing for us what we cannot possibly do for ourselves. (See Philippians 1:20)

6. Through Our Sickness We Are Able to Gain an Eternal Perspective:

It is interesting to note that the attitude of New Testament Christians toward death was acceptance, not deliverance. Paul wrote, "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen." (II Corinthians 4:17-18), See also Romans 8:18; Philippians 1:23)

May I admonish the reader to consider seriously some of the suggestions and thoughts which have been shared in these studies. Go back to the Scriptures again and again asking the Holy Spirit to guide you as you seek to understand the mind of the Lord on this difficult subject. Whatever our conclusions may be, God grant us the desire that Christ be glorified in our bodies by life or by death. This would seem to me to be a good summation of the Christian view.

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