

The Bible and Illness

Dub McClish

Illness is a universal phenomenon. It doesn't depend upon whether one is rich or poor, righteous, or unrighteous, what race he may be, or the age in which he may have lived. It is something that all men experience to some degree, sooner or later. Illness has always been considered the enemy of man and rightly so because it often brings pain and misery. It disrupts our plans. It reminds us of death lurking in the shadows. Vast amounts of money, energy, and time are spent both to prevent, and to cure illness. Many people are described in the Bible, both Old and New Testaments who had a variety of illnesses. Jesus recognized the reality of physical sickness. He said, "...they that are whole have no need of a physician but they that are sick" (Mat. 9:12). While some terrible diseases have been conquered, there are still many maladies that bring misery, pain, suffering and even death to mankind. We have noticed the following things concerning the Bible and illness.

1. Everyone should know and follow the laws of health. The Bible stresses the importance of the body and its health. It is the temple of the Holy Spirit if one is a Christian (1 Cor. 6:19). We are to present our bodies a living sacrifice unto God (Rom. 12:1).
2. Sickness is not necessarily a result of sin. Concerning a man who was born blind, Jesus said, "Neither did this man sin, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him" (John 9:3). Some sins by their very nature, do produce illness such as drunkenness, sexual promiscuity, cigarette smoking and other uses of tobacco products, drug abuse, and various other things.

However, it is wrong to assume a patient's illness is always his fault. It is grossly unfair to conclude that every misfortune or every illness that comes upon one is some sort of penance for sin. The Bible simply does not teach that.

3. The apostles did not use their healing power for selfish or indiscriminate purposes. They healed when it would promote the cause of Christ. They used this miraculous power only when it would confirm that they were spokesmen of God and were speaking the Truth of the Gospel whereby the souls of men could be saved. There were times when they left their dearest friends and brethren sick and did not heal them by their miraculous power.
4. Jesus healed many people. However, He did not come to earth, merely to heal sick bodies. His larger, more permanent, and eternal purpose is couched in the words of Luke 19:10, "The Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost." Those who focus upon what Jesus did for man physically and socially and claim that was the purpose of His coming need to re-read the Gospel and see that He came for spiritual healing, and not merely physical. The great miracles which He performed were designed to prove that He was the Son of God. That is proved by John's statement, "Many other signs therefore did Jesus in the presence of the disciples which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye may have life" (John 20:30-31).

5. God's people have a responsibility to visit those who are sick. In Matthew 25:36, Jesus says that in the judgment, our fate will be based in part on whether or not we have helped those who were sick.
6. Since we are expected to visit the sick, then we should make the visit as helpful as possible to them. Maybe it would be helpful to us to look at some simple principles to be considered when visiting with the sick. The following is a list of suggestions that I have practiced over the years. I don't know who authored this list. I have revised it to include some things I have learned from observation and experience. Perhaps it will be helpful to you.
 1. Don't stay too long, unless you are assigned to sit up with a patient for several hours.
 2. Don't allow alarm, horror, or sorrow to appear in your face or in your voice.
 3. Be careful how you give sympathy. Don't be like Job's friends who falsely blamed him for all his problems.
 4. Remember that the sick often have a sharpened awareness and reaction to sights, sounds, and smells.
 5. Avoid kicking the bed when entering or leaving the room.
 6. Stand or sit in such a position while you are visiting that the patient can see you without having to strain himself by looking up at an awkward angle.
 7. The object of a visit is to make the patient feel that you care about him.
 8. Don't make apologies for not coming earlier.
 9. Don't talk about topics that require close or prolonged attention. Choose topics appropriate to the patient in space, time, and interest.
 10. Don't bring up depressing or alarming subjects.
 11. Remember that sick people like variety, change and little surprises.
 12. Be as optimistic about the future of the patient as you can. Don't be like one visitor who entered a room and said to the patient, "Oh, my friend had what you have and died and oh, how he suffered before he died."
 13. Let the patient do some talking if he is able to and be sure to listen to him.
 14. Don't offer suggestions for treatment to the patient. His doctor is handling that.
 15. Don't criticize the doctor or his treatment, even if you do not agree with it or don't respect the doctor.
 16. Never whisper or speak in low tones to others while in or near the sick room. The patient, even when unresponsive, can very often hear that which is whispered even when apparently unconscious.
 17. Don't argue with the patient.
 18. Don't gossip to the patient.
 19. Be cheerful.
7. In Psalms 39:4 David said, "...Let me know how frail I am." Illness, especially if it is serious, is one of those things that reveals the frailties of physical life and the need for something eternal to grasp. A person may have known and shown little interest in prayer, Bible reading, or worship. Sometimes sickness can make the difference. He may have avoided those who represent the Lord's people such as preachers, elders, and other Christians who might visit him before, but usually when he is ill, he's happy to see them. Illness has been the element that has brought many a hardened, stubborn sinner to his knees before God. Illness can tend

to make us more sympathetic toward others who have walked the road of pain, misery, and perhaps fear. Then we can better understand how others feel when they are ill. Illness can further teach us patience in a way that few other things can. It can also enhance our gratitude and appreciation for our own health if we think correctly about it.

8. What about our attitude toward illness? There are two attitudes we can have:

We can have the attitude of rebellion and bitterness. Job's wife had this attitude when he became seriously ill. She said, "Dost thou still hold fast thine integrity? renounce God and die" (Job. 2:9). I once went into a hospital room where a non-Christian, the husband to a devout Christian lady, had gone in for a check-up just a few hours before and a terrible malignancy had been discovered; he knew that his illness was terminal. When I walked into his room, he uttered a profanity that took the name of God in vain. Then he said, "Don't come in here crying and praying over me." I had not come in there to cry and pray over him, unless he wanted me to, of course. I had come simply because I cared about him. But as far as I know that man went on to his grave in a few months' time still holding that bitterness and rebellion in his heart.

The other attitude we can have is one of submission and trust in God. When Job's "friends" falsely accused him of sin, his reply was, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust him" (Job 13:15 KJV). So ought our attitude be toward God. After Paul had prayed three times that his thorn in the flesh be removed, God's answer was, "My grace is sufficient to thee" (2 Cor. 12:9). An attitude of submission was in the heart of Paul. As far as we know, he never asked that it be removed again. Rather, he wrote from his prison cell, "In whatsoever state I am in, I have learned therein to be content" (Phi 4:11).

We are not promised any escape from illnesses while we are on this earth, regardless of how righteous we are. In the spiritual and eternal realm, however, " ... he shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and death shall be no more; neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain, any more: the first things are passed away" (Rev. 21:4). This is what Jesus came to prepare for us and what he will take us to if we are his servants.

[**Note:** This article is adapted from a radio script I wrote for the Light of Life program on KPAR radio, which aired on May 29, 1980. This daily program was presented by the Granbury Church of Christ, Granbury, TX.

Attribution: From *thescripturecache.com*; Dub McClish, owner and administrator.