

can we give for it? Can we suppose for a moment that God created sickness and disease at the beginning, that He who made all things “very good” made Adam’s race to sicken and die? Such an idea introduces a grand imperfection into the midst of God’s perfect works. The only explanation we can give is that which the Bible gives. Something has come into the world which has dethroned man from his original position. 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 it? It is **SIN**. “Sin entered into the world, and death by sin” (*Rom 5:12*). Sin is the cause of all sickness, disease, pain, and suffering on earth. It is part of the curse which 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.

### **SICKNESS IS BENEFICIAL**

*“Can God be a God of love, when He allows pain? Can He be a God of mercy, when He permits disease?”* These questions are often asked; but these questions are most unreasonable. We might as well doubt the existence of a Creator because of the disturbance caused by earthquakes and hurricanes. We might as well doubt the providence of God because of the horrible wars and massacres in the world. It would be just as reasonable for us to doubt the mercy of God because of the presence of sickness in the world.

I ask all who find it hard to reconcile the prevalence of disease and pain with the love of God, to cast your eyes on the world around you, and to mark what is going on. I ask you to observe the extent to which men constantly submit to present loss for the sake of future gain, present sorrow for the sake of future joy, present pain for the sake of future health. The seed is thrown into the ground, and rots: but we sow in the hope of a future harvest. A boy is sent to school amidst many tears: but we send him in the hope of his getting future wisdom. A man undergoes some fearful surgical operation: but he bears it in the hope of future health. Apply this great principle to God’s government of the world. See that God

allows pain, sickness, and disease, not because He loves to vex man, but because He desires to benefit man’s heart, mind, and soul, to all eternity.

Sickness comes in the wise permission of God. It is a blessing as much as it is a curse. Yes, it is a rough schoolmaster; but it is a real friend to man’s soul. Why is sickness good?

**1.** Sickness helps to remind men of death. Most live as if they were never going to die. They follow business, pleasure, politics, or science, as if earth was their eternal home. They plan and scheme for the future, like the rich fool in the parable (*Luke 12:16-21*), as if they had a long lease on life. A heavy illness sometimes goes far to dispel these delusions. It awakens men from their daydreams, and reminds them they have to die as well as live.

**2.** Sickness helps to make men think seriously of God, and their souls, and the world to come. Most in their days of health can find no time for thoughts of God and the judgment to come. But a severe disease has a way of bringing up these thoughts in men’s minds. Even heathen sailors, when death was in sight, were afraid, and “cried every man to his god” (*Jonah 1:5*).

Sickness helps to soften men’s hearts and teach them wisdom. The natural heart is as hard as a stone. It can see no good in anything which is not of this life, and no happiness except in this world. A long illness sometimes goes far to correct these ideas. It exposes the complete emptiness of what this world calls “good,” and teaches us to hold it with a loose hand.

**3.** Sickness helps to level and humble us. We are all naturally proud and high-minded. We tend to look down on others and secretly flatter ourselves that we are “not as other men are” (*Luke 18:11*). A sick bed can tame such foolish thoughts. It forces on us the mighty truth that we are all poor worms, that we “dwell in houses of clay” and are “crushed before the moth” (*Job 4:19*); and that kings and subjects, masters and servants, rich and poor, are all dying creatures, and will soon stand side by side at the bar of God. In sight of the coffin and the grave, it’s not easy to be proud.

**4.** Sickness tries a man’s religious profession, of what sort it is. Disease is sometimes

most useful to a man in exposing the utter worthlessness of his soul’s foundation. It often shows him that he has nothing solid to stand on. It often exposes the gracelessness of a man’s soul.

Sickness does not confer these benefits on all to whom it comes. Too many are laid low by illness, and restored to health, who learn no lesson from their sick beds, and return again to the world, even as before. They receive no more spiritual impression from it than the beasts that perish.

But in the lives of many, sickness is God’s “day of visitation.” It is one of God’s most important subordinate instruments in saving sinners. It is often a means whereby He works effectually on the heart. The sickness of men’s bodies many times leads, in God’s good providence, to the salvation of their souls.

If sickness can help to make men think of God and their souls, then we have no right to murmur at it. We ought rather to thank God for it. It is God’s witness. It is the soul’s adviser. It is an awakener to the conscience. It is a purifier to the heart. It is a blessing and not a curse, a help and not an injury, a gain and not a loss, a friend and not a foe to mankind. So long as we have a world wherein there is sin, it is a mercy that it is a world wherein there is sickness.

### **SICKNESS AND OUR DUTY**

**1.** Because of the prevalence of sickness in the world, our first duty should be that of living daily prepared to meet God. In sickness we remember 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. “It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment” (*Heb 9:27*).

Sickness should cause us to prepare to meet God. We are never prepared to meet God till our iniquities are forgiven, and our sin is covered (*Psalms 32:1-2*). The blood of Jesus Christ can alone cleanse our sins away (*1 John 1:7*). The righteousness of Christ alone can make us acceptable in the sight of God (*2 Cor 5:21; Phil 3:8-9*). Faith alone, simple childlike faith, gives us an interest in Christ and His cleansing blood (*Eph 2:8-9*).

**2.** Because of the prevalence of sickness

in the world, we should be ready to bear it patiently. Sickness is 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 vocations, to see our plans broken off and our purposes disappointed, to endure long hours, days and nights of weariness and pain, all this is a severe strain on poor sinful human nature. Who would wonder that peevishness and impatience are brought out by disease!

Surely in such a dying world as this we should study patience. We should make a real business in our prayers to ask for strength to endure God’s will in our lives. We should seek and cultivate those passive graces of the Spirit: meekness, gentleness, longsuffering, faith, and patience. Never do these graces shine so brightly as in a sick-room. They enable many a sick person to preach a silent sermon, which those around them never forget. Would you adorn the doctrine you profess? Would you make your Christianity beautiful in the eyes of others? Then lay up a store of patience against the time of illness. Then, though your sickness be not unto death, it shall be for the “glory of God” (*John 11:4*).

**3.** Because of the prevalence of sickness in the world, we should be ready to feel with and help others. Sickness is never very far from us. Few are the families who have not some sick relative. 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, a mere expression of sympathy—these go a long way for good. These are the sort of things which bring people together and promote good feelings. These are ways by which you may ultimately lead others to Christ. These are good works to which every professing Christian should be ready. In a world full of sickness we ought to “bear one another’s burdens,” and be “kind one to another” (*Gal 6:2; Eph 4:32*). These things may appear small and trifling to some people. They must needs be doing something great, and grand, and heroic! But these little acts of brotherlykindness are one of the clearest evidences of having “the mind of Christ” (*Phil 2:4-5*). Consider the weight of these words at the judgment to come, “I was sick, and ye visited me” (*Math 25:36*).

### THREE CLOSING WORDS

1. 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, when you must sicken and die. The time may be near or far off. God only knows. But whenever the time may be, what are you going to do? Where will you turn for comfort? On what will you rest your soul? On what will you build your hope? Put not these questions away. Allow them to work on your conscience, and rest not till you can give a satisfactory answer. Trifle not with that precious gift, your immortal soul. Put not off the consideration of the matter to a more convenient season. Presume not on a death-bed 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.

There is no escaping the common lot of all mankind. Nobody can die in our stead. The day must come when we will each go to our long home. The body which now takes up so much of your attention, the body which you now clothe, and feed, and care for, that body must return to the dust. Oh think what an awful thing it will 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. "What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Mark 8:36-37).

2. Acquaint yourself with the Lord Jesus Christ without delay, and be converted. Seek your 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. Flee to the only Saviour, and cry mightily to Him to save your soul. Apply to Christ at once. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved" (Acts 16:31). Commit your soul into His keeping. Cry mightily to Him for pardon and peace with God. He will hear you. He said, "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out" (John 6:37). Put off repentance no longer. Seek the grace of God in Christ to break off from those sins, and turn away from them without delay.

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 without personal union with Christ Himself. Rest not till you have the witness of the Spirit in your heart that you are washed, and sanctified, and justified, and one with Christ. Rest not till 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 to Him against that day" (2 Tim 1:12).

A mere formal 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 vital union with Christ, Christ interceding for us at God's right hand, Christ known and believed as our Prophet, Priest, and King, Christ who alone can rob death of its sting and enable us to face sickness without fear.

Take every care and trouble to Him. He will keep you and carry you through it all. Pour out your heart before Him when your conscience is burdened. He is the true Confessor. He alone can absolve you and take the burden away. 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.

3. Christian, consider how much you may glorify God in your time of sickness, how much you may honor Him to lie quiet in His hand when you are ill. I know how ready the heart of a believer is to faint, and how busy Satan is in suggesting doubts and questions, when the body of a Christian is weak. I have seen something of the depression which 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, saying 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. Remember that Christ cares for you as much when you are sick as He does

when you are well, and that the very chastisement you feel so acutely is sent in love, and not in anger.

Lazarus was specially loved by Christ. He was a dear friend to the Savior. He was a true Christian, and an heir of glory. And yet Lazarus was sick! "He whom Thou lovest is sick" (John 11:3). Sickness is no sign that God has left us or is displeased. Sickness is intended for our good and God's glory. Lazarus' sickness "was for the glory of God" (John 11:4). "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose" (Rom 8:28).

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. God's people travel toward a world where there's no more sickness, where pain and crying are done with forever. Christ shall wipe away all tears from their eyes. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is Death (Rev 20:14).

In the meantime let us live a 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. 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 (2 Tim 1:10). He lives who said, "O death, I will be thy plagues: O grave, I will be thy destruction" (Hosea 13:14). He lives who will one day change our vile body, and make it like unto His glorious body (Phil 3:21). In sickness and in health, in life and in death, lean confidently upon the Lord Jesus Christ. ■

—Adapted from the writings of J.C. Ryle

## SICKNESS

### SICKNESS IS UNIVERSAL

Sickness 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, all 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 which 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 up the ailments by which our bodily frame may be assailed?

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. 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 preventible by anything that man can do. The average duration of life may be somewhat lengthened. The skill of doctors may continually discover new remedies, and effect surprising cures. But after all, whether in healthy or unhealthy localities, whether in mild climates or in cold, 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" (Psalm 90:10).

How do we account for the universal prevalence of sickness? What explanation