

Tuesday's Touch ...#38

...from Pastor Ed ...October 13, 2009

Sickness, Healing, and the Flesh - Part 1

A biblical view of present suffering.

I am the LORD who heals you... Exodus 15:26

Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits: who forgives all your iniquities; who heals all your diseases; ...Psalm 103:2-3

Pray for one another that you may be healed. James 5:16

For this thing I prayed to the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for you: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong. 2Corinth 12:8-10

No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for your stomach's sake and your frequent infirmities. 1 Tim 5:23

Trophimus have I left at Miletum sick. 2 Tim 4:20

The topic of sickness and healing must be germane to our consideration of the flesh. Every person suffers with various physical and psychological afflictions rooted in our physiology; and physical healing is not an infrequent topic in the Bible. Due, in part, to the disparity between the ministries of well known evangelists who claim to have the “gift of healing,” and staunch conservatives who deny any type of miraculous healing today, it has become a prominent issue of intrigue and sometimes heated debate among many Christians. It is important that any examination of this topic be framed squarely in the Bible's overall teaching about our current material body – *the flesh*. Failure to maintain the “big picture” will most certainly lead to seemingly logical, but biblically erroneous conclusions about healing.

As previously pointed out, the physical aspect of our humanity is as integral to being human as is the spiritual, and it has been corrupted by the fall. As a result, our present bodies are subject to afflictions, diseases, and eventually death. *Everyone dies* (biblical exceptions noted). Death is the perennial reminder that our redemption is not yet complete, historically speaking. Death is the *last* enemy to be defeated (Rom 15:26). The resurrection and glorification of the body *is* the consummate healing of the flesh (and that most certainly *is* “in the atonement”). Until then, *all* physical healing is partial and temporary.

However, though the flesh is corrupted and corruptible, Paul reminds us that even this falls out according to God's good purpose for the believer. All things are working together for His glory *and our good* (Rom 8:28). “All things” means *all* things. This is foundational to any proper perspective on healing. God is absolutely sovereign in the unfolding of every aspect of the Christian's life, including any suffering or affliction He may allow. Our spiritual maturity takes a giant leap forward once we understand and embrace this truth. Though we may not always see the good God is working, the scriptures clearly reveal it to be so and living faith embraces it. I point out a few of these “good things” that God is working in our suffering.

1. We have this treasure of eternal life in frail vessels of clay that God alone may receive the glory for any good worked in and through us (2 Corinth 4:7). His strength is perfected in our weakness (2 Corinth 12:9). Countless saints throughout history have glorified God *through* their brokenness. William Cowper, David Brainard, and many others were greatly used for God's glory though they struggled throughout their adult years with bouts of severe mental depression. Joni Erickson Tada's paraplegia has been a fruitful channel of grace to the blessing of others. Affliction reminds us that the

joy and contentment of the Christian life is not found in present physical or material prosperity, but by living to magnify God's great glory as we abide in Christ.

2. The trying of our faith is indispensable both to verify the genuineness of the Christian's conversion, and to expose spurious faith (1 Peter 1:6-7). By the winds of adversity He separates the wheat and the chaff (Psalm 1:4; Prov 10:25; Matt 3:12). The chaff is blown away from his trust in God while the wheat is drawn nearer and his faith deepened (James 1:1-7; Job 13:15; Habakkuk 3:17-18).

3. Each time the Lord bears us along causing us to persevere through adversity we gain an ever growing assurance of His faithfulness. As our "catalog of experiences" grows so does our hope, which is our trust in God's sufficiency for the trials of tomorrow, and the certainty of His promises for the future. (Rom 5:3-4 KJV; Rom 8:25)

4. Suffering is designed to make the saints better comforters of others (2 Corinth 1:3-4). We are much more apt to be comforted by someone who has actually experienced what we are going through. In fact we are encouraged to come to Jesus in our hour of need precisely because He has been where we are and is touched by the feelings of our infirmities (Heb 4:15-16).

5. The Lord uses adversity to restore his children when they have grown careless or have strayed too far from the path (Heb 12:7-8). It is important for us to remember that, for the child of God, "chastisement" is never "punishment," but loving correction. All of the believer's judgment for sin fell on Christ – we in no way can pay for our own sins. But a loving Father will not allow His children to wander too far. He will do whatever it takes to bring them to repentance, drawing them near again to Himself in love. If a professor of Christ is left to completely fall away, he is revealed to be an illegitimate child (Heb 12:8).

While the above is not an exhaustive list, it does show from scripture that God has His loving purposes in *all* the sufferings of His children; and that certainly includes times of sickness and disease.

And so, we find in the New Testament good and faithful servants who were afflicted in the flesh without a hint of it being due to their own sinfulness or lack of faith. Nor do we find any admonition to anyone to seek out someone with the "gift of healing" (1 Corinth 12:7-10; Phil 2:25-27; 1 Tim 5:23; 2 Tim 4:20). So when someone says it is *never* God's will for the Christian to be sick or suffer – that it is solely the devil's work - they go far beyond the bounds of any reasonable hermeneutics.

Now all of this is *not* to deny that God heals. He most definitely does, and in *many* ways from the "natural" to the miraculous. But failure to keep this in a biblical context will promote false teaching which harms and does not heal. Such teaching will offer false hope, create needless guilt, will become man-focused rather than God-centered, will not cause the saints to glory in tribulation (Rom 5:3; 12:12, et al), and will focus more on the devil than on the glory of God and the truth that truly sets men free.

Stay tuned - there's much more to say...

Great Physician,

Your healing is absolute and complete, and we do with patience wait for it. Teach us, for now, the magnitude of your power which can work through our weaknesses; and grant us faith to lay hold of present gifts of healings when, in your mercy and wisdom, you extend them to us.

Praying for wisdom to discern the difference,

Amen

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