

Warnings and Encouragement

Sermons From Pastoral Rule, Book 3

July 03, 2016

I. Exhorting and encouraging those who are healthy and those who endure a lot of sickness,

A. Scripture concerning health and sickness

1. Exodus 15:26 . . . And [God] said, "If you will give earnest heed to the voice of the LORD your God, and do what is right in His sight, and give ear to His commandments, and keep all His statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you which I have put on the Egyptians; for I, the LORD, am your healer."
2. 3 John 1:2 . . . Beloved, I pray that in all respects you may prosper and be in good health, just as your soul prospers.
3. 2 Timothy 4:20 . . . Erastus remained at Corinth, but Trophimus (Trōph-ĩ-mus) I left sick at Miletus.
4. 2 Chronicles 16:12 . . . In the thirty-ninth year of his reign Asa became diseased in his feet. His disease was severe, yet even in his disease he did not seek the LORD, but the physicians.
5. John 9:1-3 . . . As [Jesus] passed by, He saw a man blind from birth. [2] And His disciples asked Him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he would be born blind?" [3] Jesus answered, "It was neither that this man sinned, nor his parents; but it was so that the works of God might be displayed in him."
6. 1 Corinthians 11:27-32 . . . Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord. [28] But a man must examine himself, and in so doing he is to eat of the bread and drink of the cup. [29] For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself if he does not judge the body rightly. [30] For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep. [31] But if we judged ourselves rightly, we would not be judged. [32] But when we are judged, we are disciplined by the Lord so that we will not be condemned along with the world.

B. Prayer

II. The Healthy

- A. Though the farmer must do the hard work of preparing the field, sowing the seed, weeding the field, and harvesting the crop, it is God who gives the sunshine and the rain, and it is God who makes the seeds break open

and sprout a plant that produces the fruit to be harvested. In other words, to get a harvest, the farmer must do a lot of hard work, but the harvest itself is a gift from God.

1. In a similar way, though we must do the constant work of drinking enough liquids, eating good food, exercising, wearing proper clothing to protect ourselves against the elements, and getting sufficient rest to get and maintain good health, the good health we have is a gift from God.
 2. And because good health is a gift from God, we have the responsibility to use our good health in ways that benefit Him, that is, that bring Him honor and advancing His purposes.
- B. Now you may be thinking, “Where does it say that in the Bible?” It doesn’t, at least not directly. Yet there are passages of scripture that make it clear we are to use God’s gifts for good, and specifically His good.
1. For example, in explaining His parable about being ready for His return (Luke 12:35-48), Jesus stated a principle that applies to everyone and to every gift or thing we are given. Jesus said, “From everyone who has been given much, much will be required; and to whom they entrusted much, of him they will ask all the more” (Luke 12:48).
 2. In His parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14-30), Jesus confirmed this principle. As you may recall, in that parable Jesus told of giving a specific amount of money to each servant with the expectation that each servant would manage the money given them until the master returned. Upon His return, the master asked each servant for an accounting.
 - a. The servants who used what they were given to earn a profit for their master, were praised and rewarded.
 - b. The servant who feared losing what money he was given and so hid it in the ground until his master’s return, thus returning no profit for the master, was condemned and punished.
 - c. Therefore, to fail to manage what we have been given by God so as to gain a profit for God, is a life-affecting failure. God’s expectation is that we will use His gifts for His benefit, regardless of how much we are given.
 3. In His parable about the Lamp (Luke 8:16-18), Jesus concludes with these words, “So take care how you listen; for whoever has, to him more shall be given; and whoever does not have, even what he thinks he has shall be taken away from him.”

- a. The point Jesus is making is that to wind up with nothing is not the result of something over which we have no control, but rather the result of not listening carefully and than acting according to what we were told.
 - b. In other words, if in spite of our good health we have no profit to present to our Lord Jesus Christ, it won't be because circumstances or people prevented us from gaining the kind of profit He seeks, but because we did not pay heed to and therefore follow His instructions on when, where, and how to earn a profit.
4. Paul puts a little different emphasis on this same principle, and I am confident you will get his point as I read what he said, "Instruct [those who are rich, or we could say, healthy] to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, [19] storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is life indeed" (1 Timothy 6:18-19).
- C. The point here is that if we have good health – that is, both mental and physical health – we have it because it has been given to us by God, and to whom much is given, much is required.
1. Therefore, I encourage all who have good health to use that good health to live a godly, caring, serving, charitable life – for the benefit of God.
 2. And as a warning, understand that if you do not gain profit for God when you can, the day will come when you will no longer be able to gain Him profit even though you wish you could.
 3. Therefore, pay heed to the scripture that says, "Behold, now is the acceptable time, behold, now is the day of salvation" (2 Corinthians 6:2).

III. The sickly

- A. According to the Bible, there are several reasons why some are sickly, or as I said at the beginning, why some endure a lot of sickness.
1. Some struggle with prolonged sickness or various sicknesses because of the discipline, or even punishment of the Lord. And in my opinion, this is true for the Christian and non-Christian alike, though Christians ought to be wiser about this because the scripture tells us what to expect.
 - a. One scripture that clearly states this is found in Deuteronomy 28:58-61, "If you are not careful to observe all the words of this law which are written in this book, to fear this honored and

awesome name, the LORD your God, [59] then the LORD will bring extraordinary plagues on you and your descendants, even severe and lasting plagues, and miserable and chronic sicknesses. [60] He will bring back on you all the diseases of Egypt of which you were afraid, and they will cling to you. [61] Also every sickness and every plague which, not written in the book of this law, the LORD will bring on you until you are destroyed.”

- b. Or as Paul states in Galatians 6:7-8. “Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. [8] For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.”
 - c. On the positive, discipline can change you side of this issue, we read in Proverbs 20:30 (Amplified Bible), “Blows that wound cleanse away evil, and strokes [for correction] reach to the innermost parts.”
 - d. God’s discipline is for the purpose of transforming us, not to make us miserable. The only purpose of the misery is to get our attention in hopes that we will listen and obey.
2. Some are sickly because they continue to take communion (the Lord’s Table) in an unworthy manner, that is, with known yet unconfessed and unrepented sin in their life (1 Corinthians 11:27-32).
 3. Some struggle with prolonged sickness or various sicknesses because even though their body is weak and prone to sickness, they do not seek the Lord for healing (2 Chronicles 12:16). And when I say they do not seek the Lord for healing, I mean this is two ways.
 - a. First, they do not repent of and put an end to the sin that is bringing God’s discipline or judgment upon them.
 - b. Second, they do not go to the elders or to the church as a whole to be prayed for. Or, instead of following the example of the widow with the unjust judge, they do not continue to plead with God for healing until the healing is given.
 4. Some are sickly because God wills to one day use their sickness to display His power and glory in them and through them (John 9:1-3). And though we do not know how to discern who fits this reason for a continued struggle with sickness, we do know that God – who works all things out for good – knows, and we can trust Him to fulfill His purpose in each of these situations.
 5. Some struggle with prolonged sickness or various sicknesses because God – who wisely and lovingly chooses what works best in each of

our lives – has chosen that method to transform us into the likeness of Christ, and to bring great benefit out of us for the rest of the Body of Christ.

- a. Surely this is affirmed by James 1:2-4, where James says that trials and tribulations bring about a transformation of faith and spiritual growth that leads to spiritual perfection.
- b. And we know from scripture that God uses hard times to bring about our spiritual development and growth.
 - (1) We read in Revelation 3:19, “Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline.”
 - (2) And we read in Hebrews 12:5-6, “My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor faint when you are reprovved by Him; [6] for those whom the Lord loves He disciplines, and He scourges every son whom He receives.”
 - (3) And Jesus said, “Every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit” (John 15:2).
- c. At this point I want to remind you that God uses the means that work best at getting your attention and urging you to cooperate with His transforming work. For some it is sickness, for some it is health, for some it is something that has nothing to do with sickness or health. But regardless of the method God uses, we are responsible to Him for how we respond to His work in us.
- d. I believe there are examples of those who have responded well to God’s transforming work through sickness, and their response has not only changed them, it has resulted in them giving gifts to the church that have led the church into a richer, stronger faith and deeper form of godliness.
 - (1) For example, Fanny Crosby struggled with blindness most of her life, yet look at the literature and hymns she left for the rest of us.
 - (2) Amy Carmichael is another example. She spent the last 20 years of her life in bed, yet during that time she wrote some of the richest and most mature Christian literature – and that to the benefit of us all.
 - (3) These are just two examples of believers who used their struggle with sickness to draw near to God and serve the rest of us. And though you may not be a poet or writer or musician, your attitude and example of faith and patience and care for others in the midst of your prolonged sickness can lead others to those same qualities of godliness.

- e. Therefore, if you struggle with sickness, listen carefully for any speaking from God – be it from His word, or a church leader, or directly from the Holy Spirit. And then, respond accordingly.
 6. Finally, I believe some are sickly for more than one of the previously stated reasons, and there are some who struggle with prolonged sickness for reasons we will never know or can even imagine in this life.
- B. Whatever the reason you may be experiencing a prolonged sickness or recurring bouts of sickness, I encourage you to look at several ways of dealing with your situation.
1. I believe it is always wise to go to God and implore Him to reveal the reason for being sickly so that if it has to do with discipline or judgment over sin or sins you are yet unaware you are committing, you can make the changes necessary and gain healing.
 2. It is always wise to follow the exhortation of 1 Corinthians 11:31, which is to judge yourself rightly. And if you need help in judging yourself rightly, begin by praying for wisdom and insight. Then ask a more mature believer to talk with you about your sickness in relation to how you are living your life.
 3. I encourage you to ask the elders and even the whole church to pray for your healing – though this may include confessing known sin.
 4. And should healing not come, embrace your sickness as God’s will, or even God’s gift, to be used by Him and by you to grow spiritually in ways and to degrees you would never grow without the sickness. And see if you can use your sickness to bless others in the church – possibly by teaching them to be patient, content, and confident that God is good and continuing to work all things out for good.

IV. Conclusion

- A. Everyone experiences both blessings and trials in this life. Yours may be good health or it may be prolonged sickness. In either case, neither the health nor the sickness sums up the totality of your life. You are much more than either one of those conditions, so take full advantage of your condition to gain stronger faith, greater godliness, a fuller knowledge of God, and ultimately, intimacy with God. Then, when life ends, you will be able to step into eternity with a glad heart and a joyful embrace of God – whom you were already embracing and drawing near to in this life regardless of your circumstances.