

Sickness and Health 3

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

Brothers and sisters, we're coming to the end of a series on sickness. The question tonight is: sickness or health? It concerns sickness or health for you and me. So tonight I will be summarizing some of the things that we said during the past two Sundays and perhaps trying to tie it together from the point of view of practical application. Now it might be good to begin with Romans 5:12 where we see plainly where God puts sickness: "Therefore as sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all men sinned."

Now death came through sin and death is the ultimate in sickness. So what God is plainly saying is that if there had been no sin, if there had been no independence of him in the race of mankind -- there would have been no sickness. So that's the basic position we start with.

Nevertheless, you know that though that is true in regard to the whole race of mankind, it is not necessarily true in every individual situation. Now Jesus pointed out that though sin generally is responsible for sickness, and so sickness is something that God opposes and does not want -- yet individually you cannot say that everyone who is sick has himself sinned.

You remember we found that in John 9:1 where Jesus deals with a man who had a congenital sickness. He was born blind: "As he passed by, he saw a man blind from his birth. And his disciples asked him, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?'"

So though sickness here was due to the original rebellion of man against God and though if man had never rebelled there never would have been any blindness, yet you see how Jesus answered as far as the individual is concerned. John 9:3: "Jesus answered, 'It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be made manifest in him.'"

So there are many individual sicknesses that are not due to the individual sin. Jesus emphasized this again in Luke 13:2. Luke 13:2 follows the same line that though sin in mankind was the cause of sickness, yet you cannot apply that in every individual case. Luke 13:2: "And he answered them, 'Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered thus?'"

So it's not fair to see someone who is under the weather with a cold and say, "This man has sinned worse than the rest of us." Jesus said plainly, "You cannot say right across the board that every individual who is sick has sinned." Yet it is true that that is sometimes the case.

That's what Jesus was really saying: it's not always the case that the individual has sinned, but sometimes that has caused his sickness. Sometimes it is God trying to point out some sin in an individual that is really the cause of the sickness. Now, you find that in 1 Corinthians 11:30. Some of these verses we mentioned in the last two talks.

1 Corinthians 11:30: "That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. But if we judged ourselves truly," that is if we really thoroughly examined our own lives, "we should not be judged." This implies that when you become sick and ill you are sometimes being judged and not being punished. Jesus bore all the punishment for our sins. God doesn't punish us with sickness but he judges us sometimes with sickness.

Sometimes he says, "Okay, look at this part of your life. It's not right." "But when we are judged by the Lord, we are chastened so that we may not be condemned along with the world." (Verse 32) So sometimes God uses sickness in order to point out some sin in us -- "that we may not be condemned along with the world." It's not to punish us. It's not to condemn. So it's to save us from a blindness to a certain sin that is developing in our lives.

Yet it's good to see you see that sickness is not brought by God. Sickness is caused by sin and by Satan. Whenever you're oppressed by sickness, you're not being oppressed by God but you're being oppressed by Satan himself. It's simply that God uses Satan's work at times to point out certain things.

Now, that isn't always the case. Sometimes God wants us to move into a new position of Christ-likeness. So he allows a weakness or sickness to come upon us. You find that in Hebrews 5:8 in regard to Jesus himself. Jesus, you remember, was without sin at all. God himself said that. Yet Hebrews 5:8 says: "Although he was a Son," and a perfect Son, you can see that from the capital S, God's only Son, "Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered." So there's a place for God allowing weakness and sickness to come upon us in order to bring us into a new place of Christ-likeness.

So sometimes he allows it to point out a positive thing. Sometimes he allows it to bring us into a new place of Christ-likeness. It's mentioned again in 2 Corinthians 12:7. There's a clear example of that happening in one of God's greatest saints. This man you remember said, "In Christ we are more than conquerors through him that loved us." (Romans 8:37) This is the man who said, "I can do all things in Christ." (Philippians 4:13) This is the man who said, "Who shall deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord." (Romans 7:24-25) Yet this man said in 2 Corinthians 12:7: "And to keep me from being too elated by the abundance of revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan, to harass me, to keep me from being too elated." So at times God allows sickness to come upon us in order to bring us into a new position of Christ-likeness.

It is true that in Exodus 15:26, God promised his people if they obeyed his laws and commandments, to keep them from many sicknesses that the Egyptians have suffered. So it is true, brothers and sisters, that there is sufficient emphasis in the Bible on health as a result of obeying God. There is also sufficient emphasis on the need to confess our sins in order that we should be healed. We are to seriously examine ourselves when we come into sickness and say, "Lord, I know this may not mean that I've sinned. But does it? Are you trying to point out some sin in my life?" Certainly if God does not point out any sin then we should say, "Father, what new position of Christ-likeness do you want me to come into?"

Maybe we should look, brothers and sisters, just for a few minutes at God using sickness to bring us into a new position of Christ-likeness. In other words, sickness in regard to God's work and in regard to his workers and preparing his workers. Maybe we could look back at the basis of God's power over sickness.

Isaiah 53:4-5 talks about this: "Surely he has borne our griefs," -- that is, as you see when you look at footnote "x", "sicknesses." "Surely he has borne our sicknesses and carried our sorrows." You see the footnote "y", "or pains." The Hebrew is "pains." "Surely he has borne our sicknesses and carried our pains; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was

wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that made us whole, and with his stripes we are healed.”

Now there it says plainly that Jesus bore our sins and he also bore our sicknesses. Yet the Holy Spirit does apply the benefits of Christ’s atonement in regard to those two facts differently, doesn’t he? Jesus bore our sins so that for any of us that confess our sins to God, God forgives those sins and removes them from us. But it seems different with sicknesses, doesn’t it? Even though Jesus has borne our sicknesses and God is free to lift all our sicknesses from us, it does seem that at times the Holy Spirit applies that particular benefit of Christ’s atonement differently.

You can see some of the reasons why leaving sin in our lives would never glorify God. Any time a person confesses a sin, God deals with it and removes it right away. He doesn’t always remove sneezes, or remove sickness. Sometimes he leaves the sickness and it seems that he can glorify himself through a sickness. But he can’t glorify himself through a sin.

I think it’s important, brothers and sisters, to see that there is nothing that God cannot do. Jesus has already borne our sins and borne our sicknesses. But it is the Holy Spirit’s right and prerogative to apply the benefits of that bearing by Jesus according as it will glorify God. And sometimes when he leaves a sickness upon a person for a little longer – the Holy Spirit is able to glorify the Father.

Now you can see that in 2 Corinthians 12:10 again in regard to Paul: “For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities; for when I am weak, then I am strong.” Somehow it is possible in sickness to say, “When I am weak, then I am more strong. When I am at my weakest the power of Jesus is most powerful in me.” Whereas you can’t say, “When I am most sinful then I am most holy.”

So there is a real difference. Even though Jesus has borne both sin and sickness on the cross for us, yet the Holy Spirit always removes one of them when we confess it. But the other at times he will leave upon us because this can often glorify the Father and can often enable us to say, “When I am really most weak then I am really strongest.”

Yet it is important never to accept sickness as one of God’s workers, never to accept it unquestionably -- because it is a work of Satan. You should never accept any work of Satan unless God very clearly explains to you that, “I want you to bear this for a little.” Now that’s important, brother and sisters. I think too many of us pray away there and ask God to heal us. He doesn’t heal us so we say, “Oh well, I’ve just to bear this. This is God’s will for me.”

Now, God does not work in us by default. We do not assume God’s will through silence. We do not assume it is God’s will because we hear nothing from him. The only reason you should ever accept the sickness is if God clearly tells you that this is his will.

Now you can see that in Paul’s experience there in that same chapter, 2 Corinthians 12:8. Paul is saying, “Three times I besought the Lord about this,” -- probably some sickness of the eyes -- “that it should leave me; but he said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’” And then Paul says, “I will all the more gladly boast of my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.”

But do you see that God specifically said to Paul, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” In other words, God explained it to him, “This is going to glorify me -- what you’re experiencing.”

I think it’s very important for us to see that, so that we don’t condemn a person who is walking under sickness and yet so that we do not easily accept sickness. Loved ones, it is significant that it’s God’s giants in the Bible that bore sickness over a long period of time. So let us be careful before we say, “God is allowing me to bear this sickness that I may serve him better or may glorify him better.” It is God’s giants that bear sickness as a normal run of their lives over a long period of years.

Nevertheless, it is important to see that they do it. There are some other examples beside Paul. If you look at 2 Timothy 4:20, you’ll see a reference there. It is important, brothers and sisters, to see this -- otherwise you’re driven into absolutism in healing. That is, you say, “If you had enough faith you’d be healed.” That’s enough to drive a person insane if you beat them with that law. So it’s important to see there are definite instances in the New Testament where God did ask someone to walk in sickness. Yet it’s important to see that it did not interfere with their work, and that they were real spiritual giants at that time.

2 Timothy 4:20: “Erastus remained at Corinth; Trophimus I left ill at Miletus.” Now it should also deliver us from this business of, “Why don’t you heal if you’re an apostle of God?” If Paul, with all his power, left Trophimus ill at Miletus, then we can’t get each other over the barrel in this kind of way. If you drive yourself into absolutism as far as healing is concerned, you really will back yourself into a corner that will spoil all blessings from God. So it is important to see that there are instances in the Bible of this.

1 Timothy 5:23, is another one: “No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments.” I mean, why didn’t Paul just heal Timothy? So it is vital for us to see that God has allowed sickness in some situations. But I think before we get ourselves lined up with old Timothy, Trophimus, and Paul we ought to really check: are we maybe that stature and is God really allowing that sickness to come upon us? Or is it our own stubbornness that will not deal with God over what is wrong in our lives?

So our general attitude should be not one of getting ourselves onto a rack: “If this sickness is left upon me then I’m not getting through to God.” But rather, “This could be the Father’s will but it’s more than likely not.” God’s normal will for his children is for them to be well. So we should pray like this: “Father, is there anything wrong in my life that has opened me up to this sickness?” Really, that should be our attitude rather than just accepting the thing.

It seems the normal attitude is stated in 3 John 1, and you find that that’s really God’s will for us. 3 John 1:2: “Beloved, I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in health; I know that it is well with your soul.” That’s praying according to God’s will: “I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in health.”

Along these same lines is 1 Thessalonians 5:23: “May the God of peace himself sanctify you wholly; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” God’s normal will for his children is health, and we need to be very clear that it is not otherwise.

Nevertheless, do you see that we should not look upon sickness as something terrible? I've said often to you: would you treat the law as a dear friend? We should love the law. We children of God should love the law. We should not grind under the law. We should not be glad we don't have to obey the law. We should love the law because the law is God's list of symptoms that show us when we're lacking his light of the Spirit flowing through us.

So it is with sickness. When sickness comes we should not treat it as something terrible. We should see it's something that is lovingly filtered down to us by a dear Father, and that dear Father will not give us more than we're able to bear. We should see that.

It's in James 5:11 that God says that: "Behold, we call those happy who were steadfast. You have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful."

God only allows sickness to come upon us for a certain purpose. So we need to accept it in that light and receive it from him in that light. Not accept it as a permanent will for us but receive it as something that is filtered down to us by a Lord that is compassionate and merciful. Yet we need to go before him and say, "Lord, why has this come upon us?"

I suggested last Sunday that we should never be preoccupied with our sickness. Watchman Nee describes a friend of his who, when he got sickness, he really enjoyed it. "I know a brother who always expected love and kindness from others. Whenever people inquired after his wellbeing he habitually responded with complaints about his physical weakness. He would give a detailed report of how many minutes he suffered from fever, how long it was he had the headache, how many times a minute he breathed, and how irregular was his heartbeat. He was continually in discomfort. He loved to tell people of his stress so that they might sympathize with him. He had nothing to relate except his tail of endless sickness and at times he wondered why he was never healed."

Well, even if God is showing us something through sickness, or even if God has said to us, "This sickness is my will for you for a little while," we should never emphasize the sickness. We should never talk about the sickness. We should be looking up to the Father.

You might say, "Does that mean we should tell a lie?" There's an interesting example in 2 Kings 4:18-21: "When the child had grown, he went out one day to his father among the reapers. And he said to his father, 'Oh, my head, my head!' The father said to his servant, 'Carry him to his mother.' And when he had lifted him, and brought him to his mother, the child sat on her lap till noon, and then he died. And she went up and laid him on the bed of the man of God, and shut the door upon him, and went out." Then Verse 25, "So she set out, and came to the man of God at Mount Carmel. When the man of God saw her coming, he said to Gehazi his servant, 'Look, yonder is the Shunammite; run at once to meet her, and say to her, Is it well with you? Is it well with your husband? Is it well with the child?' And she answered, 'It is well.'" And it was well that she had absolute faith that God was in charge of the child's life and that this man of God would be used by the Father in a way that would bring about his will.

But it is interesting to see that God's word obviously agrees with that. You don't talk about your sickness. You deal with God about it and you commit the whole thing to him and you don't fret, and you don't talk to everybody about your sickness. It does seem, brothers and sisters, that you can tell a prayer of faith in a person by whether they delineate in great detail what their sickness is, or whether they glory in the fact that Jesus has borne their sicknesses. You really can.

You can tell whether a man or a woman is going in God's direction by how they pray. If they pray under the sickness all the time, then you can be sure that there is something of Satan's deception in them, and they are really in some way preoccupied with the sickness, and they are really in some way glorying in the sickness -- because it brings them a lot of attention.

But when God's people are rightly related to Jesus about a sickness, they don't mention the sickness much. They glory in the health that is streaming down from Jesus. That's really God's will, whether the sickness is for pointing out a sin inside you, or whether it is pointing out a new position of Christ-likeness in you, or whether it is to keep you from being too proud, or to keep you close to God yourself. Yet in all of those three instances, God's will is for us to glory in his healing, and to glory in the fact that he has the thing under control, and what is happening is known by him and is being controlled by him.

Now what should we do in seeking healing when sickness comes upon us? What should be our attitude? First of all, don't get all over-anxious and run here, there, and everywhere for remedies. That's the first thing. Don't do what most of us do. Don't do that. Satan has gotten us used to that. That's one of the reasons we experience so little healing, relatively speaking, in the bodies of Christ -- because we're all used to running to the doctor immediately for a remedy. So don't be over-anxious, and don't run for quick remedies from anybody.

Second step: examine yourself. That's it. Under the Holy Spirit's light examine yourself: "Father, I thank you for this sickness. I thank you that it has been allowed to come upon me for a purpose. It may have been caused by a virus of some kind. But you obviously allowed this to come upon me. Now thank you for that."

"Now, I want to examine myself before you, and Father, I want you to show me in your word through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit if there's any sin in my life." Then if there's no sin stay before the Father maybe several days, praying, "Father, is there a new position of Christ-likeness that you want me to come into? Is there new light and new revelation that I have to receive?" Stay before the Father until he shows you.

When he shows you, deal with him over it. Don't leave it there. If he's getting at you over a lack of care about your sleeping habits, put them right. If he's getting to you over the way you eat, put that right. If he's getting to you over tension or strain that you're enduring because some part of your life is not fully surrendered to him, get that right. Whatever it is, get it right.

If he's getting at your prayer life, then put your prayer life right. Whatever it is God is highlighting, put it right and then thank him for healing. Because once the cause is removed the healing will follow.

God always will remove the sickness if the cause of the sickness is removed. If you want any help in it, it's good just to look up to God, to look to his power, and see that there's no question of his power, no question that he is able to heal. There's an example in Mark 9:21-23. Some people came to Jesus and this question came up of his power to do a thing. So you need to establish yourself firmly on that fact first -- because sometimes the sickness seems to be so heavy upon us that we wonder at times, "Well, can God do anything with this?"

Mark 9:21: "And Jesus asked his father, 'How long has he had this?' And he said, 'From childhood.

And it has often cast him into the fire and into the water, to destroy him; but if you can do anything, have pity on us and help us.” And it’s unusual for Jesus to use this kind of strength and really almost rebuke the man: “And Jesus said to him, ‘If you can! All things are possible to him who believes.’”

So it’s good to look directly to the power of God and say, “Father, this is in your power.” It’s good to look to the will of God. It’s good to look to his general will for you. It’s referred to in Mark 1:40-41. You ought to establish it with a word of scripture because so often Satan on sickness can make us doubt. Mark 1:40-41: “And a leper came to him beseeching him, and kneeling said to him, ‘If you will, you can make me clean.’ Moved with pity, he stretched out his hand and touched him, and said to him, ‘I will; be clean.’” That’s Jesus’ will.

Unless Jesus very clearly explains to you, “It’s not my will to heal you,” -- it’s his will to heal you. Notice you don’t take it for granted that it’s not God’s will to heal because you’re not getting anywhere. That’s walking by sight. Walking by faith is, “Lord, I know it’s your will to heal me. I accept that.” And only if God very clearly explains to you as he explained to Paul after beseeching him three times -- only then do you say, “Well, perhaps God, you want me to be under this for a while.”

Then the third step that is important is in Mark 11:23-24: “Truly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, “Be taken up and cast into the sea,” and does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says will come to pass, it will be done for him. Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.”

We said that hope is belief that God will undoubtedly do something. Faith is belief that he has already done it. So the third step is -- after looking to God’s power and looking to his will -- accepting healing. You still have a pain in your back -- that’s sight back there. You don’t walk by sight. You don’t walk by removal of symptoms. You walk by a faith that the thing has happened, and you walk that way with your eyes on Jesus and not on the sickness -- until it pleases God to remove the symptoms.

Now brothers and sisters, that is the approach we should take now inside the body in regard to sickness. If it’s God’s will that we should take a little wine for our stomach’s sake, if it’s God’s will and he guides us to a doctor or to drugs of some kind -- alright that’s for him to guide us that way. But his normal will for us is that we would receive healing directly through the life of Jesus. Yet you can see that that’s something we need to deal with individually and honestly in regard to him.

Now dear ones, I think we should stop and you should ask questions, if you have any.

[Question -- inaudible]

You remember, John 9:3, Jesus said, “It is not that this man sinned or his parents but that the works of God might be made manifest in him.” We touched on it last Sunday. It seems to me that it was the power of Jesus to heal even a congenital illness -- that Jesus had complete power to heal -- and that that is where God is normally glorified in the sickness. That’s why it’s normally not his will for us to lay under sickness permanently. It is only on a rare occasion with a giant of his that he is glorified in the continual sickness. God is normally glorified by the removal of the work of Satan -- not by the continuation of the work of Satan.

[Question inaudible]

I see. This is the man who was born blind. You're asking: If any man is filled with the Holy Spirit and believes completely that God will heal his sickness, why does he remain sick?

All I can say is -- I'm going along the lines that I explained -- that the Holy Spirit can only apply the benefits of Christ's bearing of the sickness, in the light of our honesty about our sin, or about the new Christ-likeness into which God wants us to enter, or in the light of the fact that sometimes God asks a man to walk with sickness as he did Paul, and Trophimus, and Timothy. In other words, according to that man's dealing with God.

If that man is walking in the fullness of the Spirit and walking into all the light, then his sickness will be lifted from him unless God wants him to walk as he wanted Paul to walk. But that is an abnormal situation, dear ones.

Question: What position is a child of God in if he turns to medicine to remove the sickness?

It seems to me, brother, that first of all we have to withdraw from any position that would suggest that we condemn such a person because otherwise you'd have to condemn Paul and his advice to Timothy about a little wine for a stomach sickness. So we cannot condemn each other for going to medicine. Nevertheless, I think we should see that medicine is like the law. The law is there to restrain sin in the world so that the redeeming grace of God can go to work to hold the world back from chaos and disorder. So medicine is primarily in the same position in regard to sickness. It's to keep the world from being destroyed by plagues and tremendous diseases. It's not God's primary will but it is certainly his permissive will. So medicine is primarily for the unbeliever, or for holding back sickness in a situation. Really, the believer is to go to Jesus.

But we should be very wise and see that God will always deal with us according to our situation and our state. Sometimes some of us are so proud in our faith and have been so strong in condemnation of others who did not trust God, that God makes us go to medicine. Or at times God may have some work for us to do. I have known hospitals that were blessed, brother, by some brother or sister in Christ being in that hospital. So there are situations like that. So again, it's as with absolutism in sickness: we should teach strongly what is God's normal way, but we should not dare to condemn a person who does not come into that normal pattern because God can move as he wishes.

[Question inaudible]

That's right. The Father deals with us according to our situations, right? Obviously it would be most obvious that the Father would expect you -- if Paul gave Timothy instructions to use something that would stimulate the juices in his stomach -- then undoubtedly God would certainly agree with us massaging the heart and doing what natural things we know in order to keep the person alive. So obviously, God deals with us according to our particular situation. Nevertheless, I do believe if more of us really trusted to Jesus to pour down his life in emergency situations, the life would come down like that.

Question: What should our attitude be to vaccinations?

Could you go to some other church? {Laughter} That's good brother, that's good. I've been on this

campus for five years and I've never been in this position. At least I can say you're a professor and not a student. I don't know. At least I've the confidence to say that. Ushers could you keep this man out of the church? {Laughter} It would seem to me that one undoubtedly is up against lots of influences of environment in regard to that question.

For instance, in Ireland because we lived there the whole TB {tuberculosis} situation was utterly different from here in Minnesota. It was really a fearful disease certainly when I was in high school. I can see that was partly because you're taking part in the sinfulness or the sinful and sick atmosphere around you and you cannot avoid it. You're born to parents with this kind of thing. I can see how you're laboring under an environmental predisposition to a disease that some people maybe in another country or another part of the world are not laboring under. So I can see that in some things you're fighting against a general sickness. You're sharing in the sickness of the world.

Now in that regard, obviously one could liken it in some way to the congenital blindness of the person in John. So I'm sure that that would influence what God would have people do with their children. I'm sure that one would have to accept that God has provided some medical means of counteracting this kind of environmental influence. Now at the same time I would have to hold that if the Father put one of us in Iran with children in a situation that was very open to this kind of sickness where vaccination was not possible, I'm quite sure the Holy Spirit would give the strength and the immunity that would normally proceed through vaccination. So I think that I would walk somewhere between those two positions. Has anyone any light on it?

(End of tape)