

<b>Series:</b> Healing	<b>Reference:</b> Acts 19:11-22	<b>Title:</b> Sanctification Thru Sickness?	<b>Date:</b> 01.6.18
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Francis McNutt said, "When we say that God sends sickness or asks us to endure it, we are creating for many people an image of God they must eventually reject." How can we begin bring our view on sickness & healing in line with how Jesus viewed it is our question to wrestle with in this sermon.			

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#### TITLE SLIDE UP FIRST

Acts 19:11-22 - *God did extraordinary miracles through Paul, <sup>12</sup>so that even handkerchiefs & aprons that had touched him were taken to the sick, and their illnesses were cured & the evil spirits left them. <sup>13</sup>Some Jews who went around driving out evil spirits tried to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who were demon-possessed. They would say, "In the name of the Jesus whom Paul preaches, I command you to come out."*

*<sup>14</sup>Seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, were doing this. <sup>15</sup>One day the evil spirit answered them, "Jesus I know, and Paul I know about, but who are you?" <sup>16</sup>Then the man who had the evil spirit jumped on them & overpowered them all. He gave them such a beating that they ran out of the house naked & bleeding.*

*<sup>17</sup>When this became known to the Jews & Greeks living in Ephesus, they were all seized with fear, and the name of the Lord Jesus was held in high honor. <sup>18</sup>Many of those who believed now came & openly confessed what they had done. <sup>19</sup>A number who had practiced sorcery brought their scrolls together & burned them publicly. When they calculated the value of the scrolls, the total came to fifty thousand drachmas. <sup>20</sup>In this way the word of the Lord spread widely & grew in power.*

*<sup>21</sup>After all this had happened, Paul decided to go to Jerusalem, passing through Macedonia & Achaia. "After I have been there," he said, "I must visit Rome also." <sup>22</sup>He sent two of his helpers, Timothy & Erastus, to Macedonia, while he stayed in the province of Asia a little longer.*

We're not going through this passage verse by verse, rather we'll use the concepts as a springboard to talk about an issue vital to Christian formation. An issue somewhat confusing for folks with a secular western world view. One which sets the Christian faith apart from the rest. If you'd like to read something on this subject, read Ken Blue's, *Authority to Heal*, much of his thinking & words are in this series. For the next few weeks we'll use the concepts in this passage to explore healing.

We will center around three questions: Does God care about our soul, but not our body? Is sickness a form of suffering to be endured? Are we to accept sickness as a testing, or refining blessing, from God?

Sometimes our theology needs healing - our own thinking about God, can hold us back from experiencing the power & abundant life he wants for us. What sets our message apart & validates it, from all the rest?

Obviously, there are the differences in our theology with other religions. The crucified/resurrected Christ is unique to our faith. Christianity is unique in its message of Grace. That's clear. But what else validates our message, what shows it to have transforming power above all the others? Ken Blue pastored a church in a very needy area. He was one church among many other ministries in the area. They all prayed, fasted & preached, but they were all largely ineffective. After a while he wondered what set them apart. **This is what he writes:**

*“A unique difficulty we faced on our mission field was that we were just one of literally dozens of religious groups there. All of these groups preached the virtues of their various gurus & saviors. From the general community's point of view, little separated them from us. While we could point to our Holy Scripture, our prophets, our conversion experience, our community of love, acceptance & social responsibility, so could they. When we sat down with leaders from these other groups to discuss truth questions & the rational support for our beliefs, we won the day convincingly. But this seemed not to matter. We did everything humanly possible to define our distance from the other groups in order to present the unique saving gospel of Jesus Christ. But we lacked, as the Lausanne Committee for Evangelism pointed out, “signs to validate our evangelism.”<sup>1</sup>*

We should notice that when Jesus tells his followers to preach the Kingdom of God, he also commanded them to heal the sick & cast out demons (Lk 9:1-2; 10:8-9; Mt 10:7-8; Mk 6:12-13). Therefore logic would tell us that if we do one, but ignore the other, we're not running on all cylinders. When a car doesn't run on all cylinders you feel it; it runs roughly & loses power. The Church likewise, loses power when we ignore or gloss over these issues of power & healing. But, why do we do that? Why aren't we comfortable in the area of healing & demonic activity? Many of us have come from backgrounds which may talk little of the Holy Spirit, let alone healing. Others come from different backgrounds which may have put too much emphasis on such things & not on others. Either way, we wouldn't be running on all cylinders.

*Here's an ancient prayer to consider: “From cowardice which shrinks from new truth, from laziness which is content with half-truth, from arrogance which thinks it knows all truth, O God of Truth, deliver us.” - author unknown -*

*We're in danger in our relationship with the living God if we think we know it all, avoid new revelations from the Lord & become content with only part of the story. So, what's different about the Gospel message than all others out there? I put forth, we serve a*

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<sup>1</sup> pp15, *Authority to Heal*, Ken Blue.

living active God who cares about & intercedes in the physical nature of the universe. God heals & delivers.

Sometimes our theology of God is insufficient or faulty either in theory or practice; our theology needs healing before we can experience these issues of healing & power available to the Church. There are four theological roadblocks in which we need to address: (1) *Sanctification through Sickness*, (2) *Divine Determinism*, (3) *Faith Formula*, and (4) *The Secular World View*.

Let's walk through these four views taking one a week for the next four weeks. Beginning with, *Sanctification through Sickness* - Francis MacNutt explains this well:

*“When we say God sends sickness or asks us to endure it, we're creating for many people an image of God they must eventually reject. What human mother or father would choose cancer for their daughter in order to tame her pride? Those preachers & chaplains who try to comfort the sick by telling them to accept their illness as a blessing sent from God are giving an immediate consolation, but at what an ultimate cost! In a sense, we unwittingly treat God as something like a pagan deity, placated by human sacrifice.”<sup>2</sup>*

Our thinking's influenced by our history & don't realize how much. The idea of sanctification through sickness can be traced back to the persecution of the Church under Rome in the 2nd & 3rd centuries. Early Christians, rightly so, found dignity & purpose in suffering; they learned to value it as something which built up their faith & purified the Church. Through suffering, they rejoiced & others who were not truly walking with the Lord left the faith - addition by subtraction.

Tertullian declared; *“The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church.”*

Suffering became so valued there arose a sort of cult of martyrdom between the years AD 100-300. And in a sense, a good thing, was perverted & became the status symbol of the Church.

Three classes arose in the Church: (1) Outcasts who compromised to avoid suffering, (2) The majority who didn't suffer much persecution, and (3) The “Confessors” who were imprisoned, or martyred, for their faith - The Super-Christians!

But under Constantine persecution halted; Christianity was elevated & guarded in its status; Christians became the privileged class.

This caused two things in the Church: (1) Its moral & spiritual standards dropped, and (2) Without persecution they lacked the means to attain martyrdom or ‘Confessor’ status - addicted to that status, how did they become the Super-Christian without outside persecution?

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<sup>2</sup> (Francis MacNutt, *The Power to Heal*, Notre Dame, Ave Maria Press, 1977, pp. 139-40)

Well, some fled to the desert & practiced asceticism - to deny the body certain pleasures, or needs, in order to build the spiritual character of a person. So, the idea was, without state-sponsored persecution they had to persecute themselves. They practiced prolonged fasting, flogging, sitting on the top of columns, isolation, sleep deprivation, exposure to the elements, etc. Naturally, sickness developed, which became, for some, synonymous with suffering. Sickness - the new way to martyrdom, or 'Confessor' status.

This was compounded in the 3rd & 4th centuries by Greek philosophy which believed the material universe (the body) as evil & only spiritual things as good. Therefore, anything which punished the body was seen as a strong & welcomed spiritual practice. This thinking greatly influenced & fertilized the thinking of the new martyrs/ascetics.

With sickness becoming a new form of persecution & seen as valued, prayer for sickness became less important & interpretation of the passages on physical healing changed. They were now seen, not as addressing physical healing, but in terms of healing the soul. In the 16th century the Church of England, in the office of visitation, wrote: *"Wherefore, whatsoever your sickness is, know you certainly that it is God's visitation...that your faith may be found in the day of the Lord laudable, glorious & honorable...or else it be sent unto you to correct & amend in you whatsoever doth offend the eyes of your heavenly Father."*

Now God was viewed as the one bringing sickness on a person & you were to endure it as a good Christian as 'suffering'. It was God's Visitation. You were to just pray & realize he must have some reason for it. Maybe it was discipline. When I discipline my children, I clearly state why I'm doing so. If not, I'd be raising frightened traumatized children. To punish without clarity, or without end, would be evil of me as a father. It'd in no way educate them in what's good. Such unclear & unfair discipline would cause my children to think their own father cruel & make them resent me. Has our fear of new truth, laziness in half truth, or pride in thinking we know all truth, made us resent God? How many times do we get angry with him for a sickness because deep down we, in some way, think He's rejoicing in making us sick & unwilling to give us reason?

It's true, sickness sometimes is sent on God's people, by God, for the purpose of correction; however, it's rare & not normative. And, the reason seems *always* clear with a promise of healing when behavior's finally amended. Paul, in Acts 9, was struck blind, which proved integral in his salvation, but was healed thereafter. In 1 Corinthians 11, sickness & death was visited on the Corinthian church; a remedial punishment for their grave sin. When they'd stop sinning against the Lord's Supper, there was a promise of healing. And, we must remember their choices brought this on themselves, not God's pleasure in it. In this case the sickness was to be viewed as nothing but a strong encouragement to stop sinning; it was educational.

Some may teach sickness is a cross-bearing endeavor sounding really pious. However, cross-bearing in the Scriptures is always voluntary; active not passive (Mt 16:24; Lk 9:23). Sickness is neither voluntary, nor active; it's always passive.

Some teach it's a 'test' sent from God. However, tests are only valid if, you learn the reason for the test & whether it's been passed or failed. But, rarely does the person teaching sickness as a test can, or does, explain to the sick person what the test is for & if they've passed or failed. Of course, we know God uses all things for good for his children (Romans 8:28), that we don't deny. But, it doesn't say we should receive sickness passively, as if it's God's sadistic will. Nor should we pursue it as some valid form of suffering. We should always fight against it by the means Christ gave his people.

We must realize suffering & sickness in New Testament terminology are distinctly separate. The English language lumps them into the same category, which is unfortunate. Only once does the New Testament refer to a sickness, which some say was epilepsy, in Matthew 17:15, as suffering, but in that case the sickness is ascribed to demonic forces. And, in Mark 5:26 the woman's suffering isn't ascribed to her sickness, but to her treatment under physicians. In the NT we're told suffering has value, but are never told the same of sickness.

In James 1:2, we're told to *consider it pure joy...whenever you face trials of many kinds*. But in James 5:14-15 it says that, *if any of you is sick, he should call the elders to pray & the prayer, offered in faith, will make the sick person well*. The NT teaches us to endure suffering, but always to pray for healing in sickness. Jesus never viewed sickness as anything but bad & never dealt with it in any way but to heal it.

Some would claim Paul's 'thorn in the flesh' in 2 Corinthians 12:7 was a sickness. But that's unclear. To justify that claim, in light of all the other evidence on the issue in the NT, would be formidable. If we look at the term 'thorn in the sides', in light of the OT Scriptures we find out, it always refers to the harassment & persecution with Israel's neighbors (Numbers 33:55; Joshua 23:13; Ezekiel 28:24) The OT term 'thorn in the flesh' refers to persecution, not sickness - Paul, an educated theologian, would know that when using the term. And, the context of Paul's speaking in 2 Corinthians 12, has to be seen in the light of the previous two chapters where he speaks of being persecuted by false prophets, and political & religious authorities. So, for Paul, a 'thorn in the flesh' is akin to our modern expression of 'a pain in the neck'.

In conclusion: (1) Sometimes our theology must be healed before our bodies can. We must realize we don't have a God who rejoices in making people sick. He's a god who heals, delivers & brings life. (2) Sanctification through sickness doesn't seem to be a Scriptural view. (3) Suffering has value, sickness doesn't. (4) Sickness isn't a cross to bear, nor a test of character; although God will use all things to strengthen you. (5) Rarely sickness does come as an impetus to deal with sin in God's people, but also seems always to come with a promise of healing. There's no indication there's pleasure in His doing so. (6) An interactive powerful God who heals & delivers validates our message of Grace.

Next week we'll look at the second theological roadblock to our understanding of God as interactive in our affairs; Divine Determinism. You're probably left with more questions

than answers. We'll get to them as best we can, realizing, not all questions can be answered to total satisfaction. As we clear out these weeds of theological roadblocks, I'm praying it'll open the way to cultivating an understanding of the Holy Spirit's power in our lives further. Going beyond the past work of Christ & into the current power-filled work of the Spirit. Not developing an unhealthy focus on healing ministries, but a focus on the Living Christ who's interactive in the world now, through his Word & Spirit. To become more natural in our living relationship with the Holy Spirit, reliant on him in faith.