

## B - Illness

*Illness: a condition or tendency regarded as abnormal or harmful to an individual.*

### 1. Why do we die?

*A. Because of original sin, all people get sick and die.*

*Gen 2:16-17:* God told Adam that if he ate of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, he would die.

*Gen 3:14-24:* The curse: Because of Adam and Eve's sin, God multiplied women's pain of childbirth, made them subject to their husbands, made men toil for food, and made them return to the ground, i.e. die. He banned man and woman from the Garden and tree of life, thereby sentencing them to death. *Gen 3:6:* Adam and Eve's sin was much deeper than just eating forbidden fruit. They believed that the tree was good for food, a delight to the eyes, and desirable to make one wise. Their act was a sign of their rebellious hearts which corrupted their relationship with God:

*1 John 2:16-17:* For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. And the world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God abides forever.

Eating the fruit was a sign that their hearts were already corrupt, that the sin of the world had consumed them. They lost contentment and lusted for more than what God had given them. They wanted to be God.

*B. We all follow Adam's example and sin. We also die because of our own sin.*

*Rom 5:12:* Therefore just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all men sinned.

*Rom 6:23:* For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus, our Lord.

Sin has no place in God's realm, and it has to die before we can be united with Him. In order to redeem us, He had to curse us. He has to take us through pain and death to bring us to life.

### 2. If we are all destined to die, by God's plan, is death the enemy?

Death has different meaning for the saved and unsaved. To the unsaved, death indeed is the enemy. There is nothing good about death. If they don't believe in God, then it is an end of everything, and they lose all. If they do believe, then it is encompassed by fear of judgment and punishment, in short, of hell. In fact, even God hates His creation to die and go to hell:

*Ezekiel 18:30-32:* For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone who dies, declares the Lord God, therefore repent and live.

However, to the godly, death is not to be the enemy. We are called to be aliens to this world (1 Peter 2:11); this is not our home. Like Paul, we can look forward to our death as the final step in our journey to God, our hope for the future:

*Phil. 1:21:* For me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

Even God longs for our return to Him:

*Psalm 116.15:* Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His godly ones.

In fact, Psalm 116 illuminates the terror of death to the unsaved (vs. 3, 8) as opposed to the joy of death to the saved (vs. 15). The saved have already gone through death. We died to our old selves when we became Christians and were reborn in Christ. Therefore for us there is no more death.

### **3. What about illness? From where does it come, and what is its purpose?**

#### **Historical views of disease:**

##### Religious magical:

Based primarily on animism, people believed that disease was caused by evil gods, human enemies with supernatural powers, or spirits of dead people, animals, or plants. Healing occurred through magical rituals and charms.

##### Hippocratic ecological:

This Greek view was based on a desire to systematically understand nature. Based on Hippocrates' doctrine of four humors, disease was considered to be an internal imbalance or discordance with nature. As for healing, "Nature heals; the physician is only nature's assistant." Hippocrates also considered humans to be often causative in their own diseases: "there would have been no need for medicine if sick men had profited from the same mode of living and regimen of food and drink as men in health."

##### Church period:

Based on Old Testament and Jesus' teaching, early Christians held a view of disease similar to the Hippocratic view, but they considered God, not nature, to be the ultimate healer. The early church considered healing to be a spiritual gift, and through prayer, sought to heal the ill. Caring for the sick became a sacred obligation, ruled by compassion (Matt. 25:31-46, esp. vs. 36,43).

The first hospitals were Christian, devoted to "gather in the sick from the streets and to nurse wretched sufferers, wasted with poverty and disease." They were organized and run by the churches.

With the collapse of the Roman Empire, healthcare and medical knowledge moved to monasteries. Their purpose can be summarized as follows (a rule from a sixth century Italian monastery):

"I insist, brothers, that those who treat the health of the brethren should fulfill their duties with exemplary piety. Let them serve with sincere study and help those that are ailing, as becomes their knowledge of medicine, and let them look for their reward from Him who compensates temporal work by eternal wages. Learn, therefore, the nature of herbs, and study diligently the way to combine their various species for human health, but do not place your entire hope on herbs, nor seek to restore health only by human counsels. Since medicine has been created by God and since it is He who gives back health and restores life, turn to Him."

##### Biomedical period:

In the 1100's and 1200's, the church began to forbid that its clergy attend to people's physical needs, relegating their duties to only spiritual needs. This change was based on a growing dualism in Christianity, which included the belief that the body is of no importance to people's spiritual well-being.

The dichotomy between religion and medicine grew during the Renaissance, as science flourished outside the church. Religion and science began to compete. The church and scientists disassociated themselves from one another. The dualism was complete. Physical issues were to be addressed by science, and spiritual issues by the church. Medicine, having made great advances through science, followed its secularized course. Healing was removed from the church. (Interestingly, faith healing gained a resurgence in the twentieth century, though it has been based in the church, and with little science involved, as it has often been considered opposing to scientific healing).

#### Biblical view:

##### *A. God is the ultimate source of illness and health.*

*Deut 32:39:* See now that I, I am He, and there is no God beside me. It is I who put to death, and give life. I have wounded, and it is I who heal. And there is no one who can deliver from my hand. (also *Ex. 15:26, Job 5.17-18*)

##### *B. Sin, both original sin and man 's current sin, have caused all death, disease, suffering, and lack of wholeness.*

Consider, as noted above, Adam and Eve's sin, the resultant curse, and Paul's statements that, since all men have sinned, the curse applies to us as well.

##### *C. What about specific disease?*

According to the biopsychosociospiritual model, illness results from disruption in any of these aspects of life. Since these areas of our lives are not isolated from one another, the whole person is affected. Examples of illness resulting from these different areas include:

Physical: infectious disease, genetics

Psychological: depression, anxiety

Social: enmities, strife, jealousy, disputes, dissension, factions

Spiritual: resulting from sin: hatred toward others, lack of forgiveness for others, alcoholism, drugs, STD's, gluttony

Many of these areas are summarized in *Gal 5:19*.

#### **4. Why do we get sick, or why don't we get well sometimes?**

##### *A. There is sin in our life that is making or keeping us ill.*

*(Deut. 28:15, 27-28, 35; 2 Chron. 21.12-19; Psalm 107.17; Prov. 6:12-15)*

*Psalm 38:1-8:* vs. 3: There is no soundness in my flesh because of Thine indignation; there is no health in my bones because of my sin. For my iniquities are gone over my head; as a heavy burden they weigh too much for me.

*Psalm 31:10:* My strength has failed because of my iniquity, and my body has wasted away.

Our physical health can be deeply tied to our spiritual lives and our sin. God is not necessarily punishing us, but He does often allow the consequences of our sin to reap what our sin sows. He allows this cycle in order to draw us back to Him. Examples: alcoholism, drug addiction, STD's, gluttony.

B. *We don't ask God for healing, or we don't have faith that He can heal us.*

*2 Chronicles 16:12-13:* And 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. So Asa slept with his fathers, having died in the forty-first year of his reign.

Asa did not seek the Lord for healing. As in other areas of his life (vs. 7&9), he was estranged from God. He trusted in the world, and the world failed him.

*Matt. 17:14-18:* And I brought him to your disciples, and they could not cure him. And Jesus answered and said, "O unbelieving and perverted generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring him here to me." And Jesus rebuked him, and the demon came out of him, and the boy was cured at once.

Either the disciples or the father or both didn't have faith, and the boy was not cured. But because of Jesus' faith, and the father's faith in Him, the boy was cured.

C. *God has a higher purpose.*

God is always weighing our good- be it physical, spiritual, psychological, or social. Because physical wellness is only one component of our wholeness, sometimes we must be physically unwell in order to be more whole. Ultimately our spiritual health is most important because it is eternal. The others are merely temporal.

*Some examples of God's higher purpose:*

1. Illness leads to redemption.

*Isaiah /9:22:* And the Lord will strike Egypt, striking but healing; so they will return to the Lord, and He will respond to them and will heal them.

2. Illness leads to greater wholeness. (example: Job)

*James 1:2-4:* Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

*Phil. 3:8-1/:* More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish in order that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith, that I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.

Illness identifies us with Christ. It humbles us. It reminds us that Christ lives within us. Through illness and trials and suffering, we become more complete, more whole, more Christ-like, and more easily able to identify with God.

### 3. Illness, and its healing, glorifies God.

*Matt. 15.30-31*: And great multitudes came to Him, bringing with them those who were lame, crippled, blind, dumb, and many others, and they laid them down at His feet; and He healed them, so that the multitude marveled as they saw the dumb speaking, the crippled restored, and the lame walking, and the blind seeing, and they glorified the God of Israel.

*John 9:1-3*: And as He passed by, He saw a man blind from birth. And His disciples asked Him, saying, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he should be born blind?" Jesus answered, "It was neither that this man sinned, nor his parents; but it was in order that the works of God might be displayed in him."

God sometimes allows our illness to worsen to the point where only a miracle can heal the person. God then provides such a miracle, resulting in His glorification.

### 4. Illness helps us to minister to others.

*2 Cor. 1.3-7*: Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort; who comforts us in all our affliction so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For just as the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance, so also our comfort is abundant through Christ. But if we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; or if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which is effective in the patient enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer; and our hope for you is firmly grounded, knowing that as you are sharers of our sufferings, so also you are sharers of our comfort.

Only people who have gone through a specific illness or trial can truly relate with others who suffer from the same.

### 5. So what do we do to be healed?

#### A. *Seek reconciliation with God and repent of any sin.*

*Hosea 6:1*: Come let us return to the Lord, for He has torn us, but He will heal us, He has wounded us, but He will bandage us.

*Psalm 51.2-3*: Wash me from my iniquity, cleanse me from my sin, for I know my transgressions, and my sin is before me.

vs. 8: Let the bones which Thou hast broken rejoice.

vs. 10: Create in me a clean heart, oh God.

*Psalm 38:18*: For I confess my iniquity

vs. 22: Make haste to help me, O Lord, my salvation!

These verses show the authors to be in some form of illness, realizing that their sin was causative or associated with the illness, and they returned to the Lord in repentance in order to reestablish a relationship with Him and be healed.

*B. Believe that God can heal.*

*Matt 9:20-22:* The woman with the hemorrhage was healed because of her faith.

We must trust in God, not in ourselves, not in our doctors. Doctors are merely God's instruments. Have faith that God is our healer.

*C. Trust that God is sovereign, and He knows what is best for us.*

*Deut 32:39:* See now that I, I am He, and there is no God beside me. It is I who put to death, and give life. I have wounded, and it is I who heal. And there is no one who can deliver from my hand.

We must have faith that God is sovereign, and He loves us. Therefore, He wants what is best for us. If it is in our best interest to be healed, He will heal us. If remaining ill serves a higher purpose, He will comfort us and show us why we are remaining ill.

## **6. Application:**

*A. Remember that God is the source of all healing, not us.* Patients have faith in someone. Most faith these days is not in God, but in the healing power of doctors, modern medicine, and technology.

When patients give up faith and hope, they die. Therefore, we must decrease, so that God may increase (John 3:30). We must attribute all healing to God when relating with our patients, never taking the credit. We must restore their faith in God and reduce their faith in us, except as tools of God.

*B. We must examine the whole person,* taking into account spiritual, social, and psychological as well as physical aspects of their lives, in order to correctly diagnose and thereby know how to treat. We must not be afraid to address spiritual matters when they are involved, as well as encourage their spiritual health. On the other hand, do not be too quick to attribute someone's sickness to sin or lack of faith, realizing that often a patient's illness has other purposes, such as leading others to God.

*C. We must remember that sometimes people are meant to be sick or die,* and sometimes they are meant to be well. God knows what's best, so our greatest commission is to seek Him and follow His will. This task becomes difficult for health care providers we are devoted to healing people.

*D. We must assess people's spiritual well being* because their view of death depends on this. If they are not Christians, then death is the enemy, and our goal is to draw them to Christ before they die. If they are Christians, then we must encourage them with the hope of eternity with God, realizing that death may be the greatest of friends.