

J.C. Ryle:

"The one You love is sick." [John 11:3]

The chapter from which this text is taken from is well known to all Bible readers. In lifelike description, in touching interest, in sublime simplicity, there is no writing in existence that can compare with that chapter. A narrative like this is to my on mind one of the great proofs of the inspiration of Scripture. When I read the story of Lazarus, I feel "There is something here which the unbeliever can never account for." "This is nothing else but the finger of God."

The words which I chiefly dwell upon in this chapter are especially moving and instructive. They record the message which Martha and Mary sent to Jesus when their brother Lazarus was sick: "Lord, the one You love is sick." That message was short and simple. Yet almost every word is deeply suggestive.

Note the child-like faith of these holy women. They turned to the Lord Jesus in their hour of need, as the frightened infant turns to its mother, or the compass needle turns to the North Pole. They turned to Him as their Shepherd, their almighty Friend, their Brother born for adversity. As different as they were in natural disposition, the two sisters in this matter were entirely agreed. Christ's help was their first thought in the day of trouble. Christ was the refuge to which they fled in the hour of need. Blessed are all they that do likewise!

Note the simple humility of their language about their brother Lazarus. They call him, "The one You love." They don't say, "He who loves You, believes in You, serves You," but "The one You love." Martha and Mary had a deep understanding of God. They had learned that Christ's love towards us, and not our love towards Christ, is the true basis of hope, and the true foundation of faith. Blessed, again, is everyone who has learned these same truths! To look inward to our love towards Christ is painfully unsatisfying: to look outward to Christ's love towards us is peace.

Note, lastly, the touching circumstance which the message of Martha and Mary reveals: "Lord, the one You love is sick." Lazarus was a good man, converted, believing, renewed, a friend of Christ, and an heir of glory. And yet Lazarus was sick! Therefore, sickness is not a sign that God is displeased. Sickness is intended to be a blessing to us, and not a curse. "We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose." [Romans 8:28] "The world, life, death, the present or the future--all are yours, and you are of Christ, and Christ is of God." [1 Corinthians 3:22-23] I say again, blessed are those who have learned this! Happy are those who can say, when they are sick, "This is my father's doing. It must be good."

I invite the attention of my readers to the subject of sickness. The subject is one we ought frequently to look squarely in the face. We cannot avoid it. You don't have to be a prophet to see sickness coming to each one of us some day. Let us turn aside for a few moments, and consider sickness as Christians. Reflection on it will not accelerate its coming, and by God's blessing, the examination of sickness, may teach us wisdom.

In considering the subject of sickness, three points appear to me to demand attention. On each I will say a few words.

I. The "universal prevalence" of sickness and disease.

II. The "general benefits" which sickness bestows on mankind.

III. The "special duties" to which sickness calls us.

VI. The "universal prevalence of sickness"

I don't need to dwell very long on this point. To elaborate on the proofs of it would only be multiplying self-evident truths, which the majority of people already acknowledge.

Sickness is everywhere. In Europe, in Asia, in Africa, in America; in hot countries and in cold, in civilized nations and in savage tribes--men, women, and children get sick and die.

Sickness is found in all classes. Grace does not lift a believer above the reach of it. Riches will not buy exemption from it. Rank cannot prevent its assaults. Kings and their subjects, Presidents and their people, masters and servants, rich men and poor, educated and uneducated, teachers and students, doctors and patients, ministers and their congregation, all alike go down before this great foe. "The wealth of the rich is their fortified city." [Proverbs 18:11] A man's house is called his castle; but there are no doors and barricades which can keep out disease and death.

Sickness comes in a variety of ways. From the top of our head to the sole of our feet we are prone to disease. Our capacity of suffering is something fearful to contemplate. Who can count up the ailments by which our bodies may be attacked? It is not so amazing to me, that men die so soon, as it is that they should live so long.

Sickness is often one of the most humbling and distressing trials that can come upon men and women. It can turn the strongest into a little child, and make him feel helpless. It can unnerve the boldest, and make him tremble at the sound of a leaf being blown by the wind. The connection between body and mind is curiously close. The influence that some diseases can exercise upon the mood and spirits is very great. There are diseases of the brain, the liver, and the nerves, which can bring down a Solomon in mind to a state little better than that of a baby. He who wants to know to what depths of humiliation man can fall, has only to spend a little time on sick-beds.

Sickness is not preventable by anything that man can do. The average duration of life may doubtless be somewhat lengthened. The skill of the doctor may continually discover new remedies, and accomplish remarkable cures. The enforcement of wise sanitary regulations may greatly lower the death rate in a country. But, after all--whether in healthy or unhealthy localities--whether in mild climates or in cold--whether treated with home remedies or modern medicines' latest drug--men and women will get sick and die. "The length of our days is seventy years - or eighty, if we have the strength; yet their span is but trouble and sorrow, for they quickly pass, and we fly away." [Psalm 90:10] That witness is indeed true. It was true 3,300 years ago. It is still true.

Now what can we make of this great fact--the universal prevalence of sickness? How shall we account for it? What explanation can we give of it? What answer will we give to our inquiring children when they ask us, "Father, why do people get sick and die?" These are grave questions. A few words on them will not be out of place.

Can we suppose for a moment that God created sickness and disease at the beginning? Can we imagine that He who formed our world in such perfect order was the Creator of needless suffering and pain? Can we conceive that He who made all things "very good," made Adam's race subject to sickness and death?

The idea is, to my mind, revolting. It introduces a grand imperfection into the midst of God's perfect works. I must find another solution as to the origin of sickness to satisfy my mind.

The only explanation that satisfies me is that which the Bible gives. Something has come into the world which has dethroned man from his original position, and stripped him of his original privileges. Something has come in, which, like a handful of gravel thrown into the midst of machinery, has marred the perfect order of God's creation. And what was that "something?" I answer, in one word, it is sin. "Sin entered the world . . . and death through sin." [Romans 5:12] Sin is the cause of all sickness, and disease, and pain, and suffering, which prevail on the earth. They are all a part of that curse which came into the world when Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit and fell. There would have been no sickness, if there had been no fall. There would have been no disease, if there had been no sin.

I pause for a moment at this point, and yet in pausing I do not depart from my subject. I pause to remind my readers that there is no ground so untenable as that which is occupied by the Atheist, the Deist, or the unbeliever in the Bible. Boldly, I say that it requires far more faith to be an atheist than to be a Christian. Boldly, I say, that there are numerous and obvious facts in the condition of mankind, which nothing but the Bible can explain, and that one of the most striking of these facts is the universal prevalence of pain, sickness, and disease.

In short, one of the greatest difficulties in the teachings of Atheists and Deists, is with the physical body of man.

Surely you have heard of Atheists. An Atheist is one who professes to believe that there is no God, no Creator, no First cause, and that all things came together in this world by mere chance. Now shall we listen to such a doctrine as this? Go, take an Atheist to one of the excellent surgical schools of our land, and ask him to study the wonderful structure of the human body. Show him the matchless skill with which every joint, and vein, and valve, and muscle, and sinew, and nerve, and bone, and limb, has been formed. Show him the perfect adaptation of every part of the human body to the purpose which it serves. Show him the thousand devices for confronting wear and tear, and replenishing the daily loss of strength. And then ask this man who denies the existence of a God, and a great First Cause, if all this wonderful system of components is the result of chance? Ask him if it came together at first by luck or accident? Ask him if he thinks about the watch he looks at each day, and the bread he eats, of the coat he wears? Oh, no! Design is an insurmountable difficulty in the Atheist's way. "There is a God."

You have certainly heard of Deists. A Deist is one who professes to believe that there is a God, who made the world and everything in it. But He does not believe the Bible. "A God, but no Bible! A Creator, but no Christianity! This is the Deist's creed. Now, shall we listen to this doctrine? Go again, I say, and take a Deist to a hospital, and show him some of the awful handiwork of disease. Take him to the bed where lies some tender child, scarcely knowing good from evil, with an incurable cancer. Send him to the ward where there is a loving mother of a large family in the last stage of some excruciating disease. Show him some of the agonizing pains and sufferings which flesh has inherited, and ask him to account for them. Ask this man, who believes there is a great and wise God who made the world, but cannot believe the Bible--ask him how he accounts for these traces of disorder and imperfection in his God's creation. Ask this man, who sneers at Christian theology and is too wise to believe the fall of Adam--ask him to explain the origin of the universal prevalence of pain and disease in the world. You will ask in vain! You will not get a satisfactory answer.

Sickness and suffering are insurmountable obstacles in the Deist's way. "Man has sinned, and therefore man suffers." Adam fell from his original position of joy and bliss, and therefore Adam's children get sick and die.

The universality of sickness is one of the indirect evidences that the Bible is true. The Bible explains it. The Bible answers the questions concerning it which will originate in every inquiring mind. No other systems of religion can do this. They all fail here. They are silent. They are confused. Only the Bible looks the subject directly in the face. It boldly proclaims the fact that man is a fallen creature, and with equal boldness proclaims a vast corrective system to meet his needs. I am forced to conclude that the Bible is from God. Christianity is a revelation from heaven. "Your word is truth." [John 17:17]

Let us stand firm on the old ground, that the Bible, and the Bible only, is God's revelation of Himself to man. Don't be moved by the many new assaults which modern skepticism is making on the inspired Word of God. Don't be concerned about the difficult questions which the enemies of the faith are fond of raising about Bible difficulties, and to which perhaps you often feel unable to give an answer. Anchor your soul firmly on this safe principle--that the whole book is God's truth. Tell the enemies of the Bible that, in spite of all their arguments, there is no book in the world which will bear comparison with the Bible--none that so thoroughly meets the needs of man--none that explains so much of the state of mankind. As to the difficult things in the Bible, tell them you are content to wait. You find enough obvious truth in the book to satisfy your conscience and save your soul. The difficult things will be cleared up one day. What you don't know now, you will know then.

II. The second point I propose to consider is "the general benefits which sickness confers on mankind."

I use that word "benefits" cautiously. I feel it is of the utmost importance to see this part of our subject clearly. I know well that sickness is one of the supposed weak points in God's government of the world, on which skeptical minds love to dwell--"Can God be a God of love, when He allows pain? Can God be a God of mercy, when He permits disease? He could prevent pain and disease; but He doesn't. How can these things be?" Such is the reasoning which often comes across the heart of man.

I reply to all such skeptics, that their doubts and questionings are most unreasonable. They might as well doubt the existence of a Creator, because the order of the universe is disturbed by earthquakes, hurricanes, and storms. They might as well doubt the providence of God, because of the horrible massacres that have occurred in history. All this would be just as reasonable as to doubt the mercy of God, because of the presence of sickness in the world.

I ask all who find it hard to reconcile the prevalence of disease and pain with the love of God, to focus their eyes on the world around them, and to note what is going on. I ask them to observe the extent to which men constantly submit to present loss for the sake of future gain--present sorrow for the sake of future joy--present pain for the sake of future health. The seed is buried in the ground, and rots: but we sow in the hope of a future harvest. Children are sent to school amidst many tears: but we send them in the hope of their getting future wisdom. The father of a family undergoes some fearful surgery: but he bears it, in the hope of future health--I ask men to apply this great principle to God's government of the world. I ask them to believe that God allows pain, sickness, and disease, not because He loves to torment man, but because He desires to benefit man's heart, and mind, and conscience, and soul, for all of eternity.

Once more I repeat, that I speak of the "benefits" of sickness on purpose and cautiously. I know the suffering and pain which sickness entails. I admit to the misery and wretchedness which it often brings. But I cannot regard it as an unmixed evil. I see in it a wise permission of God. I see in it a useful provision to check the ravages of sin and the devil among men's souls. If man had never sinned I would have been at a loss to discern the benefit of sickness. But since sin is in the world, I can see that sickness is good for man. It is a blessing quite as much as a curse. I admit that it is a rough schoolmaster. But it is a real friend to man's soul.

(a) Sickness helps to "remind men of death." Most people live as if they were never going to die. They follow business, or pleasure, or politics, or science, as if the earth was their eternal home. They plan and scheme for the future, like the rich fool in the parable, as if they had a long lease on life, and were not simply tenants whose length of stay is brief. A serious illness sometimes goes a long way to dispel these delusions. It awakens men from their daydreams, and reminds them that they have to die as well as to live. Now this I say emphatically is a mighty advantage of sickness.

(b) Sickness helps to "make men think seriously of God," and their souls, and the world to come. Most people when they are living in the days of health can find no time for such thoughts. They dislike them. They ignore them. They count them troublesome and unpleasant. Now a severe disease has sometimes a wonderful power of gathering and rallying these thoughts, and bringing them up before the eyes of a man's soul. Even a wicked king like Benhadad, when sick, thought of Elisha. [2 Kings 8:8] Even heathen sailors, when death was in sight, were afraid, and "All the sailors were afraid and each cried out to his own god." [Jonah 1:5] Surely anything that makes men think is good.

(c) Sickness helps to "soften men's hearts," and teach them wisdom. The natural [unsaved] heart is as hard as stone. It can see no good in anything which is not of this life, and no happiness except what is found in this world. A long illness sometimes goes a long way to correct these ideas. It exposes the emptiness and hollowness of what the world calls "good" things and teaches us to hold them loosely. The businessman finds that money alone is not the answer to everything the heart desires. The woman of the world finds that expensive clothes, and the reading of novels, and the accounts of grand parties and operas, are miserable comforters in a hospital room. Surely anything that causes us to alter our value of earthly things is a real benefit.

(d) Sickness helps to "level and humble us." We are all naturally proud and somewhat conceited. Few, even of the poorest class, are free from the infection. Few are to be found who do not look down on somebody else, and secretly flatter themselves that they are "not like other men." A sick bed is a mighty tamer of such thoughts as these. It forces on us the mighty truth that we are all poor debased creatures, that we "live in houses of clay," and are "crushed more readily than a moth!" [Job 4:19], and that kings and subjects, masters and servants, rich and poor, are all dying creatures, and will soon stand side by side in judgment, in front of God. In the sight of the coffin and the grave it is not easy to be proud. Surely anything that teaches that lesson is good.

(e) Finally, sickness helps "to test men's religion," showing what kind it is. Most people on earth have some kind of religion, yet few have a religion that will hold up under inspection. Most are content with traditions received from their fathers, and can furnish no reason for the hope that is in them. Now disease is sometimes most useful to a man in exposing the utter worthlessness of the foundation of his soul. It often shows him that he has

nothing solid under his feet, and nothing firm to hold on to with his hand. It makes him find out that, although he may have had a form of religion, he has, for all of his life, been worshipping "an unknown God." Many a belief looks good on the smooth waters of health, which turns out utterly unsound and useless on the rough seas of the sick-bed. The winter storms often bring out the defects in a man's house, and sickness often exposes the depravity of a man's soul. Surely anything that makes us find out the real character of our faith is good.

I do not say that sickness bestows these benefits to everyone who is overcome with illness. Sadly, I can say nothing of the kind! Every year an innumerable number are overcome with illness, and restored to health, who evidently learn no lesson from their sick-beds, and return again to the world. Myriads are yearly passing through sickness to the grave, and yet receive no more spiritual understanding from it than the animals that perish. While they live they have no feeling, and when they die, "they have no struggles." [Psalm 73:4] These are awful things to say. But they are true, The degree of deadness to which man's heart and conscience may attain, is a depth which I cannot pretend to understand.

But does sickness bestow the benefits of which I have been speaking on only a few? I will allow nothing of the kind. I believe that in very many cases sickness produces feelings and thoughts much like those of which I have just mentioned. I believe that in many minds sickness is God's "day of visitation"--the day He visits us, and that feelings are continually aroused on a sick bed which might, by God's grace, result in salvation. I believe that in heathen lands sickness often paves the way for the missionary, and makes the idolater listen to the good news of the Gospel. I believe that in our own country sickness is one of the greatest aids to the minister of the Gospel, and that sermons and teachings are often brought home in the day of disease which we have neglected in the day of health. I believe that sickness is one of God's most important secondary instruments in the saving of men, and that though the feelings it calls forth are often temporary, it is also often a means whereby the Spirit works effectually on the heart. In short, I firmly believe that the sickness of men's bodies has often led, in God's wonderful providence, to the salvation of men's souls.

I leave this branch of my subject here. It needs no further remark. If sickness can do the things of which I have been speaking (and who will contradict it?), if sickness in a wicked world can help to make men think of God and their souls, then sickness confers benefits on mankind.

We have no right to murmur at sickness, and grieve at its presence in the world. Rather we ought to thank God for it. It is God's witness. It is the soul's counselor. It is an stimulator to the conscience. It is a purifier to the heart. Surely I have a right to tell you that sickness is a blessing and not a curse--a aid and not an injury--a gain and not a loss--a friend and not a foe to mankind. So long as we have a world where there is sin, it is a mercy that it is a world where there is sickness.

III. The third and last point which I propose to consider, is "the special duties which the prevalence of sickness requires of each one of us."

I would be sorry to leave the subject of sickness without saying something on this point. I hold it to be of fundamental importance not to be content with generalities in delivering God's message to the souls. I am anxious to impress on each one who reads this paper, his own personal responsibility in connection with the subject. I desire that no one lay down this paper unable to answer the questions, "What practical lesson have I learned? What should I do in a world of disease and death?"

(a) One paramount duty which the prevalence of sickness requires of man, is that of "habitually living prepared to meet God." Sickness is a reminder of death. Death is the door through which we must all pass to judgment. Judgment is the time when we all must finally meet God face to face. Surely the first lesson which the inhabitant of a sick and dying world should learn should be to prepare to meet his God.

When are you prepared to meet God? Never till your sins are forgiven, and covered! Never till your heart is renewed, and your will taught to delight in the will of God! You have many sins. Only the righteousness of Christ can make you acceptable in the sight of God. Only faith, simple childlike faith, can give you an interest in Christ and His benefits. Are you prepared to meet God? Then where is your faith? Your heart is naturally unsuitable for God's company. You have no real pleasure in doing His will. The Holy Spirit must transform you into the image of Christ. Old things must pass away. All things must become new. Are you prepared to meet God? Then where is your grace? Where are the evidences of your conversion and sanctification?

I believe that this, and nothing less than this, is preparedness to meet God. Forgiveness of sin and being dressed to meet God--justification by faith and sanctification of the heart--the blood of Christ sprinkled on us, and the Spirit of Christ living in us--these are the grand essentials of the Christian faith. These are not mere words and names to furnish bones of contention for disputing theologians. These are sober, solid, substantial realities. To live in the actual possession of these things, in a world full of sickness and death, is the first duty which I press home to your soul.

(b) Another principal responsibility which sickness requires of you, is that of "living a life that is constantly ready to bear it patiently." Sickness is no doubt a trying thing to flesh and blood. To feel our nerves weakened--to be obliged to sit still and be cut off from all our usual pastimes--to see our plans destroyed and our purposes disappointed--to endure long hours and days, and nights of weariness and pain--all this is a severe strain on poor sinful human nature. Is it any wonder that irritability and impatience are brought out by disease! Surely in such a dying world as this we should study patience.

How will we learn to bear sickness patiently, when it is our turn to suffer sickness? We must lay up stores of grace in the time of health. We must seek for the sanctifying influence of the Holy Spirit over our undisciplined tempers and personalities. We must make a real business of our prayers, and regularly ask for strength to endure God's will as well as to do it. Such strength is to be had for the asking: "You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it." [John 14:14]

I cannot think it needless to dwell on this point. I believe the passive graces of Christianity receive far less notice than they deserve. Peace, gentleness, faithfulness, patience, are all mentioned in the Word of God as fruits of the Spirit. They are passive graces which especially glorify God. They often make men think, who normally despise the active side of the Christian character. Never do these graces shine so brightly as they do in the sick room. They enable many a sick person to preach a silent sermon, which those around him never forget. Would you beautify the doctrine you profess? Would you make your Christianity beautiful in the eyes of others? Then take the suggestion that I give you this day. Store up a reserve of patience for the day of sickness that is sure to come. Then, though your sickness does not end in death, it will be for the "God's glory." [John 11:4]

(c) One more principal responsibility which sickness requires of you, is that of "always being ready to feel with and help your fellowmen." Sickness

is never very far from us. There are only a few families who do not have some sick relative. Few are the church congregations where you will not find someone ill. But wherever there is sickness, there is a call to duty. A little timely aid in some cases--a kindly visit in others--a friendly inquiry--a mere expression of sympathy, may do a vast amount of good. These are the sort of things which soften bitterness, and bring men together, and promote good feelings. These are ways by which you may ultimately lead men to Christ and save their souls. These are good works to which every professing Christian should be ready to perform. In a world full of sickness and disease we ought to "Carry each other's burdens," and "be kind and compassionate to one another." [Galatians 6:2, Ephesians 4:32]

These things, I dare say, may appear to some ineffectual and trivial. They must always be doing something great, and grand, and striking, and heroic! Allow me to say that careful attention to these little acts of brotherly-kindness is one of the clearest evidences of having "the mind of Christ." They are acts in which our blessed Master Himself abounded in. He always "went around doing good" to the sick and sorrowful. [Acts 10:38] They are acts to which He attaches great importance in that most solemn passage of Scripture, the description of the last judgment. He says there: "I was sick and you looked after me." [Matthew 25:36]

Have you any desire to prove the reality of your love--that blessed grace which so many talk of, and so few practice? If you have, beware of callous selfishness and neglect of the sick around you. Search them out. Assist them if they need aid. Show your sympathy with them. Try to lighten their burdens. Above all, strive to do good to their souls. It will do you good even if it does no good to them. It will keep your heart from murmuring. It may prove a blessing to your own soul. I firmly believe that God is testing and proving us by every case of sickness within our reach. By permitting suffering, He tests whether Christians have any feeling. Beware, lest you be weighed in the balance and found wanting. If you can live in a sick and dying world and not feel for others, then you still have a lot to learn.

I leave this portion of my subject here. I throw out the points I have named as suggestions, and I pray to God that they may work in many minds. I repeat, that constantly being ready to meet God--constantly being ready to suffer patiently--constantly being willing to sympathize--are clear duties which sickness requires of everyone. They are duties within the reach of everyone. In naming them I ask nothing extravagant or unreasonable. I ask no man to retire into a monastery and ignore the duties of his occupation. I only want men to realize that they live in a sick and dying world, and to live accordingly. And I say boldly, that the man who lives the life of faith, and holiness, and patience, and love, is not only the most true Christian, but the most wise and reasonable man.

And now I conclude everything with four words of practical application. I want the subject of this paper to be turned to some spiritual use. My heart's desire and prayer to God in placing it in this volume is to do good to souls.

(1) In the first place, I offer a "question" to all who read this paper, to which, as God's ambassador, I plead for their most serious attention. It is a question which naturally grows out of the subject which I have been writing on. It is a question which concerns everyone, of every rank, and class, and condition. I ask you, What will you do when you are sick?

The time must come when you, as well as others, must go down the dark valley of the shadow of death. The hour must come when you, like all your forefathers, must sicken and die. The time may be near or far off. God only knows. But whenever the time may be, I ask again, What are you going to do?

Where do you plan to turn for comfort? On what do you plan to rest your soul? On what do you plan to build your hope? From where will you get your relief?

I plead with you not to ignore these questions. Allow them to work on your conscience, and do not rest until you can give them a satisfactory answer. Do not play with that precious gift, an immortal soul. Do not defer the consideration of the matter to a more convenient time. Do not presume on a death-bed repentance. The most important business surely ought not be left to the last. One dying thief was saved that men might not despair, but only one that none might presume. I repeat the question. I am sure that it deserves an answer. "What will you do when you are sick?"

If you were going to live forever in this world then I would not address you as I do. But it cannot be. There is no escaping the common lot of all mankind. Nobody can die in our place. The day must come when we must each go to the place where we will spend an eternity. I want you to be prepared when you face that day. The body which now takes up so much of your attention--the body which you now dress, and feed with so much care--that body must again return to the dust. Oh, think of what an awful thing it be in the end to have provided for everything except the one thing that was needful--to have provided for the body, but to have neglected the soul--to die, and "give no sign" of being saved! Once more I ask the question of your conscience: "What will you do when you are sick?"

(2) In the next place, I offer "counsel" to all who feel they need it and are willing to take it--to all who feel they are not yet prepared to meet God. That counsel is short and simple. Seek after the Lord Jesus Christ, and be saved.

Either you have a soul or you do not. Surely, you will never deny that you have one. Then if you have a soul, then seek that soul's salvation. Of all the gambling in the world, there is none so reckless as that of the man who lives unprepared to meet God, and yet puts off repentance. Either you have sins or you have none. If you have (and who will dare to deny it?), turn away from them without delay. Either you need a Savior or you do not. If you do, flee to the only Savior this very day, and strongly cry to Him to save your soul. Pursue Christ at once. Seek Him by faith. Commit your soul into His keeping. Cry mightily to Him for forgiveness and peace with God. Ask Him to pour out the Holy Spirit on you, and make you a true Christian. He will hear you. No matter what you have been, He will not refuse your prayer. He has said, "whoever comes to me I will never drive away." [John 6:37]

Beware, I beg you, of a vague and indefinite Christianity. Do not be content with a general hope that all is right because you belong to an old established church denomination, and that all will be well in the end, because God is merciful. Do not rest without a personal union with Christ Himself. Do not rest until you have the witness of the Spirit in your heart, and are washed, sanctified, justified, one with Christ, and Christ is in you. Do not rest until you can say with the apostle, "I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day." [2 Timothy 1:12]

Vague, and indefinite, and indistinct religion may seem to work fine in a time of health. It will never do in the day of sickness. A mere formal, mechanical Christianity may carry a man through the sunshine of youth and prosperity. It will break down entirely when death is in sight. Nothing will do then but real heart-union with Christ. Christ interceding for us at God's right hand--our Friend--Christ alone can rob death of its sting and enable us to face sickness without fear. He alone can deliver those who

through the fear of death are in bondage. I say to everyone who wants advice, Be one with Christ. If you are ever to have hope and comfort on the bed side of sickness, then be one with Christ. Seek Christ. Pursue Christ.

Take every care and trouble to Him when you are one with Him. He will keep you and carry you through everything. Pour out your heart before Him, when your conscience is burdened. He is the true Confessor. He alone can forgive you and take the burden away. Turn to Him first in the day of sickness, like Martha and Mary. Keep on looking to Him to the very last breath of your life. Christ is worth knowing. The more you know Him the better you will love Him. Be one with Jesus Christ.

(3) In the third place, I exhort all true Christians who read this paper to remember how much they glorify God in the time of sickness, and to "lie quiet in God's hand when they are sick."

I feel it is very important to touch on this point. I know how ready the heart of a believer is to faint, and how busy Satan is in suggesting doubts and questionings, when the body of a Christian is weak. I have seen something of the depression and despondency which sometimes comes upon the children of God when they are suddenly laid aside by disease, and obliged to sit still. I have noted how prone some good people are to torment themselves with morbid thoughts at such times, and to say in their hearts, "God has forsaken me: I am cast out of His sight."

I earnestly entreat all sick believers to remember that they may honor God as much by patient suffering as they can by active work. It often shows more grace to sit still than it does to go here and there, and perform great deeds. I entreat them to remember that Christ cares for them as much when they are sick as He does when they are well, and that the very chastisement they feel so acutely is sent in love, and not in anger. Above all, I beg them to remember the sympathy of Jesus for all His weak members. They are always tenderly cared for by Him, but never so much as in their time of need. Christ has had great experience with sickness. He knows the heart of a sick man. He used to see "every disease and sickness among the people" [Matthew 4:23] when He was on earth. He especially felt for the sick in the days of His flesh, and He especially feels for them now. Sickness and suffering, I often think, make believers more like their Lord in experience, than health would. "He took up our infirmities and carried our diseases." [Isaiah 53:4; Matthew 8:17] The Lord Jesus was a "Man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering." No one has such an opportunity of learning the mind of a suffering Savior as suffering disciples.

(4) I conclude with a word of "exhortation" to all believers, which I heartily pray that God would impress upon their souls. I exhort you to keep up a habit of close communion with Christ, and never to be afraid of "going too far" in your religion. Remember this, if you wish to have "great peace" in your times of sickness.

I observe with regret a tendency in some quarters to lower the standard of practical Christianity, and to denounce what are called "extreme views" about a Christian's daily walk in life. I remark with pain that even religious people will sometimes look coldly on those who withdraw from worldly society, and will censure them as "exclusive, narrow-minded, selfish, unkind, bitter," and the like. I warn every believer in Christ who reads this paper to beware of being influenced by such censures. I entreat him, if he wants light in the valley of death, to "keep himself from being polluted by the world," to "follow the Lord wholeheartedly," and to walk very closely with God. [James 1:27; Numbers 14:24]

I believe that the lack of "thoroughness" concerning many people's

Christianity is one reason for their lack of peace, both in health and sickness. I believe that the religion of "compromise," which satisfies many in the present day, is offensive to God, and sows thorns in dying pillows, which hundreds never discover until it's too late. I believe that the weakness and feebleness of such a religion never reveals itself so clearly as it does on a sick bed.

If you and I want to be "greatly encouraged" in our time of need, we must not be content with a barren union with Christ. [Hebrews 6:18] We must seek to know something of a heartfelt, experimental "communion" with Him. Never, never let us forget, that "union" is one thing, and "communion" another. Thousands, I fear, who know what "union" with Christ is, know nothing of "communion."

The day may come when after a long fight with disease, we shall feel that medicine can do no more, and that nothing remains but to die. Friends will be standing by, unable to help us. Hearing, eyesight, even the power of praying, will be fast failing us. The world and its shadows will be melting beneath our feet. Eternity, with its realities, will be looming large before our minds. What will support us in that trying hour? What will enable us to say, "I will fear no evil" ? [Psalm 23:4] Nothing, nothing can do it but close communion with Christ. Christ living in our hearts by faith--Christ putting His right arm under our heads--Christ sitting by our side--Christ alone can give us the complete victory in the last struggle.

Let us cling to Christ more closely, love Him more wholeheartedly, live to Him more thoroughly, copy Him more exactly, confess him more boldly, follow Him more fully. Religion like this will always bring its own reward. Worldly people may laugh at it. Weak brethren may think it extreme. But it will wear well. At the evening time of our lives it will bring us light. In sickness it will bring us peace. In the world to come it will give us a crown of glory that will never fade away.

The time is short. This world is passing away. A few more sicknesses, and it will all be over. A few more funerals, and our own funeral will take place. A few more storms and gales, and we will be safe in the harbor. We travel towards a world where there is no more sickness, where parting, and pain, and crying, and mourning, are done forevermore. Every year heaven is becoming more full of God's beloved children, and the earth more empty. The friends that have gone before us are becoming more numerous than the friends left behind. "In just a very little while, "He who is coming will come and will not delay." [Hebrews 10:37] In His presence will be fullness of joy. Christ will wipe away all tears from His people's eyes. The last enemy that will be destroyed is Death. But he will be destroyed. Death himself will one day die. [Revelation 20:14]

In the meantime let us live the life of faith in the Son of God. Let us lean all our weight on Christ, and rejoice in the thought that He lives forevermore.

Yes: blessed be God! Christ lives, though we may die. Christ lives, though friends and families are carried to the grave. He lives who abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light by the Gospel. He lives who said, "I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death. Where, O death, are your plagues? Where, O grave, is your destruction?" [Hosea 13:14] He lives who will one day change our vile body, and make it like His glorious body. In sickness and in health, in life and in death, let us lean confidently on Him. Surely we ought to say daily with one of old, "Blessed be God for Jesus Christ!"