

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **SICKNESS**

Sickness is the most commonly encountered thing in the human life. If we want to know the way to preserve our body in a condition that glorifies God, we must know the attitude that we should have toward sickness, how to utilize our sickness, and how to have our sickness healed. Since sickness is so common, we will inevitably have a great lack in our lives if we do not know how to deal with it.

### **SICKNESS AND SIN**

The Bible reveals that sickness and sin are closely related. The ultimate result of sin is death. Sickness lies between sin and death. Sickness is the issue of sin and the forerunner of death. If there were no sin in the world, there would surely be neither death nor sickness. One thing is certain: if Adam had not sinned, there would be no sickness today on the earth. Like other afflictions, sickness is brought in by sin.

We have a spiritual nature and a physical nature. Both of these were affected when man fell. The "soul" (for now, I will combine the spirit and the soul and call them one thing, the "soul") was damaged by sin, and the body was invaded by sickness. Sin within the "soul" and sickness in the body prove that man is destined to die.

When the Lord Jesus came to save, not only did He forgive man's transgressions, but He also healed man's sicknesses. He saved man's "soul" and also man's body. When He began His work, He healed man's sicknesses. When His work ended, He became an offering of propitiation on the cross for man's transgressions. He healed many sick people when He was on the earth. His hands were always ready to touch and raise the sick. Whether considering His own acts or the commandments He left to the apostles, the salvation that He brought always included the healing of sicknesses. His gospel is the forgiveness of sins and the healing of sicknesses. The two go together. The Lord Jesus saves man from sin and sickness so that man will know the love of the Father. Whether in the Gospels, the Acts, the Epistles, or the Old Testament, we can see that the healing of sicknesses and the forgiveness of sins go together.

Isaiah 53 is the passage in the Old Testament that explains the gospel most clearly. Many passages in the New Testament that speak of the Lord Jesus' redemption as being a fulfillment of prophecy make reference to Isaiah 53. Verse 5 says, "The chastening for our peace was upon Him,/And by His stripes we have been healed." Here we clearly see that the healing of the body and the peace of the "soul" are given to us at the same time. Another even more obvious point is the two different uses of the word "bear" in this chapter. Verse 12 says, "He alone bore the sin of many." Verse 4 says, "Surely He has borne our sicknesses." The Lord Jesus bore our sin, but He also bore our sicknesses. Just as we do not need to bear our own sin because the Lord Jesus has borne it, we do not have to bear our own sicknesses because the Lord Jesus has borne them. (However, the extent to which the Lord has borne sin and the extent to which He has borne sickness are somewhat different.) Sin has damaged our "soul" and our body. The Lord Jesus wants to save these two things. Therefore, not only did He bear sin for us, He also bore sicknesses for us. Hence, He will save us not merely from sin but also from sickness. The believers can now rejoice with David, saying, "Bless the Lord, O my soul...who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases" (Psa. 103:2-3). It is a pity that many believers can only give a partial praise because their salvation is partial. They themselves suffer pain, and God also suffers loss.

We should realize that if the Lord Jesus only forgives our sins without healing our sicknesses, His salvation is still not complete. Although He has saved our "soul," He still leaves our body behind to be dominated by sickness. Hence, when He was on earth, He took care of both things equally. Sometimes He forgave the sin first and then healed the sickness. At other times He healed the sickness before He forgave the sin. He gave to man according to what he could receive. If we study the Gospels, we will see that the Lord Jesus seems to have done more healing work than anything else. This is because it was harder for the Jews to believe in the Lord's forgiveness of sins than in His healing of sickness (Matt. 9:5). However, believers today are completely the opposite. In those days, men believed that the Lord Jesus had the power to heal sickness, but they doubted His grace to forgive sins. Believers today believe in His power to forgive sins, but doubt His grace to heal sickness. Believers seem to think that the Lord Jesus only comes to save people from sin, but they have forgotten that He is also the healing Savior. Man's unbelief always divides up a perfect Savior into two halves. Nevertheless, Christ is always and forever the Savior of man's "soul" and body. He forgives as well as heals.

To the Lord Jesus, it is not enough for a man to be only forgiven but not healed. Therefore, after He said to the paralytic, "Your sins are forgiven," He also said, "Rise, take up your bed and go to your house." To us, even though we are full of sin and sicknesses, it is enough as long as we receive forgiveness from the Lord—we should bear our own sickness or think of other ways for healing. But the Lord Jesus never intended for the man who was sick of palsy to be carried home again after he had seen the Lord and been forgiven of his sins.

The Lord Jesus' perception of the relationship between sin and sickness is different from ours. In our eyes, sin is an item of the spiritual realm; it is something God dislikes and condemns. Sickness is merely a condition in our human lives and does not seem to have any relationship whatsoever with God. However, the Lord Jesus regards both sin in the "soul" and sicknesses in the body as the works of Satan. He came to "destroy the works of the devil" (1 John 3:8). Hence, whenever He met demons, He cast them away. Whenever He encountered sicknesses, He healed them. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the apostle wrote concerning His healing: "Healing all those who were being oppressed by the devil" (Acts 10:38). Sin and sickness are as closely related as our "soul" is to our body. Hence, forgiveness and healing are mutually dependent upon each other.

## **GOD'S DISCIPLINING**

We have seen something concerning the matter of sickness in a general way. Now we want to pay particular attention to the source of the believers' sicknesses.

The apostle said, "Because of this many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep. But if we discerned ourselves, we would not be judged. But being judged by the Lord, we are disciplined that we may not be condemned with the world" (1 Cor. 11:30-32). The apostle considered sickness as a kind of chastisement from the Lord. Because believers have made some mistakes before the Lord, the Lord allows them to become sick. This is for the purpose of chastising them so that they would judge themselves and correct their mistakes. God is gracious to His children by chastising them so that they will not be condemned with the world. If the believers repent, God will not chastise them again. If we are willing to judge ourselves, we will avoid sickness.

We often think that sickness is only a problem of the body and that it has nothing to do with God's righteousness, holiness, and judgment. But the apostle tells us most vividly

that sickness is the result of our sin and that it is a chastisement from God. Because of the story of the blind man in John 9, many believers do not consider that sickness is a chastisement from God because of sin. They do not realize that the Lord Jesus never said that sin and sickness were unrelated. He was merely warning His disciples not to use sin to blame each and every person who was sick. If Adam had not sinned, that man would not have been blind. Furthermore, he was "born" blind; therefore, his case is completely different from that of the believers' sicknesses. Perhaps all our "born" sicknesses have nothing to do with our sin. But the sicknesses that we incur after we have believed in the Lord, according to the Bible, are related to sin. James 5:16 says, "Confess your sins to one another and pray for one another that you may be healed." One has to confess his sins before he can receive healing. Sin is the root of sickness.

Hence, sickness is usually God's disciplining so that we would pay attention to the sin that we have neglected and repudiate it. God allows sicknesses to come upon us in order to chastise us and cleanse us, so that we may see our mistakes. Perhaps we have some unrighteousness in us and owe someone something. Perhaps we have offended someone and not corrected it. Perhaps we have pride and a love for the world. Perhaps we have harbored a presumptuous and covetous heart in the work, or have become disobedient after God has spoken. When these happen, God's hand comes heavily on us to make us pay attention to them. Hence, sickness is God's clear judgment on sin. This does not mean that whoever becomes sick have sinned more than others (cf. Luke 13:2). On the contrary, those who are chastised by God are mainly the most holy ones. Job is one example.

Every time a believer is disciplined by God and becomes sick, there is the potential of receiving great blessings. "The Father of spirits...discipline[s]...for what is profitable that we might partake of His holiness" (Heb. 12:9-10). Sometimes sickness makes us recall and examine our life; it makes us aware of any hidden sin and any indomitableness and self-will that would cause God to discipline us. Only during such a time will we see what kind of barrier there is between Him and us. Only then will we search the deepest part of our heart and realize how much our past life has been filled with self and how much is incompatible with God's holy life. In this way, we will be able to advance in the spiritual life and receive God's healing.

Therefore, a sick believer should not hastily seek after healing or methods of healing at first. He does not need to be terrified or afraid. He should put himself fully in the light of God and sincerely examine and find the shortage in himself that has led to God's discipline. He should judge himself and condemn himself. Then the Holy Spirit will reveal to him the area where he failed. Whatever he sees he must repudiate immediately, and he must confess the sin to God. If this sin has caused a loss to others, he should do his best to compensate and believe that God is pleased with this. He must consecrate himself anew to God and be willing to do all of His will.

God "does not afflict willingly/Or grieve the children of men" (Lam. 3:33). When the self-conviction that He wants has been achieved, He will cease His scourging. When His chastisement becomes no longer necessary, He will be very happy to withdraw it. The Bible tells us that if we judge ourselves in this way, He will not condemn our sins. God wants us to be rid of sin and self. Therefore, when this is achieved, the sicknesses will end because they have accomplished their mission. The great need of a believer today is to know that God chastens with a specific purpose. Therefore, he should allow the Holy Spirit to point out his sin so that God's purpose can be fulfilled. When God's goal is achieved, discipline is not needed anymore; God can and will heal him.

After a believer confesses and eliminates his sin and believes that his sin has been forgiven, he can believe in God's promise and know with boldness that God will raise him up. His conscience will not accuse him anymore. Hence, he has the boldness to come to God to ask for grace. When we are far away from God, we have difficulty believing, or we are unable to believe. However, by obeying the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit, by eliminating sin and evil, and by obtaining forgiveness, we will be led to the presence of God. Once the source of the sickness is removed, the sickness will subsequently go away. Since it is not hard for a sick believer to believe that the Lord has scourged his body because of sin, and since his sin has been forgiven, his body will also obtain forgiveness and grace. At such times, the Lord's presence will become more obvious, and His life will enter the body to enliven it.

Do we not know that our heavenly Father is not satisfied with us in many areas and wants to correct us? By means of sicknesses He helps us understand our own shortcomings. If we do not suppress the voice of our conscience, the Holy Spirit will surely tell us the reasons for our chastisement one by one, through our conscience. God is happy to forgive our sins and heal our sicknesses. The great work of the Lord Jesus' redemption includes both the forgiveness of sins as well as the healing of sicknesses. Nevertheless, He does not want to have any distance between us and Himself. He wants us to live by Him. Therefore, now is the time that we should completely obey and trust Him. The heavenly Father would rather not scourge us. He is so willing to heal us and bring us into a more intimate fellowship with Himself through our further perception of His love and power.

### **SICKNESS AND SELF**

All of our bad and hostile environments expose our true condition. These environments will not bring out sins that we do not have. They will only expose the true conditions within us. Sickness is one of these environments, and it makes us understand our own true condition.

We never know how much we live for God and how much we live for self. When we become sick, especially during a long illness, we find this out. At other times, we can say that we are totally willing to obey God and that we are satisfied no matter how God treats us. However, when we become sick, we find out whether or not our previous words were true. What God wants to accomplish among His children is that they would consider His will as their satisfaction and take His ordained will as their enjoyment. God does not want them to murmur against His will—especially His arrangement—on account of their own feelings. He occasionally allows sicknesses to come upon His beloved children in order to see their attitude toward His ordained will.

It is most unfortunate when a believer who is under God's trial complains because of his own desires and questions why he has fallen into such a state. He does not consider what God has given him as the best. (When we say God gives sicknesses, we mean that God allows them to come upon us. Satan is the one who causes sickness directly. But the sickness comes to us through God's permission, and it comes with a purpose. The experience of Job is the best example.) His heart is filled with many hopes for an early recovery. Hence, God has to prolong the period of sickness on his body because He will not remove His means until His goal is accomplished. God's goal in communicating with the believers is for them to obey Him unconditionally, so that no matter how He treats them, they would obey willingly. God is not pleased when He sees a believer praising Him during favorable times but murmuring against Him, doubting Him, or

misunderstanding His works during troubled times. God wants a believer to obey Him to the extent that he will not resist even if he is to be put to death.

God wants His children to realize that everything that befalls them is given by Him. Regardless of how precarious the conditions of the body and environment are, they are all measured by His hands. Everything that has to do with them is under His will; even the falling of a strand of hair is no exception. If a believer resists the things that come upon him, he inevitably resists the God who permits such things to come upon him. If he becomes bitter through the suffering of his illness, he will inevitably resist the God who permits such illness to come upon him. It is not a question of whether or not a believer should become sick, but whether he should resist God. God wants a believer to forget his sickness while he is sick and simply look to Him. If the Lord wants you to be sick this way and continue to be sick in the future, are you willing to take it or not? Can you obey His almighty hand and not resist? Will you crave for health outside of His present will during your suffering? Can you obey until He has accomplished all that He wants to accomplish and only then ask for healing according to His will? When you are disciplined, will you refrain from seeking after healing apart from Him? At times of extreme suffering, will you try unwittingly to have what He will not give you? All these questions should deeply pierce the heart of every sick believer.

God has no delight in seeing His children become sick. His love would rather see His children pass through favorable days. However, He knows there is a danger: when believers have favorable days, all their love for Him, all the words of praise for Him, and all the things they do for Him are done only because of the favorable conditions. He knows that it is very easy for our heart to be turned away from Him and His will and turned toward His gifts. Therefore, He allows sickness and other similar things to come upon us so that we will see whether we are for God or for His gift. If, in every adverse circumstance, we do not seek after anything by ourselves or for ourselves, we are indeed seeking for God. Sickness can reveal if a man is after his own will or if he is after God's arrangement.

We still have our own will. Our daily life is too filled with our own will. In God's work, in our dealing with people and matters, in our thinking and opinions, there are too many indomitable wills. Therefore, God has to bring us to the door of death so that we will see the plight of those who resist Him. God allows us to pass through profound grief and pain in order to break us and cause us to give up the self-will that He deplores. Countless numbers of believers do not seem to hear what the Lord says to them during ordinary days, but when the Lord makes their bodies suffer, they become willing to obey completely. The Lord's way is to resort to scourging when the admonition of love has lost its effect. The purpose of His scourging is to break our self-will. It would be well for every sick believer to examine himself concerning this matter.

Aside from our own hopes and desires, what God hates the most is our self-love. Self-love damages spiritual life and destroys spiritual works. If God cannot expel self-love from within us, we can never soar in the spiritual journey. Our self-love is especially related to our body. To say that we have self-love is to say that we love our body and our life. Therefore, in order to abolish our self-love, God allows many sicknesses to come upon our body. Because we love ourselves and are afraid that our body might become weak, God allows it to be weakened. We are afraid to see our body suffer, yet God allows it to suffer. We long to recover, but our sickness worsens day by day. We want to preserve our life, but ultimately even the hope of life is gone. Naturally, God's dealing varies from person to person. Some dealings are heavier, while others are lighter.

However, God's intention to eliminate self-love is the same in both cases. Many strong believers have to wait until they approach the door of death before they give up their self-love. When the body is broken down, when life is at stake, when sickness has engulfed one's health, when pain has worn out one's strength, and everything is shattered, what else is there left to love? At this point, the believer may want to die, and he may realize that he is hopeless and that there is nothing more to hold onto in his self-love. It is unfortunate that even when he reaches such a point, he still does not know how to turn around and grasp the promise of God's healing.

It is very difficult when the believer's heart is far apart from God's heart. God's purpose is to have the believer lose his self-love. Therefore, He allows him to become sick. However, the more he becomes sick, the more he loves himself, and the weaker he becomes, the more he cares for himself. God's goal is that he would forget about himself, but he keeps thinking about his own sickness, the pain in his body, the way to be healed, and whether or not his sickness is getting better. All his thoughts are centered around himself! He pays attention to his food and how he should refrain from this and avoid taking that! When he feels a little uncomfortable, he becomes terribly upset! He pays considerable attention to his own warmth and sleep. When he has a little temperature, catches a little cold, or loses a night of sleep, he becomes very uncomfortable. It seems that all these are fatal to him. He is very sensitive about how others treat him. He is very sensitive about how often people think of him, care for him, and come to see him. He spends a great amount of time thinking about his own body and its condition, and not the Lord and what He wants to accomplish in him. Indeed, many believers are totally "obsessed" with their own self during their sickness! We usually are not very aware of how much we love ourselves. But when we are sick, we realize that we love ourselves very much!

Is this what God delights in? He wants us to realize that self-love damages us more than anything else. He also wants us to know that we love ourselves immensely. In the midst of a sickness, He wants us to learn not to look at our symptoms and care for our pain, but to look at Him wholeheartedly. He wants us to commit our body completely into His hand and let Him care for it. Every time a bad symptom is discovered, it should always warn us not to think of the body anymore, but to wholly think of the Lord.

However, because of self-love, the believer seeks for healing as soon as he becomes sick. It never occurs to him that he should first remove the evil deed in his heart before asking for healing. He only sees the hope of being healed. He will not inquire as to why God allowed the sickness to come upon his body, what he needs to repent of, what he needs to eliminate, or what he must reject so that he does not waste God's work. He cares for himself. He cannot afford to get weak and longs to be strong immediately. Therefore, he seeks for ways to be healed. He inquires of man and begs God, hoping to have an early recovery. Under this condition, God will never reach His goal. Although many times we see this kind of believer momentarily healed, the healing does not last; after a while, the old sickness recurs. How can long-term healing be possible when the root of the sickness is not removed?

Sickness is God's way of speaking to us. He does not intend that we frantically look for healing but that we obey and pray. It is very pitiful that the believer does not say to the Lord, "Speak, for Thy servant heareth." Rather, he hopes to obtain a speedy recovery. Our goal is to be delivered from pain and weakness immediately. Hastily we try our best to seek for the best medicine. It seems as if sickness forces us to invent all kinds of remedies. Every single symptom scares us and wrecks our brain. God seems to be far



away from us. We forget our spiritual condition. We can only think of our suffering and remedy. If the sickness is prolonged, we will misperceive the Father's love. If the medicine works smoothly, we will praise God's grace. However, we should ask if it is indeed the leading of the Holy Spirit that we be wholly delivered from pain? Will such an exercise of fleshly strength glorify God?

## **MEDICINE**

Self-love naturally produces self-effort. Because believers love themselves so much and do not deal with God in a basic way, they seek after the healing of earthly medicine when they are sick. At this point we will not pass judgment on whether or not medicine should be used. We do not have the time here to debate that question. Nevertheless, since the Lord Jesus prepared salvation for us on the cross, and since our body can receive His healing, it seems that if we still turn to the world to seek for medicinal assistance, it is out of ignorance, if not unbelief.

Many people debate whether or not one should use medicine as if once this question is settled, all questions will be settled. Little do they realize that the principle of spiritual life is not a matter of whether or not something can be done, but whether or not there is God's leading and whether or not something is out of one's own activity. Hence, our question is: when a believer is driven by self-love to fervently seek healing and a cure in medicine, are his activities out of his own self, or are they done under the guidance of the Holy Spirit? Naturally speaking, with regard to God's salvation, man always wants to be saved through his own work. Only after many dealings from God is man willing to be saved through faith. But is this not also true in regards to the healing of the body? I am afraid that in the latter case, the struggle is more serious than the struggle for the forgiveness of sins. A person knows that aside from depending on the salvation of the Lord Jesus, there is no way to gain access to heaven's door. However, there are still many medical techniques that can be used for healing the body. So why should he depend on the salvation of the Lord Jesus? The point we want to emphasize is not whether medicine can be used, but whether our application of medicine is out of our "own" activity and whether it sets aside God's salvation. Does not the world also claim to have many ways of delivering men from sin? Does it not have numerous philosophies, psychologies, ethics, morals, regulations, and education to advance men upward and deliver men from sin? Do we trust in these methods for our perfection? Are we after the salvation accomplished by the Lord Jesus on the cross, or are we after these worldly methods? In the same manner, the world also has numerous medicines to help deliver people from sickness. On the cross, the Lord Jesus accomplished the salvation that delivers people from sickness. Do we want to obtain healing according to human ways, or do we want to trust in the Lord Jesus?

We admit that sometimes God also manifests His power and glory through some media. However, according to biblical teaching and the experience of the believers, man's feelings have taken over all of his living since the fall, so he spontaneously trusts more in some of God's media than in God Himself. Therefore, when a believer is sick, he pays more heed to medicine than to God's power. Although his mouth says that he trusts God's power, his heart is totally turned to medicine. It seems that without medicine, God's power will not be expressed. In this condition, there is unrest, vexation, anxiety, and panic. He seeks for the best available source of healing. He does not have the peace that comes from trusting God. Because medicine occupies his heart so much, he loses God's presence and turns to the world. Consequently, the sickness which was meant to turn him to a closer relationship with God turns him away from God. Perhaps some

people can use medicine without being harmed by it. But I am afraid that such people are rare. The majority of believers cannot use medicine without damaging their spiritual life. They always consider the media more important than God's power.

There is an enormous difference between being healed by medicine and being healed by trusting in God. The power of medicine is simply natural, while the power of God is divine. The ways to obtain these two kinds of healings are also totally different. The healing that comes from medicine depends on man's intelligence, while the healing that comes from trusting in God depends on the merit and life of the Lord Jesus. Even when a doctor, who is a believer, asks God to grant him wisdom and bless the drugs that he uses, he still cannot give the healed ones a spiritual blessing. Unconsciously, the patient allows his heart to turn to medicine more than to the Lord's power. Even though his body may be healed, his spiritual life is greatly damaged. If a believer trusts in God, he does not need medicine. He needs only to commit himself to God's love and power. He should examine the source of his own sickness before God and see where he has displeased God. Consequently, when he is eventually healed, he will not only derive benefit for his body but also receive blessing in his spirit.

Most believers regard medicine as something given by God and therefore believe that they can use it. However, we want to pay attention to whether one uses the medicine according to God's leading. We will not debate whether or not medicine is given by God. We only want to ask: is not the Lord Jesus explicitly given by God to the believers as the Savior of their sicknesses? Should we follow unbelievers in the world or believers who are weak in faith to seek after medicine or healing by natural means, or should we receive the Lord Jesus whom God has prepared and fully trust in His name?

Trusting in medicine and accepting the life of the Lord Jesus are two completely different matters. We admit that medicine can cure people. The sciences of medicine and pharmacology have invented many ways and items to heal people's sicknesses. However, this kind of healing is only natural, and it is not the best that God has prepared for His children. A believer can ask God to bless the drug and still be healed; after he is healed, he can still thank God for it and consider that God has healed him. However, this way of healing is not through receiving the life of the Lord Jesus. This is a sign of a believer who has left the battle of faith for convenience' sake. If the whole goal of our struggle with Satan in sickness is to obtain a cure, any kind of healing is sufficient. But if we are trying to accomplish something more important than mere healing, we have no choice but to remain quietly before God and wait for His way and His time.

We will not adamantly say that God never blesses the use of medicine. On many occasions God has blessed the use of medicine because He is kind and forgiving. Nevertheless, these kinds of believers do not stand on the position of redemption; they simply stand on the same position as the worldly people. Concerning the matter of sickness, they are the same as the worldly people and cannot give any testimony for God. Swallowing medicine, applying a salve, and injecting medicine cannot give us the life of the Lord Jesus. When we trust in God, we are simply standing on a ground above the natural standing. In many cases, the healing that comes from medicine is painful and prolonged, whereas the healing that comes from God is swift and with blessing.

One thing is certain: if we are healed through trusting in God, the spiritual benefit we derive from such healing can definitely not be obtained by healing that comes from a medicinal cure. For many people, sickness seems to be more advantageous than cure. When they are in bed, they repent for the life they lived in the past. But after they



become well, they are further away from the Lord than before. If they are healed through trusting in God, they will not end up this way. They will confess their sins, deny their self, believe in God's love, and trust in His power. They will accept God's life and holiness and have an inseparable, new relationship with God.

The lesson for us is that God's goal in all illness is to have us cease from our own activities and depend on Him utterly. While we often fervently seek after healing, our hearts are simply inspired by our self-love. Because we love ourselves, we single-mindedly seek after healing and forget about God and the lesson He wants to teach us. If God's children are free from self-love, how can they seek after healing in such a fervent way? If they have stopped their own activities, how can they still turn to the world for medicinal assistance? They will surely judge themselves quietly before the Lord and first try to understand the reason that God has given them sickness, before they seek for healing from Him through the Father's love. Here we see the difference between trusting in medicinal assistance and trusting in God's power. In the former case, the believer anxiously seeks a cure; in the latter case, the believer quietly seeks God's will. A believer seeks for medicine in his sickness because he has a strong inclination and because he is filled with self-love and tries to exercise his own strength. If he is seeking God's power instead, he will not behave this way. If a believer wants to trust in God for his healing, he has to genuinely confess and deal with his sins, and he must be willing to consecrate himself fully to God.

There are many sick believers today. However, the Lord has His purpose in all of them. Anytime the "self" loses its authority, the Lord will carry out His healing. If a believer is not willing to bow down his head and accept his sickness, and if he cannot acknowledge that God has given him the best, seeking instead for healing outside of God and rebelling against the way He deals with him, He has no choice but to let him become sick again. If the believer is not willing to give up his self-love, and if he continues fastidiously to care, nurture, pity, and consider himself, not abandoning himself in God, God will give him more things that will make him pity himself even more. If the believer is not willing to cease his own ways and activities, and if he continues to seek for healing outside the salvation of the Lord Jesus, God will show him that earthly medicine will not offer him a lasting cure. God wants His children to know that a strong, healthy body is not for one's own happiness, nor is it for the purpose of carrying out one's own will; it is entirely for Him. The Spirit of healing is the Spirit of holiness. We are not short of healing, but holiness. The first thing we need to be delivered from is not sickness, but our self.

After a believer stops using earthly ways or medicine and trusts in God wholeheartedly, his own faith will become much stronger than before. This will afford him a new relationship with God, and he will begin to have a life of trust and belief that he never had before. He will commit not only his "soul" but also his body to the hand of God. He will see that God's will is to manifest the power of the Lord Jesus and the love of the Father; He wants us to be exercised and established in our faith. He wants to prove to us that the Lord not only redeems our "soul," but our body as well. Therefore, we need not "be anxious...for your body" (Matt. 6:25). If we have committed ourselves to the Lord, He will surely take care of us. If we see deliverance immediately, we should praise the Lord. But if the sickness becomes more serious, we must not doubt. Instead, we must fix our eyes only on God's promise and not allow "self-love" to rise up again. God is trying to wring out every drop of self-love from us. If we care for our body, we will have doubts. If we fix our gaze on the promise, we will draw near to God, our faith will be enhanced, and we will receive the healing.

However, we also have to be careful lest we drift into extremes. It is true that God wants us to trust in Him completely. But after we have truly repudiated our own action and have fully trusted in Him, He is also happy to see us using some natural media to help our body. We can see this in the case of Timothy's wine. Timothy's appetite was not good. He was often sick. Paul did not accuse him of a lack of faith or of not receiving God's direct healing. On the contrary, he encouraged him to use a little wine because wine was good for him. It is interesting to note that the apostle would encourage him to use something like wine, which is on the borderline between good and evil.

We can learn a lesson from this case. We must believe in God and trust in Him. (This is what Timothy did.) However, at the same time, we must not rush into extremes. If our body has some weakness, we need to take in, according to the Lord's leading, the things that are nourishing and beneficial to our body. If we follow the Lord's guidance and take in things that are nutritious to the body, they will increase our body's strength. Before the redemption of our body, we are still humans with a body, and it is still necessary to pay proper attention to the natural aspect of things.

Nutritious food can go together with faith; they do not have to contradict one another. However, the believers must not be conscious of the need for nutritious food while failing to believe in God.

### **MUCH BETTER TO BE HEALED**

There are also some believers who have gone to another extreme. According to their natural disposition, they are hard and stubborn. However, through God's allowed sickness, they have become broken by God. As a result of going along with God's will through His chastisement, they have become very gentle, kind, yielding, and holy. Accordingly, they consider that being sick is a great benefit for them, and they begin to love sickness more than health. They think that sicknesses cause their spiritual life to advance greatly. Therefore, they do not seek healing. If they realize that they should be healed, they would rather have God heal them. They accept all the sicknesses that come upon their bodies, thinking that it is easier for them to be godly when they are sick than when they are healthy. They think they are closer to God when they are lonely and in pain than when they are well and active. They think it is far better to lie in bed than to be free to run around. They do not want to ask for healing from God. They think that it may be more profitable to be weak than to be strong! We admit that many believers have given up their evil works by becoming sick, and that they have acquired some profound experiences through their sicknesses. We also admit that many handicapped and disabled persons have exceptionally godly and spiritual experiences. But we must say that many believers are quite unclear concerning several points in this area.

Although one who is sick can be holy, such holiness is compelled. Perhaps if he were healthy and could choose freely, he would want to turn back to the world and his natural self. He becomes holy only when he is sick, and he becomes worldly when he is not sick. The Lord has to keep him in sickness continuously before he can be holy continuously. His holiness is dependent on his sickness! A living that is for the Lord should not be restricted to times of sickness. We should not let others think that the only way God can subdue a believer is by sickness, and that without sickness, he is incapable of glorifying God in his daily life. A believer should express God's life in his daily life. While it is good to endure suffering, it is better to obey God at a time when one is full of strength.

We should know that healing is of God; it is God who heals us. If we seek after healing through man's medicine, we will find ourselves separated from God. However, if we seek after God's healing, we will become more intimate with God. A person who receives God's healing will glorify God more than one who remains in sickness for a long time. It is true that sickness can glorify God because sickness provides God an opportunity to manifest His healing power (John 9:3). But if one remains sick all the time, how can God be glorified? When one receives God's healing, he sees God's glory through the demonstration of His power.

The Lord Jesus never considered sickness as a blessing, as something which believers should bear until they die. Neither did He say that sickness is an expression of love from God the Father. The Lord Jesus desired His disciples to bear the cross, but He never said that the sick should remain in sickness all the time. He told the disciples the manner in which they should suffer for Him, but He never said that they should suffer sickness for His sake. Although He said we would have suffering in the world, He did not consider sickness a suffering. He indeed suffered while He was on the earth, but He was not sick. Moreover, every time He saw sick ones, He healed them. He always considered sickness to be from sin and the devil.

We must differentiate between suffering and sickness. "Many are the misfortunes of the righteous man,/But Jehovah delivers him from all of them./He keeps all his bones;/Not one of them is broken" (Psa. 34:19-20). James said, "Does anyone among you suffer evil? Let him pray" (James 5:13), so that he may obtain grace and strength. "Is anyone among you ill? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him" (v. 14), so that he may be healed.

First Corinthians 11:30 through 32 clearly depicts the relationship between sickness and the believer. Sickness ultimately is a discipline from God. If a believer will judge himself, God will cause the sickness to disappear. God never intends for believers to suffer sickness continuously. If a believer removes what God condemns and, at the same time, permits sickness to stay in his body, he does not know God's purpose in allowing him to be sick. No discipline should last forever. Once the cause of discipline is removed, the discipline itself should quickly disappear. "Now no discipline at the present time seems to be a matter of joy, but of grief; but afterward..." (Heb. 12:11a). Believers almost forget that with God there is still an "afterward." "Afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been exercised by it" (v. 11b). Discipline is not meant to last forever. In fact, the most excellent fruit comes after the discipline is over. Neither should we be misled to think that God's discipline is His punishment. Strictly speaking, believers will no longer be punished. First Corinthians 11:31 makes this quite clear. We should never allow the concept of law to come in. It is not a matter of how many sins we have committed; we do not have to suffer a certain amount of punishment before our sins can be balanced out. This is not an affair to be settled in court but a problem to be dealt with in the family.

If we turn back to the direct teaching of the Bible, we will see what God ultimately wants of our body. We need to read only one verse, and the concepts of many will be completely overthrown. "Beloved, concerning all things I wish that you may prosper and be in health, even as your soul prospers" (3 John 2). This is a prayer which the Holy Spirit reveals to the apostle, and it shows God's intention towards the believer's body and His desire in eternity. God has no intention for His children to remain sick all their lives and unable to actively work for Him. He delights to see His children prosper and healthy, even as their soul prospers. This allows us to conclude unquestionably that

prolonged sickness is not God's will. He may temporarily discipline us and cause us to lose our health, but He is not pleased to see us constantly in weakness.

Paul's word in 1 Thessalonians 5:23 also shows us that prolonged sickness is not God's will. The condition of the body should match the spirit and the soul. If our spirit and soul become sanctified wholly and preserved complete without blame, but our body is still weak, sick, and full of affliction, God will definitely not be satisfied. His goal is to save man's entire being. His goal is not just to save certain parts of man.

All the earthly works of the Lord Jesus reveal God's intention toward the matter of sickness. His only work was to carry out God's will; He had no other work throughout His whole life. We can especially see the heart of the heavenly Father and His attitude toward sickness in the story of the healing of the leper. The leper said, "Lord, if You are willing, You can cleanse me." It seems as if this person was knocking on the door of heaven and asking if healing is God's will. "And stretching out His hand, He touched him, saying, I am willing; be cleansed!" (Matt. 8:2-3). It is always God's will to heal. If a believer thinks that God is not willing to heal him and that he should remain in sickness forever, he does not know God's will. The work of the Lord Jesus on earth was to heal "all those who were ill" (v. 16). We should not think that He has changed His attitude today.

We know that God's goal today is for "Your will [to] be done, as in heaven, so also on earth" (Matt. 6:10). The will of God is done in heaven, but is there sickness in heaven? Based on this, sickness is absolutely not compatible with God's will. Today a great number of believers pray for healing for a short period of time. When God does not seem to answer their prayers and they have lost all hope, they say, "May the Lord's will be done," as if the Lord's will is synonymous with sickness and death. This is a great mistake. God's will for His children is not sickness. Although sometimes His permissive will allows them to become sick, it is for their profit; His ordained will is always for them to be healthy. There is no sickness in heaven. This proves that God never intends for His children to be sick.

If we consider where sickness actually comes from, we will realize that it is right for us to seek healing. Acts 10:38 tells us that all sickness is due to the oppression of the devil. When the Lord Jesus spoke of the woman who was bent double, He said that she had been "bound" by Satan (Luke 13:16). When He healed Peter's mother-in-law, He "rebuked the fever" (4:39) as if He were rebuking the devil. If we read the book of Job, we will see that it was the devil who caused Job to become sick (chapters one and two), and it was God who healed Job (chapter forty-two). The thorn that caused the apostle Paul to be weakened was "a messenger of Satan" (2 Cor. 12:7), but the One who made him strong was God. Hebrews 2:14 tells us that the one who has the might of death is the devil. When sickness ripens, it brings forth death. Sickness is only an indication of death. If Satan has the power of death, he also has the power of sickness; death is simply a further step of sickness, while sickness is the first step to death.

After reading all these verses, we have to conclude that the source of sickness is the devil. Because there are some defects in the believers, God allows Satan to attack His children. If God's children (1) refuse to yield to God's demands and allow sickness to remain in their bodies, or (2) if they have forsaken what God has commanded and still allow sickness to remain in their bodies, they are voluntarily putting themselves under the oppression of Satan. After we have obeyed God's revelation, we should refuse the sickness and reckon that it is from Satan. Therefore, there is no reason for us to be

under his bondage anymore. We must clearly understand that sickness belongs to our enemy, and that we should not welcome it. The Son of God has come to free us and not to bind us.

Many people may ask: when there is no need for believers to be sick, why does God not remove the sickness? We have to realize that God accomplishes things according to our faith (Matt. 8:13). This is an unchanging principle by which God deals with us. Many times, God is willing to heal His children. But since they do not believe and do not pray, God has to allow the sickness to remain. If a believer allows himself to be sick, or worse still, welcomes sickness, thinking that it will make him more unworldly and holy, the Lord can do nothing except give him what he wishes. God often deals with His children according to what they can take. God may want very much to heal them, but because they do not have the faith to ask, they never receive this gift.

We should not think that we are wiser than God or that we can act beyond what the Bible reveals. Even though the sickroom may sometimes feel like a sanctuary, and everyone who enters may be touched by the atmosphere, this is not God's ordained will and not God's best. If we act according to our emotion and ignore God's revelation, He can only allow us to walk as we please. Many believers say, "No matter what happens, I will commit myself to God's hand. Whether I get well, or whether I remain sick, I will let God make the decision for me, and I will let Him deal with me as He pleases." But very often, we see these people resorting to medicine at the same time. Is this what one does when he commits everything into God's hand? In seeking after God's healing, they put the responsibility in God's hand, and in seeking after man's healing, they resort to medicine all the same. This is too contradictory. The fact is that many believers have lost their willpower through their prolonged period of bed rest. They can no longer hold onto God's promise. Their submission is actually a kind of spiritual laziness. They desire to be healthy, but this desire will not cause God to do any work on them. Many believers have become passively resigned to their illness for a long time; they have grown habitually sick and have no boldness to seek freedom. They would rather have others believe for them or have God give them faith and make them believe apart from their own effort. However, unless their will is motivated, and unless they resist the devil and hold onto the Lord Jesus, the God-given faith will not come. Many patients do not have to be sick; they are sick because they do not have the strength to claim God's promises.

We must realize that the spiritual blessings that we receive in sickness are far less than the spiritual blessings we gain in restoration. If, through trusting in God and consecrating ourselves to Him, we are healed, we should continue to live a holy life after our restoration. Only this will maintain us in a healthy state. By healing us in this way, the Lord gains our body. This joy is unspeakable. Yet this joy comes not because we are healed, but because we have a new relationship with our Lord. We have a new experience of Him and receive new contact and new life from Him. At such times, God is glorified much more than when a believer is sick.

Therefore, God's children should rise up and seek healing. First we should go before the Lord and listen to what He wants to speak to us through our sickness. Next we should walk with a single heart according to what He has revealed to us. Finally we should put our body wholeheartedly into His care and consecrate our body to Him. If there are elders of the church who can anoint with oil (James 5:14-15), we should invite them to come and let them follow the injunction of the Bible. Otherwise, we should remain in calmness and exercise our faith to hold onto God's promise (Exo. 15:26). God will heal us.