

Chapter 3

Dangerous Assumptions

If you have been a Christian for very long, you will have discovered there are a lot of strange opinions and doctrines about healing. A lot of bad theology surfaces in the face of suffering. It is too easy to entertain simplistic arguments as rational, but they aren't. They are neither rational nor biblical. Here are a few:

1. You are sick because you sinned.
2. You are not supposed to get sick.
3. Sickness is never the will of God.
4. God always wants to heal you.
5. If you have enough faith, you will be healed.
6. If you are worthy, you will be healed.
7. You should never admit sickness.

A sad event happened in my family after our 12-year-old daughter was killed in an accident while we served God in Brazil. My mother was at home in Michigan grieving the loss of her granddaughter when a week or two later a well-meaning stranger arrived at her door to tell her that the reason our daughter Aimee died was that God was punishing her son for some secret sin he had committed. My mother was shocked that anyone would dare to assume such a view of tragedy and death. I was proud of my mother, who did not allow that woman to stay in her home making groundless accusations. My mother quickly put her out of her home.

Christian Science argues that suffering and pain do not exist. It is all in your head. Some charismatics I have known do the same mind-over-matter theological psychology, teaching positive confession. They teach believers to never admit disease but declare themselves whole regardless of evidence to the contrary.

A fictitious story is told of a boy who visited his family's Christian Science practitioner to ask him to pray for his father, who was very sick. The practitioner replies, "Son, your father only thinks he is sick. Tell him to have faith and believe he's not sick, but well." The boy did so. The practitioner saw him the next day and asks, "How is your father?" The boy answered, "Now he thinks he's dead."

I had a young man in my church who bought into that theology. He had called me on the phone to discuss something. In the conversation, his voice was raspy and nasal. Obviously he had a severe cold, and I said so. He replied, "No pastor, the Lord healed me of my bad cold. I only have the symptoms."

History is rife with sad stories of Christians who refused their children transfusions or other medical treatments in an attempt to exercise faith, only to see them die. Many well-meaning health and wealth Christians have done similar things. Faith is one thing, and folly is another. Don't mix them up.

God Uses Sickness & Suffering

You can hardly read the story of Job, let alone the rest of the Bible, without concluding that God uses sickness and suffering for his glory and our good. Romans 8:28 says it so well, "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." 1 Thessalonians 5:16 commands us to *"Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."* A favorite verse for many of us is Jeremiah 29:11, *"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."*

The purpose of healing is never to make us feel good or to escape suffering. Suffering is part of life. It is inescapable. The question is, what will you do with your suffering? How will you glorify God in your illness?

Great men of God have recognized this as well:

- "Affliction brings out graces that cannot be seen in a time of health." – Robert Murray McCheyne.
- "Praise God for the hammer, the file, and the furnace. The hammer molds us, the file sharpens us, and the fire tempers us." – Samuel Rutherford
- "After winter comes the summer, after night comes the dawn, after the storm comes clear open skies." – Samuel Rutherford
- "Grace grows best in winter." – Samuel Rutherford
"In our fluctuating feelings it is well to remember that His affections for us do not change, you heart is not the compass by which he sails." – Samuel Rutherford

The Benefits of Illnesses

Let every believer know the Lord loves us, but He also allows us to go through times of trials and suffering for our good and His glory. Let every believer not only know the promises of God, but also the purposes of God. He weaves all things together for His glory and our good.

Isaiah 48: 10-11

Behold, I have refined you but not with silver. Chosen you for the furnace of affliction, for my own sake, even for my sake.

Job 1: 21

And said, "Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD." In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly.

Job 2: 10

What? shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil? In all this did not Job sin with his lips.

Job 36:15

He delivers the afflicted by their affliction and opens their ear by adversity.

John 9:2-3

And his disciples asked him, saying, "Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus answered, "Neither has this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him,"

Psalm 119:67

Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept your word.

Psalm 119:71

It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn your statutes.

Hebrews 12:5-11

5 And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? "My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. 6

*For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.”
7 It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? 8 If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. 9 Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? 10 For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. 11 For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.*

1 Peter 1:6-7

In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. 7 These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.

1 Peter 4:12

Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.

James 1:3-4

Consider it pure joy when you face trials of many kinds, because you know the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

What we do with our sicknesses is as important as trusting God to rescue and deliver us from our afflictions.

Think About It

Chapter 3: Dangerous Assumptions – God uses sickness

Do you identify with any of the assumptions?

Do you make your own assumptions about healing?

Is sickness ever the will of God?