

DOES GOD EVER SEND SICKNESS?

This strange question is suggested by the fact that some good men say that all sickness is from Satan. I do not so think and will give my reason in few words.

Attributing all sickness and disease to Satan is calculated to work evil. It is a source of stumbling to many because so plainly contrary to the Bible. We gain nothing by wresting the word of God or in any way perverting its plain meaning to support a theory of our own. It will react on us in the end.

What do they hope to gain to their cause by denying that God, for wise and good reasons, sends sickness of one kind or another on his erring, wandering children to bring them back to himself?

It is not claimed that all sickness is sent directly by God. That it comes in many cases as the direct result of sin, intemperance, self-abuse, licentiousness and gross impudence is readily granted. We see it. The Bible teaches it. Proverbs, v., 11; xiv., 30; xxiii., 32.

The world is full of languishing and terrible suffering as a result of the violation of physical law—e. g. consumption, burning fevers, scrofula, cancers and many other diseases are often thus caused—more often than most suppose.

And that sickness and suffering are sometimes inflicted by Satan, by God's permission, is also granted. He obtained permission to destroy Job's property and children; and yet Job looked beyond the immediate instrument and acknowledged the hand of God in his affliction, and said, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away." Job, i., 21.

And when Satan smote him with boils, from sole to crown, and his wife urged him to curse God and die, he answered, "Shall we receive good from the hand of the Lord, and shall we not receive evil?" Job, ii., 10.

And happy are they who can see and confess the permissive hand of God in their trials, though they come directly from the hands of wicked men, or devils.

This was the secret of Joseph's happiness in all his long afflictions. His wicked brethren sold him. He knew that perfectly, and yet he said, "God did send me before you to preserve you alive."

Satan moved David to number Israel, and a grievous pestilence followed, and 70,000 died. II. Chron., xxi., 1, 14.

And in the New Testament we have the case of the woman bound 18 years by Satan. Luke, xiii., 16. And Paul's "thorn in the flesh the messenger of Satan to buffet him." II. Cor., xii., 7.

And many were possessed with devils, and were lunatic, or deaf and dumb, or epileptic, or crazy, etc., as a result of their possessions; and they had to be cast out before they could be healed.

All these and more we have in the Bible; and we freely grant that Satan may have much to do with many of our afflictions—perhaps more than we suppose, yet we must say, with Cruden (disease, page 135): There are a great many diseases recorded in scripture which were sent by God in the way of punishment for sins—sent directly from God for correction and to recover men back to him. The scriptures certainly teach this clearly.

Take a few cases: Exodus, xv., 26: God says that he brought the diseases upon the Egyptians; and if his people would obey him he would not bring them on them.

Leviticus, xxvi., 15-16: God declares if they will not obey his word "I will even appoint over you terror, consumption and the burning ague, that shall consume the eyes and cause sorrow of heart." Surely Satan has no hand in this case except to instigate to wickedness.

Numbers, xii., 9-12; II. Kings, v., 27; II. Chronicles, xxvi., 19-21: Miriam, Gehazi and Uzziah were struck with leprosy for their sin. The Lord did it. So felt Moses and Aaron, and any common reader would so understand it.

Deuteronomy, vii., 15: Sickness and disease are here attributed to God. He laid them on the wicked and would not on his obedient children.

Deuteronomy, xxviii., 21, 22, 27, 28, 35, 59, 60, 61, 65: In this wonderful chapter the Lord often says that he will send "pestilence, fever, consumption, inflammation, extreme burning, the botch of Egypt, emerods, scab, itch, madness, blindness, a botch that would cover the whole body, sore sickness of long continuance, all the diseases of Egypt and every sickness and plague not written in the law, a trembling heart and failing of eyes and sorrow of mind."

After such positive declaration who shall presume to say that sickness is never from the Lord? Let us be careful lest we be found contradicting God's own word.

I. Samuel, v., 6, 9, 11: Here the Lord smote the Philistines with emerods, etc., because of the ark. They so received it.

I. Samuel, xxv., 38. The Lord smote Nabal with a fatal sickness.

II. Chronicles, xxi., 14, 15, 18: Elijah says the Lord would smite the people with a great plague and that Jehoram should have great sickness. "And after this the Lord smote him in his bowels with an incurable disease." The Lord did it, not Satan.

Isaiah, xxxviii., 12: Hezekiah says of God, "He will cut me off with pining sickness."

Daniel, ix., 14: "The Lord watched upon the evil and brought it upon us, for the Lord, our God, is righteous in all his works, for we obeyed not his voice."

God sent the affliction to humble and lead to repentance; and such means are often efficacious when all others have failed.

Habakuk, iii., 5. "Before him went the pestilence and burning diseases" (margin) "went forth at his feet."

What does the New testament teach on he subject?

I. Corinthians, xi., 30, 32: Paul says of those who were "weak and sickly," for eating the Lord's supper unworthily, "When we are judged we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world." Here is sickness of body sent to save the soul.

Hebrews, xii., 5, 11: "Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth. If ye endure chastening God dealeth with you as with sons." "He for our profit that we might be partakers of his holiness."

This chastisement may be sickness, losses, persecutions or trials of any kind.

So Psalms, xciv., 12: "Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest." So Job, v., 18; Proverbs iii., 11, 12 and Revelation, iii., 19: "As many as I love I rebuke and chasten."

Is sickness, then, a good? Is it desirable? If rightly received and improved, it is a good, if it leads back to God, as our only portion. If it proves an evil it is our own fault. "God meant it for good." "Now, no

chastening, for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous. Nevertheless, afterward, it yieldeth the peaceable fruits of righteousness."

David sang: "It is good for me that I have been afflicted," and in all the ages, saints have said, "My most afflictive days have been my best days."

Chloe Lankton, on a bed of suffering for over fifty years, said (after twentyfive years), "I would not give this sweet peace of mind, and the calm trust I feel, for health, wealth and all the pleasures of the world," and after fiftysix years of terrible suffering she is as happy as heaven and perfectly contented.

James says: "Blessed is the man who endureth trial," "Count it all joy when ye fall into divers trials," because they are designed and, if borne aright, will work for our good here and a "far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory" hereafter.

Sickness or trials may be sent by God, or permitted by him, for various reasons—for a test of faith, for correction, to wean from earth and sinful vanities and pleasures, to lead to repentance and a return to God, or that the grace of God may be magnified, in enabling us to bear all with patience and sweet submission and joy.

"Give the devil his due," but he cannot have the credit of all the good which the children of God get from affliction.

Well, if sickness is such a good, is it right to pray for healing? Yes, when the lesson for which it was sent has been learned."

Then "the prayer of faith will save the sick."

But we are told that Jesus rebuked the fever of Peter's wife's mother and that he would not have rebuked what God had sent. In this case we are not told whether the fever was from God or Satan. It makes no difference; she was ready to be healed and so Christ could consistently do it.

Whether God or Satan sends our afflictions, they may be removed in answer to prayer, when the purpose for which God sent them, or permitted them to be sent, has been accomplished.

When the sufferer is properly humbled, emptied of self, weaned from the world and turns to God with all the heart, desiring only to glorify Christ in all things, then may healing be sought and obtained.

But many desire, seek and ask, yet do not obtain. Why? We may not know all the reasons. God may say to some as he said to Paul, "My grace is sufficient for thee, bear it patiently for my sake." But more likely the conditions of healing have not been complied with and of course their prayer could not avail.

I have seen many come forward for the anointing and prayer, flaunting in the face of God and all the people, their feathers, rings and fashionable dress—signs of their pride of heart, which is abomination to God—and what wonder they were not healed?

"If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me."

"Put away the evil from before my eyes. Cease to do evil, learn to do well. Be followers of God as dear children." Then the Savior says, "Whosoever ye shall ask in my name, it shall be done."

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