

The Distinctives of Grace

Why do people suffer from sickness?



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Sickness is a reality that inevitably confronts every individual. And with that reality comes questions. Why? Why does a God of love allow sickness? Why does sickness strike both believers and unbelievers? What can I say to a friend or loved one who is suffering?

Have Been Saved; Am Being Sanctified ... Will Be Glorified!

An understanding of the reality of human suffering, even for a believer, rests on the process of redemption from the perspective of God's Word. Every Christian 'has been' saved by the justifying work of grace through faith. Every Christian 'is being' sanctified by the ongoing work of the Spirit and the Word in their lives. And every Christian 'will be' glorified in the final day. *Romans 3:24; 1 Peter 5:10; Romans 8:30; 1 Corinthians 15:50-55*

While we wait for the completed work of redemption, realized in our glorification, we must endure the weakness of our mortal, human bodies. This weakness brings with it the suffering of sickness and the questions that plague us all. Let's consider the answers.

Five words provide an outline for our understanding: **Adam, Sin, Good, Hope, and Glory.**

Adam

The foundational doctrine of original sin must be our understanding. Adam fell and with him all mankind fell.

Romans 5:12

Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned - -

This original sin brought with it not only the reality of death for mankind, but the ongoing suffering of life in a fallen world - suffering that is far reaching in its effects.

Romans 8:22-23

For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now. And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body.

Christians are not exempt. Notice, Paul says: "...even we ourselves (believers) groan ... waiting eagerly...for the redemption of our body." We suffer in our bodies while we wait for our glorification.

There is a true sense in which the answer to all of the questions is found here. Why is there sickness? One word: Adam! The fall is to blame for all sickness.

But we know that God did not leave us in our fallen state. As believers, we have been redeemed. Yet we still suffer. So again, the question ... why?

Sin

Not all sickness is the result of individual sin. But! -- some sickness is the result of individual sin. The connection between sin and sickness is often drawn in the New Testament. Paul made the connection when addressing our coming to the Lord's Table:

1 Corinthians 11:29-30

For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself if he does not judge the body rightly. For this reason many among you are weak, and sick, and a number sleep.

James made the connection as he draws believers to confess their sins:

James 5:16

Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.

When a believer is suffering from sickness it is a right first step to consider the presence of 'living, unconfessed' sin in their lives. If the sickness is a result of that sin ... the forgiveness that confession brings will itself bring healing.

Good

We must also consider that Scripture teaches that sickness is sometimes for our good and God's glory. When Jesus healed the blind man, the disciples asked, "Who sinned, this man or his parents?" Jesus' response indicates that sin was not the issue ... it was the man's good and God's glory:

John 9:3

Jesus answered: "It was neither that this man sinned, nor his parents; but it was so that the works of God might be displayed in him."

This man would receive the obvious 'good' of being healed. And in that, God would receive the 'glory' for His goodness.

Oftentimes, the reality of sickness moves from our personal good to the good of those around us. Consider:

2 Corinthians 1:3-4

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction so that we will be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.

Simply stated, God allows our suffering to bring His comfort which enables us to comfort others who are suffering. Sickness for their 'good'.

Hope

The reality of human suffering and sickness takes an even higher road. Yes, it can be a warning sign of sin in our lives. Yes, it can be used for our good and the good of others. But even greater, it produces in us hope!

Romans 5:3-5

And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

Don't miss the divine progression: tribulations (suffering, sickness) *to* perseverance *to* character *to* hope! All of this is an element, a realization of the love of God poured out within our hearts! How unfortunate that believers will often assume suffering and sickness can only produce **hopelessness** when God has designed it to bring **hope!**

Glory

Let the questions come! The answers of Scripture addressing the reality of sickness bring peace, not anxiety. They reveal a God of love who is concerned for our sanctification and thus will alert us to sin in our lives through suffering. They reveal a God ultimately concerned with our good. They reveal a God who desires us to live lives filled with hope. But there is one more consideration that overwhelms all others: sickness and suffering *produces* glory! The Bible states it simply, clearly:

2 Corinthians 4:17

For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison.

A perspective is presented here that demand our suffering be seen in the light of eternity. Paul is not suggesting that our suffering is not real and painful, but, in comparison to what awaits us in eternity, it must be seen as 'momentary' and 'light'. And it is working. It is producing. It is effecting. The profound truth is, our sickness and suffering BUILD glory! **Glory that is incomparable!**

Sickness,

Because of Adam...

For sin's sake,

For goodness' sake,

For hope's sake,

For glory's sake!

Maintaining this Biblical perspective allows us to be comforted in our suffering, and comforters for those who suffer. We should all, like the apostles, be glad to declare:

I am filled with comfort; I am overflowing with joy in all our affliction.

2 Corinthians 7:4