

Four Sick Men

The problem with sickness and unanswered prayer

By Pastor Arthur L. Watkins

Sickness and unanswered prayer are two problems we all have to contend with most of our lives. There are many lies and false doctrines taught about these issues today that give people false hopes and aspirations. But in spite of the lies we can know the truth about these matters. There are four sick men in Paul's epistles that the Holy Spirit has signaled out for our learning and admonition. The Spirit put the spotlight on these four sick men and if we pay special attention to what is said about them we can learn a lot about sickness, healing and unanswered prayer.

Epaphroditus

In Philippians 2:25-30 we see in him that God heals Christians in this age of grace. He was at the point of death, but he survived, he was healed. What is important about his healing is *how and why* God healed him.

Timothy

In 1 Timothy 5:23-25 we see in him that godly Christians get sick and that God uses medicine to either alleviate pain or cure the sickness and disease. Paul could not heal him, so he recommended that he drink a little wine for his many infirmities.

Trophimus

In 2 Timothy 4:20 we see in him that God has withdrawn the gift of healing today. He got sick and Paul could not heal him. Even though God may heal today, the day of divine healers ended with the death of the apostles.

The Apostle Paul

In him we see how the problem of sickness and unanswered prayer are intertwined together. We see the problem with unanswered prayer in regards to sickness. In him we see a special divine grace given to those who are sick. In him we see that unanswered prayer and sickness is not a sign of sin and we even see how unanswered prayer and sickness can be the will of God and even a benefit to the believer.

The First Sick Man The Apostle Paul

In 2 Corinthians 12 Paul wrote;

(7) And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure.

(8) For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me.

(9) And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

(10) Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.

In these verses Paul the greatest of all Apostles had a problem with sickness and unanswered prayer. He had an infirmity that God would not heal. He prayed prayers that God did not answer. Does that sound familiar to you? Have you ever had these problems? We all do. Sickness and unanswered prayer are two of the greatest problems that Christians have today. Sickness and unanswered prayer can be very discouraging. It can be depressing. I have known preachers and missionaries who left the ministry because of sickness and unanswered prayer. They can make us doubt the love and care of God. So it is important that we understand why Christians get sick at times and why God does not answer all prayers. Once we see why we will not blame God foolishly or doubt his love and care or give up.

(1) Sickness and unanswered prayer is not a sign that a Christian is out of the will of God

When someone gets sick or cannot get their prayers answered many people, especially the charismatics, say they must be out of the will of God because they have the erroneous idea that God heals all sickness and answers all prayers.

Fred Price a famous charismatic TV preacher says; *"When you have developed your faith to such an extent that you can stand on the promises of God, then you won't need medicine."* Price also says *"We don't allow sickness in our home.* In other words when you become hyper spiritual you want need medicine because you want get sick.**

Paul proves this teaching is false. In these verses he was sick and could not get healed. He prayed and his prayers were not answered. But yet he was totally in the will of God while he was sick and could not get his prayers answered. Paul was probably the greatest Christian who ever lived. He founded churches in Asia, Greece and Europe. He wrote 14 books in the New Testament. He wrote more books in the Bible than anyone else. He was given an abundance of divine revelations from God and was caught up to Paradise. But he had an infirmity that God would not heal and prayers God did not answer.

It deceitful and downright mean to tell people that sickness and unanswered prayer is a sign that they are out of the will of God. You may be in the middle of God's will and be sick and have many prayers unanswered. Don't think that this is the only prayer that God did not answer for Paul. This one is mentioned just to show us it is possible for a Christian to be sick and have unanswered prayers and still be in the will of God.

(**What Price does not tell us is that his wife got cancer. And he did what we all do; he took her to the doctor who of course gave her medicine and treatment. Hypocrites like Price never take their own advice because they know they are liars, and so do we.)

(2) Unanswered prayer and sickness can be for your benefit and good

According to verse 7 God gave Paul a thorn in his flesh to keep him from being; ***“exalted above measure”***. That tells me that if God answered Paul's prayer and removed the thorn in his flesh, he would have become proud and haughty because of the abundance of revelations he was given, and for being caught up to Paradise. If that would have happened he may have departed from the faith like Demas and so many others. There is a possibility that we would have never heard of Paul if God answered his prayer and healed his infirmity. His infirmity kept him humble enough for God to use and to write 14 books in the New Testament, and to establish churches in Asia and Europe. We will never know how important his infirmity was and how wise the Lord was in not answering his prayer to heal it. That unanswered prayer was for Paul's benefit and ours too who have been blessed by his epistles and example.

It's hard to have prayers unanswered, especially when you or your loved one is sick. It hurts you deeply. You weep because they are not answered. When my son was sick with cancer I can't tell you how many

times I wept as I prayed for him to be healed. It cut me to the heart that I could not do anything for him. I know that many of you have wept over a loved one when they were seriously ill. When it happens keep in mind what happened to Paul. Unanswered prayer was for his good and benefit. Unanswered prayer kept him from becoming proud and at the same time kept him useful as a servant of God. Paul would have been ruined if God answered his prayer and healed his infirmity. Pride would have caused his downfall.

(3) We don't always know what to pray for as we ought

Romans 8:26 says; ***Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what to pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God.***

Paul is a classic example of a Christian who at times does not know what to pray for as he ought. He thought it would be to his advantage to be healed of his infirmity. He thought he could serve God more effectively if he could get rid of his thorn in the flesh. What he did not know is that if his prayer were answered it would have hurt him far more than helped him.

Many times we have problems, sickness, thorns in our flesh and we assume that we would be better off if God would take them away. What we don't know is that *some times* we are better off with them than without them. *At times* it would hurt us more if God took the thorn away than if he left the thorn in us.

(4) Unanswered prayer and sickness can be a great teacher

In verse 9 we read about the all-sufficient grace of Christ. Arthur W. Pink says this about the all-sufficient grace of Christ in verse 9;

That it is sufficient to support us under the severest and most prolonged affliction. It enables the soul to lie submissively as clay in the hands of the potter, to trust his wisdom and love, to be assured that he knows what is best for us.

I believe the grace in verse 9 is a special divine grace that God gives to special people to enable them bear up under their pain and infirmities. This grace gives you power to keep going and keep working for the Lord in spite of your pain and infirmity. This grace does not take away your pain and infirmity, it brings the power of Christ into your life so that you can rise

above the pain and live with the pain and keep serving and working for the Lord.

The average Christian today gives into pain and suffering and uses it as an excuse to quit or sit on the sidelines. The slightest headache keeps them home on Sunday morning. But if you are willing to work and serve God even though you are sick and have pain, God will give you this grace and you will be able to do what you thought you could never do.

Look at what Paul accomplished with this special grace. Everything he accomplished in his ministry as the apostle of the gentiles was done with an infirmity in his flesh. He had poor health and a thorn in his flesh most of his Christian life. But he did not give into it. He learned that God's grace was sufficient for his infirmities. He learned that he could rise above his infirmities by this all-sufficient grace of God.

But how did Paul learn that God's grace was sufficient to support him under his severe and prolonged affliction? By the thorn in his flesh. God left the thorn in him to teach him and us that his grace is sufficient to bear up under infirmities and to keep going when others quit. Paul could have used his infirmities as an excuse to quit. Many do. But instead, he relied on the all-sufficient grace of Christ to keep going.

If God answered all our prayers we would never have any thorns, sickness, problems or difficulties. But without those things we would never learn anything about the all-sufficient grace of Christ. You learn about this grace in the school of suffering. Some one said; he, who drinks deepest of sorrow, drinks deepest of grace also. God leaves thorns in our flesh to teach us that his grace is sufficient for our thorns. He who gives the thorn also gives grace to bear it.

Paul probably thought he could not live with a thorn in his flesh, so he begged God to remove it. But God did not remove it, he gave him grace instead and Paul learned by experience that God's grace was sufficient for his thorn. Paul's thorn was the result of unanswered prayer, but it taught him something that few Christians learn, that God's grace is not only sufficient for your thorns, but it is sufficient for unanswered prayer too.

(5) Unanswered prayer can be a benefit to a believer

Through unanswered prayer Paul acquired something he did not have before. Through unanswered prayer Paul received the abiding power of Christ according to verse 9. Unanswered prayer turned out to be a benefit

instead of a curse to Paul. (Rom.8:28) Paul was brought to his knees by the thorn God gave him, but on his knees he found the power of Christ. He found the power of Christ enabled him to overcome his infirmity. He found the power of Christ could keep him going when he was too weak to move. He found the power of Christ was greater than his weakness. But he never experienced the power of Christ until he became utterly weak. He became weak because God did not answer his prayer to remove his infirmity.

There may have been a possibility (this is my thoughts) that when Paul prayed for God to remove the thorn, that God may have given him a choice. He could have said; Paul if I take the thorn away from you the power of Christ will no longer abide upon you. But if you choose to keep the thorn the power of Christ will continue to abide upon you. Paul chose to keep the thorn.

We ask God to remove the thorns in our lives, but he does not answer us, instead he leaves the thorn in us to make us weak. He makes us weak so he can show us his power. It is when we are weak that we are strong. Paul's infirmity made him weak, but in his weakness he became spiritually strong by the power of Christ

When a person is weak he must depend upon God for strength. When a person is broke he must depend upon God to supply his need. When a person isn't smart he must depend upon God for wisdom. When a person cannot speak he must depend upon God for utterance.

Many prayers are not answered so that we can see and feel our weakness and helplessness so that we will depend upon God for our strength. Christians become strong by becoming weak. Many times sickness and infirmities and problems in our life make us weak, but when we are weak we become candidates for the power of Christ.

(6) We can thank God for unanswered prayer

In verses 9-10 Paul gloried in his infirmities and took pleasure in them. The infirmities Paul gloried in and took pleasure in were the result of unanswered prayer. When he said I take pleasure in infirmities, keep in mind that he had infirmities because God did not answer his prayer to remove them. So it is safe to say that Paul was thankful that God did not answer his prayer to heal his infirmity. Why? Because through them he experienced the power of Christ and through them he became strong.

Think about it. Instead of glorying in answers to prayer and healing, Paul gloried in unanswered prayer and infirmities! What a slap in the face to

modern day Christianity. This is a major rebuke to the health and wealth and prosperity gospel.

One day you may look back over unanswered prayer and give thanks for it when you see it was for your benefit that it was not answered. I have prayed for open doors that God did not open. Today I can look back and thank God they were not opened. I can thank God for unanswered prayer.

(7) Unanswered prayer takes time to understand or to make sense

In verse 8 when Paul prayed for God to remove the thorn in his flesh he didn't know at the time as to why God left the thorn in his flesh. After a period of time passed Paul finally realized the reason for the thorn was to keep him from being exalted above measure. He didn't learn this until after God said no three times. It took time for Paul to understand why his prayers were not answered and why he was not healed. Three times God had to tell him no.

You and I have many prayers that are not answered and we wonder why. It takes time to understand why some prayers are not answered, but if you stay in fellowship with God you will find out why, by and by.

(8) In time God will explain your unanswered prayers

What we read in verse 7 is what God revealed to him. This verse explains why God did not answer his prayer. It was God who revealed this to him. Verse 7 was a revelation from God. Paul did not understand this until God revealed it to him.

If we really want to know why our prayers are not answered God will reveal it to us in time. Sometimes the answer will come to us as we are reading the Bible. Sometimes it will come to us as we hear someone preach. Sometimes it will come to us as we are praying or meditating. It took time for Paul to come to the conclusion that he did in verse 7. It will take time for us to reach a conclusion as to why many of our prayers are not answered.

(9) Unanswered prayer and sickness can be the will of God

It was the will of God for Paul to know that his grace was sufficient for all things. It was the will of God for Paul to know and experience the power of Christ. The only way God could teach Paul these things was by the thorn he put in his flesh and by refusing to answer a prayer to remove it. The prayers God did not answer and the infirmity Paul suffered were the will of God to keep him humble; to teach him that his grace was sufficient for his

every need; and so that the power of Christ would be upon his life and ministry.

Your unanswered prayers may be the will of God. There may be things in your life that you would have never learned if God had answered certain prayers that you prayed.

The Second Sick Man Timothy

In 1 Timothy 5:23 Paul told Timothy; ***Drink no longer water, but use a little wine for thy stomach's sake and thine often infirmities.***

Timothy was like Paul in that he too had infirmities in his flesh. As a matter of fact it says he had *often infirmities*. What does that tell us? That he was sick most of the time. He had infirmities frequently and had them over and over again. He was not a healthy man, but a sickly man. But what kind of Christian was Timothy? In Philippians 2:20-22 Paul said this about him; *For I have no man likeminded, who will naturally care for your state. For all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's. But ye know the proof of him, as a son with the father, he hath served with me in the gospel.* As you can see from these verses Timothy was one of the most faithful helpers Paul had. Paul had nothing but praise for Timothy. Everything he said about him was good. He said that no one was as like-minded with him as Timothy. He always put the things of Jesus Christ first and himself last. He was a very dedicated, faithful servant of the Lord. He was a faithful preacher of the gospel of grace. Paul had complete trust in Timothy, but according to 1 Timothy 5:23 Timothy had infirmities and he had them often and he had stomach problems too.

What do we learn from this? First, in Timothy we see again that sickness is not a sign that a person is out of the will of God. It does not mean that God is chastising them for sin. In some cases that may be true, but not in the case of Timothy. Next to Paul, he is one of the most faithful and spiritual Christians in the New Testament, yet he was sick most of the time and had stomach problems frequently. He had them so often that Paul mentions his infirmities in this epistle, which billions of people have read. It was no accident that the Spirit of God told us about the infirmities of Timothy. Words mean things and it is obvious that the Spirit of God wanted us to know that even the best of Christians like Timothy get sick and many stay sick for years.

The second thing that we learn from the case of Timothy is that God uses physical ways and means to treat or cure sickness. Paul recommended that Timothy use a little wine and notice he said a little wine, for his stomach problems and his often infirmities.

That is very significant because there was a time in Paul's life when he would not have recommended medicine for sickness. In his early ministry he would have healed Timothy himself by the laying on of his hands. For example in Acts 19:11-12 it says; *And God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul: So that from his body were brought unto the sick handkerchiefs or aprons, and the diseases departed from them, and the evil spirits went out of them.* But at the end of his ministry when he wrote 1 and 2 Timothy all he could do was recommend a medication for Timothy's infirmities. This is a rebuke to the so-called faith healers of our day who actually teach that it is wrong to go to a doctor or to take medicine. They say it shows a lack of faith. But Timothy refutes this heresy for Paul recommended a medicine for Timothy's infirmities who was a very godly, faithful, spiritual Christian.

In Timothy's case we see that God may use medicine to treat sickness and disease. Some extremists look on medicine today as a curse or of the devil. But one of the blessings that God has blessed us with in this country is medicine and doctors. There are bad doctors and bad medicine, but there are some good ones too and I have personally seen God use medicine and doctors to cure sickness and disease and save millions of peoples lives.

Examples:

A few years ago my wife had a very serious physical problem. It had us both very worried. She was treated for her condition, but she kept getting worse. One Saturday morning my wife was in desperate condition and I had to do something so I called the Doctor at his house and I said you have got to give her something. He called a prescription in to the drug store. I drove as fast as I could to get it. I brought it home and she took it. Within 30 minutes she was much better and this started her on the road to complete recovery. I can't tell you what her problem was, but I believe those pills may have saved her life.

When my wife was young she had a full mastoid operation on one of her ears. The doctor took one of her eardrums completely out. It was a dangerous operation. Through the years she still had trouble with that ear

being infected. In the late sixties her ear became infected and would not heal. We took her to the doctor over and over again, but everything he tried failed. The infection began to grow inside her ear and he decided that she had to have another operation on her ear. But the operation was dangerous because the ear had to be removed and her brain exposed to get inside the head. The doctor said there was a 50% chance she would not survive the operation. But before he made plans to operate he said I want you to go and see a new ear doctor in town whose name is Dr. Donald Muller. She went and after examining her ear he gave her a \$15.00 prescription for eardrops to put in her ear. Within a week her ear was cured. There is no doubt in my mind that those eardrops may have saved my wife's life.

Look at Lance Armstrong. He had cancer in his abdomen, lungs and even his brain. But he was treated by intensive chemotherapy by Dr. Ironhorn in Indianapolis and was cured. After he was cured of cancer he went on to win the Tour of France Bike race 7 times. At one time he was the best conditioned athletic in the world and he is lost.

There is no doubt that God uses medicine and doctors today to cure sickness and disease. In our life time we have seen doctors and medicines cure polio, tuberculosis, whooping cough, small pox, malaria, appendicitis, meningitis, influenza, some forms of cancer, heart disease, diabetes, pneumonia etc. We take these things for granted, but a few years ago these diseases killed everyone who had them. But today there are medicines that will cure every one of them. Medicine and good doctors are spiritual blessings and you should never fail to use them when you need them. That is why when I pray for someone who is sick, I pray that God will guide the doctors to make the right decisions and prescribe the right medicine.

Timothy is also a rebuke to those who say that healing is a part of salvation and the atonement. Charismatics say that Christ died to make you healthy and that healing is a part of the atonement. That is why charismatic preachers like Kenneth Hagin say; *"I believe it is the plan of our father that no believer should be sick. I state boldly it is not the will of God my father that we should suffer with cancer and other dread diseases that bring pain and anguish. No. It is Gods will that we should be healed.* Oral Roberts says the same thing about sickness and disease, but what many people do not know is that Oral Roberts is kept alive by a pace maker attached to his heart!

If it is God's will for his people to be in good health, why was Timothy sick? If healing was in the atonement, why did Paul tell him to drink a little wine for his stomach problems and his often infirmities? **Is wine a substitute for the atonement?**

If healing were in the atonement Timothy wouldn't need any medicine at all. Paul would have told him to believe that Christ died to heal him, as he believed Christ died to save him. If healing was in the atonement the cross could have healed him, but all that Paul could do for him was recommend wine, which treated the symptoms of his sickness. The wine didn't heal him, it only relieved the pain. If healing is in the atonement surely this man should have been healed. Did the merits of the cross cease for Timothy? If we are saved and healed by the cross, Timothy should have been healed.

The Third Sick Man Trophimus

In 2 Timothy 4:20 Paul tells us this about Trophimus; ***Erastus abode at Corinth: but Trophimus have I left at Miletum sick.***

One of the most important things we learn from Trophimus is that the gift of healing has been withdrawn. Paul was an apostle and as an apostle he had all the signs and wonders of an apostle including the gift of healing. But when he got to the end of his ministry he could not heal this man, but had to leave him sick.

This would have never happened in his early ministry. He would have laid hands on him and healed him instantly. In his early ministry he could heal anyone who was sick. But here at the close of Paul's ministry the gift of healing was obviously withdrawn for by that time signs and wonders had served their purpose. At the end of Paul's ministry he no longer had the gift of healing and all he could do was recommend medicine for sickness. And he is the greatest apostle who ever lived.

Today there are a lot of fake healers shafting people out of millions of dollars. They are like the exorcists of Acts 19:13 who tried to heal like Paul, but it backfired on them. (I am surprised the government hasn't cracked down on these fake healers because of their false claims.)

When it comes to healing today there is divine healing, but not divine healers. If someone is miraculously healed today, without doctors or medicine, it will not be because of some healer. It will be because God chose to heal them according to his sovereign will.

Before we look at the fourth man;

Take some advice from Dr. Watkins. You and I can avoid many sicknesses and diseases if we were more careful about what we put into our bodies and how much we put in our bodies.

It does not take a rocket scientist to know that if you suck cigarette smoke into your lungs you will get sick. Nicotine is poison and poison will make you sick and it will kill you. Cigarettes kill 1000's of people like my oldest brother and father in law every year in the USA.

If you pour alcohol into your body you will get sick. Alcohol is a poison and poison will make your body sick and poison will kill you. Alcohol makes millions of people sick and kills 1000's of people every year. It is the most addictive drug in the world and the most dangerous for it kills more people than all other drugs combined.

If you eat the wrong foods that are fatty, greasy, and full of calories you will get sick. Fatty, greasy, high calorie foods are bad for your arteries, heart, colon, intestines, liver, stomach, and gall bladder. Those kinds of foods led to the death of my mother in law.

If you eat too much food you will get sick. Over eating affects your heart, lungs, back, blood pressure, and cholesterol. Over eating leads to diabetes, it causes strokes and heart attacks and many other sicknesses and disease. Someone said that Americans are killing themselves with spoons and forks.

Parents ought to teach their children while they are young what foods are good and bad for them. Don't let your children over eat. Don't feed them junk food. If it comes through a window don't eat it. If you train them to eat right when they are young, they will not be sick as often as children who are allowed to eat anything and everything they want. You are not doing your children a favor by allowing them to eat anything and everything they want.

Exercise. Get off your rear end and walk, run, do aerobics, give your heart and lungs a work out. You will feel better and think better and spend less money at the doctor's office.

The Fourth Sick Man Epaphroditus

In Philippians 2:25-27 Paul tells us about Epaphroditus; ***I supposed it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother, and companion in labour, and fellow soldier, but your messenger, and he that ministered to my wants. For he longed after you all, and was full of heaviness, because that ye had heard that he had been sick. For indeed he was sick nigh unto death: but God had mercy on him; and not on him only, but me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow.***

Verse 30 says; ***Because for the work of Christ he was nigh unto death, not regarding his life, to supply your lack of service toward me.***

Epaphroditus was sick nigh unto death, but it appears that God healed him. The healing of Epaphroditus is positive proof that God heals people in this age of grace. Let's notice some things about this man.

How he got sick

It says; ***For the work of Christ he was nigh unto death***

This tells us that you can get sick working for the Lord. Here is a man who worked and served with Paul and got sick because of his work. Being a servant of the Lord is no guarantee of good health. It was not because of the works of the flesh he got sick; it was because of the work of Christ he got sick. This again refutes the lie that sickness is chastisement for sin. This man got sick because he was serving the Lord, not because he was living in sin. His service wore him out physically until he got sick.

How sick he was

Paul said two times; ***He was nigh unto death***

He was about to die. But even though he was deathly sick he kept laboring to supply the needs of Paul so that he could continue to preach. How many preachers have a friend who would jeopardize their own health and even life to help them in their ministry? That is the kind of man he was.

How he was healed

In verse 27 it says; ***God had mercy on him***

That verse tells you how God heals sick folks today. It's because of his mercy and grace. Everything God does for us Gentiles today is by grace and mercy. Mercy and grace is the principal of salvation and blessing today. Under the law the principle was works. God said; keep the

commandments I will bless you. Under grace He blesses and saves people freely according to his will.

Grace is God giving you something that you do not deserve nor earn, like salvation. Mercy is God withholding something from you that you have earned and deserve, like wrath. Healing today is not based upon the law or the covenants of promise. Healing today is based upon the mercy and grace of God. If God heals you today it will be by his grace and mercy.

It will not be because you have earned it or deserve it.

It will not be because God is obligated to heal you.

It will not be because God made a promise to heal you.

It will not be because we have a guarantee of healing.

You cannot demand God to heal you today.

You cannot claim kingdom promises for healing today.

No one has the gift of healing today.

If you get healed today you will get healed the same way this man was, by the grace and mercy of God.

Why he was healed

Ephesians 1:11 says that; ***“God worketh all things after the counsel of his own will”***. In other words, what God does is not done without a reason or purpose. Why did God heal this man? What was the purpose? Paul said; *But God had mercy on him; lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow.* He was healed by the grace and mercy of God, but God had a purpose for healing him. It appears he was healed for Paul's sake lest he have sorrow upon sorrow. Paul needed this man desperately and without him Paul's ministry would have suffered greatly. This man was vital to Paul's ministry and God in his mercy reached down and healed him for Paul's sake. He was Paul's companion and fellow-soldier and he ministered unto his needs. He supplied Paul's needs when others failed to do so. So he was vital to Paul's survival and that is the reason he was healed.

My thoughts about the healing of Epaphroditus which are just that, my thoughts, which are not infallible.

This man's healing makes me exam my life very carefully. When I read this story it makes me ask myself certain questions that are uncomfortable: I have asked myself: If I get sick why should God heal me? What purpose would it serve? This man was vital to Paul's ministry. His sickness caused Paul sorrow and his death would have caused him sorrow upon sorrow. Paul's ministry would have suffered greatly if God had not healed him. And so I have to ask myself, what am I doing for the church and the Lord that

would cause God to heal me if I got sick? Would the ministry suffer without me? It would have been a great loss to Paul if God hadn't healed Epaphroditus. Would it be a loss if God did not heal me if I were sick right unto death?

If it is true that God healed him because he was such a valuable asset to Paul's ministry, shouldn't you and I become involved in a ministry that is so important that God would in mercy reach down and heal us, to keep us involved in that ministry? Please understand that these are my thoughts and all I ask you to do is to consider them.

Spiritual Healing

When we think of sickness and disease we usually think of physical sickness such as cancer, stroke, heart attack or Aids. But there is another type of sickness described in the Bible that is spiritual. A person who is not saved or born again is compared to a sick and diseased man in Isaiah 1 which says: ***The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores: they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment.***

The disease and sickness described in these verses is spiritual. They describe the soul and spirit of lost men and women. When God the Great Physician exams the soul and spirit of sinners he sees a mass of corruption from the top of their head to the sole of their feet. This spiritual sickness is the result of sin and it is fatal. Sin has destroyed us spiritually and physically and that is why salvation in the Bible is often compared to healing.

Even though this disease is fatal God can and will heal it. There is guaranteed healing for spiritual sickness in the cross of Christ. Peter writing to the Christians of his day said to them: ***Who (Christ) his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed.***

The healing in this verse is spiritual and it's made possible through the death and shed blood of Christ. Christ did not have to die to heal anyone physically. People were healed 1000's of years before Christ died. Every person he healed was healed before he died. But to heal us spiritually he had to die and pay for our sins which destroyed our soul and spirit. On the cross Christ provided healing for our sin sick souls by offering his soul as a

sacrifice for our sins. Isaiah 53:10 says: ***It pleased the Lord to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin.*** Verse 12 says that Christ; ***poured out his soul unto death: and he bare the sin of many.***

We are spiritually sick and diseased because we are guilty of every sin the law of God condemns. The penalty of breaking God's law is death, the second death of suffering forever in the lake of fire. (Rev.20:14-15) But thank God, Christ's death on the cross satisfied all of God's just demands against our sins. And even though we did the crime Jesus paid the fine. By repenting of our sins and believing that Christ died for us and was resurrected God will heal us from the deadly disease of sin. If you have never been healed of the spiritual sickness that has destroyed your soul my advise to you is to call on the Lord now and ask him to do for you what the Psalmist wrote in Psalms 41:4: **Lord, be merciful unto me: heal my soul; for I have sinned against thee.**

Pastor Art Watkins