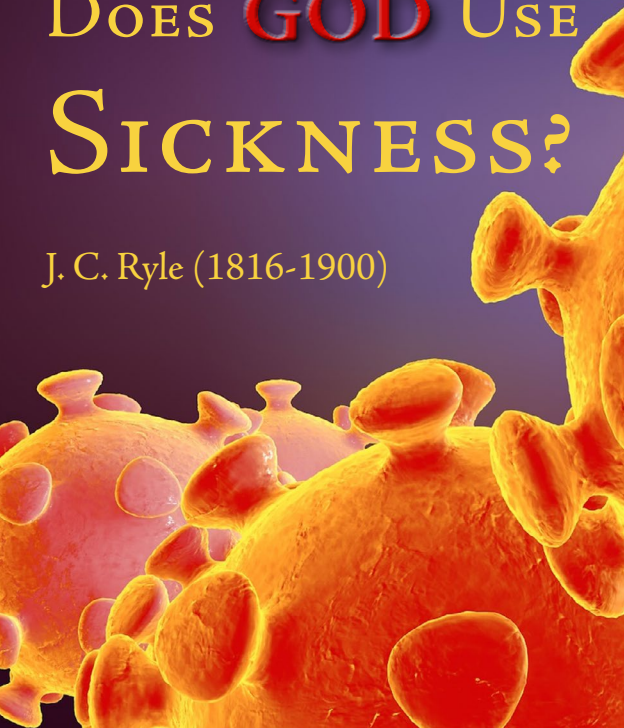


# Does **GOD** Use SICKNESS?

J. C. Ryle (1816-1900)



I invite your attention to the subject of sickness. We cannot avoid it; it will visit each of us in turn.

## **1. Universal Prevalence**

Sickness is universal and everywhere. Men, women, and children sicken and die. Sickness is among all classes and of every description.

Why is sickness universal? The only explanation that satisfies is that which the Bible gives. Something has come into the world that has stripped man of his original privileges, in a word: sin. "Sin entered into the world, and death by sin" (Rom 5:12). Sin is the cause of all the sickness, disease, pain, and suffering that prevail on the earth (Gen 3:17-19).

## **2. General Benefits**

***Can sickness be good?*** I ask all who find it hard to reconcile the prevalence of disease and pain with the love of God, to mark what is going on in the world around them. Ob-

serve the extent to which men constantly submit to present loss for the sake of future gain (as in starting a business), present sorrow for the sake of future joy (disciplining a child), present pain for the sake of future health (strenuous exercise). The seed is thrown into the ground and rots, but we sow in the hope of a future harvest (Joh 12:24).

Now, apply this great principle to God's government of the world. Understand that God allows pain, sickness, and disease, not because He loves to vex man, but because He desires to benefit man's heart, mind, conscience, and soul to all eternity. By sickness, God checks the ravages of sin and the devil among men's souls.

***What are the ways*** that God uses sickness for the good of mankind?

1) Sickness helps *to remind men of death*. Most men live as if they were never going to die. Sickness reminds them that they have to die as well as to live (Heb 9:27; Rom 6:23).

2) Sickness helps *to make men think seriously of God*, their souls, and the world to come. A severe disease has a surprising power to bring these thoughts before the eyes of a man's soul (Mar 8:36).

3) Sickness helps *to soften men's hearts* and teach them wisdom. The natural heart is as hard as a stone. It can see no happiness except in this world. A long illness exposes the emptiness of what the world calls "good" things, and teaches us to hold them with a loose hand (1Jo 2:15-17).

4) Sickness helps *to level and humble us*. We are all naturally proud and high-minded. A sick bed is a mighty tamer of such thoughts. It forces on us the mighty truth that we are all dying creatures who will soon stand side by side before God on Judgment Day. Surely anything that teaches *that* lesson is good (Jam 4:10).

5) Finally, sickness helps *to test men's profession of faith* to see if true or false. Dis-

ease is sometimes most useful to a man in exposing his lack of a new heart (Joh 3:3). Surely, anything that makes us find the real character of our faith is good (2Co 13:5).

If sickness in a wicked world can help to make men think of God and their souls, then sickness confers benefits on mankind. We have no right to murmur at sickness; we ought rather to thank God for it. It is a testimony to God's power and rule. So long as we have a world wherein there is sin, it is a mercy that it is a world wherein there is sickness.

### 3. Special Duties Sickness Calls For

Now we ask, in a world of disease and death, what ought we to do? Sickness requires that we live habitually ***prepared to meet God***. Sickness is a reminder of death. Death is the door through which we must all pass to judgment. Judgment is the time when we must at last see God face to face.

The first lesson that each should learn in a sick and dying world is to prepare to meet his God (Joh 1:12).

When are you prepared to meet God? Never, till your iniquities are forgiven and your sin covered! The blood of Jesus Christ alone can cleanse those sins away (1Jo 5:7). The righteousness of Christ alone can make you acceptable in God's sight. Faith, simple childlike faith, alone can give you an part in Christ and His benefits (Rom 5:8; Eph 2:8-9).

Sickness demands that we live habitually ***ready to bear it patiently***. Sickness is no doubt a hard thing for flesh and blood. To bear sickness patiently, we must lay up stores of grace in the time of health (Rom 5:3).

Once more, sickness calls us to be habitually ready to feel with and ***help our fellow men***. Wherever there is sickness, there is a call to duty. A little timely assistance in some cases, a kindly visit in others, a friendly inquiry, a mere expression of sympathy, may

do a vast good. Assist them if they need aid. Show your sympathy with them. Try to lighten their burdens. These may ultimately be used of God to lead men to Christ (Gal 6:2; Eph 4:32; Act 10:38).

#### **4. What Will You Do When Ill?**

The time must come when you, as well as others, must sicken and die. Rest not till you can give a satisfactory answer. Presume not on a death-bed repentance. One dying thief was saved that men might not despair, but only one that none might presume.

If you are not yet prepared to meet God, ***acquaint yourself with the Lord Jesus Christ*** without delay. Of all gambling in the world, there is none so reckless as that of the man who lives unprepared to meet God. Flee to Christ and be saved; repent and be converted (Joh 3:16).

Next, I exhort all true Christians to ***glorify God in the time of sickness***. You may

honour God as much by patient suffering as by active work. Remember that the very trial you feel so acutely is sent in love, not anger (1Co 10:31).

***Recollect the sympathy of Jesus*** for all His weak members. Sickness and suffering make believers more like their Lord in experience than does health (Mar 6:34).

Finally, let us ***cleave to Christ*** more closely, love Him more heartily, live to Him more thoroughly, copy Him more exactly, confess Him more boldly, follow Him more fully. In sickness it will bring us peace. In the world to come it will give us “a crown of glory that fadeth not away” (1Pe 5:4). ❧

*(Complete sermon Sickness available  
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