

Physical Infirmities

by Harmon A. Baldwin

The sermon emphasizes the importance of self-denial and the interdependence of body, mind, and spirit, and that physical infirmities do not necessarily affect one's spiritual strength.

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 6:19, 2 Corinthians 12:9, Galatians 5:16, Philippians 4:13, 1 Timothy 4:8

Topics: "Physical Weakness", "Spiritual Strength"

Description

Harmon A. Baldwin delves into the classification of infirmities by Wesley and Fletcher, focusing on physical weaknesses and the interdependence of body, mind, and spirit. He emphasizes the limitations of the physical man, the necessity of rest, and the need for self-denial to keep the body under control. Baldwin discusses the struggles faced by God's saints due to physical ailments, highlighting the importance of maintaining spiritual strength even in the midst of bodily weaknesses.

Transcript

Both Wesley and Fletcher class infirmities under three heads: those of the body, of the mind, and of the spirit. Owing to the complexity in the composition of body, mind and spirit, and the ever interlacing of the manifestations of their various movements, it is at times impossible to separate them) and to say with a surety, this is of the body, this of the mind, and this of the spirit. We will attempt to separate them only in a general way.

I. Physical Infirmities. There would be very little need of teaching concerning physical weaknesses were it not for the fact that it is sometimes a difficult matter for some to understand the effect that these weaknesses may have on the spirit, and where legitimate effects end and sinful principles enter. Certain it is, that, under the present order of things, the Creator has so amalgamated our entire being that all is interdependent, and one part is strangely influenced by another.

The physical man has its limitations, and these limitations are often painfully manifest. We will not be taken to task when we say that some things are physically impossible. Men can not flap their arms and fly like birds; they can not swim like fish; their voices are weak and they can not roar like lions; they can lift only so much, walk so fast, do so much work; they finally reach a place where their finiteness arises and says, "Henceforth and no farther."

The strongest man will wear out and must take rest. God has acknowledged this fact in the alternations of night and day, in setting apart one day in seven, and in frequent cautions to turn aside and rest awhile. In

our scrap book we have a long poem about the preacher's vacation in which the writer very strongly depreciated such a thing as a preacher taking a vacation, since, as he says, the devil, saloon-keepers and others do not do so. This might be a good argument, if it was true, and if the physical man would never wear out, but it does, and in these modern days the fact is acknowledged that at some time during the year every workman should have a vacation. But when it comes to the work of the Lord some people are inclined to go on the principle of the man, who, when he heard some Christian workers speaking of being tired, said, "Work on, and die, and go to heaven."

Some have wished and prayed for a stronger physique that they might do the work their hearts indite. They have looked at some big, muscular fellows, who do -- nothing much -- and almost envied them their physical powers. Notwithstanding the peculiar teachings of some, it still remains a fact that physical and spiritual strength do not always run parallel, and that though at times the outward may perish, yet the inward man may be renewed day by day.

Some of God's saints must continually fight against harassing pains, some against sluggishness of body, some against distressing nerves, others are overtaken by uncontrollable weakness, and some gradually break down and fall into the grave. Who will venture to say that in spite of any or all of these physical ailments the soul will mount on eagle's wings, and feel exalted to the third heaven? But if even this soul continues steadfast in the faith, God's favor will not be withdrawn. Thus we learn that continual ecstatic joys are not essential to the favor of God. It is the true heart that counts.

While we live in this world we will never be wholly free from physical desires and appetites. In themselves these desires and appetites are legitimate and are not a sign of depravity, but when men fell their natural appetites became depraved, and will never, in this life, reach such a state that their possessors will not be forced to deny themselves daily, -- to keep their bodies under. In other words, while, in the article of holiness, moral depravity is removed, yet physical depravity remains, and a man must deny his inordinate appetites, tastes, desires, and preferences to such an extent as to keep his body under and his soul in the ascendancy. Be careful when your bodily appetites, the lowest part of man, are getting control, you are in danger of becoming a cast away.

(Note. The words depravity and inordinate, as used above in connection with the natural appetites, must be properly qualified, or they will lead to misunderstanding. "Depravity" is used for want of a better word, and refers, not to sinful depravity, which can reside only in the spirit, but to the lack of that perfection which originally characterized the whole man, even his physical desires. The word "inordinate" as we have here used it does not refer to that condition in which the physical desires conquer the whole man, but simply to the fact that, even in the sanctified, certain desires are so strong that there remains the necessity for self-denial.)

In a holy man the natural desires may be warped in the direction of one's own individual besetment; this is not actual sin, but is only a proof of physical depravity. Although God may, He does not usually, or it may be ever, so change a man's natural disposition as to make him entirely unlike his former self, but his former self is often so sanctified and made meet for the Master's use that it is scarcely recognizable, and the Lord says that old things are passed away and all things are become new. One man's natural besetment is lightness, he must practice sobriety; another's is melancholia, he must rejoice in the lord; one man is given to too much talk, he must study to be quiet; another does not talk enough, he must learn to speak. We knew one man who had an inordinate desire for food; his efforts at self-control carried him into asceticism. We have heard of a horse getting scared at the water on one side of a bridge and jumping off

into the water on the other side.

When a person demands any form of recreation, association, food, pleasure or indulgence to make him happy he is leaving the track of self-denial and is putting some other thing in the place only God should occupy. This is one of the strongest arguments against the use of tobacco, opiates or any form of narcotics or stimulants; they form a habit which steals one's happiness until gratified, even common sense is forgotten and God's presence often obscured in the intense longing for the favorite indulgence. "The passions become eagle eyed, the judgment blind."

The proper limit of any gratification is one's own good, the good of others or the glory of God; anything beyond this is allowed; allowed, not commanded, because of the weakness of the human instrument. And when we say allowed we do not mean to teach that God ever winks at self-indulgence, but He can pardon because of the atonement. The spirit of the sanctified truly is willing, but the flesh of even this man is weak, and God forgives his unwitting trespasses because of the blood and judges him by Christ's evangelical law of liberty. This is what we mean when we pray, "Forgive us our trespasses ('debts' or 'sins') as we forgive those who trespass against us." Not actual transgressions or inherent sin (this latter can not be forgiven,) but inadvertent trespasses against the infinitely pure law of God which allows of no mistakes, caused by human shortsightedness and lack of understanding.

"Except a man deny himself," refers to that thing which would be pleasing to the natural man, but the doing of which would be displeasing to God and detrimental to the soul's best good. Except a man, when occasion arises, put away pleasing food, pleasing associations, pleasant occupations, the possibility of gain, desirable position; except he accept, when the occasion arises, unpleasant things, annoying circumstances, scant supplies, hissing and scorn, the track of tribulation, he can not be Christ's disciple. If a man would gain his life, he must consent to lose it. All this holiness will do for a man even though the flesh is weak. By this ye shall know whether ye are Christ's disciple, if ye love him more than these.

Concerning the physical infirmities of Christ and the corresponding infirmities of the holy, Fletcher writes:

"Was not our lord Himself imperfect? Did His bodily strength never fail in agonizing prayer, or in intense labor? Did His animal spirits ever move with the same sprightliness? Do we not read of His sleeping in the ship when His disciples wrestled with the tempestuous sea? Did He not fulfill the precept, 'Be ye angry, and sin not'? Had He not the troublesome sensation of grief at Lazarus' grave, of hunger in the wilderness, of weariness, at Jacob's well, and of thirst, upon the cross.? If He was 'made in the likeness of sinful flesh,' and 'tempted in all things as we are,' is it not highly probable that He was not an utter stranger to the natural appetites and uneasy sensations which are incident to flesh and blood? Is it a sin to feel them? Is it not rather a virtue totally to deny them, or not to satisfy them out of the line of duty, or not to indulge them in an excessive manner on that line? Again: Did not His holy flesh testify a natural, innocent abhorrence to suffering? Did not His sacred flesh faint in the garden? Were not His spirits so depressed that He stood in need of the strengthening assistance of an angel? Did He do all the good He would? To suppose that He wished not the conversion of His friends and brethren is to suppose Him totally devoid of natural affection: but were they all converted? Did you ever read, 'Neither did His brethren believe in Him,' and, 'His friends went out to lay hold on Him; for they said, He is beside Himself?' To conclude: Did He not accidentally stir up the evil He would not when He gave occasion to the envy of the Pharisees, scorn of Herod, the fears of Pilate, the rage of the Jewish mob? And when He prayed that the bitter cup might pass from Him, if it were possible, did He not manifest a resigned desire to escape pain and shame? If every such desire is indwelling sin, or the flesh sinfully lusting against the spirit, Did He not go through the sinful conflict as well

as those whom we call perfect men in Christ, and consequently, did He not fall at once from mediatorial, Adamic, and Christian perfection; indwelling sin being equally inconsistent with all these perfections? What true believer does not shudder at the bare supposition? And if our sinless lord felt the weakness of the flesh harmlessly lusting against the willingness of the spirit, according to His own doctrine, 'The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak,' is it not evident that the conflict we speak of, -- if the spirit maintains its superior, victorious lusting against the flesh, and by that means steadily keeps the flesh in its proper place -- is it not evident, I say, that this conflict is no more inconsistent with Christian perfection than the suffering, agonizing, fainting, crying, and dying, which were the lot of our sinless, perfect Savior to the last?" -- Last Check to Antinomianism, Sec. VII.

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