

Medical Decisions--Providence and Health

by John Newton

The speaker advises trusting God's providence and wisdom in matters of physical health, rather than taking matters into our own hands.

Scripture: Psalm 20:7, Psalm 56:3, Proverbs 3:5, Isaiah 41:10, Philippians 4:6

Topics: "Gods Providence", "Faith And Health"

Description

John Newton addresses the dilemma of smallpox inoculation, emphasizing the importance of faith and trust in God's providence in making decisions about health and well-being. He contrasts the perspectives of those who choose inoculation as a preventive measure and those who choose to trust in God's timing and care, highlighting the need for strong faith in all aspects of life. Newton encourages a deeper reliance on God for both spiritual and physical needs, acknowledging that true faith involves entrusting God with every aspect of our lives, including our health and safety.

Transcript

June 3, 1777

Dear Sir,

It seems I must write something about the smallpox, but I know not well what: not having had it myself, I cannot judge how I should feel if I were actually exposed to it. I am not a professed advocate for inoculation; but if a person who fears the Lord should tell me, "I think I can do it in faith, looking upon it as a salutary expedient, which He in His providence has discovered [revealed], and which, therefore, it appears my duty to have recourse to, so that my mind does not hesitate with respect to the lawfulness, nor am I anxious about the event; being satisfied, that whether I live or die, I am in that path in which I can cheerfully expect His blessing," -I do not know that I could offer a word by way of dissuasion.

If another person should say, "My times are in the Lord's hands; I am now in health, and am not willing to bring upon myself a disorder [the vaccination was a sort of controlled disease], the consequences of which I cannot possibly foresee: If I am to have the small-pox, I believe He is the best Judge of the season and manner in which I shall be visited, so as may be most for His glory and my own good; and therefore I choose to wait His appointment, and not to rush upon even the possibility of danger without a call. If the very hairs of my head are numbered, I have no reason to fear that, supposing I receive the small-pox in a natural way, I shall have a single pimple more than He sees expedient; and why should I wish to have one

less? Nay, admitting, which however is not always the case, that inoculation might exempt me from some pain and inconvenience, and lessen the apparent danger, might it not likewise, upon that very account, prevent my receiving some of those sweet consolations, which I humbly hope my gracious Lord would afford me, if it were His pleasure to call me to a sharp trial? Perhaps the chief design of this trying hour, if it comes, may be to show me more of His wisdom, power, and love, than I have ever yet experienced. If I could devise a means to avoid the trouble, I know not how great a loser I may be in point of grace and comfort. Nor am I afraid of my face [a common feature of smallpox was disfiguring of the face]; it is now as the Lord has made it, and it will be so after the small-pox. If it pleases Him, I hope it will please me. In short, though I do not censure others, yet, as to myself, inoculation is what I dare not venture upon. If I did venture, and the issue should not be favourable, I should blame myself for having attempted to take the management out of the Lord's hand into my own, which I never did yet in other matters without finding I am no more able than I am worthy to choose for myself.

Besides, at the best, inoculation would only secure me from one of the innumerable natural evils the flesh is heir to; I should still be as liable as I am at present to a putrid fever, a bilious cholic, an inflammation in the bowels or in the brain [relatively common and often fatal diseases of the 18th Century], and a thousand formidable diseases which are hovering round me, and only wait His permission to cut me off in a few days or hours: and therefore I am determined, by His grace, to resign myself to His disposal. Let me fall into the hands of the Lord (for His mercies are great) and not into the hands of men."

If a person should talk to me in this strain, most certainly I could not say, "Notwithstanding all this, your safest way is to be inoculated."

We preach and hear, and I hope we know something of faith, as enabling us to entrust the Lord with our souls: I wish we had all more faith, to entrust Him with our bodies, our health, our provision, and our temporal comforts likewise. The former should seem to require the strongest faith of the two. How strange is it, that when we think we can do the greater, we should be so awkward and unskilful when we aim at the less!

Give my love to your friend. I dare not advise; but if she can quietly return at the usual time, and neither run intentionally into the way of the small-pox, nor run out of the way, but leave it simply with the Lord, I shall not blame her. And if you will mind your praying and preaching, and believe that the Lord can take care of her without any of your contrivances, I shall not blame you; nay, I shall praise Him for you both. My prescription is, to read Dr. Watts, Psal. cxxi. every morning before breakfast, and pray it over till the cure is effected. Probatum est. (It is a good thing.)

Hast Thou not given Thy word

To save my soul from death?

And I can trust my Lord,

To keep my mortal breath.

I'll go and come

Nor fear to die,

Till from on high

Thou call me home.

Adieu. Pray for yours, &c.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/john-newton/medical-decisions-providence-and-health/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net