

Christ a Physician

by William Plumer

Christ is the great Physician who can heal us from the dreadful disease of sin through his blood and righteousness.

Scripture: Isaiah 1:6

Topics: "Sin And Redemption", "Christ Our Savior"

Description

William Plumer, an American Presbyterian minister, delves into the metaphor of sin as a disease and God, particularly Christ, as the Physician in his book 'The Rock of our Salvation.' Sin is portrayed as a dreadful, universal, hereditary, and perpetual disease that corrupts human nature entirely. Plumer emphasizes that sin is the worst disease, as it leads to spiritual death and eternal damnation. However, he offers hope by highlighting the remedy for sin found in the work and death of Christ, who justifies and sanctifies believers, reconciling them to God. Plumer describes Jesus Christ as a tender, approachable, and skilled Physician who is always ready to heal sin-sick souls without charge, showcasing his love, wisdom, and efficacy in saving even the chief of sinners.

Transcript

William Plumer (1802-1880) was an American Presbyterian minister. This article comes from his "The Rock of our Salvation," a book on nothing but varying attributes of Jesus Christ. This is the chapter on 'Christ a Physician'..

Often in Scripture is sin spoken of as a disease, a sickness, a hurt; the plan of mercy as a remedy, a balm, a healing; and God, and particularly Christ, as a Physician. (Psa. 38:7; Isa.1:6; Jer. 8:21,22; Hos. 5:13; Matt. 4:23; 8:17; 9:12,35; Mark 2:17; Luke 5:31) More just or striking figurative language is nowhere found. Men's sins make them sick. The only remedy is sovereign grace. The Physician must be divine.

Let us look at the great doctrines of the gospel under this figure:

I. Sin is a dreadful disease. Yea, it is the very worst disease. It was the first, and so is the oldest malady. It infected man very soon after his creation. The devil was a murderer from the beginning (John 8:44). For nearly six thousand years sin has committed its ravages and been gaining inveteracy. No other disease is so old.

Sin is also a universal disease: "All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." "There is none righteous, no, not one: there is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way." (Rom. 3:10-12, 23) Other maladies have slain their thousands; this has slain its tens of thousands. The whole world is a graveyard, full of spiritual death and corruption. No mere man ever lived without sin. As soon as we begin to act we begin to transgress.

Not only is every man sick, but our whole nature is diseased. "The understanding is darkened;" the memory is polluted; the imagination of the thoughts of the heart is only evil continually; the throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues men use deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips; their mouth is full of cursing and bitterness; their feet are swift to shed blood. The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked. Their hands are full of bribes and of blood. They love darkness rather than light. They put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter. They call the proud happy and the humble miserable. They are utterly vain. Sin makes men blind, and deaf, and dumb, and lame, and lethargic. It is a terrible complication of diseases. It is a rottenness in the bones. It is a maddening fever, a wasting consumption, a paralysis of all the powers. Human nature is wholly corrupt. "From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrefying sores: they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment." (Isa. 1:6)

Sin is a perpetual disease. It rages day and night, on the sea and on the land, in the house of mirth and in the house of God. The wicked "sleep not, except they have done mischief". They devise mischief upon their beds. They "cannot cease from sin". Even in sleep their dreams are vain or vile. Sin has no rest. If for a season the evil spirit forsakes his house, it is only to bring with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there, and the last state of that man is worse than the first.

Sin is a hereditary disease: "By one man's disobedience many were made sinners". We are conceived in sin and brought forth in iniquity. The child of a consumptive may die of old age, but the children of sinners must be sinful. "Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?"

Sin is also contagious. Sinners are enticers, seducers, corrupters (Isa. 1:4). Many are "factors for hell, studying to corrupt all about them." Men are often partakers of each other's sins. To the perpetual disgrace of Jeroboam and Manasseh, it is said that they "made Israel to sin". Some men strongly resemble the upas-tree, whose leaves and bloom and shade blighted all within its reach.

Sin is also the most deceitful and flattering disease. One of its strong delusions is, "Thou shalt not die". Paracelsus tells us of a disease "which made men die dancing". So with the wicked. When they cry, Peace and safety, lo, sudden destruction cometh upon them, and they shall not escape. See the throng of ungodly men marching to perdition, the slaves of Satan, the servants of corruption, the enemies of God. Their mirth would make an ignorant man think them the happiest of mortals, and not, as they are, condemned criminals, on their way to the eternal prison-house of inflexible justice. Just as the fool thought himself prepared for a long and merry life, his soul was required of him. Sin has its hectic flushes, its unnatural excitements, its delusive dreams, its strange ecstasies. The worse a man is, the better he thinks himself to be.

Sin is the worst disease, because it is the parent of all other diseases. In Paul's argument, "death by sin" is an axiom. But for sin, we should never have seen a human being faint, or sicken, or die. Suffering and agony have one parent--transgression.

Other diseases are calamities; this is a wickedness. Sin is not a misfortune; it is a crime. It is a wicked thing to be a sinner. Transgression brings guilt. God is angry with the wicked every day. The more sinful any one is, the more is God displeased with him.

Sin is the most loathsome of all diseases. Pride is the worst kind of swelling. No heart is so vile as a hard heart. No vileness compares with an evil heart of unbelief. No sight is so appalling as a sight of vile affections. The physician of the body sees sights which try his nerves, but he who has right views of sin is sickened and frightened at the discovery. It is horrible and abominable to God and to all right-minded creatures.

Sin is also the most dolorous disease. They multiply their sorrows who hasten after transgression. The most bitter cries that ever were heard were extorted by sin. This is true of saints and of sinners, of earth and of hell.

Other diseases do but kill the body; this kills soul and body in hell for ever. They may pursue their victims to the grave; but "sin kills beyond the tomb". It will, if possible, rage more violently beyond the tomb than on earth. It will be followed by eternal regrets and reproaches, eternal weeping and wailing, eternal wrath and anguish.

Nor can this disease be cured by any means of human devising. If music did cure the bite of the tarantula, the music of the angelic choir, announcing the advent of Messias, will not of itself heal any soul. Nay, the melodies and harmonies of the skies, singing the song of Moses and the Lamb, would not save a soul. All reformations wrought by persuasion and the natural will never cure the heart. "If I wash myself with snow-water, and make my hands never so clean; yet shalt thou plunge me in the ditch, and mine own clothes shall abhor me" (Job 9:30,31). "I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess," said the Pharisee, while spiritual wickedness reigned within. Herod heard John gladly, and did many things (Mark 6:20), but he sinned on. Saul lifted up his voice, and wept, and confessed his sin, but he was not turned from folly. Nor can any mortal "redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him; for the redemption of their soul is precious" (Psa. 49:7,8). We may weep and lament over our own sins or over the sins of others, but that will neither dethrone sin nor atone for it. God alone can do that work. Though conversion is not a miracle, as we now use that word, yet it is wrought by the almighty power of God, as truly as creation was the work of omnipotence.

II. There is a remedy for sin. This remedy is in Scripture sometimes called a healing, sometimes a recovery, and sometimes "the balm of Gilead". Let us carry out this figure. The balm or balsam here alluded to was an oily juice gathered from a tree about fourteen feet in height. It chiefly grew in Gilead. We know that this balm was very highly prized. It was famous as a remedy in many lands. The Ishmaelites who bought Joseph were going from Gilead to Egypt with myrrh and spices and this balm (Gen. 37:25). When Jacob sent presents down to Egypt, he forgot not to send balm (Gen. 43:11). Ezekiel informs us it was part of the merchandise of Tyre (Ezek. 27:17). The best quality of balm sold for double its weight in silver. This celebrated medicine has long been mentioned as the best cure. Jeremiah says of Egypt: "Go up into Gilead and take balm; O virgin, the daughter of Egypt: in vain shalt thou use many medicines, for thou shalt not be cured." Again, of Babylon he says, she "is suddenly fallen and destroyed: howl for her; take balm for her pain, if so be she may be healed" (Jer. 46:11; 57:8). So that the general import of the phrase is clear and very striking. The remedy for sin, the gospel balm of Gilead, is found in the work and death of Christ. His blood cleanseth from all sin (1 John 1:7). With his stripes we are healed (Isa. 53:5). His merits clothe our nakedness.

1. By the blood and righteousness of Christ we are justified. We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. He is the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world. He is all our salvation. The word Jehovah, commonly rendered Lord, is in Scripture variously combined with other words, and always much to the strengthening of our faith. Thus we have Jehovah-jireh (Gen. 22:14), the Lord will provide; Jehovah-nissi (Exod. 17:15), the Lord is my banner; Jehovah-shalom (Judg. 6:24), the Lord send peace; Jehovah-shammah (Ezek. 48:35), the Lord is there; Jehovah-rophi (Exod. 15:26), the Lord that healeth thee; and Jehovah-tsidkenu (Jer. 23:6), the Lord our righteousness. Which of all these could believers spare from the teaching of Scripture? Not one. But among them all, none are more precious than the two last cited. Well do our translators put that last cited in capital letters. The types all foretold that Christ should bear our sins. The prophecies did the same. Christ's death atones. By his sufferings we have remission. He is our ransom; and by his obedience we have acceptance, justifying righteousness, a right to the tree of life. Our blood is nothing, our tears are nothing, our works are nothing; all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; they are of no avail. The first effect, therefore, of Christ's undertaking for us, is an effect external to us. It changes the state of things at the throne of God in reference to us. It reconciles God to the offer and grant of saving mercy to us sinners. It makes him willing and just to take into his favor us poor miserable outcasts and rebels. Thus by what Christ has done and suffered, all barriers to God's merciful communications to sinners are removed, and they are actually restored to the Divine favor. Eternal Justice is no longer against them, but for them. The sovereign Lord makes them his sons, his heirs, and joint heirs with his Son to an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away.

2. The same Jesus who reconciles God to sinners, reconciles sinners to God: Christ "is made unto us sanctification". If human hearts are ever overcome and brought sweetly to comply with the demands of God's law, it will be by looking on him that was pierced. When the Romans saw Caesar's bloody robes, they said, "His murderers shall die." And when by faith the sinner sees how his sins crucified the Lord of life, he says he will mortify his members, which are on the earth.

"Yes, my Redeemer, they shall die,

My heart has so decreed;

Nor will I spare the guilty things,

That made my Saviour bleed."

Nothing but the cross will melt a hard heart, or bend a stubborn will, or give a death-blow to corruption. A sight of hell never frightened one out of the love of sin. The thunders of Sinai never made a rebellious heart submit to God. Pliny, the naturalist, says that blood readily extinguishes fire. It is sure that the blood of Christ not only quenches the flaming wrath around the throne of God, but it also extinguishes the fires of unhallowed desires in the soul. It begets hatred to sin, and love to holiness. In its application this remedy is often painful. The sinner is so accustomed to look to himself for righteousness and holiness, that when God is convincing him of his guilt and helplessness, he often fears that all is for ever lost. He supposes his exercises are but a foretaste of the wrath to come. Even renewed men, having a clear sight of their sins, are sometimes sore vexed. Luther in desertion was so overcome that he lay as one dead. But in all cases where it is applied, the gospel remedy is sovereign and efficacious. It availed for the dying thief, for the bloody Saul of Tarsus, for the cruel jailor, and for millions on millions who once esteemed themselves as vile and as worthy of everlasting death as any of us can possibly esteem himself. Christ came to save the

chief of sinners, and if he failed in that, the whole object of his mission would not be attained.

III. There is a great and good physician. His name is Wonderful, Counsellor, The Mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace, Jesus Christ the Righteous. He is the Physician of souls. None but he can cure a sin-sick soul.

He is a very tender Physician. He can be touched with a feeling of our infirmities. He was once hit by the archers himself. His compassions are without a parallel. The bruised reed he will not break; the smoking flax he will not quench. He died for his patients. His strength was dried up like a potsherd, that we might be strong in the Lord. His heart was melted in him like wax, that ours might be melted in penitence. By his stripes we are healed. He knows what temptation and sorrow mean. He is the most approachable being that ever walked the earth.

He will go wherever he is asked. He will go among rich or poor, old or young, captives or captors, if they really desire him. Never did he refuse to heal a sin-sick soul submitted to him. From the days of righteous Abel until now, he has graciously received every returning penitent. I was once asked, What is the most consolatory text in the Bible? I have never been able to answer the question, but I know of none sweeter than this: "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever." The Lord Jesus is still as ready to save as when he called Zaccheus, poured his mercies on the dying thief, or granted the request of the Canaanitish woman.

Then he is always at hand. He is omnipresent. We need not wait a long time for him to come. He is a present help in time of trouble (Rom. 10:6-10).

He makes no charge for all his cures. He practices without money, without price. He utterly contemns all sordid proposals. The full soul he sends empty away, but he fills the hungry with good things, and gives grace to the humble. Grace is poured into his lips; the oil of grace is poured into every bleeding heart.

He seems most ready to go where he is most needed. When he sent forth his apostles to preach, he told them to begin at Jerusalem--to begin with his murderers--those who had taunted him, mocked him, and crucified him, crying, "His blood be on us and on our children." He knows that the whole need not a physician, but they that are sick.

And well does he love his work. Nothing could balk his purpose. Having loved his own, he loved them to the end. His heart is set upon saving sinners, so as it is set upon nothing else. He delights in his work. He sees the travail of his soul, and is satisfied. His people are his crown. His redeemed are his diadem.

He is vastly skilful. He knows what is in man. He understands all the difficult and stubborn cases. His wisdom is more than equal to any demands we can make upon it. He has the tongue of the learned, that he should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary. He knows the enormity of sin, the dreadful burden it brings upon the conscience, and its fearful obstinacy. He knows our frame and remembers that we are dust.

Never has he failed in any case that he undertook. One of his names is, Mighty to save. Manasseh and Paul and Bunyan are as holy and as happy as if sin had never defiled their souls. Whosoever believeth in him shall not perish, but have eternal life. Where sin abounded, grace hath much more abounded.

He is a famous Physician. His whole undertaking has been "to the intent that now unto the the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God,

according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Eph.3:10,11). So famous is he that his name is above every name that is named in heaven and in earth. All heaven thinks itself well employed in singing, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing."

He will take his own time, use his own pleasure, and employ his own methods respecting the cure. He will have his own way or he will not do any thing. He knows that his way is best. He admits no counsellor to teach him. The wisdom of creatures is folly.

His prescriptions are useless unless we confide in him implicitly. The whole efficacy of his remedies depends on our confidence in him. "According to your faith, be it unto you", is still the rule of distribution and admeasurement in his kingdom.

And now, poor, sin-sick, dying soul, repair to this Physician, submit your case to him, and seek for the healing remedy. If you stay away, you must die. "The wages of sin is death." There is balm in Gilead, and a Physician there. Why then is not your health recovered? Nothing but your unbelief hinders you from being a sharer in the infinite mercies of God. O come, and welcome to all the blessings of salvation.

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