Articles by A. Stinton

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Health and Disease (Nov 1957)

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It is not surprising that, in the full-orbed view of men which the Scriptures take, we should find considerable reference to an experience so universal as health and disease. A matter which profoundly affects man's relationship not only to his fellows, but also to his God, is bound to receive more than passing attention in God's revelation of His dealings with men, and of His will concerning their conduct and condition on earth. Thus we find reference to items as diversified as the healing of fractures (Ezek. 30:21), and the period of quarantine for various diseases of the skin (Lev. 13:4). The healing ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ is, of course, of paramount interest and importance.

In the Old Testament, health was promised as a reward for obedience to the laws of God (Deut. 7:15): sickness was to be the portion of the disobedient (Lev. 26:15-16). The prolonged health and strength of Joshua and Caleb might be taken as instances of the fulfilment of the former promise (Num. 14:38); the plague of boils in Egypt (Ex. 9:10) and the leprosy from which Gehazi suffered (2 Kings 5:27) are instances of the latter.

It is unjustifiable, however, either to conclude today that all who enjoy good health do so as a special mark of God's favour, or to adopt the view of the disciples who evidently felt that all sickness and disability are due to the sins of an individual (John 9:1-3). The story of Job is a warning not to assume that illness is always the result

of personal sin. The New Testament, too, provides examples of righteous men who suffered ill-health; for instance, the Apostle Paul himself had a physical disability, almost certainly a diseased condition of the eyes (Gal. 4:13-15; 6:11).

It is obvious that a perfect creation, whether past or future, cannot be marred by the presence of disease. As originally created, man was free from sin, disease, and death; his life stemming from the life of God (Gen. 1:27, 31; 2:7). But with the entrance of sin into the world, there also entered disease and death, to which all of us are subject (Rom. 5:12). What, then, is the relationship between sin and disease at the present time? Because as Christians we are free from the penalty of sin, should we expect to be free from disease as well? Disease, like death, is the common heritage of mankind, until the redeemed are forever delivered from the presence of these forces, through being translated into the presence of the Lord (Rom. 8:22-23). Until that day, we can expect to suffer the effects of these forces, and although it is clearly stated that some suffer as a result of sin in their lives (1 Cor. 11:30), it is usually almost impossible in a particular case to attribute the illness to a direct visitation from the Lord. It is safer to say in general that our sin, and that of our forefathers, has made us subject to disease, from which we will be delivered at the redemption of our bodies.

If a Christian becomes ill, should he expect divine healing? In the first place, it must be stated that the nature of the healing process, being a living force, is unknown. It is as mysterious as life itself, and has its source in God. The best that man can do is to assist this healing process. Because God is the Author of all

healing, whether assisted or unassisted by human remedies, there is a sense in which all healing is divine healing. Since God regulates all healing, it is obvious that He can speed the process into an instantaneous one, if He so desires.

The Lord Himself and His disciples performed miracles of healing; gifts of healing were given to the Church. Does this mean that we should expect to exercise the power of instantaneous healing today? In reply it is necessary to examine the place and purpose of miracles in apostolic days. They were designed to prove the authenticity of the message, rather than to attract people to the message (Acts 14:3. Heb. 2:3-4). On several occasions, the Lord forbade the sufferer whom He cured, to noise abroad the event (Mk. 1:44). The Lord never attracted people to hear His message by a promise of miraculous healing, although His compassion for suffering souls led Him to cure the sick, apparently in large numbers (John 21:25). Paul and Barnabas likewise did not exploit their gift of healing; they did not use it to attract a hearing; rather, when they returned to Jerusalem, they defended their turning to the Gentiles by declaring what miracles and wonders God had wrought among them, as proof of divine approval of their deeds (Acts 15:4-12).

Today, such a witness to the authenticity of the message is unnecessary, because there are many other widely known and infallible proofs. This does not mean, however, that the gift of healing has been removed from the Church, even though instantaneous healing is not a common occurrence today. All down the centuries, believers in the Lord Jesus Christ have been to the fore in ministering to and healing the sick: even today, the

ministry of healing is an important and fruitful handmaiden to the ministry of evangelism on the mission field. Nor does it mean that cases of instantaneous healing cannot occur today. Where conditions approximate those of apostolic days, miracles of healing may occur even now, as a witness to the authenticity of the gospel message.

Prayer is enjoined for the sick in James 5:15, without necessarily implying that an instantaneous cure, or one apart from the use of God-given remedies, will occur. In fact, it would seem that the Apostle has in mind those cases of sickness which are directly the result of sin in the believer's life, the forgiveness of that sin being the primary end in view.

In the light of all this, what should be the attitude of believers to so-called miracles of healing today? Primarily, it should be one of caution, especially in view of the cure of psychosomatic disease by natural methods. Such cures may to the undiscerning appear truly miraculous. Furthermore, "miracles" of various kinds have been performed through the use of "spiritual" power which is decidedly not the power of God; for example, the feats of the magicians at the court of Pharaoh in the days of Moses (Exod. 7:11, 22; 8:7, 18), the sorcery of Simon (Acts 8:9-11), and the works of practitioners of the occult even to modern times. In addition, there is a very real danger of "spiritual healers" doing harm to suggestible people, especially in cases of incipient mental disease. It would also be well for Christians to beware of any abuse of God-given gifts of healing, seeking rather to enter into new depths of consecration to God, more understanding of the power of prayer and the authority of God in every aspect of life,

until we are made ready to enter into the likeness of His image, freed forever from all trace of our former lost estate (Rev. 21:4).

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If thou knowest God, thou knowest that everything is possible for God to do.

Go Ye Into All the World (Sept 1958)

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A. W. Stinton, M. D.

Commended to service for the Lord in 1952, Arthur Stinton is about to return with his wife and family for a second term at the Boma Mission Hospital in Angola, Portuguese West Africa. This is the doctor's second helpful article published in Food for the Flock, the first being "Health and Disease", p. 214, November, 1957.

The Great Commission of our Lord Jesus Christ was the final clarification of the fact that God's grace is without partiality or favour (Matt. 28:18-20).

The first divine intervention in human history with the redemption of the whole human race in view had been the call of Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3). At that time, God had chosen a nation, not that they might be the sole recipients of His favour, but that through them the Redeemer might come, bringing grace and salvation to all mankind. Although for centuries God's dealings had been primarily with this nation, He had clearly purposed that all nations might come to know Him.

With the advent of the Redeemer, however, God's eternal purpose came into focus more clearly, as illustrated by Jesus' own words: "Come unto Me, all ye that labour" (Matt. 11:28); "Other sheep I have … them also I must bring" (John 10:16). Finally came the Redeemer's commission to His disciples — still a binding imperative on all who call themselves His followers, and still a clear indication that God's love and grace are universal in scope.

The chief role of the Church is the fulfilment of this commission. The most important directive in the life of any Christian is “Go …teach … baptize.” No believer is exempt from responsibility in this connection; although, obviously, some are entrusted with the direct fulfilment of the command, while others function, one might say, indirectly. But whether the function is direct or indirect, the charge and responsibility are the same.

The most important decision which any Christian can make, and one which every Christian should face squarely, is whether he is to function directly or indirectly in obedience to the One Whom he has confessed as Lord and Master of his life. It is a decision which must be made prayerfully and carefully, in the light of Christ’s command, the world’s need, and one’s own gifts and opportunities.

Clearly, a personal confirmation of the Lord’s commission, such as Barnabas and Saul received, would be a most stimulating experience (Acts 13:1-4). But the trail having been blazed by these pioneers, there is no reason to expect a repetition of such clear-cut direction. While the local assembly has a solemn responsibility towards one of its number who feels separated by the Holy Spirit to a particular work in the Lord’s service, whether at home or abroad, there is no point in always expecting the local assembly to initiate the exercise. However, once convinced of the genuineness of the separation to full-time service, the assembly has a duty to support and encourage by all possible means, the one who has been thus separated.

Missionary Objectives

What are the scope and purpose of missionary endeavour? The simple answer, “to plant New Testament assemblies”, may not be entirely adequate, especially in relation to backward areas, unless all that is involved in the founding of churches be kept clearly in mind. The preaching of the gospel involves much more than just making a public announcement of the way to Heaven. The message of our Lord included direction concerning attitude and action in every relationship and sphere of life. There is more to the founding of a church than the establishment of a weekly communion service. All that He taught must be taught; greater works than He did must be done (John 14:12). The responsibility of the local church, both to its members and to those without, must be constantly kept in mind.

The local church is a Christ-centred community of believers, with a corporate responsibility to God, to other churches, and to the world. In backward areas, the discharge of this responsibility may well involve the church in activities which, in more developed areas, are the responsibility of other agencies. But this is right and natural, and these works should be engaged in until, and only until, other agencies can assume the burden. Then the church should relinquish all but its peculiar religious activities in that community.

Missionary Rewards

What is the reward of missionary endeavour? Precisely the same as the reward for any other Christian service; for, in God’s sight, the missionary is in no special category. He must discharge his responsibilities faithfully in the service to which God has called him, but

so must every other Christian. It is true that those who leave home deny themselves some of the comforts and conveniences of life in the homelands, and also the pleasure of various family and social activities. But God is no man's debtor, and He compensates the missionary here on earth with joys of other kinds, which far outweigh the earthly pleasures forfeited (Matt. 19:29). Any missionary who feels himself entitled to a special share of sympathy and commiseration from fellow believers at home because of the sacrifices he has made, had better re-examine the motives of his service!

Missionary Support

On the other hand, the missionary should not be made to exist on the charity, as it were, of believers at home. The latter's financial participation in the missionary's work should be on the basis of discharging a responsibility to Christ in the light of His commission, and not merely because of sympathy with one who has gone so far from home.

Neither is there any reason why this participation should not be as orderly as Sunday School work, for instance; or any other evangelistic effort carried on by the assembly. Some have fallen prey to the curious idea that because missionary work is geographically distant from other assembly activities, its support can be on a haphazard or hit-and-miss basis. In fact, some may even think it to be more "spiritual" because of this disorder!

However, the full-time servant of God overseas is not more obligated by Scripture to live by faith than the servant of God who is secularly employed at home, for we are all the servants of God if we profess to acknowledge Him as Master in truth. Unquestionably,

assembly missionary enterprise has suffered for years through a lack of true spirituality and realism on the part of many concerned in it.

In the light of indications that the return of the Lord of the harvest may be imminent, there is an urgent need for a re-examination of our motives and methods, with the desire to be more effective in His service, and with the hope that we may not be ashamed at His coming.