

## MY SICKNESS

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**"THE CHRISTIAN FAITH"**

I was in a group a few years ago trying to answer questions that people phoned in. I'll never forget one occasion when a woman made this enquiry: 'Did God send my sickness?'

It was not a question we could brush aside. Her distress and sincerity were so obvious, even over the phone. Nor was it a moment for a long involved discussion. But what could we say? 'Did God send her sickness?'

I think all of us on that panel had the same initial reaction. We wanted to say 'No' as firmly and clearly as we could. Indeed the first of us to speak said just that, and I suppose you can see why.

God is loving and good. We love him because of his sheer goodness and mercy to us. To say that he is involved in such a thing as a distressing sickness is like compromising his fatherly care; it's like throwing dirt at motherhood or patriotism.

As well, none of us wanted to burden that poor woman with extra care. Would it be right to say that God could have prevented her illness but did not? Wouldn't that take away the crutch of her faith in God?

And yet as we talked about it, I think it became clear that the real answer to the question ought to be 'yes'. Not, that God is a vindictive tyrant, maliciously torturing people as he pleases; but that we ought to say very firmly that there are no dark depths through which we pass where God has lost control.

You see the love and goodness and mercy of God is not romantic and sentimental, but strong and bold and righteous. He has many reasons for dealing with us in a hard way, and there can be no doubting that his mercy can be very severe indeed. But true faith does not exclude God, otherwise it is only a crutch. After all mothers often do get their hands dirty; and patriotism does make self sacrifice.

We do not know why God may send a particular sickness. But the fact that he has his good reasons, hidden though they may be, gives us hope and strength and enables the Christian to patiently, even joyfully bear it. What if God did not send it? What a comfortless, desolating ideal! Then, indeed, there would be no meaning in my suffering at all; it would be outside God's control. This is weak thinking, sentimental thinking and it leads to weak faith.

Are you sick? God cares and loves you even in the worst hour of trial and suffering. But when you cry out 'why?' as many Christians have done, do not turn your face away from God; speak to him, cry out to him. Put your trust in him, and his answer, whatever it is, for, 'even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me.'



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