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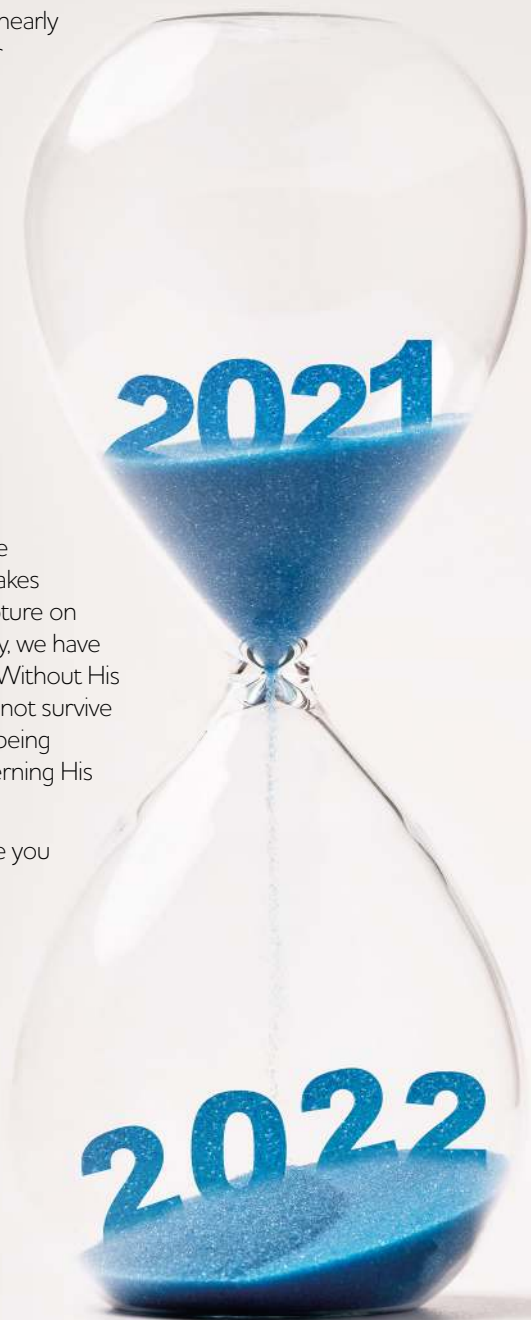
Editor's Introduction

Here we are moving swiftly towards the end of another year! 2021 has nearly run its course. How has the year been for you? Hopefully, we have all learned lessons from our experiences, and our walk with the Lord has become increasingly important to us.

In this issue Phil Raggett reminds us about what the scriptures call us to be aware of, and Andrew Dutton challenges us to be good ambassadors for Christ. But for many, this year has presented big challenges. Friends who have contracted Covid-19 may have passed away. Why do these things happen? Tim McMullan takes us through the teaching of scripture on this heart-searching topic. Finally, we have an article about the Holy Spirit. Without His presence in your life, you would not survive a day as a believer, so it's worth being reminded about the truth concerning His person and work.

Thanks for your company. I hope you find the articles a real blessing.

Stephen Baker



Edited by
STEPHEN BAKER

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YOUNG PRECIOUS SEED is a supplement of *Precious Seed*, designed for those young in the faith. Its purpose is to restate timeless truths from the word of God for a new generation of Christians and to kindle a biblical approach to current issues in the world in which we live. YPS is published by *Precious Seed*, 34 Metcalfe Avenue, Killamarsh, Sheffield, S21 1HW, UK, and is available separately from the main magazine.

Paul's I am Series

BY ANDREW DUTTON, NORWICH, ENGLAND



'I am an ambassador', Eph. 6. 20

'And for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in bonds: that therein I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak', Eph. 6. 19, 20

Apart from world politics, the term 'ambassador' is unlikely to be part of our everyday vocabulary. It is even more unlikely that we would ever use the word to describe ourselves. Yet, at the end of Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians, he states, 'I am an ambassador', Eph. 6. 20.

We will consider the setting of this statement in Ephesians along with definitions of the term 'ambassador', before making some applications to the Christian life.

The setting in Ephesians chapter 6

The main themes of the six chapters could be summed up as follows: 'our blessings in Christ'; and 'our responsibility to the Lord'.¹ In chapter 6, Paul talks about the 'whole armour of God', v. 11, which we should 'put on . . . to stand against . . . the devil', v. 11. The blessings that we have received lead to personal responsibility to live our lives to please the Lord. Whilst God supplies all that we need in 'the evil day', v. 13, it is important to decisively 'put on' the armour available to us.

Although a separate study, it would be beneficial to consider the whole armour of God, vv. 11-20, and the importance of each element to daily Christian life:

- 'loins girt about with truth', v. 14
- 'breastplate of righteousness', v. 14
- 'feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace', v. 15
- 'the shield of faith', v. 16
- 'the helmet of salvation', v. 17
- 'the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God', v. 17

Paul concludes that section by stating, 'I am an ambassador', v. 20, and relates this to making known the gospel, v. 19. Paul, out of responsibility to the Lord, and being fully equipped and guarded by the whole armour of God, can 'speak boldly', as he 'ought to speak', v. 20.

Definitions of an ambassador

The dictionary definition of 'ambassador' is 'an important official who works in a foreign country representing his or her own country there, and who is officially accepted in this position by that country'.²

In Bible study, it is often helpful to look at words in the original language. The word 'ambassador' is translated from the Greek word *presbeuō*, which is defined by VINE as, 'to be elder, to be an ambassador',³ and STRONG adds, '[to] act as a representative',⁴ and refers to the idea of being a 'preacher'.

Paul is an official representative of Christ. A representative with experience who has been entrusted with the responsibility to proclaim the

word of God and communicate the gospel on behalf of his Lord.

Applications

As Christians, it has often been said that we are in this world, but not of it. An ambassador's single purpose is to represent the interests of his home country in a foreign land. Paul recognized that he was a representative of God and the gospel in a world that disowned his Lord. He was faithfully serving in a place that was not his home. This brings about a personal challenge – how 'at home' am I in this world? Can I become comfortable with the world's systems and thinking? Paul's function was to officially represent One from a different place, in his thinking, actions and speech.

As a preacher of the gospel, Paul was to speak boldly. Whilst Christians are not all called to be preachers like Paul, we all have a responsibility to pass on the message of the gospel. As our tool, we need to 'take the sword of the Spirit, which is the

word of God', v. 17. As believers we need to read and study the word of God, so that we can use it accurately and skilfully in presenting the gospel to others. As Paul recognized his need to 'speak boldly', v. 20, there is a requirement for us to be bold. Passing on the message of the gospel can be a daunting task, so we should ask the Lord to give us opportunities and help.

Just as Paul represented the Lord Jesus well in his day and situation, we too can follow his example and represent the Lord in ours.

- 1 A. LECKIE, *What the Bible Teaches, Ephesians*, John Ritchie Ltd., pg. 118.
- 2 Cambridge English Dictionary.
- 3 W. E. VINE, *Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, Nelson.
- 4 JAMES STRONG, *Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, Hendrickson Publishers.

Proverbs: The Book of Wisdom

BY RICHARD BURDITT, NORTHAMPTON, ENGLAND

All quotations are taken from the New King James Bible.

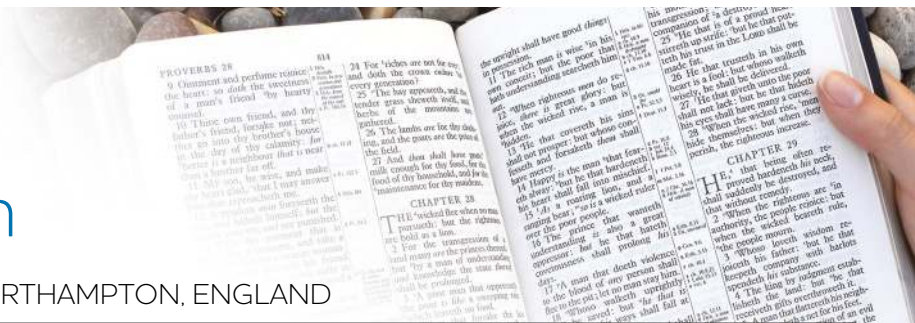
Apart from Christ Himself, Solomon was the wisest man who ever lived. He made his request for wisdom early in his reign, and God responded by giving him such wisdom 'so that there has not been anyone like you before you, nor shall any like you arise after you', 1 Kgs. 3. 12.

Word of his wisdom spread far and wide. The Queen of Sheba felt compelled to visit him and see for herself if the rumours were true. As he answered her

questions and she saw how he managed his kingdom, she was overwhelmed, 'Your wisdom and prosperity exceed the fame of which I heard', 1 Kgs. 10. 7.

What a gift, then, the Book of Proverbs is for us. As we read it, we are listening to Solomon passing down the wisdom of the Lord to his son. It contains practical advice to 'give prudence to the simple, to the young man knowledge and discretion', Prov. 1. 4.

Wisdom has three components: looking upward, looking forward and looking inward.



Looking upward

'The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction', Prov. 1. 7.

How wise we are is determined ultimately by our attitude towards the Lord Himself. To fear the Lord is not to be terrified of Him, as though He were a threat to our safety. Rather, it is to have a reverence for His greatness.

Job experienced this fear when the Lord spoke to him out of the whirlwind. It gave him a deeper appreciation of God's majesty, 'I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees You', Job 42. 5. Upon seeing the vision, Job ceased to defend himself and, instead, acknowledged the Lord's righteousness and omnipotence.

Solomon explains that fearing the Lord will also effect change in our behaviour. We will trust in Him instead of our own understanding, Prov. 3. 5. We will depart from evil, v. 7. We will honour Him with our possessions and wealth, v. 9, and we will not despise His chastening and correction, v. 11.

Looking forward

'Surely, in vain the net is spread in the sight of any bird', Prov. 1. 17.

Warning: The Book of Proverbs contains spoilers. Throughout, Solomon reveals and compares the outcomes of various attitudes and actions. These include diligence and laziness, love and hate, generosity and selfishness, and righteousness and wickedness.

Solomon makes one such comparison when offering his son relationship advice. The harlot of chapter 7 invites men to 'take our fill of love **until morning**', v. 18, whereas the loving wife of chapter 31 will do her husband 'good and not **evil all the days of her life**' (emphasis mine).

Rather than crashing through life learning by our mistakes, we can take heed to Solomon's Proverbs. Through them, we can anticipate where our desires

and actions will lead us. We cannot be wise without considering the long-term results of our choices.

Looking inward

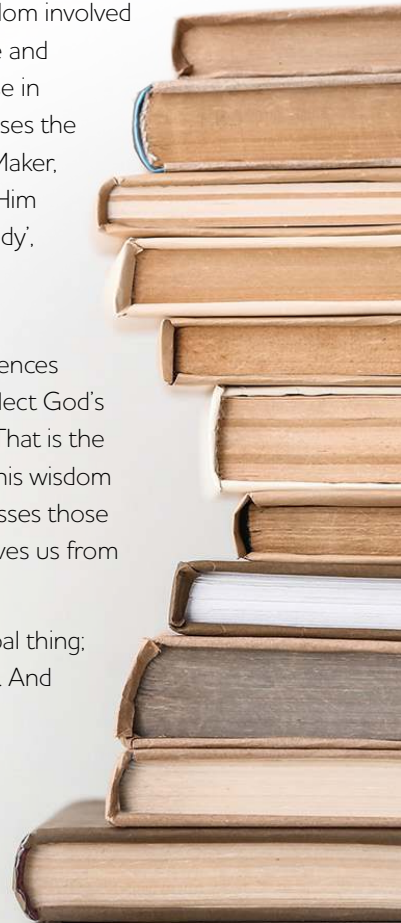
'To receive the instruction of wisdom, justice, judgment, and equity', Prov. 1. 3.

Wisdom has a moral component. It is not merely a case of making choices that pay off in the long term. Our decisions ought also to reflect God's moral character. This character was apparent in the law in the Old Testament, which contained many commands that encouraged generosity and a consideration of the poor and oppressed.

When landowners harvested their crops, they were to leave the corners of the field for the 'poor and ... stranger' to glean from, Lev. 23. 22. A more natural, self-focused wisdom might have maximized the profits of the field for the landowner. God's wisdom involved sacrifice, showing care and consideration for those in need. 'He who oppresses the poor reproaches his Maker, but he who honours Him has mercy on the needy', Prov 14. 31.

To fear the Lord is to consider the consequences of our actions and reflect God's heart in our attitude. That is the essence of wisdom. This wisdom honours the Lord, blesses those around us and preserves us from all kinds of trouble.

'Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom. And in all your getting, get understanding', 4. 7.



Be Mindful

BY PHIL RAGGETT, PRESTWICH, MANCHESTER, ENGLAND

The practice of mindfulness has become increasingly popular in society today. However, there is real danger associated with becoming overly focused on self. As an antidote to self-occupation, I would like to consider what the Bible says we should be mindful of – profitable things that we should strive to remember and focus our minds upon.

Security

The first reference we want to consider is in 1 Chronicles chapter 16 where we read in verse 15, 'be ye mindful always of his covenant'. The setting is the bringing up of 'the ark of the covenant of the Lord', 15. 25. David had pitched a tent for it, and it was brought up and set 'in the midst', 16. 1.

Notice how giving God His rightful place, in the midst, affected: their **attitude** – 'with joy', 15. 25; their **anthem** – 'the singers', 15. 27; their **actions** – they offered 'burnt sacrifices', 16. 1; and their **appreciation** – David appointed 'Levites to thank and praise the Lord', v. 4, and then he wrote a 'psalm to thank the Lord', v. 7.

The theme of the psalm, comprised of sections of three of the Psalms (96, 105 and 106), is what God had done – notice the reference to His 'deeds', v. 8, His 'wondrous works', v. 9, His 'marvellous works', v. 12, and His 'wonders', v. 12.

There is much to encourage us as we too remember God's dealings with us and our security in Him. The context is the covenant with Israel, but the principle can be applied in our experience as we have trusted the same God who will fulfil His promises toward us – 'the Lord thy God, he is God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant', Deut. 7. 9.

This psalm David wrote can be divided into four sections:

God's control and power, vv. 8-12
God's choice and promise, vv. 13-20
God's care and preservation, vv. 21, 22
God's character and praise, vv. 24-36

The One who is in complete control and is all-powerful is the One who has chosen us in Christ and given us precious promises. He is the One who will care for us and preserve us.

How do we know He will keep us secure and fulfil His promises to us? Because of the greatness of His character. Little wonder this psalm ends with bursts of praise – 'O give thanks unto the Lord; for he is good', v. 34, and 'blessed be the Lord God of Israel for ever and ever', v. 36.

It is good to know that what God asks them to do is what He Himself will do. Psalm 111 verse 5 gives us the assurance that He 'will ever be mindful of his covenant'.

Signs

The next reference occurs around 600 years later in Nehemiah chapter 9 where we are told of something that the nation had not been mindful of. In this chapter there is a reminder once more of God's faithfulness in His dealings with the nation and the many signs they had of His care. Despite all that God had done they failed and had to confess to their failure in response. Many times, they had lost sight of God's signs and wonders – in verse 17 their minds were so taken up with Egypt that they even desired to 'return to their bondage'. What a sad indictment of the people of God when we learn that they 'refused to obey, neither were mindful of thy wonders', v. 17.

They failed God so often, and yet it is wonderful to read of His perseverance with His erring people as

'many times', v. 28, and over 'many years', v. 30, He delivered them and was patient with them. How thankful we are that God is indeed the God of recovery, who is faithful despite our unfaithfulness.

Once more we see the perfect example of God's attitude toward us as we are reminded that 'the Lord hath been mindful of us', Ps. 115. 12. In return, let us be ever mindful of the wonder of God's dealings with us and consider the 'great things he hath done', 1 Sam. 12. 24.

Salvation and Strength

We now turn to Isaiah chapter 17 where we have the prophecy concerning Damascus, and the associated judgement of Israel. The reason for the judgement of God upon them is outlined in verse 10, where they are told that it was because they had 'forgotten the God of thy salvation' and were not 'mindful of the rock of thy strength'.

Remembering that God is the God of our salvation and that He is our strength will help us to live with a balanced perspective – not thinking too highly of ourselves but equally not becoming too despondent at our lack of power to keep on going. Just as we were totally dependent on Him for our salvation, so we should be for our daily strength.

We should always remember that our salvation is only because He was first mindful of us – 'what is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?' Ps. 8. 4.

Scriptures

How do we fill our minds with thoughts of our security, God's signs, salvation, and strength? The answer of course is by being occupied with the scriptures, as we are exhorted to in our final text.

In 2 Peter chapter 3, Peter appeals to the believers to 'stir up your pure minds', v. 1, in order that they might 'be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets [Old Testament], and of the commandment of us the apostles of the Lord and Saviour [New Testament]', v. 2.

There is an additional purpose to this recollection of the truth of scripture as it enables us to **resist the scoffers** of the word of God, w. 3, 4 and to **rest in the strength** of the word of God, w. 5-7.

The perfect example is again found in deity, where we read in one of the Messianic Psalms, 'thy law is within my heart', Ps. 40. 8.

In a world where there are so many distractions, let us seek to saturate our minds with 'the sincere milk of the word', 1 Pet. 2. 2.

Who is the Holy Spirit?

BY GORDON ARMSTRONG, TAMPA, USA

Throughout the pages of the word of God the Holy Spirit is mentioned. In the book of beginnings, Genesis, He is moving across the face of the deep, Gen. 1. 2, and in Revelation He joins the bride in saying 'come', Rev. 22. 17. One writer referred to the Holy Spirit as the forgotten God, and, while we may not go that far, is it possible that He has been neglected in our lives?

The word 'spirit' is often synonymous with horror movies, dark arts, and paranormal activity. We must not think of the Holy Spirit as a mysterious force or subjective influence, but as a real person and fully God who is operational in the world, the church, and the individual.

The personality of the Holy Spirit

People have bodies, yet a body does not define a person. When we consider the Holy Spirit, the Bible mainly uses personal pronouns such as 'He' and 'His' to describe the Holy Spirit. In the Upper Room discourse between the Lord and His disciples, He tells them that He will depart, and the Comforter will come, John 16. 7. Disappointment, alarm, and fear would have filled the room but in fifteen verses, 14. 16-31, there are twelve instances of personal pronouns which all emphasize that the One who is coming is not a force but a person who has the same nature as the Lord Jesus.

There are personality terms used when describing the actions of the Holy Spirit; intelligence, will and emotional language are employed in the context of His work. When speaking of the distribution of spiritual gifts, we read, 'all these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he **wills**', 1 Cor. 12. 11 ESV. In connection with God's revelation, Paul teaches us that, 'the Spirit **searches** all things, yea, the deep things of God', 2. 10. This emphasizes the wisdom and intelligence of the Spirit who communicates the truth to the people of God. Cogitation and revelation are hallmarks of a real person, not an inanimate force. Paul also warns the Ephesians, '**grieve** not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption', Eph. 4. 30. Whilst it is sobering to consider that a Christian can grieve God, the verse also accentuates that an inanimate influence cannot experience grief; the Comforter can. These three qualities highlight the truth that God's Spirit is a real person.

The power of the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is God and therefore all-powerful. In Acts chapter 5, when Peter confronts Ananias, he asks him, 'why has Satan filled your heart to **lie to the Holy Spirit** and keep back part of the price of the land for yourself?' v. 3 NKJV, and then continues by saying, 'You have **not lied to men but to God**', v. 4 NKJV. Peter was highlighting the seriousness of their sin by reminding them of the deity of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is also referred to as the

'eternal Spirit', Heb. 9. 14; this is another title which underlines His power and deity, since only God is eternal.

The power of the Holy Spirit was demonstrated in creation and in resurrection. In the second verse of the Bible, we learn that 'the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters', Gen. 1. 2. The Spirit of God is also referred to as 'the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead', Rom. 8. 11 NKJV. In this we can see the unity and fellowship of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit in their work as different aspects of creation and resurrection are attributed to them.

The proof of the Holy Spirit

Paul teaches us that the day we trusted the Lord Jesus we were sealed by the Spirit of promise, Eph. 1. 13. To be a Christian is to possess the Holy Spirit, 'But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his', Rom. 8. 9. As the children of God, we ought to show this in our daily lives. We are commanded to walk in the Spirit, and display the fruit of the Spirit, Gal. 5. The picture of fruit reminds us of a tree; the fruit indicates what type of tree it is. Paul contrasts the works of the flesh with the fruit of the Spirit in the expectation we submit to God's work in our lives and display the evidence of His Spirit. The sealing of the Spirit is a unique event which takes place at the moment of conversion. However, walking in the Spirit is a daily choice. In yielding to the Spirit, we are controlled by Him and can experience greater freedom from sin and boldness to witness for Christ. In the book of Acts, we recognize that the power in the gospel came not from the apostles, but we read they were men filled with the Holy Spirit, Acts 4. 8, 31. Let us have a greater appreciation of the person and work of God's Spirit and be thankful for His work in our lives.

Can sickness be for the glory of God?

BY TIMOTHY MCMULLAN, BALLYMONEY, N. IRELAND



When we have a friend or loved one who is unwell and going through a real trial with their health, it's difficult, isn't it, to see the purpose behind it or to understand why our God doesn't seem to intervene immediately despite all our heartfelt prayers? Of course, the simple answer is to say that it's because of the fall. From the point when Adam sinned in the Garden of Eden, all of humanity have been subject to sickness, disease, and death. Certainly, being a child of God doesn't insulate us in any way from the corrupting physical influence of sin in the world. However, in some circumstances we can discern the will of God moving through the circumstance for His own purposes.

In 1 Corinthians chapter 11 verse 30, the Apostle Paul brings before us a sobering and challenging example of this when he says, 'For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep'. As Paul recounts the institution of the Lord's supper, he warns the church at Corinth that it's not something that should be done lightly, or carelessly, especially by those with unconfessed sin in their lives. Those who do shall be 'guilty of the body and blood of the Lord' and face divine discipline – 'he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body'. This damnation is not the eternal damnation of lost sinners, but the disciplining hand of God, resulting in sickness, and even death. How solemn to think that our behaviour at the Lord's supper could result in God's chastening and discipline, by means of sickness.

However, when we turn to John chapter 11, we see a very different aspect of the purpose of suffering. Lazarus is sick, and is at the point of death. His sisters, recognizing that Jesus is the only one who can help, turn to Him in their distress. Despite this, He waits another four days until, in human terms at least, it's too late. But in the midst of the circumstances, He says these lovely words, 'This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby', John 11. 4. How is it possible that a believer's sickness could result in bringing glory to God?

May I suggest at least three ways in which it could be so? In the context of the passage, the Lord Jesus reveals one of these.

1. The strengthening of faith

He says to the disciples in verse 15, 'And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, that you may believe'. The thought is that their faith would be strengthened. The ultimate purpose was undoubtedly God's glory, as stated, but this was accomplished, in part at least, by the strengthening of the disciples' faith. There is a similar thought in Romans chapter 4 verse 20. When speaking about Abraham, Paul says he 'was strong in faith, giving glory to God'. Our dependency and complete reliance upon God, our faith in His ability to meet our needs despite any external circumstances, brings glory to Him. The word of Job in chapter 13 verse 15, 'Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him', is the highwater mark of such faith, the faith that glorifies God.

2. Conformed to the image of the Son

The second possibility is that glory is brought to God as we are conformed to the image of His Son through our suffering. Again, think of Job's words in chapter 23 verse 10, when he states, 'when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold'. In the New Testament, we see this same principle of trial and suffering perfecting us running through Peter's First Epistle. In chapter 5 verse 10, this is highlighted, 'But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, establish, strengthen, settle you'. As the trial of our sickness and suffering makes us more like Christ, this glorifies God.

3. As a witness to the unsaved

Finally, could it be that as the unsaved look on at the believer in their trial, they are convicted and won for Christ? As they watch the storm rage and sickness ravage a child of God, they perceive a calm assurance of heart. They see the Christian living out what they profess when they sing, 'the worst that can come but shortens our journey and hastens us home'. As a result, they desire the peace and certainty of heaven that alone is found by faith in Jesus Christ. Such a wonderful outcome could certainly be described as 'sickness . . . for the glory of God'.