

- I. “Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits: Who forgives all your iniquities, Who heals all your diseases”
 - A. When the Lord was on earth He miraculously cured many diseases, some of which we read about today.
 - B. Obviously that does not happen in the same way today, but people do give credit to God for unexpected cures. We have a sense that the Lord is present within us and that His life and power can change the course of our health
 1. New Church teaching refers to people’s intuitive awareness of this in that people pray for health and give credit for health to the Lord (SEm 4650)
 2. A doctor once said to me, “God heals; the doctor sends the bill,” which was in reference to the fact that although doctors do an amazing amount of good, they often don’t know why or how people recovered. It just happened
 - C. And of course we know He heals us at deeper levels – healing us of our greed, pride, discontent, contempt, lust, vengefulness and the like
- II. New Church teaching offers some startling and at times challenging ideas about disease and healing – not in the sense of specific medical cures, but in the way we think about what disease is and consequently how we might go about seeking health and well-being.
 - A. I’ll begin with teachings that challenge us by pointing out our areas of personal responsibility for disease, and then look at some broader principles that line up with the way we commonly talk about sickness via germs
- III. Before we talk about disease we need to address the topic of our final reading, namely that all things in this world are caused by things in the spiritual world
 - A. This is something that we might easily give lip service to without following through what it really means
 - B. Consider this teaching: “The soul forms a body about itself” (SE 4887e). We see intuitively that if we are spiritual beings the spirit forms the body. And further that “the soul can enter into the body, and form it, but not the body into the soul” (AC 2519).
 1. Our internal is the creative and causative force for what is external
 - C. We think of this world as real, yet we know it’s not. Our bodies and this reality is a thin skin we wear for a few years and then shed for eternity
 1. Who we are, what is truly real, is our spirit
 - D. Yet in daily life we can think of it in reverse – you said something mean and that caused my spirit to be hurt.
 1. In reality, the spirit always flows down into the body and is the causative agent. Someone could say exactly the same thing and one day you might be deeply hurt and another day might feel compassion for that person that they would say something so unkind
 2. Your spirit acting into your body causes the response
 3. And that’s why we do spiritual work, so that our spirits can react

differently to the things that yesterday caused pain, hardship, or evil acts

- IV. We acknowledge the primacy of spirit in so many ways
 - A. Married couples find each other more attractive 50 years in even though, objectively speaking, they are less so than when they first married
 - B. In the law, intention is seen as more important than what actually happened
 - C. We recognize this without even having to think about it.
- V. And it is the same with diseases. Evils cause disease, and specific evil loves cause specific diseases. Consider this teaching:
 - A. “The reason diseases have a correspondence with those in hell is that diseases correspond to the evil desires and cravings of the lower mind, and these desires and cravings are the origins of those diseases, the origins of diseases in general being various kinds of intemperance and self-gratification, wholly physical pleasures, as well as feelings of envy, hatred, revenge, lust, and the like, which destroy a person's interiors. Once these are destroyed his exteriors suffer and subject him to sickness and so to death.” (AC 5712)
 - B. New Church teaching specifically tells us what some diseases mentioned in Scripture stem from, and it’s useful to think of that correlation
 - 1. Diseases that affect the lungs are likely to have something to do with damage to our ability to understand and think well
 - a. So pride or intellectual laziness might manifest as lung diseases
- VI. With each of us, then, diseases come from the presence of spirits with us
 - A. Swedenborg describes being present with some devils who exuded a burning heat from lusts. “These desires present in those hells were the origin of the heat that was rising up. When it acted on my body it *instantly* caused a sickness like that of a burning fever; but once that heat ceased to come into me, this form of sickness instantly departed. When a person falls sick in this way he has contracted his sickness from the life that is his; in his case an unclean sphere corresponding to the sickness attaches itself and is present as the cause from which the sickness springs.” (AC 5715)
 - B. This can be a bit alarming to think about since we normally think about diseases as coming from bacteria and viruses, and such, but the Lord is not challenging the germ theory of disease; merely adding another layer
- VII. We’ll get to germs in a minute, but for now it is worth considering that just as our souls cause our bodies to come into and remain in existence, so our diseases have existence from spiritual causes, & sometimes those causes are our own choices
 - A. We know this at a lower level. Medicine talks about lifestyle diseases – ones that are directly impacted and sometimes even caused by our life choices such as inactivity, drinking, smoking, unhealthy eating and the like.
 - B. Here the Lord is taking it further: Our spiritual lifestyles make us susceptible to some diseases, which is not surprising
 - 1. Again, without thinking much about it, we’d acknowledge that someone prone to extreme violent rages is more vulnerable to something like a stroke.

2. We choose our spiritual environment, and since, ultimately, diseases come from the spiritual world we protect ourselves or damage ourselves by our choices

C. Something we could take away from this teaching is to ask ourselves if there are ways we can see that our spiritual choices make us vulnerable to the particular health challenges that we face

1. We'd not want to get paranoid about this because things happen, but it can be a useful question to ask, as long as we don't take it too far.
2. Not all diseases line up well with their cause: Swedenborg mentions being in contact with, for instance some evil people who were serious adulterers, and the effect on his body was extreme pain in nerves and periosteal (AC 5714). Some hypocrites caused tooth pain (AC 5720)
3. It seems things are way more complicated than we might think, so even for diseases brought on by personal choices, we can't make spiritual judgments about others, or even about ourselves.
4. My thought about this is that the danger of making spiritual judgments is way worse for us than the benefit of seeing a one-for-one correlation between evils and diseases, and so the Lord pulls veils over our ability to make those direct connections
 - a. This is why there are 3 pack a day smokers who live to be 98, and totally healthy young people who develop lung cancer out of the blue
 - b. One passage speaks about this danger in the positive. If good people always had better health than bad people they'd start to "claim merit and righteousness" for their goodness, which would destroy its benefit to them (SEm 4630). For this reason the faithful "suffer misfortunes equally as, and even more than the unfaithful" (Ibid).
 - c. The thought "what have I done to deserve this" that we can have when bad things happen shows this thought process. Part of us wants to believe that good people have good fortune, even in external things like health or wealth, which is not necessarily so
 - d. The Lord insures that we can't make spiritual judgments. Bodily suffering is better than having us suffer in our souls
5. In other cases it is more obvious, but we need to be careful.

VIII. So this is one way of thinking about disease that can be productive: Since disease can come from our own inner evils we can ask what role did we play in this disease happening? But it's not the whole picture.

- A. The Lord is clear that disease can also come from natural causes (SEm 4648), what today we'd call germs: bacteria, viruses, toxins, and the like
1. This seems to fly in the face of the teaching that everything in the natural world is caused by something spiritual, until we look a bit deeper
 2. What caused those bacteria and viruses to exist? Well those were caused by hell
 3. Think about it this way: every evil that exists in creation is going to be manifested in our world, and nature is a mirror of our inner states

4. So greed, which is a spiritual sickness, is going to manifest itself as a natural sickness also, and it'd be the same with every form of evil, each showing up as some kind of earthly sickness or malaise
- B. And here's the thing: the nature of evil is that it affects innocent people. That's why it's called evil. If only bad people suffered from bad things we'd call them consequences
 1. If I stab you it is not because you are afflicted by murderous spirits.
 2. Just as evil hurts innocent people we can expect disease to afflict innocent people
 - C. New Church teaching explains the way germs cause disease. Basically spirits are not allowed to randomly attach themselves to our bodies – that would be demon possession, which is forbidden. But “only when we fall sick do they enter any further, into the kinds of uncleanness that are the essence of diseases” (AC 5713).
 - D. So hellish spirits are present in any disease, but they are present often indirectly, carried into us by uncleanness of the bacteria, viruses, or the like
 - E. And this is why natural remedies can work (AC 5713; SE 4585). They remove the external element that allows the disease to be present, similar to what happens if we break a glass holding poison – the poison flows away because the glass was broken.
 - F. This ties in with our reading that “no effect can remain in being unless its cause is present within it constantly; for the instant a cause ceases to exist, so does its effect.”
 1. Take an antibiotic and if it's the right one the disease can almost miraculously disappear because there's no vessel into which hell can flow
 2. And it's the same the other way. Drive out the evil and the bacterium that manifests that evil dies
 - G. And this is why the Lord could heal a leper or paralytic so easily and instantaneously. His presence could drive away the presence of hell, and if that were the case the disease would instantly lose its power and die. His presence was the most powerful antibiotic that evil existed.
- IX. Why is this all worth thinking about? It's all well and good to know that spirits cause disease, but does that change your thinking if you get the flu next week?
 - A. It changes us because, apart from the normal health regimes we might use, it allows us to do something about disease right now
 - B. As I said, we can look at our own tendencies to our particular brand of evils and ask if there are ways their presence is affecting our health. Maybe that would be a stimulus to work on them more
 - C. And more broadly, we can consider that all disease is empowered by the presence of evil in the world, and you and I are part of that causative pattern
 - D. So if we diligently shun evils as they show up in our lives, we diminish in some small way the presence of evil in the world. And that might diminish the virulence of some disease.
 1. Maybe a little girl in Thailand will pull through her disease because your

work on your own evils made the disease that tiny bit less virulent

- E. Part of what's frustrating about Covid, cancer, Crohn's disease, or a cold is the feeling of helplessness we can experience
 - 1. And it is true that to some extent we are helpless, especially in the face of highly infectious disease, just as we are helpless in the face of a murderer with a gun
- F. But in another way we can help ourselves and others by thinking about the spiritual causation of disease.
 - 1. If we do our own work now, today, turning to the Lord, shunning evils we see, and seeking to serve others, we become part of the force for good in the world; we diminish the power of evil and enhance the power of good
 - 2. And yes, each of us is 1 person out of 7 billion. We can't do it alone
 - 3. And we don't. Because the Lord is the one who heals all our diseases, just as He forgives all our iniquities.
 - 4. When we, with all our might, push away evil and do good, we invite the One who has all power into our lives and into the world, and there is not telling what good that will do in our lives and in the lives of many others

Ps 103:1-3 Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless His holy name! Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits: Who forgives all your iniquities, Who heals all your diseases, Who redeems your life from destruction, Who crowns you with lovingkindness and tender mercies, Who satisfies your mouth with good things, so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.

Matt 8:1-15 When He had come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed Him. And behold, a leper came and worshiped Him, saying, "Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean." Then Jesus put out His hand and touched him, saying, "I am willing; be cleansed." Immediately his leprosy was cleansed. And Jesus said to him, "See that you tell no one; but go your way, show yourself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, as a testimony to them."

Now when Jesus had entered Capernaum, a centurion came to Him, pleading with Him, saying, "Lord, my servant is lying at home paralyzed, dreadfully tormented." And Jesus said to him, "I will come and heal him." The centurion answered and said, "Lord, I am not worthy that You should come under my roof. But only speak a word, and my servant will be healed. For I also am a man under authority, having soldiers under me. And I say to this one, 'Go,' and he goes; and to another, 'Come,' and he comes; and to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it."

When Jesus heard it, He marveled, and said to those who followed, "Assuredly, I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel! And I say to you that many will come from east and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. But the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." Then Jesus said to the centurion, "Go your way; and as you have believed, so let it be done for you." And his servant was healed that same hour.

Now when Jesus had come into Peter's house, He saw his wife's mother lying sick with a fever. So He touched her hand, and the fever left her. And she arose and served them.

AC 10083:5 It was often said by the Lord, when the sick were healed, that they should "have faith," and that it would be done to them "according to their faith." The reason was that the first of all is to acknowledge that the Lord is the Savior of the world, for without this acknowledgment no one can receive anything of truth and good from heaven, thus no faith; and because this is the first and most essential of all, therefore in order that the Lord might be acknowledged when He came into the world, in healing the sick He questioned them concerning their faith, and those who had faith were healed. The faith was that He was the Son of God who was to come into the world, and that He had power to heal and to save. Moreover, all the healings of diseases by the Lord, when He was in the world, symbolized healings of the spiritual life, thus the things that belong to salvation.

AC 5711 Since the subject is the correspondence of diseases, it should be recognized that all human diseases too have a correspondence with the spiritual world. For

nothing at all comes into being in the natural creation that does not have a correspondence with the spiritual world; it has no cause from which it may be brought into being and from which it may be kept in being. Things existing in the natural world are nothing else than effects; their causes exist in the spiritual world, while the causes behind those causes, which are the ends, exist more internally in heaven. No effect can remain in being unless its cause is present within it constantly; for the instant a cause ceases to exist, so does its effect. Essentially an effect is nothing else than its cause; but a cause so clothes itself outwardly with an effect that it is enabled to act as a cause in a lower sphere than its own.