

Spiritual Signs and Symptoms

What can sickness teach us?

Babies cry because they cannot say what is wrong or where it hurts. Crying is thus a visible and audible *symptom* of an underlying problem. Hunger or wetness can be dealt with easily, but, if crying continues, parents become medical detectives, looking for other general symptoms that may indicate an infection or disease. For example, a runny nose or pain in the muscles or joints are some common, qualitative symptoms that could point to either bacterial or viral infection. The diagnosis based on symptoms is confirmed by the results of specific tests that are medically called *signs*. In this case, the child's body temperature could be elevated, a blood test could reveal increased numbers of bacteria-eating, white-blood cells, or ear fluid could be used to grow and identify disease-causing bacteria. Signs and symptoms like those above lead to the realization that a disease or infection is actively hurting the body and needs to be treated. They are a call to action.

This is not to say that the body cannot actively defend itself. In fact, the symptoms of redness and swelling at the site of a cut indicate the body is doing just that, bringing bacteria-eating white blood cells to the area. Likewise, most viral infections resolve after seven to ten days because the body produces its own anti-viral medicine called interferon. To the knowledgeable observer, it seems that the human body's active defenses against bacteria and viruses must have been designed with foreknowledge of what they would be fighting. But if these lines of defense fail and the infection or disease continues without treatment, there can be severe consequences. Hearing or sight can be lost.


Limbs may need to be amputated. Damage to the heart or other organs can occur. Some infections, like pneumonia, can result in death, as is frequently the case among elderly people in nursing homes. To ignore the

call to action of ongoing signs and symptoms can have terrible, even deadly, results.

Just as in the physical realm, spiritual signs and symptoms serve to call attention to the reality of an underlying spiritual problem that, if left untreated, results in death. An observer of human history would note the general, but chronic, symptoms of selfishness, hate, violence, and moral ambiguity, and the ensuing

specific signs of innumerable wars, the killing of millions of unborn children, and the legal redefinition of sexuality and gender, as confirmation of an underlying spiritual disease. The disease is called sin. Sin is a congenital spiritual disease of human beings that keeps us separated from God and, if left untreated, is eternally fatal. Spiritual signs and symptoms call for an effective spiritual prescription.

Thankfully, there is an effective treatment freely available. Like a physician prescribing the right medicine to cure an infection, the biblical prescription for the disease of sin is faith in Jesus Christ. Only faith in Jesus brings relief from the symptoms of sin, an eternal resolution of the infection of sin, and freedom from the fatal outcome of sin.

"But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, and by His scourging we are healed" (Isa. 53:5). 

—MICHAEL G. WINDHEUSER, PH.D.

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