

QUESTIONS WE WANT ANSWERED

85.1 What Is the Christian View of Sickness and Healing?

Part I

*Scripture: Isaiah 53:4-5; Matthew 8:1-4; I Corinthians 12:9, 28, 30
II Corinthians 12:7-10; James 5:13-16; Exodus 15:26*

INTRODUCTION

One of the great problems that mankind faces is the problem of sickness, with its accompanying pain and grief. This has been true through the ages and is a fact of life today even in the wake of the great advances in medical science. Because Christians are not exempt from the experience of illness, a study of the nature of disease and what the Bible has to say about bodily healing is of great importance. Within the last thirty years there has been a reemergence of the phenomenon of healing in the professing Christian church so that we have seen a new emphasis emerge within most of the major denominations, foremost among them the Episcopal church. I have been asked what I believe concerning healing and what I think our attitude should be toward this emphasis. Let us turn to the Scripture and try to establish some basic facts from which I hope we will be able to draw our own conclusions. Now, what are some Biblical truths concerning this subject? What may we consider to be the Christian view of sickness and healing?

I. THERE ARE DEFINITE REASONS WHY WE BECOME SICK:

We will readily admit to the reality of illness and seek to understand the causes.

1. The Tragic Sin of Man Has Brought Disease into the World:

(Genesis 3:17-19; Romans 5:12; 8:20-22; Colossians 1:17). As a result of the introduction of spiritual disorder into the universe, a curse was pronounced upon man's dominion, introducing a principle of decay and death. This was superimposed on the basic principle of conservation by which all things are upheld and we have our being. We can say that this curse is unnatural and will one day be removed when Christ returns.

2. The Work of Satan:

(Luke 13:11-16; Acts 10:38; Job 2:6; II Corinthians 12:7). In a way which we are not able to understand, there is Divine permission for this oppression.

3. A Violation of Natural Laws:

(Leviticus 13-15). Sometimes we become ill because we fail to take care of our bodies, such as failure to exercise properly, get enough rest, or eat the right foods.

4. The Chastening of The Lord:

Sometimes, God directs bodily affliction. If there is a divine healing, there is also a divine sickness. It is important to understand that God will never use the sword of punishment on His children, but he will use the rod of chastisement. A classic passage here is I Corinthians 11:29-32.

5. For God's Glory:

According to John 9:1-3 and John 11:4, illness can be the means by which God is glorified. This is accomplished by the manner in which we willingly accept His will for our lives. Consider two people who have identical illnesses. One person curses God, while the other praises Him. Such praise is unnatural. It is supernatural. It is evidence enough of the touch of God upon a person's life.

6. Sickness Can Be for Our Spiritual Growth:

We don't know the exact nature of Paul's affliction as mentioned in II Corinthians 1:8. The context leads us to believe that bodily illness was included with perils and threats. Several observations can be made from the passage. The experience enabled Paul to speak of God as the God of all comfort (1:1). It thus enabled him to have a fuller understanding of God's character. Secondly, he evidently learned to have less confidence in himself and to place more trust in God and His promises (1:9-10).

7. To Promote Corporate Comfort and Praise:

Paul writes (II Corinthians 1:4) *"that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God."* He further states (1:11), *"Ye also helping together by prayer for us, that for the faith bestowed upon us by the means of many persons thanks may be given by many on our behalf."* The experience of affliction was brought into

the life of the entire church family. Some were comforted by knowledge of it and the church was stirred by the deliverance and together the people praised God.

8. To Fulfill the Will of God:

It is interesting to note how readily we admit to human will in given situations. We accept the fact that some people are exceptionally strong-willed and that all of us do things simply because we want to do them. However, we find it difficult to accept the concept of divine will and in so doing we unknowingly rise to challenge the sovereignty of God. But God will be God. I will refer to the issue of God's will again, but at this point we would do well to ponder seriously the words of a king, who, upon coming to his senses, affirmed a truth that seems to have escaped so many. See Daniel 4:34-35.

These are reasons which can be given to those who would search the mind and will of God concerning illness. We have the confidence that when something goes wrong in our bodies we have the full attention of God in the matter. This is not to deny the existence of sickness and death. There is a position held by professing Christians which denies the reality of disease, being persuaded that it exists in the mind only. By mentally ignoring the malady it will cease to be. We take our bias from the Scriptures, which nowhere ask us to deny a reality we are not able to escape.

II. ALL HEALING IS GOD HEALING ALTHOUGH HE MAY VARY THE PROCESS:

Pastors are often asked if they believe in faith healing. For the sake of laboring a point, I sometimes respond by saying that I do not. I do believe in God healing, because all healing involves the activity of God, and this is where the emphasis belongs. Without much intervention on the part of God no healing would take place.

God may vary the processes, but the source remains the same. Sometimes God is going to heal:

1. Through Rest:

I remember hearing Vance Havner at the Pinebrook Bible Conference years ago saying, "You will come apart. Either you come apart and rest, or you simply come apart." Mark 6:31 and Psalm 139:14 are places God has reminded us of this therapy.

2. God May Heal Through the Use of Medicine:

The Bible has a healthy respect for the medical profession. God wanted us to know about a certain man long ago who was almost beaten to death by robbers. He was restored, according to Jesus, by the loving application of oil and wine in the binding up of his wounds (Luke 10:33-34). Jesus reflects upon the propriety of the medical profession in Matthew 9:12. The point is subordinate in the context, but he does not condemn going to a doctor by the statement he made. Other helpful Scriptures are Colossians 4:14; I Timothy 5:23; Isaiah 38:21. I believe that for one person to advise another against the use of medicine or a physician's skill is to go beyond what the Scripture teaches. Healing as we study it in the Bible included the sensible use of medicine and those trained in its use.

3. God May Heal Through Direct Intervention:

Here God heals our ills with out the use of medicine or natural means. Somehow there is the direct touch of His omnipotence upon the body renewing what has been impaired. The direct healings in the Bible were characterized by immediacy (Matthew 8:3), totality (John 5:9), and permanency. The latter is suggested by the silence of Scripture as no case of relapse is recorded. Of course, this is not to deny the sickness which may have been unto death and eventually came to all who were healed earlier.

In concluding this point we have emphasized the fact that God heals. In fact, He alone heals. Physicians may prescribe, operate, and place their bandages, but the actual healing process of renewal and restoration is of God. There is no healing outside of His strengthening involvement. Secondly, because God employs various means in healing we ought not to exclude their possibility. By eliminating this process or that in our thinking we unknowingly take it upon ourselves to decide for God how He has to work. Lastly, we err when we look only to the means and disregard God as well as when we look to God only and disregard the means.

III THERE ARE STRONG SCRIPTURAL PRECEDENTS FOR DIVINE HEALING:

Repeatedly the Bible gives us intimations, direct statements and examples of the fact that God is able to minister physical healings. Very early in recorded history God revealed Himself as Jehovah-rapha, "*the Lord that healeth.*" (Exodus 15:26) These words may be rendered, "I am the Lord thy physician," and to the Israelites the title was tantamount to the ordinance of healing.

1. The Old Testament Describes Healing in Answer to Prayer:

God healed early in Biblical history. It is the Old Testament which lays the foundation for belief in God-healing. It was a miracle of healing which enabled Sarah, the laughing princess, to conceive. (Genesis 18:15; 21:2) God healed Abimelech and his wife. (Genesis 20:17-18) Rebekah was able to conceive. (Genesis 25:21) Luther makes the observation that to this point the only known prayers of the patriarchs had to do with physical needs. Other stories of healing concern Jacob and Rachel (Genesis 29:30-31), Moses leprous hand (Exodus 4:5-7), Job (James 5: 11); Jeroboam (I Kings 13:1-10); Naaman (II Kings 5; Luke 4:27), and Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 4:37). The Old Testament closes with Malachi's prophecy of the Messiah as healer. (4:2)

2. The Sick Were Healed by Jesus and the Apostles:

There are many passages in the New Testament which leave no doubt that the sick were healed in a miraculous way by Jesus and the apostles. (Matthew 4:24, 10: 1,8; Mark 6:13) These were extraordinary visible acts of divine power. We have no record of an infirmed person coming to Christ without being healed. Jesus also sent out a band of 70 who later returned with a glowing report. (Luke 10:17) Peter, Stephen, and Paul also healed in the name of the Lord. (Luke 9:1, 10:1-2, 8-9; Mark 16:17-18)

3. The Book of Acts Describes the Healing Church:

As the four gospels portray the Acts of the Apostles present the church as a continued living expression of the ascended Lord. We have the living Christ continuing to authenticate His identity and message through His church. It is in this regard that we read of the healing gift in I Corinthians 12, verses 9, 28, and 30. According to Paul it is the gift of healings. The word is plural and may have to do with the fact that each separate healing is a separate gift or that healings occur at every level of need, be it mental, physical or emotional.

Harnack is correct when he states that, "Jesus appeared among His people as a physician," There are 26 individual miracles of healing ascribed to the Lord and to these can be added 10 occasions when a general healing of large numbers took place. He met a variety of ailments to include demon possession, leprosy, paralysis, blindness, epilepsy and lameness. He healed by touch, word, and by anointing. He authorized and empowered others to heal. He did so to twelve (Matthew 10:1, 7-8), to seventy (Luke 10:1, 17-19), to a larger number of believers (Mark 16:17-18). The New Testament

records 5 different occasions when Jesus gave instructions and promises about a healing ministry.

The **divine** healing referred to in these Old and New Testament references may be defined as the direct act of God upon an afflicted body to restore it to health. God introduces a superior law which transcends, not violates, the laws of healing with which we are familiar. The human body is thus acted upon from the realm of the spirit. The process is a mystery to us and for want of a better term is called **divine** healing. I had meant to note the fact that there are 9 accounts of individuals being healed, and 7 instances of general healings under the ministry of the apostles. (Acts 3:6, 4:30, 5:12, 6:8, 8:6, 9-10, 14:3, 19:11-12) We may be assured of the reality of divine healing from the Scripture.

IV. THERE ARE DEMONIC AND PSYCHIC HEALINGS:

All healing requires God's power and it is in this sense I have stated God alone heals. However, there can be a secondary means so that we may say not all healing comes directly from Him. God cannot, for instance, be excluded from the laws of nature because they are His laws with our name. Healing may then be the result of scientific nutrition, a more favorable climate or environment, surgery, medicine, or mental suggestion of some kind. It may also be the result of Satanic power.

1. Metaphysical, Magnetic, Mystical, and Mental Healing:

Various names have been used to describe healing which may be psychosomatic. Metaphysical healing employs the principle of mind over matter. Remove a particular problem from the mind and the body will respond. The point here is that there is nothing structurally wrong except the wrong messages which are being sent from the mind. Magnetic healing or **mesmerism** introduces the impressive charismatic qualities of the healer, the exercise of a unique personality is said to have a healing effect. **Mystical** healing is the application of profound spiritual insights which stimulate the body organically. **Healing by affirmation** is the denial of the condition which is not desired. Emile Coue (1857-1926) was a leading advocate of this auto suggestion. He taught his patients to say, "Every day and in every way I am getting better and better." His intensive instruction at the New Nancy School of Therapeutics produced miracles, so-called.

Psychosomatic healing is commonplace. The success of these systems can be explained in the following ways, **(1)** God providentially healed the sincere

believer in spite of the system of doctrine or theology. **(2)** The healing was satanic. **(3)** The healing was a delusion. **(4)** The healing was a psychosomatic reaction.

2. Diabolical Healing:

The first century world was marked by the presence of demon supported healers and workers of magic. This was the reason Jesus was accused of casting out demons by evil power. (Matthew 12:24) The powers of darkness enabled Jannes and Jambres to do amazing things. (Exodus 7:11-12; I Timothy 3:8) Today black magic openly employs the name of Satan and healings are not uncommon.

Alan B. Christensen, Pastor, Hope Evangelical Free Church, Wilton, CT,
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