

QUESTIONS WE WANT ANSWERED

85.2 What Is the Christian View of Sickness and Healing?

Part II

*Scripture: Exodus 15:26; I Corinthians: 12:9, 28; Matthew 8:16-17
II Peter 2:24; Ephesians 4:7-16; Isaiah 53:4-5*

INTRODUCTION

Our study of health and healing is a most relevant one. The reason being that the first interest of adults around the world is not love, romance, sex, money, popularity or fame. A recent and costly survey covering a two year period revealed that the first interest of people everywhere is health. It is felt that nothing is enjoyed without it and nothing can take the place of it. Little wonder that we are seeing an emphasis upon physical wellbeing and healing within the church. Many Christians ponder this emphasis. They are asking if they should consider that it is of God, or if they should shun it. The traditional view among evangelical Christians is that God is possessed of the power to heal, and in point of fact does heal through prayer, but such healing is an exceptional occurrence when it is without the use of medicine or natural means. Classical Pentecostalism has continually held out the promise of **immediate** healing in its extreme form. The conviction is that God wants everyone healed who trusts the Lord because of the atonement He wrought at Calvary. I cannot help but feel that a kind of tension must necessarily arise when this subject is discussed. On the one hand we know enough about the Bible to understand that sickness can be viewed as a kind of blessing in disguise through which God does things in our lives He could do in no other way. On the other hand, we would not want to fail to seek all that God does have for us. We would not want to be robbed of our heritage, to accept what is terrible as good, or to believe that the Christian view of healing is more hopeless than hopeful. Let us again go to the Scripture and try to establish some basic facts from which we shall be able to draw our own conclusions.

In our first study we noted that there are definite reasons why we become sick, that all healing is of God although He may vary the process, that there are strong Scriptural precedents for healing, and that there are psychic and demonic healings.

V. GOD'S RESPONSE IN HEALING IS BELIEVED TO BE ABSOLUTE OR CONDITIONAL:

Christians are people who believe that God is omnipotent. They believe that God does not lack one infinitesimal modicum of power. Further, it is believed that God is free, within the restrictions of His nature, to do what He purposes to do. Thus, He is able to heal any illness. Healings already referred to in both the Old and New Testaments are examples of this.

The issue which these healings create is one of precedent. Inasmuch as God has healed in the past, some Christians believe God is committed to heal every sickness for which intervention has been sought and when the qualifications of a given promise have been fulfilled. Others believe that the promise of healing in Scripture is not an absolute one, but one which is conditional.

The primary consideration here is not the amount of faith a person brings to a given situation, it is the sovereign will of God. These positions have long been debated within the church without significant synthesis. To the one person healing is a **privilege** experienced as an act of God which is sovereignly bestowed. To the other it is a **possession** to be claimed having been vouchsafed by the atonement. I think if we remember the words "privilege" and "possession" we will have a handle on the way Christians differ regarding the doctrine of divine healing. I don't anticipate the issue being settled by us.

What we are able to do is to define the subject so that it does not become blurred. It seems to me that three basic considerations are before us. First, the atonement of Christ does or does not assure the believer of deliverance from sickness once certain conditions have been met. **Second**, it is or is not God's will to heal all believers. Lastly, the gift of healing is or is not possessed by men today.

VI. THE ATONEMENT IS THE PROCURING CAUSE OF BENEFITS TO THE BELIEVER:

The grounds for believing that healing is in the atonement are Isaiah 53:4-5 and Matthew 8:16-17. Both of these passages have received every possible consideration by the finest of scholars with different conclusions being drawn. Those who teach "healing in the atonement" do so on the basis of these passages with the belief that the trusting Christian can claim healing from his sicknesses. I Peter 2:24 and Galatians 3:13 are often added in support of this view. Jesus is viewed as our sickness bearer as well as our sin bearer. Salvation is to be understood to include physical and spiritual healing. The believer has the right

to claim deliverance from sickness just as he claims the forgiveness of sins. There is no question that Isaiah 53:5 must be considered very seriously. *“He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.”* The interpretation here is that “healing” refers to bodily healing. This is understood by Matthew’s reference to Isaiah (8:16-17) where it is said that Jesus *“bare our sicknesses.”* To infer that Matthew made an incorrect comparison would be charging the Holy Spirit with making a mistake in quoting His own prediction. It is further believed that every form of sickness and disease known to mankind was included in the curse of the law. (Deuteronomy 28:15- 62) Paul makes a positive statement that Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law in Galatians 3:13. The conclusion is Christ has therefore redeemed us from all sickness and disease.

Others view these crucial passages differently. They understand the prophet to be speaking of the Messiah’s physical healing (v. 4) and to His spiritual healing ministry (vv. 5, 6). They feel that Matthew 8:17 is a fulfillment of Isaiah 53:4, 5. The word “grief” may be translated “diseases” and the word “sorrow” may become “pains.” The translation, *“Surely he hath borne our diseases and carried our pains,”* is an acceptable one. When did the events of Matthew 8:17 take place? When did Jesus fulfill Isaiah’s prophecy? We read in Matthew 8:16, *“When the evening was come, they brought unto him many that were possessed of demons; and he cast out the spirits with his word, and healed all that were sick.”* The prophecy of Isaiah 53:4 was fulfilled years before Jesus ever went to the cross. The Greek word “borne” means to sympathize with. On these occasions Christ wept and had continual sorrow for those in need. One cannot be dogmatic about healing in the atonement from these verses. Jesus’ identification with physical grief’s was during the years of public ministry, He related to our iniquities at Calvary.

The Apostle Peter uses Isaiah’s words as if to clarify for us, *“Who his own self bore our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness; by whose stripes **we are healed.**”* It is common knowledge that the word translated “healed” is not confined in its meaning to physical healing. “In Luke 4:18 it refers to the alleviation of heartaches, and in Hebrews 12:13, to the rectifying of one’s conduct. In Matthew 13:15 it means to bring about (one’s) salvation.” (Kenneth S. Wuest, **First Peter In The Greek New Testament**, p 70) The main idea in Peter’s statement is that *“He bare our sins.”*

The context will show that Peter means to associate the cross work of Christ, not with bodily healing, but with the healing of the soul.

In Galatians 3:13 we read that Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law. It is true that sickness was included in that curse, but we must realize that physical healing is not necessarily available to God's people because the body is included in the atonement. About the most perceptive statement of this truth I have ever read has come from the pen of J. Hudson Ballard, an early teacher at the Christian Missionary Alliance school at Nyack. He wrote, "It is not enough to learn that a certain blessing is provided by the atonement; if we would enjoy that blessing in this life, we must also ascertain whether that particular portion of the atonement privilege is accessible in this life. All that shall ever come to us from God, both in this life and in the life to come, is through the atonement.

It is not enough therefore to prove that a blessing is in the atonement to assure us that this particular blessing may not be included in the large proportion of atonement privileges which are experienced only in the life to come. Absolute sinlessness, for instance, is ours through the atonement, but it is to be ours only in the future life. Again, a condition of the body not subject to weariness is purchased by the atonement, but will not be enjoyed in this life. Further, the resurrection body complete is in the atonement for us, but we are not to experience it until the translation. How may it be now concerning the redemption of the mind? And it might be added parenthetically, how may it be concerning the healing of the body? A great many who believe in divine healing think that the question is settled entirely if they can prove that healing is in the atonement, but this by itself in no wise makes it certain that healing is a present day possibility. It may be one of those atonement blessings which belong to the next life. Fortunately we have abundant evidence that healing is for us. The same is true of redemption for the mind." (J. Hudson Ballard; **Spirit, Soul And Body**, pp.157-8)

I believe it is important for us not to misunderstand the implication of healing in the atonement. Redemptive blessings are many and some of them only partially enjoyed. God does heal today in answer to the prayers of His people and we must therefore conclude that healing is in the atonement and quick to add that the Bible does not tell us how. But this is not healing as a possession or right just as there are many benefits which are automatic but which will not be enjoyed in this life.

The clear and unmistakable purpose of Christ's death throughout Scripture was for the sins of the world. Going from the simplest to the most complex of passages the death of Christ had as its objective the putting away of our sins. He came to be made sin (not sickness) for us. (II Corinthians 5:21) He came to seek and to save the lost (not sick). (Luke 19:10) His blood cleanseth us from all Sin (not sickness). (I John 1:7) This is the guarantee of the atonement, nowhere is assurance given regarding physical healing.

VII. IT IS THE SOVEREIGN WILL OF GOD WHICH IS PREDOMINANT IN THE WORD OF GOD:

Christianity teaches that everything which happens answers to the will of God. One of the most revealing pictures we have of God in Scripture is that He will do what He wants to do. We are not conditioned to understand unqualified freedom. God is all-knowing, all-powerful and completely free. The fact that God is able to do as He pleases always, everywhere admittedly raises problems which are not yet solved. There are certain things in the creation which God cannot approve of such as evil and death. He surely could have prevented them from coming into existence. We can only say that in His wisdom God has permitted evil to exist in controlled areas in His universe. In Revelation 20:1-3 we read that Satan is free, bound and set free again. Why is this so? It is so because God has willed that it be so. In Ephesians 6:10-18 believers are seen locked in battle with Satanic power. If God has the power to bind Satan, why doesn't He do it? The answer is that He does not choose to as yet.

We must distinguish between God's **positive** and **permissive** will. He positively wills all the good that happens. This is in keeping with God's nature. God is certainly good, and if He permits evil of any kind it is because He allows cause and effect to work in His creation. What has happened is that the human race has used its freedom to abandon God, and in so doing has created a set of circumstances which has brought ruin, misery and pain. It is good to be just and God's justice permitted this grief. We might just say here that the miseries of this world have driven many to God who would have been self-sufficient if it were not for the insoluble problem of suffering. God did not will men to sin, but having created them free, He permitted it and its consequences. It is only in this way that we are able to speak of catastrophes like Hitler and the Jewish holocaust in the same sentence with the will of a loving God. God has never taught the Christian that everything which happens to him in this world will be good. Some things that happen will be terrible. The Christian's faith is that God will cause the

best to come out of the good and the bad. I believe this to be the import of Romans 8:28. We ought to mark it in big red letters. The disasters of the world, the sicknesses we experience do not have their origin in the positive will of God. How could I trust God for the best if I knew He was the source of the worst. The assurance I have as a believer in Christ is that I know the conclusion of every one of life's experiences will be redemptive.

If a person believes that healing is in the atonement as being a right or possession, it follows that he also believes that it is God's will for him to be healed. Otherwise, believing that he is not assured of healing through the atonement the believer appeals to the will of God in faith believing that God is able to heal him. I must confess that the general use of this matter of God's will, is to handle the more difficult problems people don't want to explore, to avoid an in depth encounter with the painful side of life. I do not trivialize God's will, but there is a definite relationship between sickness and what God purposes to do with our lives. I do not believe it is God's will to heal all people. Interesting verses of Scripture are Romans 8:22-23, II Timothy 4:20, and II Corinthians 12:9. At times we are going to see a divine creative act, other times God will use the forces of natural processes or medicines to heal in an extraordinary way. There will also be those times when He does not heal. We must know at that time that our Lord is the source of our adequacy. God is sovereign and nothing needs to be hidden. Everything can be faced.

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January 22, 1978