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## HEALING AND MIRACLES

There can be no doubt that **healing** is a biblical teaching. It can be found from Genesis (20:17) to Revelation (22:2), with numerous examples between. Yet the subject has sometimes been shrouded in controversy, even among Christians. Is healing for us *today*? Or are the days of miracles *past*? Is it *always* God's will to heal? Is healing in the *atonement*? When people are prayed for, but are not healed, does this indicate there is *sin* in their lives or that they do not have *faith*?

*Prayer* for the sick is mentioned a number of times in the Bible (Gen. 20:17; Num. 12:13; Isa. 38:5; Acts 28:8; James 5:14-16). But we never once read that Jesus prayed for the sick.

It sounds strange to say, but it's true: there is no record in the Bible that Jesus *prayed* for the sick! He HEALED the sick. Apparently the healing gift was so powerful in his ministry that just a word or the touch of his hand brought healing. He prayed other times, and even all night, but there is no indication he had to pray long prayers at the point that people were healed.

Some were healed by simply touching him in faith, such as the woman with the issue of blood who "had suffered many things from many physicians. She had spent all that she had and was no better, but rather grew worse" (Mark 5:26). We quickly read over these words, perhaps without thinking of the primitive state of medical knowledge at that time. With this serious female problem, there was embarrassment, frustration, pain, rejection, and loss of all her money as "she suffered many things from many physicians."

Having touched Jesus in faith, this woman—to whom tradition has assigned the name Veronica—came before him "trembling," knowing she was healed (Luke 8:47). Why was she trembling? According to the Law of Moses, "a woman with an issue of blood" was ritually unclean and anything she touched was unclean (Lev. 15:25-28). For her, in this condition, to press through and touch the garment of Jesus could have brought severe rebuke by the Jewish legalists. No wonder she was trembling. But Jesus did not rebuke her. Love was stronger than law, her need more important to him than ceremonial ritual.

"Daughter, be of good cheer; your faith has made you well. Go in peace" (Luke 8:48).

Because we read statements like: "*Your* faith has made you well," it is easy to assume that only those who have faith can be healed. Yet, there were exceptions to this in the healing ministry of Jesus. What about the dead who were raised? Did they exercise faith at a certain moment? Did those who were insane perform some faith ritual to be healed? Or what about Malchus whose right ear Peter cut off with a sword? He was among those working against Jesus. He was not a believer in Jesus nor did he have faith for healing. Yet the healing power of God extended *even to him!* (Luke 22:51; John 18:10).

Another point about the healing ministry of Jesus that has not always been fully understood is this: the healings he performed were not *gradual* healings, but *instantaneous*. Repeatedly we read expressions like: "immediately his leprosy was cleansed," "immediately their eyes received sight," "she was healed immediately," "immediately the fever left her," etc. Sickness fled at his command in much the same way that a soldier would immediately obey his commanding officer (Matt. 8:5-13). Of all the many healings performed by Jesus, only two have been cited as being gradual:

(1) A blind man who received his sight, at first said, "I see men like trees walking"—things were not in focus. With this, Jesus "put his hands on his eyes again...and he saw everyone *clearly*" (Mark 8:24, 25). To me, this is not an example of gradual healing, for total healing did come within moments.

(2) A seemingly stronger case for gradual healing has been sought in the words "he began to amend" (John 4:52 KJV). But a careful reading will show this was probably an instantaneous healing also.

Hearing that Jesus was in Cana, a nobleman went there, asking Jesus to come to Capernaum to heal his dying son. Jesus replied: "Go your way; your son lives." Believing these words, he departed "and as he was now going down, his servants met him and told him, 'Your son lives!'" Then he inquired of them the hour when he got better. And they said to him, "Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him"—the same time Jesus had spoken the word.

It should be noticed that “began to amend” were the *father’s* words to the servants (not John’s). John simply recorded what the father asked. When the servants replied, they gave a precise time when “the fever left him.” This does not mean the fever left and then he gradually recovered from his sickness. What was called “fever” at that time *was the sickness*, and it was often deadly. The healing occurred at “*the exact time*” (as some translations have it) that Jesus had spoken the word. The fact the context describes this healing as a “sign,” “wonder,” and “miracle” confirms, we feel, the healing was instantaneous.

Are we saying, then, that God never heals gradually? No. Our point is simply that the ministry of Jesus was so powerful that most, if not all, of the healings he performed, were done instantly.

We have no doubt about the power of God to heal. Anyone who could create this great world and make man in his own image, is certainly able to heal. “Is anything too hard for the LORD?” (Gen. 18:14; cf. Jer. 32:17). We believe God heals and rejoice with those who are healed. Surely God’s power was not exhausted on some former generation.

Still, there are valid questions that surface—questions about whether it is *always* God’s will to heal or to what extent *physical* healing is in the *atonement*.

Some believe it is *always* God’s will to heal *all* people at *all* times. They point out that multitudes came to Jesus and he healed “all” that were sick (Matt. 8:16). And, so, since Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Heb. 13:8), it is still his will to heal *all* that are sick. But one of the problems with this is obvious: there are many Christians, including people who strongly hold this viewpoint, who are not healed.

It is true that in Jesus’ ministry, there were times when “all” were healed, *but not always*. At Nazareth he “could do no mighty work there, except that he laid his hands on a *few* sick people and healed them” (Mark 6:5). At the Pool of Bethesda, there was “a great multitude of sick people, blind, lame, and paralyzed” who needed healing. Yet only *one* man was healed by Jesus (John 5:1-6).

At one period in his ministry, Jesus taught “daily” in the temple, “the blind and the lame came to him in the temple, and he healed them” (Luke 22:53; Matt. 21:14). But, while we don’t know all the details, one lame man who was “daily” carried there to beg was not healed—at least not at that time. He was healed later, however, through the ministry of Peter and John (Acts 3:1-6).

Luke describes a meeting at which Jesus was teaching, and then includes the words: “...the power of the Lord was present to heal” (Luke 5:17). If the power of the Lord was *always* present to heal, if *every* meeting was a healing meeting, what would be the sense of this statement? Is not the implication that the power of the Lord may have been present at other times to do other things? As God moves by his Spirit, there is diversity (1 Cor. 12:4-6).

The Bible does say: “Jesus Christ [is] the same yesterday, and today, and forever” (Heb. 13:8). There is a grand truth here—the truth of an unchanging Christ in a changing world! But does this mean that he always heals to the same extent and in the same ways at all times?

Two thousand years ago Jesus healed many lepers (Luke 7:22; 17:12). The Lord was the “same” in the days of Elisha, but *how many* lepers were healed then? According to Jesus, only *one* leper was healed. “Many lepers were in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet; and none of them was cleansed *except* Naaman the Syrian” (Luke 4:27).

It was not that God was unmindful of lepers, for during that same period, four lepers marched into the Syrian camp and found it forsaken, “for the LORD had caused the army of the Syrians to hear the noise of chariots and the noise of horses—the noise of a great army” (2 Kings 7:6). These lepers were blessed—with silver, gold, and clothes in abundance—but they were not healed.

Jesus healed many blind people, even a man *born* blind. The Spirit of Christ (who is the same yesterday, today, and forever) was in the Old Testament prophets (1 Peter 1:11). But apparently no one born blind was ever healed during that time. “Since the world began it has been unheard of that anyone opened the eyes of one who was born blind” (John 9:32). These were the words of the blind man who was now healed—implying this was an unusual miracle, probably a “first.” The Pharisees, who were acquainted with Old Testament history (which included miracles), offered no rebuttal. The LORD does not “change” (Mal. 3:6), yet if no one born blind was healed during the thousands of years of Old Testament history, it shows that divine healing did not always function on the same exact level. God remains sovereign.

While the Old Testament records a number of cases of healing, there are many more mentioned in the New. In Jesus’ ministry, multitudes were healed (Matt. 4:23,24; Acts 10:38). After he ascended, through the Holy Spirit, he worked with believers, confirming the word with signs following (Mark 16:20). The book of Acts provides many examples. First Corinthians 12 tells about the gifts of the Spirit, including healing and miracles. And even the book of Galatians—where we might not expect to read about miracles—shows that miracles commonly occurred (Gal. 3:5).

And the history of the church since that time has recorded outstanding instances of healing through faith. I will not “limit” God (cf. Ps. 78:41) by saying that the days of miracles are past. However, it is also true there have been periods (for whatever reason) when there were more spiritual results, times of greater visitation or revival, than at other times.

The question Gideon asked—“If the LORD is with us ...where are all his MIRACLES which our fathers told us about?”—implies there had not been any miracles for some time. The fathers had told about the miracles that occurred when the Israelites came out of Egypt—but that was long, long before. Little did Gideon realize it, but a great miracle was about to happen and he would be part of it! (Judges 6:13).

The question has sometimes been asked: “Is healing for the body—*physical* healing—in the *atonement*?” I believe it is safe to say that *all* good things are found in Christ and his atonement—a total cure for a total curse. In no way would I minimize the atonement! However, I think there are problems with the teaching that healing from physical sickness is in the atonement *just as much* as salvation from sin. Consider carefully these two passages.

(1) Having described a meeting in which Jesus healed many sick people, Matthew says these things were done “that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying: ‘He himself took our infirmities and bore our sicknesses’.” (Matt. 8:16, 17). As to *place*, this was at Capernaum—not Calvary. As to *time*, the atonement was still in the future. If Matthew believed these words he quoted from Isaiah 53:4 referred to the atonement, he did not make that application here.

(2) Peter also quoted from Isaiah 53 with an emphasis on “by whose stripes you were healed.” In this context, the atonement is definitely in view. But the type of healing mentioned is not physical healing, but *spiritual*. “[Jesus] bore our *sins* in his own body on the tree, that we, having died to *sins*, might live for righteousness—*by whose stripes you were healed*. FOR”—notice it—“FOR you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your *souls*” (1 Peter 2:24,25). The word “for”—a connective word—clearly shows that Peter spoke here of spiritual healing. Those who, as sheep, had gone astray were healed by his stripes, and thus returned to God.

This is not to say that Peter did not believe in *physical* healing. Of course he did! During one period in his ministry, very sick people placed on beds and couches were healed as his shadow passed over them! (Acts 5:15). If he believed that Christ took the stripes for our *physical* healing, we can only say he did not make that application here.

I have known fine Christians who were physically afflicted and who had the confession year after year that they were *just as much healed* as they were saved, both being in the atonement. But when healing did not become reality, some finally asked: If healing from sickness is just as much in the atonement as salvation from sin, why am I not healed? Maybe I am not saved either! If I am not fully healed, perhaps I am not fully forgiven! In some cases the resulting worry and mental conflict added to the hurt of their physical affliction.

Some believe that prior to the Exodus from Egypt, all the Israelites were healed as they partook of the Passover Lamb (a type of Christ’s atonement) and, consequently, enjoyed perfect health as they marched through the wilderness. Support for this is sought in the statement that, after coming out of Egypt, “there was not ONE FEEBLE PERSON among their tribes” (Psa. 105:37). Yet another passage mentions there were “FEEBLE” people among them! “Remember what Amalek did unto you by the way, when you were come forth out of Egypt; how he met you by the way, and smote the hindmost of you, even ALL THAT WERE FEEBLE behind you, when you were

faint and weary” (Deut. 25:17, 18 KJV). How do we reconcile these two passages?

Because “*all* that were feeble” were killed, this could explain why there were no feeble people among their tribes. *If* it is correct to link these two passages, this was a case of *killing*, not *healing*!

That there were Israelites who experienced healing in the wilderness, and that they were given healing promises, is apparent (Exod. 15:26; Num. 21:9; 12:13). But it appears that some were afflicted with blindness, deafness, lameness, deformity, scurvy, and other diseases (Lev. 19:14; 21:18-20). Those with leprosy, whether male or female, were put outside the camp (Num. 5:2-4). All were not enjoying perfect health.

I have heard Third John 2 (KJV) used in the following manner: “*God* says to us, ‘Beloved, I wish *above all things* that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospers.’ God wants us to be in health physically as much as he wants our soul to prosper spiritually.”

First of all, this was not a message from *God* to every individual believer. It was simply a form of greeting from a pastor to his close friend Gaius, as we see in verse one. Once we recognize that it was a *greeting*, it is clear that it cannot rightly be used as a basis for *dogma*. Nor does it teach that physical health and prosperity are as important as the prosperity of the soul. The actual meaning comes through clearly in the Goodspeed (and other) translations: “The Elder to my dear friend Gaius, whom I truly love. Dear friend, it is my prayer that everything is going well with you and that you are well; I know it is well with your soul.”

Let me hasten to add that Third John 2 is a wonderful verse. I have quoted it often. I would not discourage anyone from deriving inspiration or faith for a financial need, a healing touch, or some other need through this verse. But it should not be taken out of context.

Sometimes when the Bible speaks of healing, it has to do with an inner or spiritual healing—a healing of the *soul*. This is the case in Psalms 103:2, 3: “Bless the LORD, O my *soul*; and forget not all his benefits: who forgives all YOUR iniquities, who heals all YOUR diseases.” He did not say “who heals all MY diseases,” but “who heals all YOUR diseases”—diseases of the soul. Psalms 41:4 is a parallel passage: “Heal my SOUL, for I have *sinned* against you.”

I do not point these things out as a denial of healing for the physical body. Over the years I have often laid my hands on sick people and prayed for them. If God can answer any prayer at all, why not one for a person who is sick? Healing through prayer is very clearly taught in James 5:15 and other verses.

There is no doubt that Paul had a healing ministry. His preaching was accompanied by “mighty signs and wonders by the power of the Spirit of God” (Rom. 15:19). Yet he wrote to Timothy concerning one of his own ministry workers: “Trophimus I have left in Miletus sick” (2 Tim. 4:20). Timothy himself had stomach trouble and “often infirmities” for which



Paul suggested a natural remedy (1 Tim. 5:23). Paul's gift of healing obviously had some limitations.

It has sometimes been taught that if people are fully serving God, *they will not even get sick!* But I have known people who worked so hard serving God they suffered a collapse. An example of this is even found in the Bible. Paul wrote about his fellow worker Epaphroditus who "was sick almost unto death; but God had mercy on him...[it was] for the work of Christ he came close to death" (Phil. 2:25-30). He did recover, yet the wording "God had mercy on him" seems to fall short of saying it was a miraculous or instantaneous recovery.

The unrealistic teaching that if one gets sick he has *failed* God, has led to all kinds of judging and perplexity. Even Elisha, a man of faith and miracles, "became sick with the illness of which he would die" (2 Kings 13:14, 20). He was not healed. Had he lost out with God? No, he had not! God even honored him after his death when a man was raised from the dead! As some men carried the dead man to the cemetery, being frightened by Moab raiders, "they put the man in the tomb of Elisha" and when the dead man came into contact with "the bones of Elisha, he revived and stood on his feet"! (2 Kings 13:21).

When people are prayed for and are not healed, some would say there is *sin* in their lives or they do not have *faith!* It should be noticed, however, that the "Faith Chapter"—Hebrews 11—specifically lists Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as examples of *faith*. Yet when Isaac was old, "his eyes were so dim that he could not see" (Gen. 27:1). Jacob also had eyes that "were dim with age, so that he could not see" (Gen. 48:10). To argue that these men had no faith is hardly satisfactory.

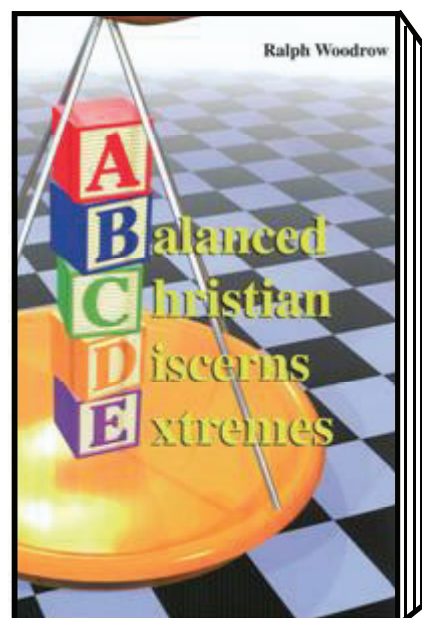
Sometimes we are prone to measure faith in terms of miracles, healings, and success. Indeed the Faith Chapter tells how people through faith "subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire," etc. We rejoice and thank God for those times!

*But*, the Faith Chapter also tells of those who "were tortured...they were stoned, they were sawn in two...were slain with the sword...were destitute, afflicted, tormented" (Heb. 11:33-37). To endure such things was *also* a demonstration of *faith!*

In closing, an old hymn with a *faith* theme, written over a century ago, comes to mind:

Encamped along the hills of light,  
Ye Christian soldiers rise,  
And press the battle ere the night  
Shall veil the glowing skies;  
Against the foe in vales below  
Let all our strength be hurled;  
Faith is the victory, we know,  
That overcomes the world.

Faith is the victory!  
O glorious victory,  
That overcomes the world. [1 John 5:4]



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