

United Church of God, *an International Association*



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Divine Healing

Doctrinal Study Paper

Approved by the Council of Elders
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All scriptures are quoted from *The Holy Bible, New King James Version* (© 1988 Thomas Nelson, Inc., Nashville, Tennessee) unless otherwise noted.

Healing as a Doctrine

Psalm 103:1-5 says: “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.”

Divine healing is a promise from God. It isn’t the only promise that God gives in His Word. Even in this Psalm we find a reference to “benefits” plural. In Psalm 68:19, we find a similar statement about God’s benefits: “Blessed *be* the Lord, *Who* daily loads us *with benefits*, The God of our salvation! Selah.” We must thank God every day that He is willing to fulfill the promises and provide the benefits. Of course, the ultimate promise from God is that of salvation, the “gift of God” (Romans 6:23).

It is important to note that God promises He will heal, but He does not say when. We must leave the timing up to Him. This is true of all of God’s promises. There is no timetable attached to any of God’s promises. When we pray the prayer of faith, we must leave our petition with God. We believe and know that God always has our best interest at heart. His will is more important than our own. If someone dies while looking to God for healing, we mourn with and comfort those who experience the loss, but our faith is unchanged. We know this life is not the most important thing. Calling for the elders of the church as we are instructed to do in James 5:14-16, and trusting God to fulfill His promises are important components in the application of the doctrine of divine healing. We believe in the certainty of God’s promises, but we trust Him to perform what is best for each individual in regard to the timing of their fulfillment. This requires faith in God’s providence.

Healing and Sin

The body of Christ has a direct connection to divine healing. But one must be careful not to think in terms of two sacrifices of Christ—one physical and the other spiritual (although there are both physical and spiritual aspects to Christ’s sacrifice). This thinking leads to equating all illness with sin in a cause and effect relationship. Deuteronomy 21:22-23 shows that the one put to death on the stake is accursed for our sakes, for our sins. Our reconciliation to our Father and healing of the breach comes through the complete sacrifice, including His preliminary sufferings.

We cannot conclude in all cases that illness is associated with sin, although it is true that in many cases there is a definite relationship. The term “physical sin” does not appear in scripture, therefore, we must question its validity. James 5:15 states: “And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.” The phrase “. . . if he has committed sins . . .” identifies a qualification. We also have

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the example of Christ and the blind man in John 9:3. Here He states that “. . . Neither this man nor his parents sinned . . .” While in all cases illness is a trial, we must not judge that all cases of illness are the result of some sin in the person’s life. We can all learn lessons from trials, but we may not have committed a particular sin that produced the trial. God’s people can expect trials and persecution (1 Peter 4:12-16; James 1:2-4; John 16:33), but these are not necessarily related to disobedience.

There are numerous examples in scripture where we see no relationship between illness and sin. What sin did Elisha commit (2 Kings 13:14)? What was Hezekiah’s sin? We are told that he was a righteous king and that God prospered him because of his good works (2 Chronicles 31:20-21). What sin did Epaphroditus commit (Philippians 2:25-27)? The Apostle Paul speaks of a physical ailment that plagued him (2 Corinthians 12:7-10). Was it the result of sin? We can not conclude from scripture that all illness results from sin. In fact, we can show that many people who commit horrible sins never get sick. The Bible record and our life experiences demonstrate this reality. With this understanding from scripture, we conclude that healing is not always the result of the forgiveness of sin. In cases where sin may be involved, repentance is necessary and upon repentance, we know that God will forgive us. But this does not mean that God will heal us immediately even though he forgives our sins. We all know people who deeply repented of their sins, yet they were not healed. It should also be noted that if all healing is the forgiveness of sin, then one should be made physically whole at the moment of baptism or else we have to conclude the baptism to be invalid.

Isaiah 53 and 1 Peter 2

Scripture confirms the truth of the beaten body of Christ and its relationship to healing. Since the forgiveness of sin is not intrinsically linked to healing, we must understand the connection between the beaten body of Christ and healing as explained in scripture.

In Matthew 8:16-17, Isaiah 53 is quoted in reference to healing: “When evening had come, they brought to Him many who were demon-possessed. And He cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all who were sick, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying: ‘He Himself took our infirmities, And bore *our* sicknesses.’” A direct connection is made between Christ’s beaten body and healing. He “bore our sicknesses.” Notice the wording in Isaiah 53: “Surely He has borne our griefs And carried our sorrows; Yet we esteemed Him stricken, Smitten by God, and afflicted. But He *was* wounded for our transgressions, *He was* bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace *was* upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way; And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, And as a sheep before its shearers is silent, So He opened not His mouth.” For this prophecy to be cited in connection with physical healing is significant. While there is no doubt a spiritual connection and “spiritual healing” is the primary focus in this prophecy, we cannot ignore the physical

implication of what Isaiah prophesied and Christ fulfilled. He paid the price for sin, that we may be made whole in every sense of the word.

The Apostle Peter quotes from Isaiah 53. Notice 1 Peter 2:21-25, “For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: ‘Who committed no sin, Nor was deceit found in His mouth;’ who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed *Himself* to Him who judges righteously; who Himself 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 you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.” The spiritual application of Christ’s sacrifice is clearly delineated—our sins are forgiven. But this does not preclude the physical—the healing of our illnesses.

Healing and the Passover

There is only one sacrifice for sin. We should emphasize that the suffering and death of Christ constitute one sacrifice. Yet we read in 1 Corinthians 11 that proper discernment of the *body and blood* of Christ is essential. Paul discusses judgment and illness in the Church and relates them to an improper understanding of the Passover symbols or “unworthy manner” of participating (verse 27). This does not divide the sacrifice of Christ into two parts, but it does connect the body of Christ with the physical healing of our bodies.

Paul writes: “For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the *same* night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke *it* and said, ‘Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me.’ In the same manner *He* also *took* the cup after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink *it*, in remembrance of Me.’ For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death till He comes. Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks *this* cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord’s body. For this reason many *are* weak and sick among you, and many sleep” (1 Corinthians 11:23-30).

Paul refers to the sacrifice of Christ in terms of the body and the blood. But he relates those who are “weak and sick” as not having discerned the “Lord’s body.” There is a connection between the beaten body of Christ, symbolized by the bread on Passover night, and the healing of the body. We must be careful that we aren’t guilty of ignoring the principle of healing which is embedded in the sacrifice of Christ and symbolized each year through the Passover symbols. His total sacrifice provides access to the Father. The bread is also shown in scripture to have a deeper meaning. 1 Corinthians 10 and John 6 both reference the bread as symbolic of our unity in Christ.

Conclusion

We are told that God's thoughts are not our thoughts, nor are His ways our ways (Isaiah 55:8). We will never understand in this life every step in the process which leads to the healing of our illnesses. We must rely on the clear scriptural statements for our doctrine. God promises to heal us, but we leave to Him the process and the timing of the fulfillment. This is where faith comes in. We must have unqualified faith in God as our Healer (Exodus 15:26) with no doubts about His promises.

We know from scripture that there is a connection between the beaten body of Christ and our physical healing (Isaiah 53:3-6). This understanding should not divide the sacrifice of Christ into a physical component and a spiritual component. There are clearly two elements—the bread and wine (body and blood), but one sacrifice.

God is a loving Father and will do nothing which will be detrimental to our potential to be in His Kingdom. Even His correction is always for our good (Hebrews 12:4-11). We have numerous examples of divine healing which occurred prior to Christ's life and His subsequent death. Yet we have clear statements linking the healing of the body to the sacrifice of Christ. We can make no demands on God for healing except to claim the promise which is given in scripture.

James 5 provides us with the basic understanding of our part in the process. We are instructed to call for the elders of the Church and be anointed with oil. It is the prayer of faith that saves the sick. We believe that divine healing is a promise from God and we claim that promise through faith.