

THE GIFTS & MINISTRY OF BIBLICAL HEALING

Introduction

When most of us get sick the first thought we have is to call a doctor and that is certainly a legitimate response. But what if we actually believed that God was for us and that He was compassionate and caring (He actually is much more caring than we are) and we stopped and asked for His healing touch in prayer. Sounds a bit unusual in this day and age of the rational scientific mind, but the truth is when we are sick or hurt and the doctors can't help us He is the first one most of us turn to. Rarely would we identify this as asking for divine healing, but it certainly is. Divine healing is an issue that lies at the heart of Christianity. If we are talking about theology, we would call divine healing a core issue as it relates to God's love for people and His desire to both restore and forgive. All of salvation is predicated on God's hungering passion to rectify the destruction sin has wrought spiritually, emotionally and physically. The deepest sickness we experience in this life is the sickness of sin, and the truth is all other sickness flows out of this debilitating disease. Fortunately, God is a forgiving, kind and compassionate Father who has dealt with the consequences of sin and the damage it does to so many areas of our lives. Healing in all its forms, physical, emotional, and spiritual, is a natural demonstration of His compassion towards the people He created and loves. It lies at the heart of His salvation message for mankind.

Jesus' Healing Ministry

Jesus' healing ministry is actually a wonderful picture of the Father's heart for people. We see the compassion of God when He touched and healed, "*many with various diseases*" (**Mark 1:34**). And the good news is, physical healing didn't end with Jesus' ministry, in fact it was just beginning. He made that clear when He declared the Kingdom of God was at hand and then directed the seventy-two to "*Heal the sick...and tell them 'The Kingdom of God is near you,'*" (**Luke 10:9**). Later, He declared His people would, "*place their hands on sick people, and they will get well,*" (**Mark 16:18**), thus insuring that healing ministry would become a vital aspect of His coming church. The reality of these and other New Testament declarations make it clear that healing is foundational to the Kingdom of God. Many of us aren't familiar with this term, "The Kingdom of God," but it was in fact the key phrase Jesus used when describing the work He was doing on earth. The Kingdom of God is literally the place where God rules and reigns, the King's domain or His place of dominion over evil and Satan. Jesus used healing to demonstrate His authority over sickness and His desire to restore and renew the damage resulting from sin. Each of us who have surrendered to Him are actually part of this Kingdom. So we enjoy a bit of the fruit of the Kingdom now, like healing ministry, but we are all keenly aware we have yet to see it in all of the fullness that the book of Revelation speaks of.

Sickness and Judgment in the Old Testament

One of the confusing aspects of healing ministry is the distinct difference between the Old and New Testaments and how they portray God in physical healing. Because of this many people would argue that divine healing is not always what God has in mind or desires to do. They would accurately state that the Old Testament is full of pictures of God using sickness and disease to discipline and bring judgment on His people, Israel.



In fact, **Exodus 15:26** makes this point rather boldly, *“He said, ‘If you will give earnest heed to the voice of the LORD your God, and do what is right in His sight, and give ear to His commandments, and keep all His statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you which I have put on the Egyptians; for I, the LORD, am your healer.’”* It is clear throughout the Old Testament, that Israel’s physical health, or lack thereof, was always a reflection of their spiritual well-being and obedience. But, it is also quite obvious that God is a healer, as it is He who added, *“For I, the Lord, am your healer.”* As commentators Keil and Delitzsch aptly state, “All that is clear and undoubted is...Jehovah made Himself known to the people of Israel as their Physician.” Also, He was declared such by His Old Testament name of Jehovah-Rapha, which the NIV translates, *“I am the Lord who heals you.”* So did God heal in the Old Testament? The answer is an unequivocal yes (See **II Kings 20**—Hezekiah’s healing). Did He also use sickness to discipline His people? The answer is yes. The Old Testament was a relationship that was always straining under the Law. It was, keep the guidelines and get life, walk away and get an immediate response both physically and spiritually. Fortunately for us, we live in the age of grace. Does God still hate sin and the consequences it brings to people? Yes! But the consequences are tempered by the cross and the sacrifice of Jesus’ own life. Thus we experience much more liberty to enter into a deeper and more life-giving relationship with Him.

Reconciling the Old and New Testament’s Views of Sin and Sickness

How do we reconcile the pictures in the Old Testament and the New Testament? First and foremost, it is essential to understand that the New Testament doesn’t conflict with the Old Testament, rather it clarifies it. Jesus’ declarations early in His ministry that the Kingdom of God was near (**Mark 1:15**) were followed immediately by Him healing the sick and casting out demons. Later when He healed a demonized man, He told the Pharisees in **Matthew 12:28**, *“But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.”* These and other demonstrations and declarations by Jesus in the New Testament bring to the forefront the role Satan has in sin, sickness, poverty and oppression and help immensely to clear up the role disease and judgment have in relationship to healing and obedience. The New Testament focus is clearly on Satan’s ability to derail God’s people rather than on the weakness and sinfulness of the people. That is not to say that some sickness isn’t caused by disobedience and sin, but that not all sickness is a result of personal sin. Jesus corrects His disciples Old Testament perspective that regularly connected sickness and disease with the judgment of God. In **John 9:1-3**, He is questioned by His disciples about a blind man He heals.

As He passed by, He saw a man blind from birth. And His disciples asked Him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he would be born blind?” Jesus answered, “It was neither that this man sinned, nor his parents; but it was so that the works of God might be displayed in him.”

John Wimber makes this point when he aptly states in his book “Power Healing”:

“The rule of the New Testament is that the righteous suffer the majority of all recorded satanic attacks...Jesus Himself was an innocent sufferer, all of His disciples (except John) died violently, and the entire book of 1 Peter is about suffering for Christ.”



The Foundation for all Biblical Healing

A close look at the prophetic picture of Jesus in **Isaiah 53** will help to bring God's heart and will into focus, as it addresses both sin and salvation's impact on people.

“Who has believed our message? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? For He grew up before Him like a tender shoot, And like a root out of parched ground; He has no stately form or majesty that we should look upon Him, Nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him. He was despised and forsaken of men, A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; And like one from whom men hide their face He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. Surely our griefs He Himself bore, And our sorrows He carried; Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, Smitten of God, and afflicted. 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. All of us like sheep have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way; But the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him.” ~ Isaiah 53:1-6

Isaiah 53:1-6 is crucial for a biblical understanding of healing because it addresses the atonement of Christ, which is the fundamental doctrine of the Bible. It is the foundation for all other doctrines, including healing ministry. The word, atonement, means to cover over and make as one. This is the process God implemented when sin estranged men and women from Himself. Sin cuts off our relationship with God, (**Romans 3:23**) and there is nothing we can do to fix that according to **Romans 3:20**. But the atonement, Jesus' death on the cross, did what we cannot do for ourselves. He paid our price and atoned for our sins thus the atonement is the healing we all need. **II Corinthians 5:21**, “He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” The question that is often raised is, “What did Jesus' death on the cross actually accomplish?” Was this atonement or forgiveness of sins a promise of perfect health? Jesus' death on the cross took away our sins, but did it also remove all our disease?

Isaiah 53:4 states, “Surely our griefs He Himself bore, and our sorrow He carried.”

These two words, griefs and sorrows, are crucial to understanding what Jesus accomplished on the cross. He bore both of these and took them to the cross, putting them under His blood. What are our griefs and sorrows? The Hebrew word here for griefs is **הָלִי** (hole/Lee). This word is used 22 times in the Old Testament and only twice in **Isaiah 53:3-4** is it translated grief or griefs; every other time it is translated sickness, illness or affliction.

The second word sorrows is **מַכָּאב** (mac/Ho/V) and its root word **הָלָה** (Ha/La), as you might have guessed, also has dual meanings and can be translated as such. The Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament notes that of the 16 times this word is used 12 of them are for mental anguish or sorrow, while four of them deal with physical issues. Only four usages of **הָלָה** (Ha/La) refer to physical pain, however, it is impossible to separate the mental and physical anguish as far as this word is concerned. A case in point would be **Exodus 3:7** where God's compassion for his people's affliction is expressed. Surely they were suffering physical pain, but their total situation was cause for anguish as well.

The point is quite simple, these words describe sin's impact as both physical and mental, which means Jesus carried our griefs and sorrows as well as our sickness and pain to the cross. This position is clearly supported in the New Testament when in **Matthew 8:14-17** the writer references **Isaiah 53:4** when discussing Jesus' healing of both Peter's mother-in-law and all those brought to Him who were ill:

When Jesus came into Peter's home, He saw his mother-in-law lying sick in bed with a fever. He touched her hand, and the fever left her; and she got up and waited on Him. When evening came, they brought to Him many who were demon-possessed; and He cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all who were ill. This was to fulfill what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet: “He Himself took our infirmities and carried away our diseases.”



The Atonement and Healing

This text leaves no doubt that the atonement can and does include physical healing. R.A. Torrey says of this passage, “It is often said that this verse teaches that the atoning death of Jesus Christ avails for our sicknesses as well as for our sins; or, in other words, that “physical healing is in the atonement.”

I think that is a fair inference from these verses when looked at in their context. This then raises another thorny issue that must be addressed, does the atonement guarantee healing for all? Is there healing in the atonement or as an outcome of the atonement or is the atonement a guarantee of healing?

Again we will turn to the **Isaiah 53** passage, which states in verse 5, “*By His scourging (or stripes) we are healed.*” **I Peter 2:24** quotes this text and it is often used in support of the position that if our sin is completely healed at the cross then our physical disease is as well. Thus, the atonement is healing for all people all the time if they have faith to believe for it. Stated that simply, it certainly sounds great, but the context of **I Peter 2:21-24** is clearly dealing with the issue of sin and not physical healing:

“For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth; and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously; and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed. For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls.”

Verse 24 clearly states that “*He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness,*” thus to declare that the atonement holds healing for all people all the time on the bases of these verses is certainly a misrepresentation of this scripture. To take the position that the atonement holds a healing guarantee for all violates the whole of scripture that clearly teaches that the fullness of the Kingdom and the wholeness of resurrection life are yet to come.

Revelation declares that there will be a day, at the end of time when, “*He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away,*” (**Revelation 21:4**). (See **Revelation 21, Romans 8:16-25, II Corinthians 5:1-5**.)

Declaring that the atonement is a guarantee of healing dangerously presumes on God and leaves no room for His sovereignty. Furthermore, though the atonement holds healing and healing comes through the atonement, physical healing is not the promise of the atonement, forgiveness of sins is. That is, our souls are completely saved in this age and all our sin forgiven, but our bodies will not experience the fullness of the Kingdom of God until the age to come, as **I Corinthians 15:51-55** says,

“We will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality. But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, ‘Death is swallowed up in victory. ‘O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?’”

In summary, we are living, as George Ladd has said, between the first and second comings of Christ which places us in Ladd’s words, “In the now and not yet of the kingdom.” His part is releasing His power, authority and kingdom to bring healing to our hearts and lives. Our part is to believe and pray for His kingdom to come and His will to be done in every situation then trusting Him no matter the outcome.



Disease and Illness in Biblical Leaders

If the Atonement was a guarantee of healing for all people all the time then we would have serious reason to doubt the Apostle Paul's ministry, which according to **Galatians 4:13** included a serious bodily ailment, *"you know that it was because of a bodily illness that I preached the gospel to you the first time."*

Paul is just one of many New Testament leaders who struggled with sickness and disease. We are told that "Trophimus I left sick at Miletus" (**II Timothy 4:20**) and of poor Timothy, who it seems was often sick we are told in **I Timothy 5:23**, *"No longer drink water exclusively, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments."*

It is unmistakable here that Paul affirms the use of wine to help with Timothy's frequent stomach ailments. He doesn't say, "I am praying for your healing" or "believing you will have faith to receive your healing" or "if you repent God will heal you" or "please quit talking about your sickness and making negative declarations and God will heal you." He simply states that God has made a way naturally for you to get some relief, take some wine, or we might say, go to the doctor, which Paul obviously didn't think was an action that would be interpreted as less spiritual.

It is important to note that all three of these men were highly esteemed leaders in ministry. They were mature believers who were not healed, as far as we know. Explanations for their continued illness such as personal sin or unbelief or unbelief in those who prayed for them is simply not plausible here. Paul continued his ministry and continued to see others healed in his ministry, though it appears he was not.

God's Heart for Healing

What the Word does teach is that there is healing in the Atonement, healing for sin and sickness, which I believe clearly makes it possible to state that God wants to heal people, all people, all the time. Please let me explain. He wants perfect health as much as He wants a sin free world. But that will not happen this side of heaven, any more than all people will be healed from sin this side of heaven.

Those of us who live in His grace and know His forgiveness for sin also know and are keenly aware that we still battle sin daily. Though we are forgiven, we are still living in a physical body and a world that is a battle. If **Isaiah 53** is taken as it is given, it clearly states that Jesus bore our sins on the cross and that by His stripes or scourging we are healed. We have no doubt that God wants to heal and forgive all sin, for all people, all the time. **John 3:16** says so, *"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believes in Him will not perish but will have everlasting life."*

So why do we doubt or fear declaring that likewise God wants to heal all people, all the time? The answer is simple, because we see people we pray for not getting healed and at times even dying. So how could it be, unless as some declare, it is a lack of faith that prevents them from being healed?

Simply put, sin and sickness were dealt with at the cross. We experience healing from sin daily, but we are not yet completely healed from sin. The same is true for physical healing. We can and do experience physical healing here on earth, yet we will all ultimately die a physical death unless Jesus returns and takes us home first. One will not know perfect holiness this side of heaven and likewise we will not know perfect health until we experience what Paul called *"the redemption of our bodies,"* (**Romans 8:23**).

We should pray for the sick as we pray for the lost, knowing some will be saved and some will be healed. Not all will be saved and not all will be healed. God simply doesn't heal all people all the time. Though we are told, *"Jesus healed all who were brought to him,"* (**Matthew 4:24, 8:16, Mark 1:32, Luke 6:18-19**). We also see Him at the pool of Bethesda where sick people are lying about seeking physical healing and we are told that Jesus healed only one man (**John 5:1-9**).



Barriers to Healing

Having stated not all are healed, it is vital to discuss barriers to healing for there are several. Earlier I mentioned that some people believe a lack of faith is an issue that may prevent a physical healing. It is important to clarify this. All healing ministry is founded on faith. Without faith, the writer of Hebrews tells us, it is impossible to please God.

Matthew 17:16-17 holds a story of Jesus painfully and passionately healing a boy.

“Lord, have mercy on my son, for he is a lunatic and is very ill; for he often falls into the fire and often into the water. “I brought him to Your disciples, and they could not cure him.” And Jesus answered and said, “You unbelieving and perverted generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring him here to Me.” And Jesus rebuked him, and the demon came out of him, and the boy was cured at once. Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, “Why could we not drive it out?” And He said to them, “Because of the littleness of your faith; for truly I say to you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move; and nothing will be impossible to you. “But this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting.”

Jesus’ answer to the disciple’s question unveils a barrier to healing, a littleness of faith, or a smallness of faith, as well as a lack of clear understanding of the demonic realm and the power of prayer and fasting. The change in Jesus’ disciples after Pentecost is noteworthy if for no other reason but to demonstrate how much their faith had grown. Peter and John healed a lame man in **Acts 3:6** and Peter later tells the crowd in verse 16:

“And on the basis of faith in His name, it is the name of Jesus which has strengthened this man whom you see and know; and the faith which comes through Him has given him this perfect health in the presence of you all.”

The faith which comes through Him, Jesus, gave this man perfect health. So faith is crucial to healing and a lack of faith can certainly be a barrier to God’s will to heal. But, it is important to note, that it is not clear whose faith was at work here, the lame man’s, the Apostles’ or both? Since the faith was in Jesus, it is likely we can assume that it was John’s and Peter’s faith that is principally referenced here.

Personal sin is another barrier to God’s healing power. When a person chooses to willfully live in sin, their decision becomes an impediment to their healing. Following on the heels of **James 5:14’s** directive to receive healing prayer if we are sick, **James 5:16** reminds us how sin can derail the very healing we seek; “Therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed.” IF we continue to sin and are do not repent do we truly believe in what Jesus did on the cross for us. Jesus is very clear in **Mark 11:24-25** that unconfessed sin, particularly an unforgiving and bitter spirit, hinders our prayers.

“Therefore I say to you, all things for which you pray and ask, believe that you have received them, and they will be granted you. Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father who is in heaven will also forgive you your transgressions. But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father who is in heaven forgive your transgressions.”

Another barrier goes beyond unbelief to fear and despair, as well as, those who have no faith for healing. These all impede the ability to pray with faith for healing.

Finally, many people are not healed because those praying expect an instant response and when they don’t get one they quit praying. Those who persevere are often the blessed recipients of the miracle they are seeking. Always continue to seek, ask and knock on the Father’s heart until the Holy Spirit has released you to stop asking (**Luke 11:1-13**).



Practical Issues of Healing Prayer

Praying for the sick is a wonderful opportunity for both you and the ill person to grow. Often our first response to the Holy Spirit prompting us to pray for those who are sick is, “No way, I will look like a fool, and God what if you don’t show up, what if you don’t do anything?” The reality is that almost any time we pray for the sick, they are blessed and encouraged whether or not they are immediately healed.

At Church Two42, we follow the biblical pattern found throughout the Word of laying on hands while praying for the sick. There are multiple pictures of Jesus doing this in the New Testament including, **Mark 5:23, 6:5, 8:23-25, 10:16, Luke 4:40, 13:13**. The Apostles followed Jesus’ example in **Acts 6:6, 8:17-19, 9:12, 17, 13:3**.

The church will also often anoint a person with oil before praying. This oil represents the working and touch of the Holy Spirit, this is also a very biblical thing to do according to **James 5:14** which states,

“Is anyone among you sick? Then he must call for the elders of the church and they are to pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; and the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him.”

Conclusion

Finally, it is important to remember that of the nine spiritual gifts listed in **I Corinthians 12**, only one is plural, the gift of healings. It is not the “gift of healing” as in one is now a healer. But it is “gifts of healings” which means you only deliver the gift—you do not have it! I like to say you are an errand boy here! No one person is the healer—who has the gift of healing; it is gifts of healings—we can all have them, and we should all use them.

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John Wimber book “Power Healing”

