

SABBATH THOUGHT 2022-01-15—ANOINTINGS

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

Anointings are very much a part of a believer's life. I imagine most everyone has been anointed by an elder for a physical disease or illness at one time or another. The elder will, upon request, lay hands on the person and anoint them with oil while praying for God to intervene and heal them. The oil represents the Holy Spirit, which is the power of God, coming upon the person. Oil is an integral part of this because to *anoint* literally means to “smear or rub with oil.”

Interestingly, anointings have been around from the beginning of recorded history and have been used for many purposes aside from healing. After awakening from his dream of a ladder extending to the heavenly throne of God, Jacob made a memorial pillar out of the stone he used for a pillow and poured oil upon it. He did this to consecrate the place where he had his dream because God's presence was there (Gen. 28:16-19). In fact, he called it the Gate of Heaven. Jacob repeated this another time when he was at Bethel. There, God spoke to him and confirmed the covenant of Abraham would continue with him (Gen. 35:9-15). These anointings sanctified, or made holy, places where he had contact with God.

We also find that anointings were used to set apart someone in service to God. Aaron was anointed as the high priest by Moses (Exo. 28:41). This was a critically important role that God established to ensure the ancient Israelites maintained a proper worship of God by the people through sacrifices, offerings, and care of the tabernacle. God even commanded Moses to prepare special oil to be used for anointing Aaron and the fixtures of the tabernacle (Exo 30:23-30).

God also instituted anointing for the purpose of healing as in the case of a leper (Lev. 14:18). What is most interesting is that the Bible says that the leper was *cleansed*, not healed. In the Hebrew, *taher* means to *make holy* or *purify*. While leprosy was certainly a physical disease, God does not see the healing as a purely physical issue. Have you ever wondered why?

It all began with Adam and Eve. Before they sinned, they never knew pain, suffering, or disease. It was only after they sinned that they became subject to the afflictions that can come upon a physical body. Sin brought about all of them. Just look at the promise of God to the ancient Israelites: **“If you will diligently hearken to the voice of the LORD your God, and will do that which is right in His sight, and will give ear to His commandments, and keep all His laws, I will put none of these diseases upon you...”** (Exo. 15:26). Obedience to God means He protects those who obey Him.

If we have this promise from God, then why is any believer afflicted with disease or illness? Does this mean he or she sinned? Not necessarily. There are three possible cases: first, we ourselves sinned; second, someone else sinned; and third, no one sinned.

The first one is obvious. Eating unclean foods can lead to sickness or being injured while performing a dangerous task because we failed to implement proper safety measures are both situations we should have avoided. The fault lies with us. In the second case, perhaps it was someone else who sinned and subsequently got sick who spread disease to others. This is not our fault.

Finally, we can be afflicted even if no one sinned, believers are all subject to trials whereby God tests our faith and obedience under duress (1 Pet. 2:21-24; 5:9-10). This is, again, not our fault, because we must suffer for the sake of the kingdom of God and as a witness to the world at times. A perfect example of this is the man who was born blind discussed in John chapter 9. After healing him, Jesus tested him by asking if he believed in the “Son of God” (v35-39). Jesus also used this healing to witness against the Pharisees (v40-41). What is so amazing is that the Pharisees knew that there had never been someone who had been born blind and was later healed (v32); still, they did not believe.

So, except in the case where someone is being tested or used by God as a witness to others, healing involves dealing with sin. If sin did not exist in the world, neither would disease or illness. When we are sick or ill, SOMEONE sinned. This is the reason that Jesus Christ said He forgave the sins of the paralytic instead of telling him that he was healed (Mat. 9:2-7).

That brings me to another point. There is a difference between disease and illness. A disease is something that causes sickness. Examples of disease include heart disease, cancer, viruses, infections, etc. Illness, on the other hand, is a more general condition or ailment that may or may not stem from a disease. For example, chronic pain can occur without any specific diagnosis; in other words, there is no known cause for it.

Whether it is disease or illness, the sacrifice of Jesus Christ included the SUFFERING of the entire world. In fact, Jesus did not just HEAL those who were sick but also those who were tormented, possessed, mentally ill, and paralyzed:

MATTHEW 4:23-24 And Jesus went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every disease and every bodily ailment among the people. 24 Then His fame went out into all Syria; and they brought to Him all who were **sick, oppressed by various diseases and torments, and possessed by demons, and lunatics, and paralytics; and He healed them.**

While we all understand disease and illness affect our physical wellbeing, anointings are also something to consider when there are, what I might call, spiritual weaknesses or

afflictions. In other words, they are something that affects the heart, mind, and soul spiritually. These are what the Bible calls *infirmities*:

MATTHEW 8:16-17 Now when evening had come, they brought to Him many possessed with demons, and He cast out the spirits by *His* word, and healed all who were sick; 17 So that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying, "**He Himself took our infirmities** and bore our diseases."

How did Jesus take upon Himself our infirmities and diseases? Through the terrible beatings before His crucifixion:

ISAIAH 53:4-5 Surely **He has borne our infirmities**, and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. 5 But **He was wounded for our transgressions [sin]; He was crushed for our iniquities**; the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and **with His stripes we ourselves are healed**.

Now we have come full circle to the beginning of my article—anointings. These are the means by which we call upon God who, through the stripes of Jesus Christ, heals us. It is in the book of James that we find the ordinance of anointing for healing:

JAMES 5:14 Is anyone sick among you? **Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him after anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord**.

But what if an elder is too far away? Apparently, this happened often to Paul who was limited to how far he could walk in a day. His solution was to send anointed cloths to those who asked for healing:

ACTS 19:11-12 And God worked special works of power by the hands of Paul, 12 So that even when **handkerchiefs or cloths were brought from his body to those who were sick, the diseases departed from them and the wicked spirits went out from them**.

Notice, in particular, that Paul also healed those who were possessed—a spiritual affliction. Again, anointings and healings are not just for disease. They can be for all manner of infirmities or illnesses. While it was common in the days of the apostles to deal with afflictions other than disease, it is not the case today. Many request anointings for disease (as they should); however, requests of anointing for spiritual afflictions are rare (but should not be).

Now I come to the heart of the matter. Even though we acknowledge that disease is usually the result of sin, do we assume it is always the sin of someone else? No one is ashamed if they suffer because someone else sinned, so asking to be anointed carries no shame. However, we live in a culture where we are ashamed to admit sin—sometimes

even to ourselves. So, do we withhold asking for anointing for spiritual afflictions because we assume we might be judged?

It is very important to understand that confessing to sin is NOT required for an anointing. When someone asks to be anointed, the elder will anoint the person without regard to the cause of it. In other words, the elder is not concerned with whether or not there was sin involved or who committed it. He understands that judgment belongs solely to God, which, by the way, includes forgiveness. John said, “If we confess our own sins, [God] is faithful and righteous, to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” (1 John 1:9). No one should ever be ashamed to ask for an anointing when they need it regardless of whether it is for a physical disease or spiritual condition. Both circumstances can be difficult matters for a believer; but, sometimes a spiritual weakness or inadequacy is a more important concern because it can affect our eternal lives. Getting anointed for spiritual conditions may be just what is required.

NOTE: While James 5:16 says “Confess your faults to one another,” it is referring to reconciling offenses. Refer to the booklet “Offenses—Ordinance of God.”

If we are reluctant to request an anointing for spiritual afflictions because sin may be involved, we should rethink our perspective because EVERYONE sins. I do and so do you—even if it is a fleeting thought, misspoken word, an offense, or something worse. Our lives belong to God and only He knows our hearts and minds (1 Kings 8:39). If Jesus Christ lives in us (Gal. 2:20), we must strive to overcome sin through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ and the forgiveness of God. Being willing to admit our sins is the only way to receive forgiveness; however, confessing our sins is something each of us does PRIVATELY to **God**.

Sin is **not** something anyone needs to discuss with the elder when asking for an anointing. Every anointing is a special “**prayer of faith**” whereby an elder petitions God to “raise him up; and if he has committed sins, they shall be forgiven him [by God]” (James 5:15). The oil invokes God’s merciful power through the Holy Spirit to CLEANSE, FORGIVE, and HEAL. It is a special ceremony that formally petitions God to allow the stripes borne by Jesus Christ to take away the disease or illness. An elder will never assume guilt nor will he ever ask any questions unless the petitioner wants to discuss something more deeply. Simply speaking, anointings can be a powerful spiritual help as we overcome the world!

May God fill you with His peace and joy!

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