

SPIRITUAL HEALING

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Someone recently mentioned that a relative was suffering from a severe health problem, one that had been ongoing for a number of years. The family had enlisted the best medical help to no avail. With feelings of frustration and maybe even a little anger, he talked about the family's many prayers to God for healing but there was no improvement. *Why* did not God heal this long time, faithful believer? He recalled hearing, and even experiencing miraculous healings, in times past but there seemed to be far fewer physical healings today.

That question can lead to others. For example, what are the promises of God's healings? Are there *conditions* for His healing? If we are not healed, are we doing something wrong or have we sinned? We can be overwhelmed with all the questions and doubts, not only when we see others who are sick, but especially when we ourselves are afflicted. So, let us take a fresh look at Scripture and understand healing from God's perspective.

First, look at the promises of blessings God gave to the ancient Israelites in Deuteronomy: "Wherefore it shall come to pass, **if ye hearken to these judgments, and keep, and do them**, that the LORD thy God shall keep unto thee the covenant and the mercy which he sware unto thy fathers: ... And **the LORD will take away from thee all sickness, and will put none of the evil diseases of Egypt**, which thou knowest, upon thee; but will lay them upon all *them* that hate thee." (Deuteronomy 7:12, 15). As part of the covenant, God promised to take away the sicknesses and diseases from among the ancient Israelites. But if they did not obey God, notice the consequences: "But it shall come to pass, **if thou wilt not hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe to do all his commandments and his statutes** which I command thee this day; that all these curses shall come upon thee, and overtake thee: ... Moreover **He [God] will bring upon thee all the diseases of Egypt**, which thou wast afraid of; and they shall cleave unto thee." (Deuteronomy 28:15, 60).

The modern nations that are the descendants of Israel have completely forsaken their covenant with God and are now afflicted with diseases that were never heard of just a generation ago. These have affected everyone; unconverted and converted alike. But why would God's people be included? Remember what Jesus Christ said: "**I do not pray that You would take them out of the world**, but that You would keep them from the evil one." (John 17:15). When God curses a nation, it can affect everyone living in it, so true Christians can be subjected to the same diseases.

Now consider one of the most common scriptures regarding healing: "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. And **the prayer of faith shall save the sick one, and the Lord will raise him up**; and if he has committed sins, they shall be forgiven him.” (James 5:14-15). Many turn to this scripture when the topic of healing arises. This is a promise of physical healing because the word Greek word for *sick* means *feeble*, such as in the case of disease or illness. It directs us to ask an elder to anoint us with oil, representing God’s Holy Spirit, who then pray on our behalf for healing in the name of the Lord.

Now notice the next verse: “**Confess your faults** to one another, and **pray for one another, that you may be healed. The supplication of a righteous man prevails much**, being effective.” (James 5:16). Again, Paul mentions praying for healing but this time it is not because of physical suffering; instead, he refers to spiritual problems. The word *fault* means *trespass* or *transgression* so this is not referring to a physical illness or disease.

Notice that there is also a difference in how we are to deal with these two situations. A physically sick person is to ask an elder to pray for them whereas we are to pray directly to God in the case of a transgression. The former involves faith through an anointing by an elder in the name of the Lord while the latter is faith through personal prayer to God for forgiveness **and** healing.

Obviously, there are two different healings: one for physical afflictions and the other for spiritual transgressions. But what does it mean to be *spiritually* healed? Notice what it says in 1 Peter 2:24: “Who Himself bore our sins within His own body on the tree, so that we, **being dead to sins**, may live unto righteousness; **by Whose stripes you were healed.**” This is actually quoting Isaiah 53:5, which says, “But 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.**” (Isaiah 53:5). This is unmistakable. Jesus Christ suffered in His body not only for our physical healing but so that we may be healed of our transgressions, iniquities, and sins. These are spiritual conditions because transgressions, iniquities, and sins are violations of God’s Law.

So, just how are we healed spiritually? Is it not sufficient that we are forgiven of sin by the shed blood of Jesus Christ? What does it mean to be healed by the beatings and scourging of Jesus Christ’s body? Think of it this way. When a bacteria or virus invades the body, the person becomes physically sick or ill. It is not until the bacteria or virus is eliminated that the body is truly healed. As long as the bacteria or virus remains, a person will continue to get sick over and over again. To be completely healed requires eliminating the **source** of the sickness or illness.

Likewise, sin is a result of a *spiritual* “sickness” or “illness” in our hearts and minds. Notice how James describes the process that leads to sin: “But **each one is tempted** when he is drawn away and is **enticed by his own lust [in the mind and heart]**. And **after lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin**; and sin, when it is completely finished,

brings forth death.” (James 1:14-15). The evil or lustful thoughts that spawned the sin must be removed, or **healed**, so the sin does not reoccur. In other words, our hearts and minds must eliminate the *source* from which the sin originated. Even though God *forgives* our sin, we are not completely whole **spiritually** until the original evil or lustful thoughts are cleansed, as is the case with any physical disease. Only when evil or lustful thoughts are purged is the source of the sin eliminated from our hearts and minds so that we will not sin again. When God heals us of sin, our hearts and minds are made clean and pure! This is why **both** the blood and body are so important. Sin is forgiven by the blood of Jesus Christ but God **heals** us of sin by the broken body of Jesus Christ.

Now let us return to the question of physical healing today. To answer this question we need to understand why Jesus Christ suffered. Notice: “But we see Jesus, Who was made a little lower than the angels, crowned with glory and honor **on account of suffering** the death, in order that by the grace of God He Himself [*Jesus Christ*] might **taste death for everyone**; Because it was fitting for Him, for Whom all things were created, and by Whom all things exist, in bringing many sons unto glory, **to make the Author of their salvation perfect through sufferings.**” (Hebrews 2:9-10).

To “taste death” is not just the act of being killed. It is not just going to “sleep” in the grave. In order to be the perfect Author of salvation, he had to experience the pain and suffering that **leads** to physical death. How could He be the perfect *Author* of salvation if He never experienced any of the terrible sufferings that many believers endured for His name sake? Jesus Christ had to be subjected to torments because He asks His followers to do the same. He had to suffer such things firsthand; otherwise, He could not **be** the perfect Author of salvation.

But Jesus Christ suffered **before** the sins of the world were put upon Him. Have you ever wondered why? Notice:

HEBREWS 5:7-9 Who, in the days of His flesh, offered up both prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears to Him Who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because *He feared God*. 8 Although He was a Son, yet **He learned obedience from the things that He suffered**; 9 And having been perfected, He became *the* Author of eternal salvation **to all those who obey Him**,

Jesus had to suffer without sin and without cause. In other words, He had to suffer *innocently* so that He could be the Author of salvation for everyone that also suffers **innocently in obedience** to God. It was only just prior to His death that the sins of the world were put upon Him so that His shed blood covers (atones for) our sins. Jesus Christ left us an example of suffering in **obedience** to God’s will. As it says:

1 PETER 2:19-21 Because **this is acceptable**: if, for *the* sake of conscience toward God, anyone endures sorrows, **suffering unjustly**. 20 For what commendation *is there* if, disobeying and being beaten, you endure it? But if

while doing good you endure suffering, this *is* acceptable with God; 21 **For to this you were called because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example**, that you should follow in His footsteps

Eternal salvation, while a gift of God, is not given unless the character of those that seek and desire it is proven through trials and tests. Jesus Christ was the **example** to us that we must suffer for the Kingdom. Why? Because we must *prove* we will obey God in all things just like Jesus did. If Christ had not suffered innocently, how could He command us to do the same? Jesus Christ had to suffer *because* God requires the same of His potential children. Through unjust and undeserved suffering, we prove our faith and our commitment to God in the same manner as Jesus Christ.

God's covenant with ancient Israel was a promise of physical blessings—land, children, and good health. Healing for them was *physical*. Still, physical death was their end. The new covenant is spiritual, so the promise is eternal life; the end of death! Those under the old covenant sought physical healing but those under the new covenant seek eternal, spiritual healing because we know that physical death is like sleep from which God can easily awaken us.

Does this mean God no longer heals those that are physically sick? No; however, miraculous healings have always been, and still are, on a case-by-case basis. David and Hezekiah were likely healed because God still had work for them to accomplish. There were many evil Kings of ancient Israel that lived and reigned much longer than the few righteous ones but God is not focused on our number of years upon this earth. Our infirmities and death in this physical life are not God's greatest concern; our personal, eternal salvation is foremost in His mind.

Experience also tells us that God does not heal every one of His children, and this is true even among the apostles. Three times Paul beseeched God and three times God refused to heal him of a painful affliction (2 Corinthians 12:7-8). Did God refuse because Paul lacked faith? No, but God had a greater purpose: "But He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you; for My power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore, most gladly will I boast in my weaknesses that the power of Christ may dwell in me." (2 Corinthians 12:9). Even though Paul was an instrument of healing to others, he was not healed himself. Paul understood that God knew more about how to bring him to perfection, so he rejoiced in his own suffering because of the eternity to come: "For **I have experienced being brought low**, and I have experienced abounding. In everything and in all things I have **been taught** both to be full and to hunger, both to abound and to be without." (Philippians 4:12).

His affliction might have been a major turning point in Paul's life, too. There can be no doubt that Paul was very zealous for God; so much so that he offended many during his life. He was merciless with Peter in rebuking him for his dealings with the Gentiles.

Barnabas and Mark also felt Paul's sting (Acts 15:36-39) and it would not be surprising if it happened more than once.

But notice something about 1 Corinthians. Whenever Paul mentions mercy, it was in the context of *God* showing mercy toward *His* people. However, starting with his second letter to the Corinthians, the same book in which he described the thorn in his flesh that God refused to heal, Paul begins to talk about God's mercy toward himself and about his own feelings of mercy toward others. Through his suffering he was perfected in mercy. All of his later writings also reflect the new Paul. In them, he writes with much more empathy, desiring God's mercy for himself and others. It is a dramatic change from Saul who once went around arresting and murdering people in the name of God. The new Paul showed great mercy toward others because he understood their pain through his own sufferings. What kind of man would Paul have been without suffering? It warrants some thought because God is more interested in our hearts than our physical well-being in this life.

Likewise, we cannot comprehend *why* God does not heal at times unless we understand that people only rise to their full potential only through adversity. Just as Jesus Christ was perfected in His sufferings (Hebrews 5:8-9), God requires us to suffer in order to bring us to perfection. Notice:

ROMANS 8:17-18 Now if *we are* children, *we are* also heirs—truly, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ—**if indeed we suffer together with Him, so that we may also be glorified together with Him.** 18 For I reckon that the sufferings of the present time *are* not worthy *to be compared* with the glory that shall be revealed in us.

For this reason, trials will come upon us. God tests of all His begotten children to prove whether our hearts and minds are fully committed to Him. Read each of the following verses carefully because suffering is the price for eternal life:

JOHN 16:33 These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world **you shall have tribulation.** But be courageous! I have overcome the world.

ACTS 14:22 Where they established the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and declaring that **we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.**

2 THESSALONIANS 1:4-5 So that we ourselves are boasting about you in the churches of God because of your endurance and faith **in all your persecutions, and in the tribulations that you are bearing.** 5 Your faith and endurance are a visible testimony of the righteous judgment of God, so **that you may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are suffering.**

2 TIMOTHY 2:12 **If we endure [suffer], we shall also reign together with Him;** if we deny Him, He will also deny us.

2 TIMOTHY 3:12 And indeed, **everyone who desires to live godly in Christ Jesus shall be persecuted.**

1 PETER 4:12 Beloved, **do not be surprised at the fiery trial among you which is taking place to test you,** as if some strange thing were happening to you.

Trials, suffering, and persecution come in many forms. Some are about jobs and money, some are about a spouse or children, some involve others in the Church, some are in the form of illness or injury. God will use whatever means He deems necessary to help us overcome so that He can impugn His righteousness to us.

Now it is certain that God has healed people of sickness and injury in the past and will do so in the future, but it will be according to His will to perfect us unto eternal salvation. Still, healing from God requires something from us as well—faith: “This *man* heard Paul speaking; who, after looking intently at him, and seeing that **he had faith to be healed.**” (Acts 14:9). Without faith, even Jesus Christ could not help others: “And He did not do many works of power there **because of their unbelief.**” (Matthew 13:58).

We are also not alone in our sufferings: “And if one member suffers, **all the members suffer with him;** and if one member is glorified, all the members rejoice with him.” (1 Corinthians 12:26). How do we suffer when someone else suffers? Through godly agape love. If we truly have the love of God **in** us, we cannot be cold witnesses to the suffering of others. A member of God’s family that is sick will have the full support and help of the rest of the family where there is agape love. God is pleased with those that sigh and cry for the sufferings of others. We are to, “Be mindful of prisoners, as if you were imprisoned with *them*; and **think of those who are suffering afflictions, as if you yourselves were in their body.**” (Hebrews 13:3).

However, none of this is a guarantee that God will miraculously heal any one of us. Why? Besides the fact that God promises to try us so we are perfected, there’s another more subtle reason. All the suffering and disease that comes upon us has a dual purpose. Those that suffer are also a *test* for others. In talking about the works of faith, James tells us that it not enough to **do nothing:**

JAMES 2:14-18 What *doth it* profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him? 15 If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, 16 And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding **ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit?** 17 Even so **faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.** 18 Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I

have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works.

Clearly, if we know a brother or sister in need, whether it is due to sickness or disease or some other condition, our faith is proven by our works. The closer we are to someone, **the more God expects from us** because we are familiar with their needs more than others. Knowing of someone's needs is where we find opportunity to serve, especially through prayer.

This is even more poignant for those who have experienced similar trials as others. Those who have endured similar trials have learned strength and faith that they can share with others so that they might be encouraged by the example of someone who fully understands. Notice:"

2 CORINTHIANS 1:4-7 [God] Who comforts us in all our tribulation, in order that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trial, through the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. 5 For **to the degree that the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so also our comfort abounds through Christ.** 6 And if we are in distress, *it is* for your comfort and salvation, which is being worked out by **your enduring the same sufferings that we also suffer;** and if **we are comforted, it is for your comfort** and salvation (and our hope *is* steadfast for you); 7 Knowing that as you are partners in the sufferings, **you are also partners in the comfort.**

It is certain that God will continue to physically heal some but it is just as clear that others must suffer. Maybe this generation has more to learn with the approaching tribulation. Perhaps those living in this age of godless and loveless people need to grow more in agape love through sufferings, both of ourselves and others.

Healings seem to occur mostly for three reasons: to encourage our faith (especially those that are new), to cut short a trial or suffering, and to allow a particular work to continue. Regardless of the reasons, we can be absolutely confident in one thing—God is preparing us individually and collectively to become children in His eternal Kingdom. Therefore, He is most concerned with our final, spiritual healing—the resurrection to eternal life. Recall, **“They [the saints] are the ones who have come out of the great tribulation;** and they have washed their robes, and have made their robes white in the blood of the Lamb.” (Revelation 7:14).

Through trials of disease, sickness, injury, hunger, thirst, cold, loss, need, want, and many other sufferings, look to God and Jesus Christ while not forgetting our brethren. For when these things come upon us, remember that our hope lies above. “Now may the God of all grace, Who has called us unto His eternal glory in Christ Jesus, **after you have suffered a little while, Himself perfect you,** establish, strengthen, *and* settle you.” (1 Peter 5:10).