

A Biblical View of Healing

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Part I

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The denomination I spent my childhood in taught me that God doesn't heal people today the way He did in the Bible. Then as a young man in 1968, a friend invited me to attend a healing service in Los Angeles. I went reluctantly and I certainly was not expecting to see anything supernatural. In fact, my mind was closed. I didn't want to hear or see anything that was counter to my church doctrine.

The speaker was a woman evangelist and she wasn't even a good speaker. She just walked around the platform talking about her wonderful Jesus. Suddenly, she began to point to various areas of the large auditorium announcing healings that Jesus was doing at that moment. People would stand and say, "Yes! That's me. I'm healed!" In my suspicious mind I said, "They planted these people in the audience to testify. God isn't really healing them."

Suddenly, immediately behind me a woman began to shout over and over, "My daughter's arm! Jesus healed her!" I didn't see the arm before so I couldn't be sure of her claim, but both arms and hands looked fine to me. The little girl also had a terribly shrunken, deformed leg with a steel brace on it. The mother quickly removed the brace and *immediately, before my very eyes, the malformed leg grew out and became completely whole*, just like her other leg!

From that moment, nearly thirty years ago, I set the false church doctrine I had been taught aside. I began to look only to the Bible for an understanding of God's healing power. I realized that when Jesus walked this earth His love and compassion often led Him to heal the sick. The Bible specifically tells us that Jesus hasn't changed. "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever." (Heb 13:8 NIV) Because this is true, He still heals today.

Causes of Sickness and Disease - In order to understand supernatural healing, we must first look at the sources of sickness and disease. As I see it, there are two causes or sources of sickness and disease. They are sin and the demonic forces.

1. Sin

a. Adam's Sin - When God created the earth and placed Adam on it, there was no sickness or disease. Adam's and Eve's sin opened the door for sickness, disease, and death for man kind. (See Romans 5:12-19.) Obviously, this wasn't God's choice, it came because of human sin. From that time on, every human being is subject to sin, sickness, disease, and death because of Adam's sin.

b. Our Own Sin - In Mark's gospel, we read about some men lowering a paralytic through the roof into the room where Jesus was ministering. "When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, 'Son, *your sins are forgiven*.'" (2:5 NIV, emphasis added.) The context of this healing as well as Jesus' words indicate that the man was paralyzed because of his own sin.

After Jesus healed the man at the pool of Bethesda, Scripture says, "Later Jesus found him at the temple and said to him, 'See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you.'" (Jn 5:14 NIV) We therefore conclude that our own personal sin may bring sickness into our bodies.

c. The Sin of Others - Some people get sick or diseased because of contact with others whose sin has caused a contagious disease or illness. All over the world today there are innocent

babies born with drug addictions and/or some other disease or illness given them by their parents. Other examples of harm to the body caused by another are the violent acts of those intoxicated by drugs and alcohol that maim countless other people who happen to be in their way.

There is another way the sins of others can cause our bodies harm. When God gave Moses the Ten Commandments, He spoke clearly about idol worship. "You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, *punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation* of those who hate me . . ." (Exo 20:5 NIV, emphasis added.) Some people are sick or diseased because their parents and/or grandparents hated God. Of course, this punishment may take on other forms which do not involve sickness or disease.

2. Demonic -The second way that disease, illness, and harm impact our bodies is through demonic activity. The Bible gives us examples of demons bringing sickness on people. In Mark 9:17-18, we read,

A man in the crowd answered, "Teacher, I brought you my son, who is possessed by a spirit that has robbed him of speech. Whenever it seizes him, it throws him to the ground. He foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth and becomes rigid . . ." (NIV) [in Luke's record we read on] "Even while the boy was coming, the demon threw him to the ground in a convulsion. But Jesus rebuked the evil spirit, *healed the boy* and gave him back to his father. (Lk 9:42 NIV, emphasis added.)

Luke gave us another example when he wrote, ". . . a woman was there who had been crippled by a spirit for eighteen years. She was bent over and could not straighten up at all." (Lk 13:11 NIV)

Thus we know from Scripture that demons can also cause sickness and disease.

Let me address the cases of sicknesses and diseases in which there is no discernable sin involved nor do there appear to be demonic forces at work. These instances seem to be simply random, unexplained sicknesses. I believe these cases are part of the generally fallen state of the human race since Adam and Eve's sin. In other words, when sin entered the world, we all are subject to the random diseases and illnesses that came with it. So the general fallen state of man can also be the cause of some sicknesses.

The Will - Now that we have seen the ways that sickness can enter our bodies, and we know that Jesus can and does often heal us, let's examine the will as it is involved in the healings. Searching the Scripture, I find divine healing involves two different wills: the human will and God's will.

1. The Human Will - One day when Jesus saw a sick man. He asked him a very important question. "When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, he asked him, 'Do you want to get well?'" (Jn 5:6 NIV)

The implication of this question is that there are sick people who do not want to get well. I won't go into all the various reasons some people don't want to get well, but let's look at two. If a person is just sick or infirm enough to pass the burden for his or her livelihood off onto others, he may not want to get well. Life is good enough. It pleases him that someone else provides for his needs. Or, one's sickness or infirmity may relieve him or her of socially unpleasant situations such as having to interact

with those whom he dislikes or fears.

If this hidden reward or payoff from the infirmity did not exist in some human hearts, Jesus would not have asked, "Do you want to get well?"

2. God's Will - One day a leper came to Jesus and begged Him for his healing. The leper said, "If you are willing, you can make me clean." Filled with compassion, Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. "*I am willing,*" he said. "Be clean!" (Mk 1:41,42 NIV, emphasis added.)

I believe the Holy Spirit placed these words in Scripture because it is so important for us to know, especially when we are sick, that Jesus is willing to heal us!

Most commonly healing takes place when at least one person's human will is working in concert with the Lord's will to bring about the healing.

The Healing Means - Scripture gives us various means of healing. I define "means" as that by which something is done or obtained. I have divided these means into six categories. We will examine each of them.

1. Acts of Jesus - We encounter the first means of healing in the New Testament, the various acts of Jesus. In reading all the gospels, we find that Jesus used four different kinds of physical acts to effect healing.

a. His Physical Touch - We note that with the leper in Mark 1, Jesus touched the leper. "Jesus reached out his hand and **touched** the man. . ." (1:41 NIV) Similarly, we see in Luke, ". . . the people all tried to *touch him, because power was coming from him* and healing them all." (6:19 NIV, emphasis added.)

This flowing of power from Jesus is difficult for us to understand. Thanks be to God it isn't necessary to understand it to receive it. I doubt if anyone whom He touched in Scripture really understood this flowing of power, but He healed them just the same.

b. His Spoken Words - Matthew's gospel tells the story of the Centurion asking Jesus to heal his sick servant.

Jesus said to him, "I will go and heal him."

The centurion replied, "Lord, I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. But *just say the word*, and my servant will be healed.

For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, 'Go,' and he goes; and that one, 'Come,' and he comes. I say to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it."

When Jesus heard this, he was astonished and said to those following him, "I tell you the truth, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith.

. . . Then Jesus said to the centurion, "Go! It will be done just as you believed it would." And his servant was healed at that very hour. (8:7-13 NIV, emphasis added.)

c. He Rebuked Sickness - One day when Jesus entered Peter's house, he saw Peter's mother-in-law lying in bed with a fever. "So he bent over her and rebuked the fever, and it left her. She got up at once and began to wait on them." (Lk 4:39 NIV)

The power of Jesus' rebuke drove the fever from this woman. Of course, in one sense, this is another type of the spoken words of Jesus because He did speak the rebuke aloud. But He did not just proclaim the woman healed, He specifically addressed the sickness in her body, rebuked it, and that resulted in her healing.

There is more power in Jesus' spoken words than any force in the world! Our own spoken words have power, especially

when we are speaking Jesus' words. "The tongue has the power of life and death. . ." (Pro 18:21 NIV) It is our right as believers, through Christ, to speak life and healing into ourselves and others. We can rebuke sickness just as Jesus did. We have that authority and even that responsibility as we take the light of Christ and His healing power into the world.

d. His Spittle - One day ". . . some people brought a blind man and begged Jesus to touch him. He took the blind man by the hand and led him outside the village. When he had *spit on the man's eyes* and put his hands on him, Jesus asked, "Do you see anything?" (Mk 8:22,23 NIV, emphasis added.) We see that He also put His hands on the man to effect the complete healing.

The people wanted Jesus to touch the man, but Jesus knew what to do to heal him. Just like the crowds in Jesus' day, we often ask Jesus to do what we want, not understanding that His ways are always the best.

2. Faith - The second means of healing is through faith. In fact, Scripture is clear that divine healing always involves some form of faith. Interestingly, the necessary faith may be in the heart of different people. I see three groups of people in the Bible whose faith appropriated healing.

a. The Faith of the Sick - On a number of occasions when Jesus healed people he said, "*Your faith* has healed you." These words were spoken to the woman with the issue of blood (Mk 5:34), blind Bartimaeus (Lk 18:42), and to one of the ten lepers He healed (Lk 17:19).

On one occasion, Jesus asked two blind men who were seeking healing, "*Do you believe* I am able to do this?"

"Yes, Lord," they replied.

Then he touched their eyes and said, "*According to your faith* will it be done to you"; and their sight was restored. (Mat 9:28-30 NIV, emphasis added.)

From this we conclude there are times when Jesus heals someone through *their own faith*.

b. The Faith of Others - Some men lowered the paralytic down through the roof into the room where Jesus was ministering. "When Jesus saw *their faith*, he said to the paralytic, 'Son, your sins are forgiven.'" (Mk 2:5 NIV, emphasis added.) And He healed him. Jesus also healed the Centurion's servant because of the Centurion's faith. Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith. . ." (Mat 8:10 NIV) So it is clear at times the faith of someone other than the sick person brings about healing.

For those of us who may be lacking in faith, we have the example of the father of the boy with an evil spirit. The boy's father exclaimed, "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!" (Mk 9:24 NIV) That is a genuinely valid prayer.

c. Faith of the Person Praying - Of course in most instances of healing prayer in Scripture Jesus was the one who prayed. But we see the Apostle Paul's eyes were opened when Ananias prayed for his healing. (Acts 9:17) We also see Peter's faith operating when he said to the lame man, "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk." (Acts 3:6 NIV) So we conclude that at times the healing faith is that of the person praying for the sick.

3. The Power of the Lord Was Present -

One day as he was teaching, Pharisees and teachers of the law, who had come from every village of Galilee and from Judea and Jerusalem, were sitting there. And *the power of the Lord was present for him to heal the sick*. (Lk 5:17 NIV, emphasis added.)

On a few occasions in my life I have been present in meetings in which the power of the Lord was present to heal the sick. On such occasions miraculous healings take place. I do not believe that any person has the ability to bring on this power. The sovereignty of God is its only basis. When and if such Presence is ever manifested, any and everyone who needs healing should present themselves before the Lord for His healing power.

Let me conclude this section on faith by stating that I am aware of instances of healing when no one present had the faith to believe that there would be a healing. I recall one incident I heard from a missionary in Africa who prayed for a little boy's deformed feet to be made whole. He confessed that he had prayed many times before for healings and there had never been any remarkable healing in his presence. As a result, he didn't have the faith at that moment to believe in the healing; he prayed out of pure obedience. The small boy was too young to believe and his parents weren't saved and they didn't even understand what was going on. But the Lord sovereignly healed the boy despite the lack of faith of everyone present! That healing resulted in great joy and many salvations as well as increasing the faith of those present.

4. The Elders of the Church - I am for any and every means of praying for the sick. But I believe in many of our churches today we have ritualized prayer for the sick. Usually it takes the form of an altar call either during or at the end of a service. The pastor calls the elders forward and then invites the sick to come forward for anointing with oil and prayer. This is done based on James 5. But let's examine more closely what this passage is really telling us to do.

Is any one of you sick? He should *call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil*. In the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven. Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective. (Jas 5:14-16 NIV, emphasis added.)

There are several points I want to examine in this passage. First let me say that as we examine this aspect of healing prayer, I believe we should reserve this use of the elders of the church for the seriously ill, not for lesser sicknesses that a short time and normal care will cure. In these cases we can minister the correct medicines to ourselves and we can ask others who are not elders to pray for our healing.

Let's look now at the term *elders* of the church. The most common word used in the New Testament to describe church leaders was *presbyter* and it is usually translated as *elder*. Thus, elder is the common term the New Testament used to describe anyone in church leadership or in spiritual authority. This is the word James used in the above passage. When it comes to praying for the sick, I believe we need to broaden our modern day definition of elder. In my opinion, James is referring here to those men and women in the church who know Scripture, are spiritually mature, live godly lives, and know how to pray effectively.

I believe in the context of James' exhortation, he is portraying the need to call for a number of spiritually mature people to *go to the sick person's home*, with a view toward staying there in

prayer until there is an answer from the Lord.

While the elders are praying, there may be words of knowledge or words of wisdom regarding the sickness. Verse fifteen mentions the possibility of confession of sin and repentance. Remember, we have already established personal sin as a cause of sickness.

I once heard a pastor tell of an unusual experience he had while praying for the sick at his church altar. He had prayed for several people when one woman came asking prayer for healing. As he was about to anoint her with oil and pray, the Lord spoke to him saying, "You may pray for this woman, but do not pray for her healing." He prayed a general prayer for the woman then told her what the Lord had said to him. She became very angry and stormed out of the church.

A few days later the woman was in a hospital near death. In this state she called for her husband and confessed her grossly immoral sin and asked his and God's forgiveness. In a matter of days she was completely whole and well. In this case, a word of knowledge given the pastor brought about a confession of sin and it was that sin which was the cause of the sickness. To implore the Lord to heal such a person without dealing with her sin would indeed have been futile and certainly not in keeping with the mind of Christ in the matter!

Now let's deal with James' phrase, "anoint him with oil." There are two Greek words in the New Testament that are translated as the English word "anoint." They are *aleipho* and *chrrio*. *Aleipho* means "to anoint festally, or in homage, also medically, or in embalming the dead . . . *chrrio* always has a religious and symbolical force, which is absent in *aleipho*."¹

In other words, *aleipho* means to rub ointment onto the body, which is something that would have been done in that day to treat a sick person medically. On the other hand, *chrrio* is the ceremonial anointing for kings and priests. *Chrrio* is the word from which we derive the word Christ, as in Jesus the Anointed, or Jesus the Christ.

When sick people come forward in our churches for prayer the elders *chrrio* them. I'm not suggesting we stop doing this, but the word James used is *aleipho*! Therefore, I believe James is telling us to do everything within our power to get the person healed. Concurrently with the sick person seeking medical treatment, we are to pray as intercessors for and over him or her. We are to seek the Lord for words of knowledge and wisdom, and for the gifts of healing. We are to ask about the presence of sin in the sick person and we are to confront him or her with the need for repentance in cases of known sin. If the need arises, we are to cast out demons of infirmity.

It is my firm conviction if we diligently and commonly practiced this in our churches there would be many more healings than we now have. Indeed, the prayer of a righteous man (or woman) is powerful and effective! (Jas 5:16b)

5. The Gifts of Healing - Another means God uses for healing is the gifts of healing. The Apostle Paul gives a list of spiritual gifts God has given to the church. Among this list is the "gifts of healing." (1 Co 12:9) The gifts of healing are available to believers in any church that believes and practices the teachings of the Bible. The basic question is, "Does the church know how to

effectively use the gifts of healing?" Unfortunately in many cases, the answer to this question is "No"!

God in His infinite wisdom gives various gifts to different people in the church. Gifts are given but the person must still learn how to use the gift. This takes time, practice and patience. Frequently people have spiritual gifts and don't realize it. How does a person know if he or she has the gifts of healing? It usually manifests itself in a strong desire to pray for and lay hands on sick people. We should know the people who have such desires in our church and encourage them to pray for the sick. Why? Because these are usually the people with the gifts of healing. As they mature in these gifts people get healed.

Of course, apostles and evangelists often operate the gifts of healing as a part of their ministry call. This is not the same as a person who has the gifts of healing but in all three cases, healings take place.

Let me conclude this section by addressing the fact that Scripture refers to the plural "gifts" of healing. This indicates that there is more than one type of gift of healing. The most spectacular healing gift occurs when someone is instantly healed. We all love to see or hear about someone who was miraculously and instantly healed by the Lord of an illness or affliction. But there are also those kinds of healing which are not instantaneous but are much quicker than the normal healing process. We hear about someone who was healed of wounds, etc. in a few hours or two or three days or weeks when the medical experts predict, based on their natural experience, that the healing would take much longer.

Then finally, there is the healing, however long it takes, when medically speaking, there was no chance of the person getting better. This is God causing the gift of healing to work on a body where nothing else could explain the recovery.

6. The Transfer of Jesus' Authority to Us - It is so easy to believe that Jesus went about healing people. Few of us have any problem believing in His miracles. The problem lies in believing *anything* will happen when *we* pray! Well, I have good news for you:

When Jesus had called the Twelve together, *he gave them power and authority to drive out all demons and to cure diseases* . . . (Lk 9:1 NIV, emphasis added.)

Are you a disciple of Jesus? If the answer is "yes" then this provision is yours! This reality lies at the very foundation of how Jesus established His church. He did it by deputizing and enabling His disciples to carry on His work! As Christians we can call on the name of Jesus in authority and power, power that can heal the sick and even raise the dead. Sickness and disease, as part of the natural realm, are subject to the power of God. Satan and every demonic power is also subject to the power of Jesus. It is this power that we call upon when we pray for the sick. I believe that God wants His church to be much more aware of and to use this power with much greater force and authority than most of us ever do.

How Exactly is A Healing accomplished? - We have just read that we have the power and the authority to heal in the name of Jesus, our Savior and Healer. And we know that when we pray often someone is healed. We have extraordinary examples of healings in Scripture after Christ's ascension into heaven, such as people being healed when Peter's shadow falls on them, (Acts 3:15) or others being healed when Paul's garment touches them. (Acts 19:12) But we do not know exactly how these healings happen. Is the Holy Spirit always the agent sent from the throne of God to heal? Or does Jesus simply speak the word into the natural realm of our human bodies, through the spirit realm, and then our human bodies respond? We simply don't know the answers to these questions. We know the healings happen and we know the Lord is the source. But Scripture doesn't tell us exactly how it happens, it simply happens. But that is part of God's plan too. If we understood it fully and could explain it, it would lose some of its miraculous impact, especially on the unbelievers. Supernatural healings are simply one more aspect of the awesomeness of our God.

In Part II of this teaching we will explore the several things the Lord may be trying to accomplish in us using a sickness or affliction. We will also address the ultimate question of why some are healed and some are not.

1. The Interlinear Literal Translation of The Greek New Testament, By George Ricker Berry, Ph.D., Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, Michigan - Greek-English New Testament Lexicon, Page 5.

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