

A Biblical View of Healing

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Part II

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Let me begin this second part of our healing article by recapping the story we told in Part I. Remember the woman who was very ill and, when she went forward for prayer, the Holy Spirit told the pastor specifically to not pray for her healing? When the pastor told the woman this she left the church very angry. Several days later he got a call that the woman was in the hospital. When the pastor arrived in her room, she told him that the Lord had told her, when she first entered the hospital, to confess to her husband a past gross sin in her life. In a matter of days after her confession to her husband the woman was healed!

This is an excellent example of how God works through illnesses to accomplish His purposes. Let us continue our study by examining eleven Biblical reasons for sickness.

Biblical Reasons for Sickness

Let me say at the outset that there may be more reasons in Scripture for sickness than those I have listed below. I have chosen these eleven because they seem to me the most common and obvious reasons.

1. Overcoming the Evil One

Job eventually overcame the evil one, didn't he? However, before he did, he was very sick. In the early chapters of Job, we plainly see why Job was sick: the devil caused it! John lists three stages of Christian growth in his first epistle. (See 1 Jn 2:12-14) He divided these three stages into little children, young men, and fathers. To the young men he wrote, "I write to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one." (2:13 NIV) When young Christians approach the spiritual young man or young woman stage, they are going to encounter the devil. The reason for this encounter is so they can learn to overcome him.

If this is the case, to deliver a person entering into the young man stage from his sickness before he has learned to overcome the evil one would be frustrating God's plan for his or her spiritual growth and development. After all, God's overarching purpose and will for all of us is to grow into spiritually mature Christians. It is not for us to lead problem free lives.

2. Trial of Your Faith

All of us want our faith to increase, don't we? But there's a catch. Every time we move into more faith, *it is going to be tried!* Peter knew well what this meant. He lived it first hand. Concerning trials and the problems of this life, which include sickness, he wrote:

These have come so that your faith - of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire - may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. (1 Pe 1:7 NIV, emphasis added.)

There are times when sickness can be part of the trial of one's faith. To deliver someone from the trial before his faith is proven would frustrate God's work in the person's spiritual growth.

3. To Reveal the Works of God

There are times when God wants to reveal His works

and glory. Sometimes this involves a sick person whom God intends to raise up so that we may see His power and glory. This was the case of the blind man in John's gospel.

As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" "Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus, "*but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life.*" (Jn 9:1-3 NIV, emphasis added.)

To some this may appear cruel. The man Jesus healed was fully grown. He had been blind all his life. He had never seen a sunrise, his parents, a flower, or anything. Yet God prepared him and caused him to sit begging all those years just to display His power at the right moment. Humanly speaking this is hard, but God never short changes anyone! I believe God greatly rewards those he uses in this way.

4. That We May Be Delivered From Pride

There are times that God may use a sickness to deliver us from the sin of pride. Paul said,

To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. (2 Co 12:7 NIV, emphasis added.)

No one knows for sure exactly what the thorn was for Paul. But we do know from what he wrote that he understood it was there, "to keep (him) from becoming conceited." Of course, we all have this same tendency toward pride to some degree. We commend Paul because at least he was aware of it!

But whether or not Paul's particular thorn was a sickness or something else, the principle illustrated in this passage is valid. If the Lord needs to work on our pride, might not some illness serve that purpose very well?

5. Sins of Parents, Grandparents, and Ancestors

This is a spiritual principle that many of us find hard to believe or accept. Can the sins of one (or more) of our parents, grandparents, or more remote ancestors, bring sickness or disease on us. Here is what God wrote with His own hand in the tablets of stone:

"You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. 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 20:4,5 NIV, emphasis added.)

This is what is known as an ancestral curse, an inherited curse due to the sins of an ancestor. While it is true that God did not specifically say that the punishment of this curse was sickness, certainly sickness is among the forms this punishment can take. Other forms may include poverty, imprisonment, and/or poor relationship with others.

If we believe a Christian is the victim of an ancestral curse because of the acts of an ancestor, the first thing we should do is

to break that curse in prayer. Then we are free to go on and pray for healing or deliverance. Have the afflicted person begin by praying a prayer something like this:

"God, I come to you in the name of Jesus, my Savior. I hereby confess the sins of my (ancestor)_____. I renounce his/her [witchcraft, idolatry, etc.] as sin. This sin is detestable in Your sight. On behalf of _____ I hereby ask Your forgiveness. Jesus, I now ask You to set me free from the curse my ancestor)_____. Lord, the Bible says, "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: 'Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.'" (Gal 3:13 NIV) Jesus, You took the curse of my (ancestor)_____ upon Yourself for me. Thank You Jesus for setting me free! Amen"

For those who think God is severe with the pronouncement of this curse, look what He promised for the descendants of those who love Him.

". . . but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments." (Exo 20:6 NIV)

So, by breaking an ancestral curse and loving the Lord, the believer can not only free himself and his decedents from the curse, but he can bring his family line under the love of Jesus for generations to come!

6. Physical Neglect and Carelessness

The Psalmist says:

I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. (Ps 139:14,NIV)

God has wonderfully made us. At the same time He has given us good minds and common sense. Carelessness and neglect of our physical well-being bring some sicknesses and injuries on us. For example, medical research has shown that it is not good for a person to work excessively hard for long hours, day after day, year after year. Eventually that person will experience a breakdown in health. Habitual unhealthy eating is also a form of carelessness and neglect of our bodies. And we all know that smoking, drinking alcohol, and using illicit drugs are very harmful to our bodies. Fast and reckless driving puts us and our bodies at risk, as well as jeopardizing others.

Don't forget, "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own."(1 Cor 6:19 NIV)

We must learn to take care of the Holy Spirit's temple.

7. Our Own Sin

Scripture makes it clear from the example mentioned in Part I of this teaching that sometimes we bring sickness on ourselves by our own sin:

"When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, 'Son, your sins are forgiven.'" (2:5 NIV, emphasis added)

It is obvious from Jesus' words that this man was sick because of his own sin. Let me join this principle to another verse. Jesus said:

"Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still with him on the way, or he

may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison. I tell you the truth, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny. (Mat 5:25,26 NIV)

Our adversary is the devil. One of his titles is "the accuser of the brethren." (Rev 12:10) When we are involved in long-term sin, Satan goes before God to accuse us. God, in His righteousness, must then act. If we ignore the charge, claiming our innocence, God hands us over to the officer, or Satan's power.

At this point, "prison" may take any form. Perhaps it is financial, relational, situational, or emotional problems...or it may be some form of sickness.

If this is the case, no amount of prayer and no doctor is going to bring healing. We must remove the cause of the sickness, our own sin. The only way this can happen is by going back to the Judge and confessing and repenting of our sin!

8. Affliction

Some sicknesses are afflictions. The dictionary says that an affliction is "anything causing pain or distress; calamity...implies pain, suffering, or distress imposed by illness, loss, misfortune, etc..."¹ But sometimes afflictions are beneficial because they teach us lessons that we would otherwise not learn. Look at what the Psalmist wrote: "Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I obey your word." (Ps 119:67 NIV)

Israel of old gives us an example of human nature at its worst. When everything was going well and they had plenty of food, good health, good crops, and an easy life, they tended to backslide. Whenever these conditions occurred, the Israelites turned from God to self-indulgence. Again and again God sent disaster upon them to cause them to return to Himself.

I fear that some Christians form similar habits. When God's blessings are flowing, self-indulgence can creep in and cause us to inwardly back-slide. All God has to do is momentarily lift His blessings and affliction rushes in! We too, like the Psalmist, run back to the Lord when affliction comes. Sometimes this affliction comes in the form of sickness. Its purpose is to cause us to turn again more fully toward Jesus.

9. The Discipline of the Lord

And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons: "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because *the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son.*" Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons. Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live! Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; *but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness.* No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it. (Heb 12:5-11 NIV, emphasis added.)

I believe God's discipline takes many forms. It can be in a financial, relational, situational, or emotional form. I believe that His discipline may also take some form of sickness. When the discipline produces the desired results, the Lord will most likely heal the person under discipline.

10. Willful Ignorance of God's Word

Some years ago a police officer stopped me while I was driving my car. He told me that I had violated a traffic law. I replied, "I didn't know that was against the law." He wasn't very sympathetic. I have never forgotten his answer. He said, "Ignorance is no excuse."

Many Christians ignorantly violate God's laws. However, in many cases, such ignorance is willful. Most of us know how to read and most of us have a Bible or have access to one. If this is the case, God can say to us the same words the police officer said to me, "Ignorance is no excuse."

If a Christian has a Bible, knows how to read, and doesn't learn God's laws, he or she will violate His laws. Such violations are sin. We have already established that sin brings sickness, disease, calamity, and problems in general. Furthermore, look what God thinks about those who refuse to learn His laws:

If anyone turns a deaf ear to the law, *even his prayers are detestable.* (Pro 28:9 NIV, emphasis added.)

In other words, if we are sick and have not been actively seeking to learn God's word... even our prayers are detestable to Him!

11. Taking Communion In An Unworthy Manner

Some Christians are sick and some may even die because they partake of communion in an unworthy manner. Let's read the austere warning Paul gave the church at Corinth about this:

The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. *Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord.* A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. *For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself. That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep.* But if we judged ourselves, we would not come under judgment. When we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned with the world. (1 Cor 11:23-32 NIV, emphasis added)

Based on this passage, it is very reasonable to believe that many Christians are sick because they have taken communion in an unworthy manner. In fact, the term "fallen asleep" is Paul's nice way of saying that some have even died.

But what does it mean to take communion in an

unworthy manner? The simplest and most direct meaning is when someone takes communion with sin in his or her heart. This sin can include harboring hatred, malice, adultery, or unforgiveness against another in his heart. Unforgiveness is such a deadly trap. Just this morning I read where Jesus taught, "For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins." (Mat 6:14,15 NIV)

Where or who the unforgiven are, or how badly they have hurt you, wasn't even mentioned by Jesus. He requires simply that we do our very best to totally forgive anyone who has offended us as we partake of communion.

Of course, unforgiveness isn't the only sin Christians commit. There are many others. I believe *anyone* partaking of communion with *any* unconfessed sin in his heart is "sinning against the Lord's body." In fact, 1 Corinthians 11:28 tells us that, "A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup." (NIV) Thus, we see that, as much as possible, we should be free of sin up to the very minute of communion.

Let me make a second, less obvious point here. I believe that another interpretation of sinning against the Lord's body within the context of this principle means the church at large, or the larger body of Christ. In this context I believe partaking communion in an unworthy manner includes taking communion when we lack respect for other Christian churches, particularly those of other denominations. We need to regard all who are washed in the blood of Jesus as part of the church. If someone, anyone on earth, is a Bible believing Christian who loves Jesus, we are to respect that person. To do less when we partake of communion is to take it in an unworthy manner.

What Happens When There Is No Healing?

Even with all the above means of biblical healing and a deeper understanding of why Christians may be sick and how to bring about healing, there are still going to be instances in which some are not healed. When this happens our very humanness may cry out and ask God, "Why?" From man's viewpoint, it is very hard not to allow the pain and sickness to overshadow the answer. But the answer lies in looking at the circumstances from God's viewpoint and in focusing on who God is.

The problem is that, try as we might, we are, and always will be limited to our human understanding, our human viewpoint. I believe there are circumstances that we simply will not ever be able to fully understand until we are in glory with our Lord.

Because of this, I believe that finally, after we do all we know to do and no healing occurs, we must come face to face with the sovereignty of God. Ultimately, His ways are not our ways, and His ways often have a mystery about them that we will never truly be able to understand while we are on this earth. In these instances we must squarely face the test of believing in God's love and His purposes in every situation, regardless of whether we see good in it or not. And we do know that in the fullness of time, God will be faithful to reveal to all of us His purposes for our lives and the lives of those we love.

Let us look at one last Scripture. If, after we have done everything we can, and explored the principles and directions which we have examined in this teaching, and we still have no answer, we must look to what Peter wrote:

"So then, *those who suffer according to God's will* should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good." (1 Pet 4:19 NIV, emphasis added).

Peter tells us that ultimately each of us are called to do two things, even in the midst of sickness and pain: 1) commit ourselves to God, and 2) continue to do good.

As we do this, we enable the Holy Spirit to move in the midst of a Christian's suffering and to begin an inward heart molding, purging away the sin and dross that separates us from nearness with Jesus. He is using it as an instrument to produce spiritual, permanent changes in our heart. Sometimes those changes may need to be in the heart of someone other than the one who is sick. If the Lord is accomplishing this, He isn't going to be in a rush to discontinue using this instrument of change, is He? I know that to some this may seem callous or even cruel, but the opposite is true. For God knows that we are creatures of eternity and that whatever kind of heart we take with us into eternity, we are going to live with forever! So He is merciful in his use of suffering to accomplish this purifying of the heart for all eternity. And through it all, we can be sure that our faithful Lord knows of our sickness and sorrow and will reward us beyond measure for all eternity!

Let me end with my personal story about God's miraculous healing power. When I was 20 years old the Lord called me to the ministry of a Bible teacher. I resisted that call and continued to go my own way. At age 29 I was diagnosed with Hodgkin's disease (cancer), and was given 5 years to live. When the doctor told me the news I returned to my hospital room and repented to God for my disobedience in not following my ministry call. I told the Lord that, if He chose to heal me, I would serve Him as completely as I knew how for the rest of my life. That was over 30 years ago! There is not a doubt in my mind that, even though I went through all the medical treatments available to me at the time, it was the Lord who healed me. My story is only one of countless examples which testify throughout the earth and the ages that we have a healing God!

Note: The emphasis of this teaching has been on biblical reasons for sickness and healing. This subject touches the issue of Christian suffering. For those desiring to learn more about the subject of Christian suffering, you may view our two part teaching article titled *A Biblical View of Suffering* listed on the Articles listing page of this web site.

1. *Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language*, Second College Edition, David B. Guralnik, Editor in Chief, William Collins Publishers, Inc.

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