

DOES GOD HEAL TODAY?

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Is divine healing scriptural or unscriptural? The Lord is “a very present help in trouble” (Psa 46:1)—does this mean nothing more than that the saint must seek grace from Him to patiently endure afflictions? The Scriptures have much to say concerning the body; it is to our very great loss if we ignore it.

1. Our Duties in Illness

It is clear to us that many Christians are living below their privileges in this matter. Jehovah-Rophi (“the LORD that healeth thee,” Exo 15:26) is as truly one of His titles as Jehovah-Tsidkenu (“the LORD our righteousness,” Jer 23:6).

What are the duties and privileges of the Christian when he falls ill? First, endeavor to **ascertain the occasion and cause of his sickness**. Sickness from ignoring the dictates of common prudence easily may be discovered (Pro 23:21; Gal 6:7-8). If we are unable to trace our present ill health to physical neglect or folly, then seek to **ascertain the moral cause**. “Let us search and try our ways” (Lam 3:40), making an honest endeavor to find out what it is that has grieved the Spirit (Eph 4:30). It is likely there is something *within* against which He is indicating His displeasure (Mar 7:21-23), and for which He requires me to humble myself (Psa 139:23-24). The plague-spot of my soul that needs purging may be a spirit of selfishness, the allowing of pride, the workings of self-will, the stirrings of rebellion when divine providence crosses me, the exercise of self-righteousness. If we have set up some idol, it must be thrown down (1Co 10:14; Psa 32:5);

- if we have indulged some lust,
it must be mortified (Col 3:5);
- if we have entered a forbidden path,
it must be forsaken (Pro 14:12);
- if we have willfully departed from a duty,
it must be taken up again.

If we have been careless, then we must not be surprised if we are placed on our backs for a season. This is so that there may be time for close dealings between the soul and God, so that the “hidden things of darkness” may be brought out into the light and faithfully dealt with (1Co 4:5).

Some afflictions are produced by the devil. We read of Job, and of a woman “whom Satan hath bound, lo, these eighteen years” (Luk 13:16). So it is written, “Resist the devil, and he will flee from you” (Jam 4:7)—to which should be added, “Whom resist steadfastly *in the faith*” (1Pe 5:9).

Some bodily infirmities are sent upon the saints for their refining rather than for correction, so that they may yield some choice spiritual fruit (Gal 5:22-23). Thus, the believer who desires light on his situation must wait upon the Lord to show him why He contends with him (Job 10:2).

2. 2 Chronicles 7:14

If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.

Some may object that such a passage is not applicable to us; that God dealt with Israel according to the Law, whereas He deals with us according to the riches of grace. Such a contention is entirely unscriptural. Maintaining the requirements of holiness and exercising mercy toward the penitent have ever characterized God’s ways in all ages. New Testament teaching is precisely the same on this subject as the Old.

For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation [judgment] to himself ...*For this cause* many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep [have died] (1Co 11:29-30).

The Corinthians had been guilty of turning the Lord’s Table into a carnal feast. God would not tolerate such irreverence. He visited them with a *temporal judgment*: smiting their bodies. Thus this passage is strictly analogous to that in 2 Chronicles 7.

But more; as there, so here: the remedy is also graciously made known. “For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged” (v.31). If the

Corinthians would unsparingly condemn themselves for their unseemly conduct before God, His judgment would be removed and the many sickly ones recovered. “When we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world” (v. 32). God is chastening us *here* that we may escape eternal woe *hereafter*.

Now, in 2 Chronicles 7:14 we find the Lord’s people being dealt with for their sins. How is deliverance to be obtained? First, they must “***humble themselves.***” This means the same as in 1 Corinthians 11:31, “judge ourselves.” A word in Leviticus 26:41-42 will supply the needed help:

If then their uncircumcised hearts *be humbled* and they then *accept of the punishment* of their iniquity: then will I remember my covenant.

To humble ourselves beneath the rod of God is to cease asking, What have I done to deserve this?—to stop resisting the rod and meekly bow thereto, acknowledging that my wicked conduct *deserves* it. David humbled himself when he owned: “I know, O Lord, that thy judgments are right, and that thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me” (Psa 119:75). To judge ourselves is to take sides with God against ourselves; not until we do so does the rod have its designed effect (Heb 12:11).

“And ***pray***” is the next thing. We pray for a deeper sense of His holiness and our vileness, for a contrite and broken heart (Psa 34:18; 51:17), for faith in His mercy, for cleansing and restoration to fellowship.

“And ***seek my face.***” This goes further; it expresses increased diligence and fervor. The omniscient One cannot be imposed upon by mere lip service. He requires the heart, seeking Him so that we actually have a face-to-face meeting with Him Whom we have displeased. God will not gloss over our sins; neither must we.

“And ***turn from their wicked ways.***” If they are to be delivered from God’s judgment, they must of necessity forsake their sins—with no secret reserve, with firm purpose of heart to go back to them no more (Psa 85:8). Repentance is something more than sorrowing over the past. It includes the resolution that there shall be no repetition in the future.

“Then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive

their sin, and will *heal* their land.” Here is the gracious promise: hearing from God is granted, forgiveness is assured, and healing is available for faith to claim. Will God in every instance bestow immediate and complete healing? No, 2 Chronicles 7:14 commits neither to immediate nor complete healing.

Use of doctors and medicines

The men of Jericho sought unto Elisha, saying “the water is naught” (2Ki 2:19). And the prophet said,

Bring me a new cruse, and put salt therein. And they brought it to him. And he went forth unto the spring of the waters, and cast the salt in there, and said, Thus saith the LORD, I have *healed* these waters (2Ki 2:20-21).

God could have healed those waters without any salt, as He could have made sweet the bitter waters at Marah without bidding Moses to cast a certain tree into them (Exo 15:23-25). Sometimes the Lord is pleased to use means (such as doctors and medicines), and at other times to dispense with them, for He exercises His sovereignty here as elsewhere.

The doctrine of sovereignty makes the subject more perplexing; and God may have so designed it. The natural man wants everything to be made easy for him. But God’s way is to stain human pride, to make us feel our insufficiency, to drive us to our knees. “My soul, wait thou *only* upon God; for my expectation is from him” (Psa 62:5). God is sovereign and does not act uniformly. We are both responsible agents and utterly dependent upon Him; and therefore must act neither irrationally nor presumptuously.

When God healed Israel’s land, sometimes it was by the use of means; at other times it was without use of any means at all. Thus it is when He heals our bodies. To one blind man Christ gave sight instantly, but to another He put His hands on his eyes a second time before full restoration (Mar 10:46-52; 8:22-25).

We are far from affirming that all who resort to doctors and medicines are missing the Lord’s best. But it is His will that some should glorify Him “in the fires” (Isa 24:15). God sent an angel to deliver Peter from prison but suffered Stephen to be stoned to death.

We must appropriate the promise of 2 Chronicles 7:14, yet meekly and not presumptuously. Having

righted any wrong before God, now plead His Word:

Lord, I have sought to humble myself and pray, to seek Your face and renounce my wicked ways. And You have assured me You will forgive and heal me. Do as You have said. But Lord, I know not Your mind. Is it Your pleasure to lay Your restoring hand upon me this very moment? If so, enable me to trust in You with all my heart. Or would You have me to use some means, as doctors and medicine? If so, cause me to count upon Your making them effective to me; so that I may trust You and not them, that the glory may be all Your own.

Two aspects of faith

“According to your faith be it unto you” (Mat 9:29). God is pledged to honor faith wherever He finds it. But what is the faith here spoken of? It is one that rests upon the sure Word of God, and is made up of two chief elements: submission and expectation.

Some suppose that submission—such as “not my will, but thine, be done” (Luk 22:42)—makes real expectation impossible. But this is wrong, through a mistaken conception of what spiritual expectation consists of. Let it first be said that where there is not genuine submission to God’s will, there can be no true expectation. Spiritual submission is spreading my case before the Lord and asking Him to deal with it as *He* sees best. If I count upon His wisdom and goodness, that is the *exercise* of faith. And if I have confidence that He *will* do so, that is the *expectation* of faith—the expectation not that He will grant what my carnal nature desires, but that He will give what is most for His glory and my highest good. Anything other than that is but presumption.

3. James 5:14-16

¹⁴Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: ¹⁵And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up.

A list of the supernatural gifts during the apostolic period is found in 1 Corinthians 12:9-10, including healing. The Reformers considered these supernatural gifts chiefly for the authenticating of Christianity and confirming it in heathen countries. Their purpose was only a temporary one; as soon as the Scrip-

tures were written they were withdrawn (1Co 13:8).

But James 5:14-16 is set apart. We believe this general principle and promise holds good for all generations, with only seasons of great spiritual declension excepted. In normal times it is the privilege of the saint, when seriously ill, to send for the elders (pastors, ministers) of the local gospel church to which he belongs. They who preach God’s Word to him should surely be the fittest to spread his case before the Lord (Job 42:8). They are to pray over him, commending him to the mercy of God and seeking recovery for him if that be according to the divine will. Where the sick one desires anointing with oil, his request should be granted.

It should be pointed out that those promises of God which relate to temporal and earthly mercies are quite different from those pertaining to spiritual and eternal things. The former are general and indefinite, and not unconditional and absolute as are many of the latter. Therefore, we must ask in full submission to God’s sovereign pleasure, in which He has the freedom to make them good when, as, and to whom He pleases.

Thus, the prayer of faith here is not a definite expectation that God *will* heal, but a peaceful assurance that He will do that which is most for His glory and the sick one’s good. Faith is *reliance and submission* as well as *expectation*. There is no stronger faith than one that has such confidence in the wisdom and goodness of God as leads me to say, “as it seemeth good and right unto thee to do” (Jos 9:25). Where some specific need is not covered by an express promise, faith may count upon the mercy and power of God Himself (Psa 59:16). ☞

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