

# 35

## HEALING

### Background

The whole matter of healing is bound up with the problem of sin. That must not be said in an accusatory way. It cannot be assumed that a person is ill and in need of healing because of any sin they might have committed. In John 9:1–2 we learn that the disciples thought (incorrectly) that what they imagined to be the sin of a man or his parents was the cause of his blindness. Jesus corrected them. Neither the man nor his parents had sinned in that case. Elsewhere in Scripture the forgiveness of sins may be linked with healing ministry, either explicitly in the case of a paralytic (see Mark 2:5) or *conditionally* – therefore *possibly* in some other cases (see James 5:13–15).

The connection between sin and suffering (including sickness) originated at the Fall. In this fallen, suffering world, there is much sickness because of the general sinfulness of mankind. What people do and say affects others. In a simple, physical sense, it is easy to see how this can happen. If people act in ways that fail to show true love (care for others), and instead are motivated largely by greed and selfishness, then the health and wellbeing of people often suffers as a result, with environmental pollution, malnutrition and preventable diseases taking their toll.

So some sickness is caused in obvious and direct ways by the sins of others or the generally sinful attitudes and actions of mankind. But, as we have seen, in at least one case Jesus denied the existence of a link between an individual's own (supposed) sin and the bodily disorder concerned.

Some have suggested that sin is itself a 'sickness' but it would be far from easy to justify that claim from Scripture. A biblical distinction must be maintained between the sin and sickness, and the metaphorical usage can confuse the issue. Sin is culpable disobedience to the will of God, whether in thought, word or deed. Sickness itself, however, is not something culpable (i.e. deserving of divine punishment) and not something which (in itself) needs forgiving. This is not to deny that the immediate causal factor in some disorders may sometimes have sinful antecedents (such as ungodly or disobedient lifestyles) which require repentance and divine forgiveness.

God has graciously given us a variety of ways to deal with the sicknesses that beset us. In biblical times, physicians like Luke (see Colossians 4:14) would have known about natural remedies. God has given us the ability to learn and understand a great deal about how our bodies function, what they need to thrive and how illnesses can be treated. So using medicine for healing is not somehow 'unspiritual'.

But from the very beginning of the ministry of Jesus on earth, his disciples have been given access to resources beyond the natural. Living personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, obedience to his commission to heal the sick, and the guidance and gifts of the Holy Spirit make the difference. We remember that healing is always God's gracious gift and never our 'right'.

### In the Old Testament God sometimes granted miraculous healing and even life to the dead

Numbers 12:10, 13–15; 1 Kings 17:21–23; 2 Kings 4:32–36; 5:10–14; 20:7; Psalm 103:3; 116:3–9; 147:3; Isaiah 38:1–5

### Jesus Christ came to bring healing and salvation

He applied Isaiah's prophecy to himself: "*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim... liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour*" (Luke 4:18–19). He went about preaching and healing in the power of the Spirit, and told his disciples to preach and heal. The Christian attitude to suffering is given to us in the Parable of the Good Samaritan.

Isaiah 53:5; 61:1–2; Matthew 4:23; 8:7, 14–17; 9:18–30; 10:1, 7–8; 12:15; 14:14; Luke 4:16–21; 7:11–17; 10:17–20, 25–37; John 11:1–44

### After Pentecost

In the life of the post-Pentecost church, healing was (and is) shown to be one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Yet there is a mystery here, for healing was not depicted as an *automatic right* in the life of the early church. Paul left Trophimus unwell in Miletus (2 Timothy 4:20), told Timothy to drink wine for the sake of his stomach and his

frequent ailments (see 1 Timothy 5:23), and was relieved when Epaphroditus recovered remarkably after being so near to death (Philippians 2:25–28). We are to pray in faith, and so we should be expectant even when we do not see immediate healing. The personal testimony of many Christians bears this out. We should believe that the Lord does indeed heal today, whether by medical or supernatural means. And we are to glorify him and thank him.

But Christians should not expect complete immunity to disease. As we have mentioned, we live in an environment (physical and social) which is often not conducive to good health. Nor should they be like those whom Christ rebuked because of their 'little faith', when healing of a boy with seizures was needed and the disciples could not heal the child (see Matthew 17:15–21).

### **Medicine and the gospel**

Medical clinicians may be used by the Lord to promote healing. This is God's common grace at work and does not necessarily make them Christian workers. Yet it truly expresses the compassionate nature of God when Christians are involved in both medical healing and the supernatural Christian ministry of healing the sick. It is still better when the gospel of righteousness is proclaimed (as many Christians have done in many cultures around the world) even as physical healing is administered. All peoples need an opportunity to repent and to find forgiveness, as they come to the living, risen Lord Jesus Christ and believe in him alone.

We recall that Luke was both a physician *and* an evangelist. Healing miracles have been signs accompanying true Christian preaching from the time of the Acts of the Apostles.

Mark 16:18; John 14:12, 6–18; Acts 1:8; 3:6–8; 4:22, 30; 5:16; 9:40–41; 28:8–9; 1 Corinthians 12:9, 28, 30; 2 Corinthians 12:7–9 (cf. John 11:4, 6, 14–15, 39–42); James 5:13–18 (cf. 2 Chronicles 16:12)

### **The kingdom**

The believer receives joy and comfort from the knowledge that the Lord is one day going to eliminate all illness and suffering. Healing is a foretaste of heaven. It points to the Saviour whose kingdom is certain to come. In the meantime, the Christian trusts the Judge of all the earth to do what is right – whether we are in sickness or in health (Genesis 18:25; cf. John 14:1) – and we look continually to the coming King to show his power to save and heal broken lives.

Isaiah 25:6–8; 1 Corinthians 15:21–26; Revelation 21:1–4