

WORD OF CHRIST INTERNATIONAL CHURCH
POSITION PAPER

Topic: Physical Healing

INTRODUCTORY STATEMENT

We must agree that Scripture is our final authority in settling questions of faith and practice. But when born-again, Spirit-filled Christians, following proper biblical principles, come to reasonable but differing interpretations; we do well not to become dogmatic in support of one position. We affirm the inerrancy and authority of Scripture and we desire to know for certain what God expects of us. When we come to a sure understanding of His divine Word, we are committed to declaring and obeying those clear instructions.

In the following position paper we address one of many topics that have raised a fair degree of discussion, and, at times, arguments among the brethren. It is not our intention to fuel these arguments but rather to state our position based on our earnest understanding of the Scriptures. With this said, we also exercise caution in not stirring unnecessary strife or division among the brethren, and have made every reasonable effort to base our positions on Scripture, not personal opinion or conjecture. We respect and love our brothers and sisters who hold alternative interpretations on issues that are not critical to our salvation or standing before God.

PHYSICAL HEALING

We recognize divine healing for the whole person as an integral and important part of the gospel. Deliverance from sickness is provided for in our covenant with God, and is the privilege of all believers (Isa 53:4,5; Matt 8:16,17). It is part of the good news that Jesus commissioned His disciples to proclaim.

BIBLICAL PRECEDENCE

As we observe the ministry of both Jesus and the apostles, it is evident that divine healing was not something peripheral. It was an important witness to Jesus as the revelation of the Father, as the promised Messiah, and as the Savior from sin (see John 10:37, 38).

The Bible shows a close connection between the healing ministry of Jesus and His saving, forgiving ministry. His power to heal was actually a witness to His authority to forgive sins (Mark 2:5—12). Again and again His healing miracles parallel His preaching of the gospel and show the same compassion (Matt 4:23; 9:35,36).

People came from all directions both to hear Him and to be healed (Luk 5:15; 6:17,18). He never turned any away but healed all who came to Him (Matt 12:15; 14:14), curing all varieties of sickness, disease, deformities, defects, and injury (Matt 15:30,31; 21:14). He also delivered people from demons and the problems they caused (Matt 4:24).

Miracles of healing were an important part of the works God sent Jesus to do (John 9:3,4). This is in line with the Old Testament revelation of God as the Great Physician, the Lord who heals (Exodus 15:26). Jesus showed that divine healing is still a vital part of God's nature and plan.

Healings also helped to identify Jesus as the promised Messiah and Savior. As the Great Physician, Jesus fulfilled the prophecy of Is 53:4, which in the Hebrew is very emphatic: "Surely our sickness He himself has borne [lifted and taken away], and our pain He carried [as a heavy load]. ("Griefs" is the same word used of physical sickness and disease in 2 Chron 16:12; 21:15, 18,19; Is 38:9. "Sorrows" is the same word used of physical pain in Job 33:19.)

WORD OF CHRIST INTERNATIONAL CHURCH
POSITION PAPER

Topic: Physical Healing

Matthew applies this specifically to the healing ministry of Jesus: "He himself took away our sickness and bore away our diseases" (Matt 8:17, literal translation). Isaiah ties this in with the saving ministry of Jesus (Is 53:5). His sufferings were for our sins and lead to our peace with God: "And by his wounds we are healed [healing has come to us]."

The context in Is 53:6 and the application in 1 Pet 2:24,25 emphasize especially the healing or restoration from sin. However, in view of the emphasis on physical sickness in Isaiah 53:4, it is clear that these passages include healing from both the spiritual and physical effects of our sins and waywardness.

When John the Baptist was imprisoned, he began to wonder whether or not Jesus was actually the promised Messiah or just another forerunner like himself. Jesus responded by calling attention to messianic works which linked miracles and the preaching of the gospel to the poor. Again, healing was an important witness, an integral part of the gospel (Is 61:1,2; Luk 4:18; 7:19—23).

Divine healing continued to be an integral part of the gospel through the ministry of the apostles and the Early church. Jesus sent out the Twelve and the Seventy to preach and to heal the sick (Luke 9:2; 10:9). After Pentecost "many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles" (Acts 2:43). Luke treats the Book of Acts as an extension of what Jesus did and taught, not only through the apostles but through a Church filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:1,8; 2:4).

Miracles, however, were not limited to the apostles. The promise of Jesus was to all believers (John 14:12—14) who would ask in His name (that is, recognizing His authority and conforming themselves to His nature and purposes). God used church laypeople such as Philip to preach and heal (Acts 8:5—7), and an otherwise unknown disciple, Ananias, to heal Saul (Paul) (Acts 9:12—18). Mark supports healing in the ministry of believers (Mark 6:13, 9:38,39; 16:15—18).

Gifts of healings are included among the manifestations of the Spirit intended to edify or build up the Church (1 Corinthians 12:7) and are tied in with the witness to Jesus Christ as Lord (1 Corinthians 12:3).

HEALING IN PERSPECTIVE

We are not to look to divine healing as a substitute for obedience to the rules of physical and mental health. Jesus recognized the need of the disciples to get away from the crowds and rest awhile (Mark 6:31). Jethro saw that if Moses did not delegate some of his responsibilities to others, he would wear away (Exodus 18:18).

Neither is divine healing a means of avoiding the effects of old age. Moses did retain a clear eye and his natural strength until the day of his death (Deuteronomy 34:7). But this privilege was not granted to King David (1 Kings 1:1—4).

The gradual breakdown of old age, pictured so graphically in Ecclesiastes 12:1—7, is the common experience of believers as well as unbelievers. Healing is still available to the aged, but the part that is healed usually continues to age like the rest of the body. We do not yet have the redemption of the body. Even we who have the firstfruits of the Spirit groan and travail in pain like the rest of creation, waiting patiently for the fulfillment of our hope (Romans 8:21—25). No

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matter what we do for this body, no matter how many times we are healed, if Jesus carries we shall die.

However, the Bible does not tell us this to discourage us, but to make us realize that we must encourage and cultivate our life in the Spirit, for the Spirit quickens (resurrects), and that is our real hope (Romans 8:11). In fact, even though outwardly one is perishing, inwardly one is being renewed day by day (2 Corinthians 4:16).

Actually it is this inner renewal that makes us best able to have the faith to claim the privilege of divine healing. To the woman healed of the issue of blood, Jesus said, "Your faith has healed you" (Mark 5:34). Paul at Lystra, when he saw that the hearing of the gospel had brought faith to be healed into the heart of a cripple, commanded him to stand up (Acts 14:9,10). The inner renewal of the mind (Romans 12:2; Colossians 3:10) is seen also in the great faith of the Roman centurion who recognized the authority of Christ's word (Matthew 8:5—13) and the Syrophenician woman who believed that even a crumb would meet the need (Mark 7:24—30; Matthew 15:28).

That divine healing comes through faith is further confirmed by the fact that unbelief hindered its reception at Nazareth (Mark 6:5,6) and at the foot of the Mount of Transfiguration (Matthew 17:14—20). There Jesus indicates the necessity also of expressing faith by praying and fasting (Mark 9:29).

Prayer is one of the chief means of healing in the Old Testament. Many of the Psalms include prayers for healing. Many of the prophets prayed for the healing of others. James 5:15 promises that the prayer of faith will save the sick and the Lord will raise them up.

Others found that to touch Him or His garments helped them express faith (Mark 3:10; 5:28; 6:56; Luke 6:19). Peter's shadow had the same effect for a time (Acts 5:15). So did the handkerchiefs and work aprons from Paul's tent-making shop (Acts 19:12). The faith, however, had to be in the Lord, not in the means used to help them express their faith. This seems to be the reason for the great variety of means used, lest people get their eyes on the means rather than on God. In the same class is James 5:14, which instructs the sick to call the elders of the church to anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord. It is not the oil (a symbol of the Holy Spirit) that brings the healing, but the prayer of faith.

The promise "anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing" is closely connected with prayer, asking in Christ's name (John 14:12—14; 16:23,24). His name, however, is the revelation of His character and nature. We have that in us only if we abide in Christ and His words abide in us (John 15:7). Then our will lines up with His, and we can ask what we will, and it shall be done.

Some have tried to limit healing (especially the promise of Exodus 15:26, the covenant of healing or health) to Israel. But the healing of the centurion's servant and the daughter of the Syrophenician woman show that healing is the privilege of Gentiles also. In fact, there is healing for those who desire it and will respond to Jesus, even though He has not yet dealt with their sins (as in the case of the impotent man at the Pool of Bethesda, John 5:2—9,14).

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Others have tried to set divine healing in opposition to or in competition with the medical profession. This need not be so. Physicians through their skills have brought help to many. It is true that the Lord is the Great Physician. It is also true that the Bible condemns King Asa because "in his disease he sought not to the Lord, but to the physicians" (2 Chronicles 16:12). But Asa had already sought for help from Syria in an act of unbelief and disobedience when he refused to rely on the Lord (2 Chronicles 16:7). The emphasis is not that he sought physicians, but that he refused to seek the Lord. It is evident that the physician had an honorable place in Israel (Jeremiah 8:22). Jesus also presented the medicinal use of oil and wine by the Good Samaritan in a favorable light (Luke 10:34).

When the woman with the issue of blood was healed, we are told she "had suffered a great deal under the care of many doctors and had spent all she had, yet instead of getting better she grew worse" (Mark 5:26). If it was wrong for her to go to physicians, this would have been the perfect place for Jesus to have said so. But He did not. Instead, He accepted the faith she now expressed and commended her for it. Even today God has performed many miracles for those given up by doctors.

Jesus also sent the 10 lepers back to show themselves to the priests (Luke 17:14). Under the Law the priests were in charge of diagnosis, quarantine, and health (Leviticus 13:2ff.; 14:2ff.; Matthew 8:4). Thus Jesus recognized that human diagnosticians have their place.

CONCLUSION

It is clear through numerous examples and accounts that physical healing is a privilege of the covenant in which we participate. In humility we recognize that we do not understand all that pertains to divine healing. We still see through a glass darkly. We do not understand why some are healed and others are not, any more than we understand why God permitted James to be martyred and Peter delivered. Scripture makes it clear, however, that our part is to preach the Word and expect the signs to follow.

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