

# DIVINE HEALING— IS IT IN THE ATONEMENT?

1 1 1

NO instructed Christian can help acknowledging the power of the Lord to heal the body as well as to save the soul. He who credits the miracles of the New Testament, as every sincere Christian must, necessarily recognizes the healing power of God. It is not, therefore, my desire to discuss the possibility of physical healing in answer to prayer, nor the reality of many apparent miracles of healing in our own day in connection with the ministry of certain preachers, both male and female, who give a large place to this particular phase of ministry in their public work. God can heal. God has healed. God does heal. He heals in answer to prayer. He heals where there is no prayer at all by the recuperative power of nature. He heals, as in Hezekiah's case, by the use of means. He has often healed in answer to the prayer of the individual who was sick, or of others who prayed for him. There are too many reputable testimonies at the present time to such healings to question them for a moment. Therefore, I do not intend to consider this phase of the subject at all.

But there is another serious question for many tried and distressed souls, namely, Is healing in the atonement and therefore available for any Christian who claims it by faith during the present dispensation of the grace of God?

Those who answer this question in the affirmative point at once to what they consider

to be an incontrovertible proof text found in Matthew 8. There we are told: "When the even was come, they brought unto Him many that were possessed with devils; and He cast out the spirits with His word, and healed all that were sick: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses" (vs. 16, 17).

Now, I admit that a cursory examination of this passage seems to prove conclusively that our Lord bore our infirmities and sicknesses on the cross somewhat in the same sense as He is said to have borne our sins in His own body on the tree—that is, He suffered instead of us. It was impossible that our sins as such could ever have been transferred from us to Him in such a sense as to make Him actually the sinner. But He bore them in that He endured the judgment which we had deserved because of those very sins. So some believe that on the cross He suffered the pains and the anguish and endured the symptoms of all our diseases, thus becoming the substitute for sickness as well as for sin. The horrible conclusion has been drawn from this theory that our Lord when on the cross became "a living, breathing mass of corruption." I use the exact language which I once heard used by a leading advocate of divine healing. The speaker went on to say that every disease to which humanity is subject had fastened itself on the body of Christ when He hung upon the cross; that He had endured all the ravages of these diseases in order that He might bear them away from us. So that now in resurrection, the new life of His glorified body is available for us by faith to combat diseased pathological conditions in our bodies. I may not have stated the doc-

trine in the same way that all its advocates present it, but I am giving it as nearly as I can recollect, in language which I heard used.

A more careful examination, however, of the verses quoted from Matthew 8 will make evident at once the striking fact that the inspired writer is not referring to the atonement on the cross, but is explaining something that happened during the earthly ministry of our Lord. As He moved about among men He manifested His compassion and power by delivering them from their diseases. He did not do this without cost to Himself. In His deep, tender sympathies, He entered into the sorrows and sufferings of those whom He healed. When the woman who touched the hem of His garment was healed, He "perceived that virtue had gone out of Him." There was a response on His part to her deep need. It cost Him something to heal. He really bore the sorrows of others. He took their infirmities and their diseases. He felt with them and for them. Any true Christian minister who knows what it is to enter into the distress and perplexities of those among whom he moves, particularly if he labors among the poor, shares in large measure our Lord's exercises as recorded here. Paul filled up on his part the sufferings of Christ for His body's sake, which is the Church, as he bore on his heart the great burden of the people of God. This was to him more than all his other sufferings; for after enumerating the trials he endured, he adds, "And besides all this that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches." During the three-and-a-half years of our Lord's ministry on earth, He never saw suffering that He did not alleviate it, unless, indeed, His grace was resisted. And it was this intense compas-

sion for mankind and sympathy for the distressed, not merely the persecutions He endured, that made Him the Man of Sorrows and acquainted with grief. The more we drink in His spirit, the more we shall know the meaning of the poet's words:

“Saddened, ah, yes, saddened  
By earth's deep sin and woe;  
How could I pass unheeding  
What grieved my Saviour so?”

To refer the bearing of sicknesses to the cross instead of linking it with the life and ministry of our Lord on His way to the cross is to misunderstand grossly His entire mission. If He has made atonement for sicknesses, then it is unthinkable that any believer could ever endure pain or illness. Because He has made atonement for sins, no believer shall ever come into judgment. The penalty is forever removed. In the same way, if He had stood in the place of the sick as He stood in the place of the sinner, our sicknesses would be as far removed from us as our sins.

A well-authenticated fact is worth any amount of unproved theories. If we can find recorded in Scripture any instance whatever where Christians were allowed to be sick, and were not miraculously healed, then the whole theory falls to the ground. To four outstanding instances I would direct attention.

First, there is that of the Apostle Paul himself. He had been caught up to the third heaven. Upon his return to earth there was sent to him a thorn in the flesh, “a messenger of Satan to buffet him” lest he should be exalted above measure. There was no danger for a saint in the third heaven. There was danger when he came back to earth lest he should be

lifted up in spiritual pride by the abundance of the revelation given unto him. To preserve Paul from this, God took disciplinary measures. It is not necessary to attempt to define the exact nature of the thorn, but it is important to observe that it was in the flesh. It was something physical. It was something that cost him intense humililation. It was something that cost him severe suffering. It is termed an affliction. It in some way weakened him, for he puts it in contrast with strength. He besought the Lord that it should be taken from him. He prayed earnestly that he might be healed. Instead of answering his prayer in that particular way, the Lord, as it were, said to him, "Paul, I will not remove the thorn. I will not deliver you from the infirmity, but I will do something better for you. I will enable you to triumph over it. My grace is sufficient for thee, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Immediately the apostle ceased to pray for deliverance and fell in with the will of God, exclaiming, "Most gladly, therefore, will I glory in my infirmities that the power of Christ may rest upon me."

Our second witness is Epaphroditus, of whom we read in Philippians 2, verses 25 to 30. There we learn that he was a devoted servant of Christ, one worthy to be esteemed by Paul as a brother and companion in labor and a fellow-soldier. He was unselfish, faithful, and conscientious. But he was sick; he was very sick. As the days and weeks wore on, his sickness increased until he was nigh unto death. He was sick for so long a time that word of his illness went clear back from Rome to Philippi, and the saints there were greatly disturbed concerning him. Paul prayed for him; so, doubtless, did many others. Yet

no miracle was wrought in his case. No healer appeared to lay his hands upon him and raise him up. Neither was he rebuked for his lack of faith. His illness was permitted to run its course, and at last God had mercy on him and he recovered. In this last expression we may learn the truth as to physical healing during the present dispensation. It is mercy. It is not something that is ours by right. It is not something to be demanded. It is not something that we can claim on the ground that it was bought and paid for on Calvary. It is simply divine mercy meeting our deep need according to the will of God.

The third case in point is that of Timothy. No young preacher was ever more highly esteemed than Timothy was esteemed by Paul. He was a true pastor and one whose tender heart was ever exercised by the state of the Lord's people. If anyone ever needed a robust constitution in order to continue without let or hindrance in the work of the Lord, Timothy did, so far as human judgment goes. But Timothy was a dyspeptic. Like many another itinerant, he probably suffered from the over-kindness of some good Marthas and the penuriousness of others. Varying climates and polluted water had grievously affected his health. What a mercy if he could have attended a healing meeting and gone down to the front to be prayed for! But neither Paul nor Timothy had ever heard of a healing meeting in all of their lives. Such gatherings had not yet come into existence. Instead of recommending anything of the kind, Paul gave a common-sense prescription. He wrote, "Drink no longer water, but use a little wine for thy stomach's sake and for thine often infirmities" (1 Tim. 5: 23). This is as truly inspired Scripture as John

3: 16, and the Holy Ghost has recorded it for our learning. Paul, who had healed many by the laying on of hands as a testimony to the supernatural character of his ministry, instructed Timothy to use precautionary measures to keep from breaking down his constitution and to recover from the effects of previous conditions.

Our last instance is that of Trophimus. We read of him in 2 Timothy 4: 20: "Trophimus have I left at Miletum sick." Of this man we know little, except that in Acts 20 we learn that he was in Paul's company when he went down to Troas on his second missionary journey. As 2 Timothy was written many years afterwards, during the apostle's last imprisonment, it is quite likely that Trophimus had been an intimate companion throughout the years. But he was sick. He was so sick that he had to remain quietly at Miletum and could not accompany Paul to Rome. There is no intimation that his sickness was a judgment upon him. Neither is there any intimation that he was to blame for remaining sick. We are not told that he might have been well if only he had appropriated the resurrection life of Christ by faith! What we do know is that he was a Christian and a servant of the Lord. But he was sick. Tens of thousands have been in the same circumstances since, in spite of the fact that Christ died on the cross.

It is very evident that neither Paul nor Epaphroditus nor Timothy nor Trophimus knew anything of the modern doctrine that Christ bore our sicknesses on the cross and therefore believers should never be sick. To be in the company of these men is to be in good company. If, in the wisdom of God, a thorn in the flesh is sent to us; if, in the work of the

Lord, we are permitted to be "sick nigh unto death"; if the earnest missionary and faithful shepherd of souls finds the need of care in regard to eating and drinking that he may be at his best for God; if we find ourselves left at some Miletum sick, while others go on with the work, or go out to prison and death for Christ's sake, the subject believer will simply say, "It is the Lord, let Him do what seemeth to Him good." There will be no complaining, nor will there be doubt and darkness because an unscriptural doctrine is impossible of realization in practical experience. But we shall say with our brother Paul, "Most gladly, therefore, will I glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me."

On the other hand, we know that eventually as a result of the work of the cross, all believers will be fully delivered from every physical result of sin. But this will be at the coming of the Lord Jesus, when "He shall transform the body of our humiliation, that it might be made like unto the body of His glory." This was what Paul looked forward to, and has been the goal of saints all through the dispensation, namely, the redemption of the body. It is our hope. But until its realization "we groan being burdened," but we are enabled to triumph by faith in spite of sickness and suffering, knowing that all will be over when our Saviour returns.

—H. A. IRONSIDE.

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