

Suffering, Divine Healing, and the Bible

Confusion abounds as to the place of sickness and suffering in the lives of believers. When confronted by illness, many sincere Christians question God if prayers for healing go unanswered. Others flock to divine “healers,” hoping to receive their miraculous healing. Let us examine the Bible’s teaching concerning suffering and the place of divine healing.

- I. Suffering in the Bible
 - A. The Bible teaches that believers may suffer for the sake of the Lord Jesus (Phil. 1:29). To suffer for Christ’s sake means to suffer as a result of your following Christ. It may include persecution, poverty, etc.
 - B. God sometimes allows suffering in order to bring us closer to the Lord (Ps. 119:67).
 - C. Physical suffering may be God’s chastisement—designed to bring us into fellowship with Him (Heb. 12:8).
 - D. Suffering may be God’s tool to make us strong (II Cor. 12:10).
 - E. Prominent Bible characters suffered in the will of God:
 1. King David—particularly as a result of his sin
 2. Hezekiah
 3. Lazarus—in fact, he died!
 4. Paul—unidentified “thorn in the flesh”
- II. Is the healing of our physical bodies included in Christ’s atonement on the cross?
 - A. YES—Jesus died for our sicknesses as well as for our sins. Compare Isaiah 53:4 with Matthew 8:14-17. There can be no question that the Holy Spirit applied Isaiah 53 (the great crucifixion passage) to the healing of physical diseases in Matthew 8.
 - B. YES—Romans 8:18-23 teaches that we are awaiting the “redemption of the body.” The price of our redemption was paid in full on the cross, and the benefits of redemption extend to the physical body. However, we will NOT realize these benefits fully until the resurrection.
 - C. The atonement of Christ involves the whole man—soul, spirit, and body! The indwelling Holy Spirit is the believer’s guarantee of complete redemption. Note that while salvation comes instantaneously, the blessings of salvation may come later.
- III. Is it always God’s will to heal sick believers?
 - A. NO—While Jesus has the power to heal all that are sick (Mt. 9:35), it is not always His will to do so.
 1. God did not remove Paul’s thorn in the flesh, although he prayed about it frequently (II Cor. 12:7-10).
 2. We have no record of God’s healing Timothy’s weak stomach (I Tim. 5:23).
 3. God did not heal Trophimus who was left sick at Miletum.

- B. NO—While the healing of our physical bodies is included in the atonement, the accomplishment of our complete healing awaits our glorified bodies. The great Apostle Paul awaited deliverance from the “body of this death” (Romans 7:24).

IV. How Does God Heal Today?

A. Sometimes in answer to prayer (James 5:13-15)

1. The afflicted are instructed to pray, presumably for themselves (13). The word “afflicted” carries the idea of suffering.
2. The sick are instructed to seek prayer from the elders of the church. The word “sick” means physically weak, presumably weak enough to enlist the prayers of others (14)
 - a. The sick may call for the elders (pastors) of the church.
 - b. The elders are to pray for the sick.
 - c. The elders are to anoint the sick with oil in the name of the Lord. Oil pictures the indwelling Holy Spirit who has the power to save.
3. Prayer coupled with faith will save the sick. What would be the natural course of an illness may be altered by prayer (15).
4. Believers are commanded to “pray one for another, that ye may be healed (16). The word “pray” has the idea of “keep on praying.” In other words, the prayer may be repeated and prolonged because the healing is not instantaneous.

B. Sometimes with medical means

1. The Scriptures nowhere condemn the use of medical means for healing.
2. Jesus taught that the sick need a physician (Mt. 9:12). He did not condemn the practice of seeing the doctor.
3. Luke himself was a physician (Col. 4:14).
4. In II Chron. 16:12 King Asa was not criticized for seeking help from physicians. His failure consisted of not seeking help from the Lord.
5. It is always legitimate to seek medical treatment from skilled professionals. However, it is important that believers recognize the limitations of medical science and that believers always seek the Lord in their illnesses.

C. What about divine healers?

1. The Apostles exercised gifts of divine healing (Acts 3).
2. Gifts of healing were operative in the early church, and doubtless the gift involved prayer. Prayer is the normative method for seeking divine healing.
3. The practice of “healing meetings” for the sake of showmanship is foreign to the Bible. Jesus healed the sick and crowds gathered as a result. He did not gather crowds for the purpose of demonstrating “healing” and collecting offerings.