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Christ Our Healer

“Simpson attended one of Dr. Cullis’s healing services at Old Orchard and listened to at least 200 people give accounts of their healing. ‘I had believed that there were cases of healing—but the facts did not convince me,’ he said later.

“‘They sent me to the Bible to settle the matter. If it was true, it was the most stupendous thing in life. And so I went to my room and took my Bible thinking, *If that is here, I will stand on it; if not, I will let it go. If it is true, I will accept it, cost what it will*’” (Niklaus, 40).

The above quote from Albert B. Simpson communicates humility before God. This quality endears me to our founder as the Holy Spirit is using God’s Word to shape my theological understanding. This past Sunday I preached on healing at Neighborhood Church in Gainesville, Florida. My application for the people was to accept Christ as Healer, not because I was telling them to, but because the Holy Spirit convinces them to as they study healing in Scripture as a follow up to the sermon (2nd Timothy 3:16). Accepting Christ as healer should not be solely built on experience (or lack thereof), or on the testimony of brothers and sisters within the body of Christ. The proper hermeneutic process is that our beliefs and experiences flow from Scripture. Our understanding of Scripture should not flow out of our belief and experience. My

challenge to the congregation was to allow the Holy Spirit the ministry of revealing the truth of this doctrine as they personally study God's word (1st Corinthians 2:9–11).

My sermons are always directed towards the preacher as much as they are toward those sitting in the pews. Personally, I have not known Christ's healing ministry in my own experience. Pastors, professors, disciplers, and Christian friends have instructed me that Christ is my healer. However, speaking honestly, I have not been able to say with confidence "Christ is my healer" until just recently. The reason for my hesitation was that I did not allow the Holy Spirit to reveal this wonderful truth through the diligent study of the doctrine of healing in the Bible. "The Church must draw her doctrine from the wellsprings of Scripture. While the long history of this doctrine, which embraces every age of the church, is impressive, the proof of historical theology is not enough" (Bailey, 59). Thank God for the process of ordination that has served as a catalyst of study and my continued spiritual growth.

The relationship of divine healing and atonement

Atonement

What is the relationship of divine healing and the atonement? In order to properly answer this question we must understand atonement. The atonement is "the means by which sins are forgiven... expiation. ... Though some traditional translations render this a 'propitiation,' this involves a wrong interpretation of the term in question. Propitiation is essentially a process by which one does a favor to a person in order to make him or her favorably disposed, but in the New Testament God is never the object of propitiation since he is already on the side of people. The word denotes the means of forgiveness and

not propitiation” (Louw & Nida, 504). Faith in Jesus Christ’s sacrifice as our forgiveness enables a person to experience the atonement. “*God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood*” (Romans 3:25).

As the above quote illustrates, God is in favor of humanity. God loves people. It brings Him no pleasure to see the object of His love separated from Him because of sin (John 3:16). God desires to cancel the effects of sin so that reconciliation can take place between himself and mankind (2nd Corinthians 5:18–21).

What are the effects of sin?

Sin has a two-dimensional effect on mankind. First, it effects us spiritually in that our eternal souls are damned to an existence separate from God—this is the second death that is eternal damnation in the lake of fire (Revelation 20:14–15). Second, it effects us physically, in that our bodies are cursed to die the first death (Genesis 3:3, 24). Unless the atonement is made, mankind remains dead both physically and spiritually.

Throughout God’s Word we are reminded of the two-dimensional spiritual and physical death spoken of above. David writes in the psalms, “*Praise the LORD , O my soul, and forget not all his benefits—who **forgives all your sins** [spiritual] and **heals all your diseases** [physical] (Psalms 103:2–3). And again he writes in Psalms 147, “**He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds**” (Psalms 147:3). Isaiah teaches the interconnectedness of our “double-trouble” as he prophesies, “*he took up our **infirmities** and carried our **sorrows**... the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed*” (Isaiah 53:4–5). And again in James we are reminded of the connection of our physical and spiritual need as he instructs the Christian to “*confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed*” (James 5:16).*

The question that begs to be answered is, “Does our faith in Jesus Christ’s sacrifice as our forgiveness, heal both spiritually and physically?” David tells us that the benefits of a relationship with Christ are the forgiveness of sins, healing of diseases, healing of the brokenhearted, and the mending of our wounds. Isaiah mentions that Christ would take our sicknesses and our sorrows and heal them through His death. James clearly teaches there should be an expectation of healing within the church today. However, these verses do not answer our question. They do not prove that healing is possible because of the *atonement*.

When did Christ’s healing ministry begin?

Christ’s physical healing ministry came before His act of atonement. It’s interesting to note how Jesus described His ministry as He publicly initiated it. "*The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor*" (Luke 4:18–19). As we look closely at this chapter in Luke we see that Christ healed people quite extensively—from the individual to the multitudes.

The people of this town, where Christ began His public ministry, tried to persuade Him to stay. "*But he said, ‘I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent. And he kept on preaching in the synagogues of Judea’*" (Luke 4:43–44). When we consider the events of this passage we learn that Christ never “preached” as we are accustomed to understand what it means to preach. I believe that there is an important reason for that. Jesus, in effect, is teaching that His ministry of healing is the preaching of the good news. Healing is a big part of why Christ

came. His healing ministry began with His public ministry—it preceded the atonement as He announced the “year of the Lord’s favor.”

God’s pleasure brings healing

The “year of the Lord’s favor” is what drives the healing ability of Jesus, even prior to the atonement sacrifice. Jesus pleased God throughout His earthly existence. If that were not true the atonement would not have been possible because the sacrifice would not have been perfect. It is because of God’s pleasure in Jesus that He is able to minister healing.

“I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me. The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what pleases him” (John 8:28b–29). Peter explains the supernatural abilities given to Christ because of God’s pleasure. *“We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, ‘This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.’”* (2nd Peter 1:16–17).

The resurrection, which secured the atonement, is what enables the healing ministry of Christ to continue into the present day. Christ was shown to us approved by God, as one who truly pleased Him throughout His lifetime. Paul writes about Christ *“who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord”* (Romans 1:4). God’s pleasure with Christ is communicated after the atonement sacrifice through His resurrection. The resurrection following the atoning sacrifice is what enables Christ to be in a position of authority where He can continue the ministry of healing.

Christ enables His followers to continue in the ministry of healing after His ascension (Acts 5:12–16). The religious leaders were jealous of Peter and the apostles because of the large crowds they were able to gather on account of their healing ministry. While they were taken into custody Peter defended the ministry by claiming, “*God exalted [Jesus] to his own right hand as Prince and Savior that he might give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel. We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him*” (Acts 5:31–32). Healing continues because Christ is in a position of authority. Christ’s ministry does not stop because Christ is no longer here among us. In fact, Christ’s ministry remains because He is alive and His Father is pleased with Him.

The relationship between healing and atonement is a complimentary one. The atonement does not make healing possible. However, it does enable the healing ministry of Christ to continue in as much as it is the reason for Christ’s resurrection.

The Significance of Anointing with Oil

“*As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead*” (James 2:26). The prayer offered in faith and righteousness will lead to the healing of a sick person (James 5:15–16). Faith and obedience to God are two key ingredients for physical healing to take place in the life of a Christian.

The significance of anointing with oil is faithful obedience. It seems to me that many who try to define its significance are not sure how to accurately do so. The theology textbook I used in seminary is very brief in its treatment on the subject. The brevity articulates clearly to me there is a lack of assurance to the significance of anointing oils.

“The oil *seems* to have been a physical symbol of the healing power of the Holy Spirit coming to the sick person” (Grudem, 959). Other research attempts to explain anointing oils significance figuratively. “Oil was a symbol of plenty (Deut 32:13), of luxury (Prov 21:17; Ezek 16:13), of joy (Ps 45:7; Eccl 9:8; Isa 61:3; Heb 1:9), and of hospitality (Ps 23:5). Its lack was evidence of God’s displeasure (Joel 1:10); its abundance was proof of God’s blessing (2:24)” (Oil, 515). While I believe that both of the above statements can aid in our understanding the symbolic importance the recipients of New Testament culture would have known, I don’t believe that symbolism was ever meant to be the main significance.

Anointing with oil is part of the prayer of faith that brings healing. *“Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well* (James 5:14–15). The Lord gave us instructions for healing through James’ epistle. The significance of the oil is our faith in God’s Word as authoritative, demonstrated through our obedience in the healing service.

Many people will say it is important that they understand the underlying reasons of why oil is used. We can share the figurative and historical perspectives that we know. However, the emphasis to faith and obedience must be the bottom line. Healing comes to the Christian when faith and obedience are adhered. Ultimately, the oil is a vehicle that illuminates faith in God’s instruction and obedience to His will.

The Ministry of Healing in the Local Church

“The Christian and Missionary Alliance has always taught that provision is made in the redemptive work of the Lord Jesus Christ for the healing of the physical body, and that prayer for the sick and anointing with oil are taught in the Scriptures as *privileges for the Church in this present age*” (www.cmalliance.org). The main passage that supports this doctrine of healing as a privilege of the church is James 5:13–16.

The instruction in James begins with a request from the sick person to the elders of the local church to pray for him or her. This first step illuminates the faith of the sick as they place their condition into the hands of God for Him to make whole what is broken. It is also a picture of the interdependency that should be taking place in all churches with all of their members (1st Corinthians 12:24–25).

The next instruction is that of prayer and anointing with oil by the elders. It’s interesting to note that the instruction does not say “call the pastor or one of the elders.” It specifically instructs the sick to call the elders, plural. The purpose of this is to prevent the sick from putting their trust in a human agent rather than in Christ our healer. “The methodology of healing ministry practiced by the early church always made clear to seekers and observers that healing came through Christ and Him alone. When excited crowds attempted to give the apostles a healer image they publicly renounced it and gave Christ the glory. Christ’s church on earth is just the yielded instrument through which Christ now heals from His position on high” (Bailey, 120).

James then writes, “*the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up...*”(James 5:15). James does not say the person *may* be healed. He says

the sick person *will* be healed. The only condition for receiving this healing is faith in the Lord to do it.

The instructions now convey an amazing truth: “...*if he has sinned, he will be forgiven*” (James 5:15). Earlier I mentioned the connection of our spiritual and physical need of healing. James is instructing the church here that there is a need for spiritual healing to take place before physical healing can and will occur. God is concerned about our physical wellbeing, but in His economy the condition of our spirits takes priority over physical healing. In light of this, the sick person may need to confess sin, submit to God in an area of their life, or take care of any possible spiritual hindrances prior to experiencing the desired healing.

The last instruction to note is that this healing is to take place in the context of the Church. “*Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective*” (James 5:16). The understanding is that the church will unite together in prayer and confession so the healing can take place. It is the body of Christ trusting God on behalf of the one who is in need of healing. In order for the church’s prayers to be powerful and effective, the members need to be righteous. Righteousness comes through confession to God (1st John 1:9) and to one another. Christ is our Healer and we are the hands through which He usually chooses to dispense His healing touch.

One last question

Keith Bailey, a former minister in the Christian and Missionary Alliance writes, “The promises and instructions as to how healing may be attained provide abundant proof that physical healing is available today for God’s people” (57).

One last question that deserves an answer is: “Why don’t we experience healing like the early Church if it is still a privilege today?” I believe the answer is simply because of a lack of faith and obedience. If we had faith in Christ as our Healer there would be more calls made to the elders of the church for this ministry. There would be less extended arms to our medicine cabinets at the first sign of a headache or a cold symptom. Prayer would take priority over reaching for the Advil, Tylenol, or the Nyquil. If we believed that Christ was our healer our churches would be more righteous than they are. The divorce rate in the church among Christians would not equal the rate of divorce within our secular culture. If there were more righteous churches, filled with righteous people we would most certainly be experiencing healings like that which were common to the apostles. If God’s Word is truth, healings should be taking place today if we would be faithful and obey.

God’s Word is truth!

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