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The Disciple-Making Minister

Biblical Principles for Fruitfulness and Multiplication

By David Servant

Chapter Fifteen Divine Healing

Although the subject of divine healing is somewhat controversial, it is certainly not one that is obscure in Scripture. In fact, one-tenth of all that was written in the four Gospels concerns Jesus' healing ministry. There are promises for divine healing in the Old Testament, in the Gospels and the New Testament epistles. Those who are ill can find great encouragement in a wealth of faith-building scriptures.

It has been my general observation around the world that where churches are full of highly-committed believers (true disciples), divine healing is much more commonplace. Where the church is lukewarm and sophisticated, divine healing is a very rare occurrence.¹ All of this should not surprise us, as Jesus told us that one of the signs that will follow *believers* is that they will lay hands on the sick and they shall recover (see Mark 16:18). If we were to judge churches by the signs that Jesus declared would follow the believers, we would have to conclude that many churches consist of no believers:

And [Jesus] said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned. And these signs will accompany those who have believed: in My name they will cast out demons, they will speak with new tongues; they will pick up serpents, and if they drink any deadly poison, it shall not hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover" (Mark 16:15-18).

The disciple-making minister, imitating the perfect ministry of Christ, will certainly use his gifts to promote the ministry of divine healing within his sphere of influence. He knows that divine healing furthers God's kingdom in at least two ways. First, healing miracles are a wonderful advertisement for the gospel, as any child who reads the Gospels or the book of Acts would understand (but which many ministers with advance degrees seemingly are unable to comprehend). Second, healthy disciples aren't hindered from ministry by personal sickness.

The disciple-making minister also needs to be sensitive to those members in the body of Christ who desire healing but who have had difficulty receiving. They often need tender instruction and gentle encouragement, especially if they have grown adverse to any

¹ In some churches in North America, a minister would take great risks to teach on this subject due to the heavy resistance he would encounter from the so-called believers. Jesus, too, met resistance and unbelief at times that hindered His healing ministry (see Mark 6:1-6).

healing message. The disciple-making minister faces a choice: he can avoid teaching on the subject of divine healing altogether, in which case no one will be offended and no one will be healed, or he can lovingly teach on the subject and risk offending some while helping others to experience healing. Personally, I've opted for the second option, believing that it follows Jesus' example.

Healing on the Cross

A good place to begin the study of divine healing is the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah, universally considered a messianic prophecy. Through the Holy Spirit, Isaiah graphically spoke of Jesus' sacrificial death and the work He would accomplish on the cross:

Surely our griefs He Himself bore, and our sorrows He carried; yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, and by His scourging we are healed. All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; but the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him (Is. 53:4-6).

By the Holy Spirit's inspiration, Isaiah declared that Jesus bore our *griefs* and *sorrows*. A better translation of the original Hebrew indicates that Jesus bore our *sicknesses* and *pains*, as many reliable translations indicate in their reference notes.

The Hebrew word translated *griefs* in Isaiah 53:4 is the word *choli*, which is also found in Deuteronomy 7:15; 28:61; 1 Kings 17:17; 2 Kings 1:2; 8:8, and 2 Chronicles 16:12; 21:15. In all those cases it is translated either *sickness* or *disease*.

The word translated *sorrows* is the Hebrew word *makob*, which can also be found in Job 14:22 and Job 33:19. In both those cases it is translated *pain(s)*.

All of this being so, Isaiah 53:4 is more accurately translated, "Surely our *sicknesses* He Himself bore, and our *pains* He carried." This fact is sealed by Matthew's direct quotation of Isaiah 53:4 in his Gospel: "He Himself took our infirmities and carried away our diseases" (Matt. 8:17).

Unable to escape these facts, some try to convince us that Isaiah was referring to our supposed "spiritual sickness" and "spiritual diseases." However, Matthew's quotation of Isaiah 53:4 leaves no doubt that Isaiah was referring to literal *physical* sickness and disease. Let's read it in context:

When evening came, they brought to Him many who were demon-possessed; and He cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all who were ill. This was to fulfill what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet: "*He Himself took our infirmities and carried away our diseases*" (Matt. 8:16-17, emphasis added).

Matthew plainly stated that the physical healings performed by Jesus were a fulfillment of Isaiah 53:4. Thus there is no doubt that Isaiah 53:4 is a reference to Christ bearing our physical infirmities and diseases.² Just as Scripture says that Jesus *bore* our iniquities (see Isaiah 53:11), it also says that He *bore* our infirmities and diseases. That is news that should make any sick person glad. By His atoning sacrifice, Jesus has provided for our salvation *and* healing.

² Grasping for anything by which they can cling to their unbelief, some try to convince us that Jesus *completely* fulfilled Isaiah 53:4 by His healing of people that evening in Capernaum. But Isaiah said that Jesus bore *our* sicknesses, just as he also said that Jesus was crushed for *our* iniquities (compare Is. 53:4 and 5). Jesus bore the sicknesses of the very same people for whose iniquities He was crushed. Thus, Matthew was only indicating that Jesus' healing ministry in Capernaum validated that He was the Messiah spoken of in Isaiah 53, the one who would bear our iniquities and sicknesses.

A Question Asked

But if that is true, some ask, then why isn't everyone healed? The answer to that question is best answered by asking another question: Why are not all people born again? All are not born again because they either haven't heard the gospel or else they haven't believed it. So, too, each individual must appropriate his healing through his own faith. Many have never yet heard the wonderful truth that Jesus bore their sicknesses; others have heard but rejected it.

God the Father's attitude toward sickness has been clearly revealed by the ministry of His beloved Son, who testified of Himself,

Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner (John 5:19).

We read in the book of Hebrews that Jesus was the "exact representation of His [Father's] nature" (Heb. 1:3). There is no question that Jesus' attitude toward sickness was identical to His Father's attitude toward sickness.

What was Jesus' attitude? *Not once* did he turn away *anyone* who came to Him requesting healing. *Not once* did He say to a sick person who desired to be healed, "No, it's not God's will that you be healed, so you'll have to remain sick." Jesus *always* healed the sick who came to Him, and once they were healed, He often told them it was their faith that had healed them. Moreover, the Bible declares that God never changes (see Mal. 3:6) and that Jesus Christ "is the same yesterday and today and forever" (Heb. 13:8).

Healing Proclaimed

Unfortunately, salvation has been reduced today to little more than forgiveness of sins. But the Greek words most often translated "saved" and "salvation" imply the concepts not only of forgiveness, but complete deliverance and healing.³ Let us consider a man in the Bible who experienced salvation in this fuller sense. He was healed by his faith as he listened to Paul preach the gospel in his city.

They...fled to the cities of Lycaonia, Lystra and Derbe, and the surrounding region; and there they continued to preach the gospel. At Lystra a man was sitting who had no strength in his feet, lame from his mother's womb, who had never walked. This man was listening to Paul as he spoke, who, when he had fixed his gaze on him and had seen that he had faith to be made well, said with a loud voice, "Stand upright on your feet." And he leaped up and began to walk (Acts 14:6-10).

Notice that although Paul was preaching "the gospel," the man heard something that produced faith in his heart to receive physical healing. At bare minimum, he must have heard Paul say something about Jesus' healing ministry, and how Jesus healed everyone who asked in faith for healing. Perhaps Paul also mentioned Isaiah's prophecy of Jesus bearing our infirmities and diseases. We don't know, but since "faith comes from hearing" (Rom 10:17), the paralyzed man must have heard something that sparked faith in his heart to be healed. Something Paul said convinced him that God didn't want him to remain paralyzed.

³ For example, Jesus said to a woman whom He had healed of internal bleeding, "Daughter, your faith has made you well" (Mark 5:34). The Greek word translated "made well" in this verse (*sozo*) and ten other times in the New Testament is translated "save" or "saved" over eighty times in the New Testament. It is, for example, the same word that is translated "saved" in Ephesians 2:5, "By grace you have been *saved* through faith." Thus we see that physical healing is implied within the meaning of the Greek word most often translated as "saved."

Paul himself must have believed that God wanted the man to be healed, or his words could never have convinced the man to have faith for healing, nor would he have told the man to stand up. What would have happened if Paul had said what so many modern preachers say? What if he had preached, "It isn't God's will for everyone to be healed"? The man would not have had faith to be healed. Perhaps this explains why so many are not healed today. The very preachers who should be inspiring people to have faith for healing are destroying their faith.

Again, notice that this man was healed by his *faith*. Had he not believed, he would have remained paralyzed, even though it was obviously God's will for him to be healed. Moreover, there probably were other sick people in the crowd that day as well, but we have no record of anyone else being healed. If that was so, why weren't they healed? For the same reason that many of the unsaved people in the crowd were not born again that day—because they didn't believe Paul's message.

We should never conclude that it is not God's will to heal everyone based on the fact that some people are never healed. That would be the same as concluding that it is not God's will for all to be born again just because some people are never born again. Every person must believe the gospel for himself if he is going to be saved, and every person must believe for himself if he is going to be healed.

Further Proof of God's Will to Heal

Under the old covenant, physical healing was included in Israel's covenant with God. Just a few days after the Exodus, God made Israel this promise:

If you will give earnest heed to the voice of the Lord your God, and do what is right in His sight, and give ear to His commandments, and keep all His statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you which I have put on the Egyptians; for I, the Lord, am your healer (Ex. 15:26).

Anyone who is honest will have to agree that healing was included in Israel's covenant with God, contingent upon the people's obedience. (Incidentally, Paul makes it clear in 1 Corinthians 11:27-31 that physical health under the new covenant is also contingent upon our obedience.)

God also promised the Israelites:

But you shall serve the Lord your God, and He will bless your bread and your water; and *I will remove sickness from your midst*. There shall be no one miscarrying or barren in your land; I will fulfill the number of your days (Ex. 23:25-26, emphasis added).

You shall be blessed above all peoples; there will be no male or female barren among you or among your cattle. *The Lord will remove from you all sickness*; and He will not put on you any of the harmful diseases of Egypt which you have known, but He will lay them on all who hate you (Deut. 7:14-15, emphasis added).

If physical healing was included in the old covenant, one would wonder how it could not be included in the new covenant, if in fact the new covenant is better than the old, as Scripture states:

But now He [Jesus] has obtained a more excellent ministry, by as much as He is also the mediator of a *better covenant, which has been enacted on better promises* (Heb. 8:6, emphasis added).

Yet Further Proof

The Bible contains many scriptures that offer indisputable proof that it is God's will to heal everyone. Let me list three of the best:

Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless His holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget none of His benefits; who pardons all your iniquities, *who heals all your diseases* (Ps. 103:1-3, emphasis added).

What Christian would dispute David's declaration that God wills to pardon *all* our iniquities? David, however, believed that God also wills to heal just as many of our diseases—all of them.

My son, give attention to my words; incline your ear to my sayings. Do not let them depart from your sight; keep them in the midst of your heart. For they are life to those who find them and *health to all their body* (Prov. 4:20-22, emphasis added).

Is anyone among you sick? Then he must call for the elders of the church and they are to pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; and *the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick*, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him (Jas. 5:14-15, emphasis added).

Notice that this last promise belongs to *any who are sick*. And notice that it is not the elders or the oil that brings healing but the "prayer of faith."

Is it the faith of the elders or the sick person? It is the faith of both. The faith of the sick person is expressed, at least in part, by his calling for the elders of the church. The sick person's unbelief could nullify the effects of the elders' prayers. The kind of prayer James wrote about is a good example of the "prayer of agreement" that Jesus mentioned in Matthew 18:19. Both parties involved in this kind of prayer must "agree." If one person believes and the other person does not believe, they are not in agreement.

We also know that in several passages the Bible credits Satan for sickness (see Job 2:7; Luke 13:16; Acts 10:38; 1 Cor. 5:5). Thus it would stand to reason that God would be opposed to Satan's work in His children's bodies. Our Father loves us much more than any earthly father ever loved his children (see Matt. 7:11), and I've never yet met a father who desired that his children be sick.

Every healing performed by Jesus during His earthly ministry, and every healing recorded in the book of Acts, should encourage us to believe that God wants us to be healthy. Jesus frequently healed people who sought Him seeking healing, and He credited their faith for their miracle. That proves that Jesus did not single out certain exclusive people whom He wanted to heal. Any sick person could have come to Him in faith and be healed. He wanted to heal them all, but He required faith on their part.

Answers to Some Common Objections

Perhaps the most common objection to all of this is one that is not based on God's Word, but on people's experiences. It usually goes something like this: "I knew a wonderful Christian woman who prayed to be healed of cancer, yet she died. That proves it is not God's will to heal all."

We should never attempt to determine God's will by anything other than His Word. For example, if you traveled back in time and watched the Israelites wander in the wilderness for forty years while the land that flowed with milk and honey waited just across the Jordan River, you might have concluded that it wasn't God's will for Israel to enter the promised land. But if you know the Bible, then you know that was not the case. It *was*

certainly God's will for Israel to enter the Promised Land, but they failed to enter because of their unbelief (see Heb. 3:19).

What about all the people who are now in hell? It was God's will for them to be in heaven, but they didn't meet the conditions of repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus. So, too, we cannot determine God's will concerning healing by looking at sick people. Just because a Christian prays for healing and fails to receive, that doesn't prove it isn't God's will to heal all. If that Christian had met God's conditions, he would have been healed, or else God is a liar. When we fail to receive healing and then blame God with the excuse that healing was not His will, we are no different than unbelieving Israelites who died in the wilderness claiming it wasn't God's will for them to enter the Promised Land. We would be better just to swallow our pride and admit that we are to blame.

As I stated in the previous chapter about faith, many sincere Christians have wrongfully ended their prayers for healing with the faith-destroying phrase, "If it be Thy will." This plainly reveals that they are not praying in faith because they aren't sure of God's will. When it comes to healing, God's will is very plain, as we have already seen. If you know God wants to heal you, there is no reason to add "if it be Thy will" to your prayer for healing. That would be equivalent to saying to the Lord, "Lord, I know you promised to heal me, but just in case you were lying about it, I ask you to heal me only if it is actually Your will."

It is also certainly true that God may discipline disobedient believers by allowing sickness to afflict them, even to the point of allowing their premature death in some cases. Such believers obviously need to repent before they can receive healing (see 1 Cor. 11:27-32). There are others who, by neglecting to take care of their bodies, open themselves up to sickness. Christians should be intelligent enough to maintain a healthy diet, to eat moderately, to exercise regularly, and to take necessary rest.

A Second Common Objection

It is often said, "Paul had a thorn in the flesh, and God didn't heal him."

The idea that Paul's thorn was sickness, however, is simply a bad theological theory in light of the fact that Paul told us exactly what His thorn was—an angel of Satan:

Because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, *a messenger of Satan* to torment me—to keep me from exalting myself! Concerning this I implored the Lord three times that it might leave me. And He has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness." Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me (2 Cor. 12:7-9, emphasis added).

The word translated *messenger* is the Greek word "aggelos," which is translated *angel* or angels in over 160 places where it is found in the New Testament. Paul's thorn in the flesh was an angel of Satan sent to buffet him; it was not a sickness or disease.

Notice also that there is no mention of Paul's praying to be healed nor is there any indication that God refused to heal him. On three occasions, Paul simply asked God if He would remove the buffeting angel, and God said that His grace was sufficient.

Who is the one who gave Paul this thorn? Some believe it was Satan, since the thorn was called an "angel of Satan." Others believe it was God because the thorn was apparently given so Paul wouldn't be lifted up in pride. Paul himself said, "To keep me from exalting myself."

The *King James* version translates these verses a little differently. Rather than saying, "to keep me from exalting myself," it says, "lest I should be exalted above measure." This is an important difference because God is not opposed to our being exalted. In fact, He promises to exalt us if we will humble ourselves. So it is quite possible that God was the one doing

the exalting and Satan was trying to stop Paul's exaltation by assigning a specific buffeting angel to stir up trouble wherever Paul traveled. Yet God said He would use the circumstances for His glory because His power could be manifested more in Paul's life as a result of his weaknesses.

Regardless, to say that Paul was sick and that God refused to heal him is a gross distortion of what the Bible actually states. In the passage about his thorn in the flesh, Paul never mentioned any sickness, and there is nothing resembling a refusal on God's part to heal him of his supposed sickness. If an honest person will read through Paul's listing of all his trials in 2 Corinthians 11:23-30, he will not find sickness or disease even mentioned once.

An Elaboration on the Same Theme

Some object to my explanation of Paul's thorn, saying, "But didn't Paul himself say to the Galatians that he was sick the first time he preached the gospel to them? Wasn't he speaking of his thorn in the flesh?"

Here is what Paul actually wrote in his letter to the Galatians:

But you know that it was because of a bodily illness that I preached the gospel to you the first time; and that which was a trial to you in my bodily condition you did not despise or loathe, but you received me as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus Himself (Gal. 4:13-14).

The Greek word translated *illness* here in Galatians 4:13 is *asthenia*, which literally means "weakness." It *can* mean weakness because of sickness, but it doesn't have to.

For example, Paul wrote, "the *weakness* of God is stronger than men" (1 Cor. 1:25, emphasis added). The word that is translated *weakness* in this instance is also the word *asthenia*. It would not make any sense if the translators had translated it "the illness of God is stronger than men." (See also Matt. 26:41 and 1 Pet. 3:7, where the word *asthenia* is translated *weakness* and could not possibly be translated *sickness*).

When Paul first visited Galatia, as recorded in the book of Acts, there is no mention of his being ill. There is mention, however, of his being stoned and left for dead, and he was either raised from the dead or miraculously revived (see Acts 14:5-7, 19-20). Surely Paul's body, after he was stoned and left for dead, would have been in horrible condition with cuts and bruises all over it.

Paul did not have a sickness in Galatia that was a trial to his listeners. Rather, his body was weak from his recent stoning. Most likely, he still carried the reminders of his persecutions in Galatia when he wrote his letter to the Galatians, because he ended his epistle with these words:

From now on let no one cause trouble for me, for I bear on my body the brand-marks of Jesus (Gal. 6:17).

Another Objection: "I'm Suffering for the Glory of God"

This objection is used by some who have taken a verse from the story of the raising of Lazarus as a basis to claim they are suffering sickness for God's glory. Jesus said concerning Lazarus:

This sickness is not to end in death, but for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified by it (John 11:4).

Jesus wasn't saying that God was being glorified as a result of Lazarus' sickness, but that God would be glorified when Lazarus was healed and raised from the dead. In other

words, the final result of the sickness wouldn't be death, but rather that God would be glorified. God isn't glorified in sickness; He is glorified in healing. (See also Matt. 9:8; 15:31; Luke 7:16; 13:13 and 17:15, where healing brought glory to God.)

Another Objection: "Paul Said He Left Trophimus Sick at Miletum"

I happen to be writing this sentence in a city in Germany. When I departed from my hometown in the United States last week, I left numerous sick people behind me. I left *hospitals* full of sick people. But that doesn't mean that it wasn't God's will for all of them to be healed. Just because Paul left one man sick in a city he visited is not proof that it wasn't God's will for that man to be healed. What about the hoards of unsaved people whom Paul also left behind? Does that prove it wasn't God's will for them to be saved? Absolutely not.

Another Objection: "I'm Just Like Job!"

Praise the Lord! If you've read the end of Job's story, you know he was healed. It wasn't God's will for Job to remain sick, and it isn't God's will for you to remain sick either. Job's story reaffirms that God's will is always healing.

Another Objection: Paul's Advice to Timothy About His Stomach

We know that Paul told Timothy to use a little wine for the sake of his stomach and his frequent ailments (see 1 Tim. 5:23).

Actually, Paul told Timothy to *stop drinking water* and to use a little wine for the sake of his stomach and frequent ailments. This would seem to indicate that something was wrong with the water. Obviously, if you are drinking contaminated water, you should stop drinking it and start drinking something else, or you will probably have stomach problems like Timothy.

Another Objection: "Jesus Only Healed to Prove His Deity."

Some people want us to believe that the only reason Jesus healed was to prove His deity. Now that His deity is well established, He supposedly no longer heals.

That is completely incorrect. It is true that Jesus' miracles did authenticate His deity, but that is not the only reason He healed people during his earthly ministry. Many times Jesus forbade people whom He healed to tell anyone what had happened to them (see Matt. 8:4; 9:6, 30; 12:13-16; Mark 5:43; 7:36; 8:26). If Jesus healed people for the singular purpose of proving His deity, He would have told those people to tell everyone what He had done for them.

What was the motivation behind Jesus' healings? Many times Scripture says He healed because He was "moved with compassion" (see Matt. 9:35-36; 14:14; 20:34; Mark 1:41; 5:19; Luke 7:13). The reason Jesus healed is because He loved people and was full of compassion. Has Jesus become less compassionate since His earthly ministry? Has His love diminished? Absolutely not!

Another Objection: "God Wants Me to be Sick for Some Reason."

That is impossible in light of all the scriptures we have considered. If you've been persisting in disobedience, it could be true that God has permitted your sickness in order to bring you to repentance. But it is still not His will for you to remain sick. He wants you to repent and be healed.

Additionally, if God wants you to be sick, then why are you going to the doctor and taking medication, hoping to be healed? Are you trying to get out of "God's will"?

A Final Objection: "If We Never Suffer Disease, How Will We Die?"

We know that the Bible teaches that our physical bodies are decaying (see 2 Cor. 4:16). There is nothing we can do to stop our hair from graying and our bodies from growing older. Eventually our sight and hearing are not as good as they were when we were younger. We can't run as fast. Our hearts are not as strong. We're slowly wearing out.

But that doesn't mean we have to die of sickness or disease. Our bodies can simply wear out completely, and when we do, our spirits will leave our bodies when God calls us home to heaven. Many believers have died like that. Why not you?