

STATEMENT: DH018

HEALING: DOES GOD ALWAYS HEAL?

by Elliot Miller

Evangelism is essential to the Christian faith and life. For this reason it is rightfully emphasized in many of our best churches. However, once an individual is converted, as he faces the question of what to do with the rest of his life on earth, what priorities he should have now that Christ is Lord of his life, it becomes obvious that there is more involved in Christian service than proclaiming to others the salvation we ourselves have experienced. We begin to see that God has a ministry for each of us within His Church. Paul, writing to the Ephesians, puts the thrust of this ministry into proper perspective:

And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him, Who is the head, even Christ, from Whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love. *Ephesians 4:11-16*

Paul here sets before us a lofty goal for the Church across the face of the earth, and for this goal to be realized mutual recognition of the goal, and cooperation toward it, is necessary. Notice that Paul places the emphasis upon unity, and knowledge of the Son of God. It thus becomes apparent that the enemy would seek to circulate doctrines throughout the Body of Christ that would disrupt that unity, and distract from knowledge of Christ. For this reason Paul warns against being "carried about by every wind of doctrine", and associates this with immaturity.

The 1970s have witnessed several "winds of doctrine" circulating through the Church, each unfounded in Scripture, each appealing to the carnality of man, rather than the spirit, and each in due turn creating such division among the Body of Christ that the "name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles" through the publicity drawn by these divisions. To name a few, the turn of the decade saw controversy raging over the doctrine of the "manifested sons of God." Hot on the tail of this was an even greater controversy over whether or not a Christian can be demon possessed. By the mid-seventies this issue became old, and the carnal need of always "telling or hearing something new" (Acts 17:21) became for awhile satisfied by the controversial "shepherding movement." The wind of that doctrine having blown through, the late seventies have been consumed with old doctrine of guaranteed "healing in the atonement." Again, the Church's attention has been effectively diverted from growing up "in all aspects into Him, Who is the Head."

We begin this analysis of so called "healing in the atonement" with the foregoing thoughts because we feel that this perspective is badly needed by the Church today. We do not desire to engage in endless controversy, but present the following because the questions raised by certain current healing teaching have not yet been effectively answered, and Scripture instructs us "to exhort in sound of doctrine and

refute those who contradict" (Titus 1:9). We do want to make it clear at the outset that we consider the people who are propagating this doctrine brethren, that we do not consider this to be a point of separation of fellowship, and that we are not attempting to imply that the ministries of those who are promoting "healing in the atonement" are necessarily without fruit in other areas. God blesses the preaching of the gospel. We will begin our study of healing by examining the Scriptures cited in an attempt to prove that the atonement "guarantees" healing.

And He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed. *1 Peter 2:24*

But He was pierced 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. *Isaiah 53:5*

It seems to us that one who needs to conceive of Jesus bearing all the cancer and leprosy in the world in order to understand the extent of His agony has an inadequate appreciation of the infinite weight and horror that was involved in Christ's taking upon Himself the sins of the world. The concept of a dual work on the cross, Christ's bearing our sins and sickness, is a serious misapplication of Scripture. Sickness is only one of the many ultimate effects of man's sin. Jesus took the cause of all of our sufferings, sin, upon Himself at the cross in order to rid us ultimately of all of its effects. It is illogical to affirm that for any or all of the effects to be abolished it would be necessary for Him to bear any *one* of the effects (such as sickness) along with the cause.

By dealing with the cause (sin) He sufficiently dealt with all of its effects. Jesus took care of the problem of sickness by bearing our sins on the tree. It was not necessary for Him to bear our sicknesses for us to be healed.

We would never dispute that we are healed by Jesus' stripes. But is the world "heal" (Hebrew "*raphah*") referring specifically to physical healing? A study of its usage in the Old Testament reveals that quite often it is not used to connote physical healing at all. In many cases it was used to imply spiritual healing (e.g.: Jeremiah 3:22 — "Return, O faithless ones, I will heal (*raphah*) your faithlessness", and Psalm 107:20 — "He sent His Word and healed them, and delivered them from their destructions").

When we study the context of Isaiah 53 we discover that we could not have a more *spiritual* theme. This is the great prophetic passage dealing with Christ's intercessory work between God and man. And when we examine the context of 1 Peter 2:24 we see that Peter quoted Isaiah, not in reference to physical healing, but spiritual — "And He himself bore our sins (not sickness) in His body on the cross, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed." Certainly it is safe to say that the healing Christ brought for us extends from the spiritual over into the emotional, mental, and physical planes, but as we will later consider more deeply, the actualizing of this healing will not be fully realized until the resurrection, and thus there is no absolute guarantee of healing now. Healing is therefore a *benefit* of the atonement, *never* an irrevocable gift.

And when evening had come, they brought to Him many who were demon-possessed, and He cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all who were ill in order that what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled, saying, 'He Himself took our infirmities, and carried away our diseases.' *Matthew 8:16,17*

This is the second major passage used to support the "healing in the atonement" teaching. Since Matthew is quoting Isaiah 53, which, as we have just seen, deals with the atonement quite explicitly, and he applies the text to physical healing and deliverance, many feel that this is irrefutable proof that healing is guaranteed in the atonement. However, such thinking overlooks one extremely significant point. Matthew tells us that this passage of Isaiah is fulfilled right there in the healing ministry of Jesus, *before* the atonement ever took place.

When we examine Isaiah 53, we see that while the atonement is the central theme, the entire life and ministry of Jesus is considered, extending even beyond the Second Coming — “For He grew up before Him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of parched ground; He has no stately form or majesty that we should look upon Him, nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him.” (verse 2) — “Therefore I will allot Him a portion with the great, and He will divide the booty with the strong; because He poured out Himself to death” (verse 12). The point of verse 4 is that even though the people of Israel had seen Jesus going about their land healing people of their diseases, they still considered His execution to be a judgment against Him from God: “Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.”

That “He Himself took our infirmities and carried away our diseases” is referring to action taken by Jesus in His healing ministry, and not to a passive receiving of diseases and infirmities on the cross, is supported by the Greek text; took—Greek *lambano* = take, take away, remove; carried away—Greek *bastazo* = take up, carry, bear, carry away, remove (Arndt-Ginrich, *A Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament*). Thus it is clear that while Isaiah 53:4 does refer to physical healing, its fulfillment was in the healing ministry of Jesus, as noted by Matthew, and *not* on the cross, and therefore it offers no guarantee of healing to us today.

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us — for it is written; cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree. *Galatians 3:13*

By comparing Galatians 3:13 with Deuteronomy 21:23, “He who is hanged (on a tree) is accursed of God,” and Deuteronomy 28:15-68, which details the curses that would come upon Israel for disobedience (including various diseases) the argument is drawn that Christ bore our diseases on the cross. However, the analogy does not follow. There is no basis to identify the “curse of the law” with the curses of Deuteronomy 28. The “curse of the law” is directly related to the issue of justification, which is easily discovered by studying Galatians 3 in context.

For as many as are of the works of the Law are under a curse; for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who does not abide by all things written in the book of the law, to perform them.’ Now that no one is justified by the Law before God is evident; for ‘The righteous man shall live by faith.’ However, the Law is not of faith; on the contrary, ‘He who practices them shall live by them.’ Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us — for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree.’ *Galatians 3:10–13*

The serious Bible student can immediately discern that the curse being referred to is the curse of damnation due to Jew and Gentile for their failure to keep the Law of God. The curses in Deuteronomy 28 on the other hand, were temporal curses that would be extended to the Jews under Jehovah’s Theocratic Kingdom in the land of Israel if they were disobedient. The absurdity of saying that Jesus bore these curses on the cross become apparent when we consider the nature of some of the curses (e.g.: mildew (verse 22), drought (verse 23), the violation of one’s wife by another man (verse 30), cannibalism (verse 53), etc.).

Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go to the Father. *John 14:12*

Using this verse in John as a basis, proponents of the belief that it is always God’s will to heal argue that Jesus healed all that were sick, and since He said we would do greater, not lesser works than He, if we have the faith we should expect everyone we pray for to be healed also. While it must be acknowledged that this argument sounds reasonable, there are certain inescapable flaws in it.

First, exactly what Jesus meant by “greater works” has been variously interpreted by many good scholars. If Jesus were referring only to physical miracle and healings, what “greater works” possibly

could be done than those Jesus did (e.g., what could be a greater physical sign than raising the dead?). It would seem that any “greater” work would have to be predominately of a spiritual kind. Thus it is the opinion of many scholars that Jesus was anticipating the disciples enactment of the Great Commission through which by the preaching of the gospel men and women would be saved, and the Kingdom of God established on earth through the Church.

Jesus couldn’t have been referring only to physical healing when He made this statement, otherwise He would be guilty of false prophesying. The simple fact is that the healing ministry of Jesus has *never* been reduplicated in history, even by the Apostles (we shall see examples later). This fact is illustrated again and again even in the ministries of those who preach “healing in the atonement.” Many for whom they pray are not healed. We see from this that the healing ministry of Jesus was of a different order than that of the Church, to establish a unique purpose; the authenticity of His claim to be the Messiah.

However, even Jesus did not heal everyone. In John 5 we read that by the pool Bethesda Jesus found “a multitude of those who were sick, blind, lame, and withered” (verse 3). Yet, after selecting only one man Jesus “slipped away while there was a crowd in that place” (verse 13). He *could* have healed everyone, but as in John 9 He *chose* to heal only one and for the glory of God.

For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself, if he does not judge the body rightly. For this reason many among you are weak and sick and a number sleep. *1 Corinthians 11:29,30*

From this passage of Scripture it is argued that sickness within the body of Christ is the unnecessary result of believers not “discerning the body rightly”, i.e., not recognizing that their healing is guaranteed because Jesus took their sicknesses upon His body at the cross. In the same issue of *Jesus the Healer* that we previously cited, page 6, we read: “The body of Christ ought to be the strongest bunch of people in the world, but many are sickly and dying, they’re not discerning the Lord’s body.” This is perhaps the most obviously weak argument for “healing in the atonement.” As Dr. Walter Martin put it “A text out of context proves nothing except a paucity of knowledge where the Bible is concerned, and advocates of unlimited divine healing are oftentimes guilty of this practice.” An examination, in context, of 1 Corinthians 11 reveals that judging the body rightly has nothing to do with the concept of “healing in the atonement.” Paul is not promising us healing from the sicknesses that we already have, but warning us that if we do not first examine ourselves before participating in the Lord’s supper (verse 28), if we do not soberly recognize the relationship between the bread and wine and the body and blood of our Lord (verses 27, 29), we will be partaking in an unworthy manner, being “guilty of the body and blood of the Lord” (verse 27), and thus be in danger of being judged by God with sickness and even death (verses 30-32).

Having considered the Scriptures most often used to support “healing in the atonement,” let us now seek to arrive at a more biblical understanding of the relationship between the atonement and physical health. The Bible teaches that, although Christ’s work on our behalf is finished, the total effect of our redemption is not yet complete. In Romans 8:30 we find that the redemptive work of God on our behalf includes predestination, calling, justification, and glorification. The first three have already happened us, but the fourth, while assured, has not yet taken place. That is why we read in the same chapter: “And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the *redemption of our body*. For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one hope for what he sees?” (verse 23, 24). Here Paul explains in very clear terms that the physical aspect of our redemption (glorification of our bodies, Philippians 3:21) is our great hope; something in the future that has not taken place yet. Thus, while Christ did buy perfect health for us at the cross by dying for our sins, it will not go into effect until the glorification of our bodies, and cannot be claimed now.

That perfect health is not intended for us at this time should be obvious by the fact that all believers (including those who “claim their healing”) grow old and die. And how do we die, if it happens consistently? Is it by sickness, again itself being a form of disease? Thus, God has not ordained that sickness be totally removed from our experience yet, but it is a part of our hope that one day it permanently will: “And He shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there shall no longer be any death; there shall be no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away” (Revelation 21:4). Those who teach that it is always God’s will to heal also advocate the doctrine that it is always God’s will for us to be prosperous; and little wonder, for the same sentiment is behind both. It is a sentiment that is not patient to wait for the day described in Revelation 21:4 above, that is unwilling to face the full extent of the cross that God has called us to during the brief span of our days here. It cannot quite accept the fact that God has called us to many sufferings for a season.

Yet Scripture emphatically teaches that suffering is a central part of God’s plan and way of working with us here and now. The following are only a small sampling of what could be cited to prove this point:

John 16:33: In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world.

Romans 8:17: If indeed we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with Him.

2 Corinthians 1:5: For just as the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance, so also our comfort is abundant through Christ.

2 Corinthians 4:8–10: We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed. Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body.

Philippians 1:29: For to you it has been granted for Christ’s sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake.

James 5:10: As an example, brethren, of suffering and patience, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.

If the prophets are set forth as examples to us, it must mean that we are meant to follow in their footsteps. One wonders what these men would have thought of a doctrine that it is always God’s will for His people to prosper physically, and it is their own fault if they do not, especially when one reads Hebrews 11: 35–38:

“ . . . others were tortured, not accepting their release, in order that they might obtain a better resurrection; and others experienced mockings and scourgings, yes, also chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were put to death with the sword; they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, ill treated (men of whom the world was not worthy), wandering in desert and mountains and caves and holes in the ground.”

These men who are set before us as examples hardly illustrate the current concept of spirituality which is measured by one’s wardrobe and automobiles.

This is not to deny that God often does prosper His children. Paul exemplified a well-balanced perspective when he wrote: “I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need” (Philippians 4:12).

When the Scriptural basis for “healing in the atonement” is shown to be faulty, its advocates often fall back upon the sentiment that it is inconceivable for our Father in heaven to ever will that His children be sick. To this we must counter, why would He never will us to be sick, except to spare us from suffering? But we’ve just seen clearly that it is His will that we suffer in many ways during this life. Our suffering is inextricably connected to our mortal bodies. As Paul said in 2 Corinthians 4:10, we are always bearing about in our bodies the dying of the Lord Jesus. All diseases find their completion in death, and yet God has not removed physical death from the experience of His children. It is absurd and without basis to suppose that the same God Who ordained that we suffer for a time in these degenerating, death bound bodies would at the same time ordain that we have perfect health. It would seem obvious that if God wanted us to have perfect health now He’d give us the proper mode to express it; a glorified, immortal body.

Job said: “Man, that is born of woman, is of few days and full of trouble” (Job 14:1). This truth holds for both believer and nonbeliever, yet some seek to escape the many woes of the fallen world that exist all around us by denying their existence. In the non-Christian world this has taken form in the “mind science” movement (including Christian Science, Religious Science, and Unity School of Christianity). It is interesting, if not disturbing, to note that the three prongs of the “mind science” movement are now the three central points of a movement within orthodoxy; these being (1) the denial of sickness, (2) belief that it is always God’s will that we prosper, and (3) inflexible belief that through the power of the spoken word one creates this own experience, either positive or negative. Indeed, those Christians who have lived among followers of the “mind sciences” (Christian Science, Unity, Science of Mind, Religious Science, etc.,) become the most uneasy when confronted with Christians who will never speak of anything that isn’t “positive”, and who refuse to acknowledge the obvious existence of their own ailments, offering the same explanation one often hears from mind science cultists: “I’ve been healed. What you see are only the symptoms lingering on.” No one has yet offered a satisfactory explanation as to what good it does to be “healed” of a cold if the symptoms remain! It becomes clear that because such people refuse to acknowledge reality they begin to live in a world of unreality, and they wonder why their beliefs don’t seem to work.

Those who deny that it could ever be God’s will for us to be sick insist also that Satan is always the author of sickness. It is true that we need to be discerning about sickness, for Satan could be its source (Luke 13:16). However, it is unbiblical to say that God Himself has never sent sickness upon people. Again, just a few examples:

Exodus 4:11: And the LORD said to him, ‘Who has made man’s mouth; Or Who makes him dumb or deaf, or seeing or blind? Is it not I, the LORD?’

2 Kings 15:5: And the Lord struck the King, so that he was a leper to the day of his death.

Luke 1:19-20: And the angel answered and said to him, ‘I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God; and I have been sent to speak to you, and to bring you this good news. And behold, you shall be silent and unable to speak until the day when these things take place, because you did not believe my words.’

As it turns out, there are quite a few more instances in Scripture where God is identified as the source of a physical affliction than there are instances of Satan being so identified. Why would God ever send sickness upon His own? This question we will bring before our consideration now.

Our key point of difference with Kenneth Hagin, Ken Copeland, Fred Price, and the others in this “guaranteed healing” movement, is that we are convinced from our study of Scripture that healing is not simply a mechanical process of the believer repenting (if necessary), believing, and receiving, which if we’re not healed makes it undoubtedly our responsibility. There’s also an element of the sovereignty of God in all this. As John says: “If we ask anything according to His will, He hears us” (I John 5:4). It is not

always God's will to heal us because at times He has a positive purpose in affliction. God allowed affliction to come upon Job for the purpose of proving the genuineness of Job's commitment to Him (Job 1:6 – 2:10). Some argue that while God will bring affliction upon us for a positive purpose, physical disease is not included among the ways in which He deals with His children, except in judgment. However, God Himself stated that Job did nothing to deserve the trials that came upon Him (chapter 2, verse 3), and yet Job's most severe affliction was a physical disorder: "sore boils from the sole of his feet to the crown of his head" (chapter 2, verse 7). It may be countered that this incident was in the Old Testament, before the atonement guaranteed perfect health for all. However, it appears the Apostle James did not see things in this light. He set forth God's dealings with Job, and Job's endurance through them, as a pattern and example for New Testament believers (James 5:10, 11).

Frederick K.C. Price weakly argues: "You see, Satan tried to get God to pull the hedge down. Now let's read verse 12, 'And the Lord said unto Satan, "Behold, (look-see) all that he hath is in thy power."

"Satan didn't even know that the hedge was down. JOB HAD PULLED IT DOWN."¹ Price contends that it was not God's will for Job to be afflicted, and in fact He had nothing to do with it. God, respecting Job's free will, allowed Satan to attack Job when Job, through his own choice and fault, "pulled the hedge down." The shallowness of this view becomes more apparent when one more closely studies the verse in question (chapter 1, verse 12), If by saying "Behold, all that he has is in your power," God was merely observing that Job had made himself vulnerable, why would He go on to say: "Only do not put forth your hand on him"? It is clear that God was giving Satan permission to attack Job, because such action coincided with His own purposes, but yet He set definite limits as to how far Satan could go.

Price states: "The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away' is not a true statement. God didn't do that to Job. Satan did it."² While no one would argue over Satan's instrumentality in the calamities that befell Job, yet God Himself takes the ultimate responsibility: "And he still holds fast his integrity, although you incited Me against him, to ruin him without a cause" (chapter 2, verse 3).

For any who still doubts that the Lord had a hand in Job's afflictions, the issue should be made clear by Job 42:11, where the inspired author (not Satan, nor an erring human) says concerning Job: "And they consoled him and comforted him for all the evil that *the LORD had brought on him.*" Thus we see that for a constructive purpose God brought or permitted physical affliction to come upon Job.

Another case in point is that God allowed affliction to come upon Paul, *not answering his prayer for deliverance*, so that Paul would not become too high minded as a result of the visions and revelations he had (2 Corinthians 12:7 -10). Price's response to this passage, which is typical of the movement, is: "Now that was Paul's estimate of the situation. God didn't tell him that He gave him that to keep him humble, but Paul was a man who was prone to brag and boast. Therefore he took it upon himself to believe all of this that was coming upon him was going to help him to stay humble."³ In this statement we find a disturbing lack of concern for the authority of the inspired authors of Scripture. There is nothing within the context of this passage to qualify this statement of Paul's as being merely his own, possibly errant, opinion. Paul makes the statement with the full authority that, by virtue of inspiration, was rightfully his. If by our human rationalizing that Paul was one prone to boast (which finds no basis in Scripture), we have the freedom to dismiss his declaration in verse 7 as being misguided, then we may also dismiss anything else he said that does not fit into our doctrinal scheme. Once this happens, our basis of trust in the Scripture become effectively undermined. However, we find that Paul derived this estimate of the situation from the Lord's answer to his prayers: "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is perfected in weakness" (verse 9).

Paul learned to be content with this abiding affliction, for the Lord taught him that at the very moment that he was weakest in himself, the power of the Lord would be most evident through him, bringing glory to God rather than Paul (verses 9, 10). This lesson desperately needs to be learned by

many who are being influenced by the false unlimited healing/prosperity doctrines today.

Affliction can certainly be a tool for good in God's hands. In Psalm 119 we read the following:

Verse 67: Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep Thy word.

Verse 91: It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I may learn Thy statutes

Verse 75: I know, O LORD, that Thy judgments are righteous, and that in faithfulness Thou hast afflicted me.

There have been times, even in the Bible, when God's people have had to accept and live with illness. Rather than telling him to "claim his healing," Paul gave medicinal advice to Timothy: "No longer drink water exclusively, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and *frequent ailments*" (1 Timothy 5:23).

This verse should have special significance to all who think the Bible supports some of the extreme teachings of our day. Where is Paul's "word of faith" and "positive confession"? By giving medicinal advice, and telling Timothy he has frequent ailments (thus acknowledging their ongoing existence rather than "speaking healing into being") Paul is completely out of line with the current wind of doctrine.* As Kenneth Hagin puts it "People confess their lack and build up a sense of lack in themselves. As they confess these things, these lacks gain ascendancy in their lives."⁴

This is not to deny that there is some psychological truth in what Hagin is saying. Unfortunately, however, many have tried to alter this into an unfailing spiritual principle that is so exacting that one must always be painfully conscious of every word he says, for fear he speak something destructive into being. As one who has done a considerable amount of research on the occult, I can see that such a belief in the creative power of human words is much more akin to occultic philosophy than biblical theology.

Paul also wrote: "Trophimus I left sick at Miletus" (2 Timothy 4:20*) In both cases we find that sickness had an effect upon the ministry of the apostles, even as many have to make adjustments in their ministries because of it today.

*Epaphroditus, too, was deathly sick in the presence of Paul and Paul implies no expectation of his healing, but rather states that his recovery was due to the mercy (not obligation) of God (Phil., 2:25 -27).

Some will no doubt argue that Paul was unable to obtain healing for Trophimus because of Trophimus's lack of faith, as it is held by some that one must have faith for his own healing, and the great faith of another cannot overcome one's own belief. However, the same people are often surprised to find out that the Apostle Paul himself had to endure an illness:

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. Where then is that sense of blessing you had: For I bear you witness, that if possible you would have plucked out your eyes and given them to me. *Galatians 4:13-15*

Paul's reference to his eyes is a clear indication that his illness had something to do with his eyes, and the expressed concern and sympathy of the Galatians indicates that he had not been healed. Perhaps when Paul says that they did not despise or loathe his bodily condition he means that they did not allow an unhealed illness to prevent them from receiving the authority and authenticity of his apostleship.

Unfortunately, the only conceivable answer to the above verses that could be given in defense of "healing in the atonement" is given; even though it's a low blow to the Apostle Paul. It is suggested that Paul in the instance cited above was walking in unbelief. To this we can only respond that Paul is set forth as the

example for all believers to follow (1 Corinthians 11:1). If Paul was unable to attain the level of faith required to live according to the current teaching, then what hope do we have? Jesus tells us that a disciple is not above his teacher, but it is enough for him to become as his teacher (Matthew 10:24, 25). If Paul, our example, could not pass the test of faith, then there is something wrong with God's program. We find it easier to believe that there is something wrong with the doctrine that it is always God's will to heal.

We do not derive any pleasure out of going to this length to refute the beliefs of brothers and sisters in the Lord. In fact, we put off writing this for as long as we could. However, because by the very nature of our ministry we are able to keep a fairly accurate pulse reading on what is going on among the Body of Christ nationwide, we have been made disturbingly aware of a number of problems that predictably arise wherever the healing/prosperity/confession movement spreads. It finally reached a point where we no longer had any choice but to do something about it.

One very real problem is that the emphasis that is placed upon Christ bearing our diseases at Calvary undermines the biblical emphasis upon Christ bearing our sins. Whereas the preaching that we read in the New Testament is always centered around Christ's death or our sins and resurrection for our justification (Romans 4:25), one finds that the preaching, and even the casual conversation of this current movement is *dominated* by the subject of bodily healing. Followers of the movement display practically an obsession with the topics of healing and "confession," as though these subjects *were* the gospel and there's little else in the Bible worthy of much discussion. Even if these doctrines *were* Biblical many who hold them would be guilty of being extremely unbalanced, not giving enough attention to many important aspects of Christian faith and living.

Another unfortunate result of the preaching of these doctrines is that people lose their victory in Christ, and become shaken in their faith, because someone gave them a "biblical" formula for success, and it didn't work. Because people are always looking for a quick and easy way out of their problems, rather than the slow and sometimes painful process of sanctification by the Holy Spirit, new "principles" or "methods" for victory or healing always find their takers. Such movements begin when certain people, usually untrained in Scripture, discover methods of handling their own problems which seem to work for them, search through the Scriptures finding "proof texts" for their own theories, and proceed to build a doctrine around them. Because the doctrines are not fully biblical, and because they are incapable of taking into consideration the vast differences between personalities, and the complex capture of human problems, in the long run they do not work for the majority of the people who try them. The only ones who really have any "success" with the methods are those whose personalities and problems are very much like those who developed the methods. For many of the rest there is great disillusionment, because they do not have the discernment to recognize that it was human methodology, and not the Bible, which failed. In the words of Dr. Martin: "We see then, the utter folly of trying to give a simple solution to so complex a problem as that of suffering the disease."

Probably the main reason we are concerned about the doctrine that it is always God's will to heal is because we have met too many people, and received too many letters, such as the one from which I now quote:

"I am very interested in your views on Kenneth Hagin and Copeland. I have a blood condition called Hypoglycemia. I have experienced an extreme case of it. I have often wondered why I wasn't healed instantly and supernaturally. This seems to sometimes make me feel as though I haven't repented of sin, or committed an awful sin, or even that I didn't (have) any faith or I have even doubted my salvation."

To have the audacity to tell one of God's children that if they are sick it is because of their own sin or lack of faith is to abound in presumptuousness, and be bankrupt in compassion. I've known of more than one person who demonstrated this insensitivity until God dealt with him by laying him flat on his back, and

when none of his “principles” would work he suddenly developed an empathy of those he had once judged. We never see it portrayed in Scripture that perfect health is the sign of spirituality. To set up such a standard is to divert God’s people from the spiritual standard that Scripture does set forth (such as in 2 Peter 1:5 -9).

Ken Copeland and others teach that we must resist sickness in the same way that we resist sin. This also disturbs us. We’ve seen too many good Christians striving to “believe” their sickness away, and finally collapsing into self-condemnation and utter discouragement over their “lack of faith” or the “sin” in their lives. Most likely, there was a divine purpose for that sickness in their lives, and it would have been a lot easier on them, after they prayed in faith and nothing happened, to have ceased striving and simply rested in the comforting sovereignty of God.

After being forced to go to this extent to prove that it is not always God’s will to heal, we do want to close on the positive note that we do believe that divine healing is for today. We see no Scriptural basis to doubt that we can expect to see healing take place here and now. Healing should be a regular part of the life of all churches (James 5:14 – 16). We also believe that faith plays an important part in receiving healing, and that the Church has much to learn about faith, and how to more effectively receive it for healing. We feel that many who saw this need embraced the “healing in the atonement” doctrine because it seemed to offer a more solid basis for faith. Unfortunately, however, this basis is not the Scriptural basis, and therefore it has created more problems than was hoped it would solve.

If we have no guarantee that it is always God’s will to heal, how then can we pray in faith for healing? In the same way that we pray in faith for other things which Scripture does not specifically promise us. We may pray that the Lord would give us a job at a certain company, but we cannot know for sure if it’s His will that we work there unless He personally assures us of it through His Spirit. Faith is a supernatural gift (Ephesians 2:8); it begins with God. Thus when it is God’s will for a healing (which I believe it often would be), if we are open and receptive to Him, a supernatural assurance from Him will come upon us. The Body of Christ needs to learn to be more receptive and responsive to the prompting of the Holy Spirit working in our faith, so that through a sovereign act of God’s healing will multiply in the land, and the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ will be glorified. — Elliot Miller (© CRI, 1979)

NOTES

- 1 Price, Frederick K. C., *Is Healing For All?* Harrison House, Tulsa, Oklahoma, 1976, 9.
- 2 Ibid., 10.
- 3 Ibid., 12.
- 4 Hagin, Kenneth E., *Right and Wrong Thinking*, Kenneth Hagin Evangelistic Association, Tulsa, Oklahoma, 24.