

Sects and cults - Healing in the atonement

"When evening came, many who were demon-possessed were brought to him, and he drove out the spirits with a word and healed all the sick. This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah: 'He took up our infirmities and carried our diseases'" [Matt. 8:16 f.; cf. Isaiah 53:4f.]

Is physical healing of the body a vital part of Christ's atoning work on the cross? Some say it is. Faith healers claim that a Christian should never be ill, that sickness is the result of lack of faith, and that the atonement has dealt with the Fall in every respect. The Bible teaches divine healing for our time.

P.C. Nelson in his tract Wilt Thou Be Made Whole? or Is Divine Healing for Us Today? writes: "If God indeed allows sickness to afflict the human family because of sin, and Christ died to save us from the guilt, power, pollution, and penalties of sin, why should it be thought fanatical to believe that provision for our bodily healing was made in the atonement? .. We have his specific statements to prove that Christ suffered to free us from sickness as we have to show that He died to save our souls from sin and from its consequences. Isaiah 53 is the outstanding passage on the atonement."

Faith healer Rev. Don E. Gossett teaches that we are healed with the stripes of our Lord. And he says: "The finished work of Christ gives us provision for healing and our faith produces the full benefit to our lives." If Nelson and Gossett, and like-minded, teach that healing is in the atonement, why should Christians ever become sick? Illness would be banned from the Christian's experience.

What do faith healers do with death? If faith healing is true, I like to raise the question: "Why do Christians ever die?" Faith healers, if they are consequent in their beliefs, cannot account for the physical death of Christians. If Christ atoned for the body and the effects of the atonement are fully and totally applied now, there should be perfect health, and death should no longer be possible for the Christian.

What are the benefits of Christ's atoning death as prophesied in Isaiah 53:4f.? The body is important. Just as souls are not saved, but people, so the Bible applies the concept of health to the soul as well as the body. Christ's atonement did redeem the whole person. To limit Isaiah's prophecy to the healing of the soul only, is doing injustice to the Biblical view of man.

Faith healers are right in including the body in Christ's atoning work. But they do err in failing to emphasize that bodily healing in the full and final sense awaits the day of the resurrection and the total transformation of the self.

In this present age, God never heals so finally that Christians will escape physical death. Faith healers are wrong in implying that only lack of faith is what prevents God from healing one's afflictions in this life. Just as the soul is not in this life perfectly

delivered from the power of sin (cf. Rom..7:7ff), so neither the body is perfectly delivered from the power of disease in this life. The world is still groaning and moaning while we are awaiting the redemption of the body (Rom. 8:22). Even the apostles in Jesus days in their own experiences knew that salvation from sin and its consequences offers no personal immunity from sickness and physical sufferings. Spirit filled Christians today do have to cope with physical infirmity or even deformity all their lives. The body, although redeemed, remains subject to sin, infirmity, sickness, pain and death. Our physical sicknesses will not be entirely removed until the redeemed are glorified at the resurrection. The body is not fully and finally redeemed in this life. We are still living in the realm of hope. The best. is yet to come.

T.L. Osborn believes that preaching the gospel of healing for soul and body is more effective than the preaching of forgiveness to sinners. More souls have been saved through his healing ministry in one night, he claims, than during the entire seven years he preached forgiveness. Osborn, and other sensational faith healers like him, miss the mark. Not our physical health at all cost is the basis of gospel proclamation, but reconciliation with God. "God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ not counting :men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation" (2 Cor. 5:19).

The most important problem we are facing is not the health of our bodies, but the forgiveness of our sins. The great proclamation of the Church is not the Gospel of health for the body. But it is the proclamation of forgiveness for unworthy sinners through Jesus Christ.

Johan D. Tangelder
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