

BIBLICAL HEALING

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1. HEALING AND ATONEMENT

God is omnipotent, so that he has the ability to heal the sick. He is sovereign, so that he has the authority to work miracles whenever he wants, even by the hands and prayers of men. No one can say to him, "What are you doing?" (Job 9:12). This is the baseline. Anyone who disagrees with these divine attributes and their implications for the ministry of miracles is a heretic, an enemy of God. Before we debate his cessationism, we should discuss his excommunication.

On the basis of God's attributes, we must conclude that he may heal the sick in any generation and by any person he chooses, and he does not need to obtain permission from the theologians and denominations before he does it. He needs to have sufficient reasons only to satisfy himself, whether or not he discloses these reasons. Nevertheless, God acts in a way that is consistent with what he has revealed in the Bible. Therefore, it would be beneficial to study the biblical foundation for healing.

Physical death began because of Adam's transgression: "Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned" (Romans 5:12). Some sicknesses occur as a result of specific sins. For example, after healing the man who "had been an invalid for thirty-eight years" (John 5:5), Jesus said to him, "See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you" (John 5:14). However, not all sicknesses are the results of specific sins. Jesus and his disciples came across a man who was blind from birth, and the disciples asked, "Who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" (John 9:2). Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned" (v. 3).

When we have limited and probably inaccurate information about a person, we should not assume that we know the reasons for his sickness. There are a number of possible reasons for someone to be sick, and it may not be that he has sinned. In the case of the blind man, Jesus explained, "This happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life" (v. 3). Those who assert the false doctrine that miracles have ceased often suggest that God is glorified in sickness. He is indeed pleased with our faithfulness in suffering, but endurance becomes a sinful excuse when it is founded on unbelief, and God is not deceived. Jesus said that God would be glorified in the miracle of healing. In any case, even if a sickness is the result of a sin that one has committed, James 5:15 says that there is forgiveness and healing for him: "The prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven."

The distinction between God's decrees and God's precepts is essential. God's decrees refer to his decisions as to what he would cause. A decree tells us how something can happen at all. This is our reference point when we talk about metaphysics. God's precepts refer to his definitions as to how men should behave. A precept tells us when something is right or wrong. This is our reference point when we talk about ethics. To illustrate, God's decree was that the Jews would conspire with the Gentiles to murder Jesus, so that was what

happened (Acts 2:22-23, 4:27-28). On the other hand, his precept was that it was sinful to commit murder, perjury, and so on, so that they were guilty for the death of Jesus.

This leads to a distinction between two kinds of causes. Since God is the intelligence that decides that an event should happen and then exercises power to make it happen, he is the actual cause. Since a created object might stand in a perceived relationship between an action and an event that seems to follow it, this object is the apparent cause. From the metaphysical or ontological perspective, an apparent cause is only an effect that God causes and arranges to stand in relationship to a subsequent effect that God also causes. Nevertheless, from the moral or ethical perspective, an apparent cause is the one considered.¹

Just because the murder of Christ was ordained and caused by God did not render the culprits innocent, since their minds and members indeed went through the motions of unbelief, hatred, perjury, murder, and so on. Regardless of the metaphysical or ontological cause, they were guilty of sin because moral responsibility has to do with men's actions in relation to God's precepts, not God's decrees. Since God's precepts define unbelief, murder, and so on as sinful, they were supposed to resist these things. Therefore, it follows that God's decrees could cause certain things that God's precepts instruct us to resist. There is no contradiction, because the two refer to different categories – one has to do with metaphysics, as in what would happen, and the other has to do with ethics, as in how we should behave.

This has a direct relevance to healing, because it explains how God can be sovereign over all things, including sickness, and at the same time commands us to have faith to receive and minister healing. The Christian who believes in healing and contends for miracles does this in obedience to God's precepts, so that he can at the same time affirm God's sovereignty, that all things occur according to God's decrees. On the other hand, no one can use God's sovereignty as an excuse for unbelief. If God's precepts instruct us to believe that Jesus is our healer and to expect miracles of healing, then to use "God's will" to undermine this is an act of rebellion. The attempt to hide this under religious verbiage adds to his guilt.

God is the actual cause of all things, and he exercises direct control over the existence and operation of all things. From the metaphysical or ontological perspective, God must be the actual cause of all instances of sickness, because he is the actual cause of all events. Unless God decrees and causes something to happen, nothing can happen at all, whether good or evil. Then, the Bible indicates that Satan is sometimes the apparent cause of sickness. As Acts 10:38 says, "God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him."

Since Satan is not God and does not have God's attributes of self-existence and omnipotence, he can function only as God sustains, commands, and drives him. Although God determines all things, he sometimes uses means to accomplish what he wants. Just as

¹ See Vincent Cheung, *Systematic Theology* and *The Author of Sin*.

he could send a "lying spirit" to "entice Ahab king of Israel into attacking Ramoth Gilead and going to his death there" (2 Chronicles 18:19-22), he could send Satan to inflict Job with calamities and sicknesses. As Job 12:16 says, "To him belong strength and victory; both deceived and deceiver are his."

The Bible teaches that Satan is a cause of sickness, and it teaches that God is the one who heals. For this reason, Christians who obey God in praying for miracles of healing often deny that he would inflict people with sickness. This is also the result of a failure to distinguish between God's decrees and God's precepts, or actual causes and apparent causes. The Bible insists that God can do anything he wishes, whether it is to afflict or to restore, and whether it is to strike dead or to make alive. It is futile to claim that God has nothing to do with sickness, and attribute all instances to other factors such as sin and the devil, because even sin and the devil are under God's direct control.

God said to Israel, "If you listen carefully to the voice of the LORD your God and do what is right in his eyes, if you pay attention to his commands and keep all his decrees, I will not bring on you any of the diseases I brought on the Egyptians, for I am the LORD, who heals you" (Exodus 15:26). Later, he said, "If you do not carefully follow all the words of this law, which are written in this book, and do not revere this glorious and awesome name – the LORD your God – the LORD will send fearful plagues on you and your descendants, harsh and prolonged disasters, and severe and lingering illnesses. He will bring upon you all the diseases of Egypt that you dreaded, and they will cling to you. The LORD will also bring on you every kind of sickness and disaster not recorded in this Book of the Law, until you are destroyed" (Deuteronomy 28:58-61). God was the one who sent the plagues against Egypt, and he was the one who made them sick. This same God could send sickness against Israel, or he could send them healing.

The doctrine of divine sovereignty does not diminish the doctrine of miracle healing. In fact, it was in the context of thanking God for his generosity that Hannah declared his control over both death and life, and both poverty and wealth: "The LORD brings death and makes alive; he brings down to the grave and raises up. The LORD sends poverty and wealth; he humbles and he exalts" (1 Samuel 2:6-7). Does God bring death? Of course he does, but he also brings health. Does God send poverty? Of course he does, but he also sends wealth. Does God make people sick? Of course he does, but he also makes people well. He does all these things according to his plan and his pleasure, and all that he does is by definition wise, just, and good. God is sovereign, but he is sovereignly generous with his power to save and to heal. The doctrine of divine sovereignty should increase our faith for miracle healing.

By sickness, we refer to a biological malfunction or condition that is subnormal relative to the body's original design. Precision is elusive, because after the fall of man, everything about him is subnormal, and even what is considered a healthy body is not in the condition of the normal human body before sin was introduced. This suggests that total healing will come only after this life, when God will complete the salvation that he has started in us.

Therefore, biblical healing refers to the restoration of the body by God's power, but it does not necessarily bring the body to perfection or to its maximum potential in every way. Rather, it is usually God's act on the body to correct a specific malfunction or condition. In this sense, all physical healing in this life is relative and incomplete, just as all spiritual healing in his life is relative and incomplete. We possess the promise of complete sanctification, and we start to enjoy its effects in this life, but its full manifestation comes after this life. The same applies to the healing of the body.

God is able and willing to heal any kind of sickness. If the sickness has to do with a chemical imbalance, then God could restore the chemical balance in the body. If the condition has to do with a damaged or missing body part, such as an amputated limb, then whether it happens instantly or gradually, God could restore it by his power. Some sicknesses are psychosomatic, in that the malfunction in the body is a result of the individual's destructive mental state, such as unbelief, guilt, fear, hatred, and so on. In such cases, God might act directly on the body to heal it, and then renew the person's mind over time by biblical teachings. If he wishes, he might also instantly change the persons' thinking. Then, the Bible teaches that some sicknesses are caused by demons, but God is able to expel the spirits and heal the bodies.

As we begin to discuss the relationship between healing and the atonement, we should first review the nature of Christ's atoning work.

Atonement has to do with substitutionary sacrifices for sins. As God said to Israel, "For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life" (Leviticus 17:11). The blood of the animals would make "atonement" for the people's sins. Instead of demanding the deaths of the people, God accepted the deaths of the animals as their substitutes. The animals died in the place of the sinners.

However, the Bible says, "It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins" (Hebrews 10:4). Indeed, it is reasonable to think that the sins committed by men could not be washed away by the blood of lower creatures. The animal sacrifices were symbolic and temporary. God accepted them in anticipation of a perfect sacrifice, which would completely and permanently satisfy divine justice and remove the sins of his people. As Hebrews 10:1-10 explains:

The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming – not the realities themselves. For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship. If it could, would they not have stopped being offered? For the worshipers would have been cleansed once for all, and would no longer have felt guilty for their sins. But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins, because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said: "Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased. Then I said, 'Here I am – it is written about me in the scroll – I have come to do your will, O God.'"

First he said, "Sacrifices and offerings, burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not desire, nor were you pleased with them" (although the law required them to be made). Then he said, "Here I am, I have come to do your will." He sets aside the first to establish the second. And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

It is by the "sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ" that "we have been made holy...once for all." The blood of animals was insufficient to redeem sinners, but the blood of Christ was sufficient to completely and permanently atone for the sins of those God intended to save. The passage continues to explain:

Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God. Since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool, because by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy. (Hebrews 10:11-14)

Therefore, the nature of Christ's atoning work is one of substitution, in which he died so that we may live, and in which "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Corinthians 5:21). God identified the chosen ones with Christ, so that in his death, we died with him, and that in his resurrection, we rose with him (Colossians 2:12-14). Then, God applies Christ's atoning work to his people in their lifetimes by regenerating them and giving them the gift of faith (John 3:7-8; Ephesians 2:8-9).

The Bible teaches that deliverance from damnation is not the only benefit of the atonement, but among many other things, it also offers healing for the body. Matthew 8:16-17 says, "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.'" This applies Isaiah's prophecy about the atonement to the healing miracles of Christ. Thus it is certain that the atonement offers healing for the body, and that this benefit is manifested in miracles of healing, and not in natural remedies. Since verse 16 also mentions the "demon-possessed," this means that verse 17 – the atonement – applies to both those who are afflicted by physical sicknesses and those who are afflicted by demonic powers. Anyone who denies this doctrine makes himself an enemy of the atonement, and holds the blood of Christ in contempt.

From the fact that healing is a benefit included in the atonement, some conclude that complete healing is therefore available to the Christian on demand in this life. Those who oppose this sometimes choose the heretical response of denying that healing is included in the atonement. This is obviously false, since all the benefits of heaven come as a result of the atonement, and if healing is not included in it, it would mean that sickness would continue even in heaven.

Then, others answer that although healing is indeed in the atonement, it does not follow that it is available on demand in this life. As D. A. Carson writes:

It is also argued that because "there is healing in the atonement," as the slogan puts it, every believer has the right to avail himself or herself to the healing benefit secured by the cross. Sadly, noncharismatics have sometimes responded to this by *denying* that there is healing in the atonement – a position that can be defended only by the most strained exegesis.

Of course there is healing in the atonement. In exactly the same sense, the resurrection body is also in the atonement – even though neither charismatic nor noncharismatic argues that any Christian has the right to demand a resurrection body *right now*. The issue is not "what is in the atonement," for surely all Christians would want to say that every blessing that comes to us, now and in the hereafter, ultimately flows from the redemptive work of Christ. The issue, rather, is what blessings we have a right to expect as universally given endowments *right now*, what blessings we may expect *only* hereafter, and what blessings we may partially or occasionally enjoy now and in fullness only in the hereafter.²

According to Carson, to infer from the fact that healing is in the atonement to the conclusion that complete healing is available on demand seems to be "another form of the overrealized eschatology so rampant in the church in Corinth."³

Likewise, Wayne Grudem writes:

All Christians would probably agree that in the atonement Christ has purchased for us not only complete freedom from sin but also complete freedom from physical weakness and infirmity in his work of redemption. And all Christians would also no doubt agree that our full and complete possession of all the benefits that Christ earned for us will not come until Christ returns: it is only "at his coming" (1 Cor. 15:23) that we receive our perfect resurrection bodies. So it

² D. A. Carson, *Showing the Spirit: A Theological Exposition of 1 Corinthians 12-14*; Baker Books, 2000 (original: 1987); p. 175-176.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 176.

is with physical healing and redemption from the physical sickness that came as a result of the curse in Genesis 3: our complete possession of redemption from physical illness will not be ours until Christ returns and we receive resurrection bodies.⁴

Then, he adds, "When people say that complete healing is 'in the atonement,' the statement is true in an ultimate sense, but it really does not tell us anything about when we will receive 'complete healing' (or any part of it)."⁵

Both Carson and Grudem refer to the resurrection body to illustrate that even if a benefit is included in the atonement, it does not automatically tell us when it will be fulfilled in us or how much of it we could receive in this life. However, this example is misleading, because the resurrection body is not something that we can receive by degrees, and the Bible clearly teaches that it is reserved for the next life.

In contrast, healing is something that we can receive by degrees – we can have more or less of it, and we can have it sometimes and not have it sometimes – and the Bible clearly teaches that it is intended for this life and even promises it to faith, just as the salvation and development of the soul is promised to faith. The accusation of "overrealized eschatology" is a simplistic explanation, because the Bible offers healing to faith without clear reservations.

In one instance, Jesus says to a woman, "Your faith has healed you" (Matthew 9:22). Later, he says to two blind men, "According to your faith will it be done to you," and their sight is restored (v. 29-30). In another place, he says to a leper, "Your faith has made you well" (Luke 17:19). There are a number of other cases like these. In fact, Jesus rejects all limits on what faith can do, specifically when it comes to miracles of healing. Just when he is about to heal a boy, he says to the father, "Everything is possible for him who believes" (Mark 9:23).

In Acts 14, while Paul is preaching, a crippled man receives a miracle because he has faith to be healed:

In Lystra there sat a man crippled in his feet, who was lame from birth and had never walked. He listened to Paul as he was speaking. Paul looked directly at him, saw that he had faith to be healed and called out, "Stand up on your feet!" At that, the man jumped up and began to walk. (v. 8-10)

Then, James 5:15 tells us, "The prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven."

Thus God promises healing to faith, and he places no limit on faith. The issue is how this fits with his sovereignty.

⁴ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*; Zondervan Publishing House, 1994; p. 1063.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 1063.

Paul writes, "Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ" (Romans 10:17). This tells us how faith comes – faith comes by hearing the message of Christ – but faith does not always come when the message of Christ is heard. The distinction is crucial. A tree comes by planting seed, but a tree does not always come when a seed is planted (Matthew 13:18-23). In fact, Paul is explaining Israel's unbelief, and he writes that all the people heard the message (Romans 10:18), but it was God who selected those who could believe it (Romans 9:10-24). For this reason, Jesus says, "The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life. Yet there are some of you who do not believe.... This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled him" (John 6:63-65).

Faith is a sovereign gift from God. It cannot be manufactured by man's own will: "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9). Hearing the word of God does not guarantee faith, but it is the usual means by which God grants faith when he wishes to grant it. Jesus is "the author and perfecter of our faith" (Hebrews 12:2), and he has complete control over its origin and progress.

Romans 12:3 mentions "the measure of faith God has given you." God gave you the faith that you have, and a specific measure of it. He does not give everyone the same measure of faith, and he does not grant everyone the same kind of faith. This is why the verse tells us to be aware of our measure of faith, and to function in accordance with it.

There is an account of miracle healing in Acts 3, where Peter and John healed a crippled man in the name of Jesus:

One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer – at three in the afternoon. Now a man crippled from birth was being carried to the temple gate called Beautiful, where he was put every day to beg from those going into the temple courts. When he saw Peter and John about to enter, he asked them for money. Peter looked straight at him, as did John. Then Peter said, "Look at us!" So the man gave them his attention, expecting to get something from them.

Then Peter said, "Silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk." Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man's feet and ankles became strong. He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God. (v. 1-8)

Then, in verse 16, Peter explains the miracle, and says, "By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus' name and *the faith that comes*

through him that has given this complete healing to him, as you can all see." We receive and minister healing by faith, and it is a faith that comes from God.

Therefore, the answer is that just as God is sovereign over all things, including faith for salvation, he is also sovereign over faith for healing. Based on what the Bible teaches, we must insist that healing is indeed available on demand, but it is available to the demand of faith, not the demand of desire. Then, faith itself is under God's control.

God's sovereignty does not condone the unbelief and uncertainty of those who resist the ministry of miracles. When it comes to the salvation of the soul, there are those who use God's sovereignty as an excuse for their lack of faith or lack of interest, and if they are believers, for their lack of zeal in evangelism. We refuse to accept this, but we recall a distinction between God's decrees and God's precepts. Indeed, God's decree is that this one would believe, and that the other would not believe, but his precept to both is for them to believe and preach his message. The decree refers to what God would cause, and the precept refers to how men should behave. The same applies to faith for receiving and ministering healing.

If someone says, "Since faith for salvation is a sovereign gift, I will not come to Christ, but wait for faith. If God wills, he will save me." We would realize that he is making an excuse for his unbelief, uncertainty, and rebellion. We would answer, "Now he commands all people everywhere to repent" (Acts 17:30), and "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (Acts 2:21). Likewise, although God is sovereign over healing as he is sovereign over everything, this is not an excuse for unbelief, uncertainty, and rebellion. We relate to God on the basis of his precepts, not his decrees. He says, "The prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up" (James 5:15), and "Everything is possible for him who believes" (Mark 9:23).

In fact, God's sovereignty does not diminish even the expected instances of healing, but rather increases it. God is sovereign, but he is sovereign according to his nature. He is sovereignly generous, compassionate, mindful of men's suffering, and eager to heal. He is more generous with faith for salvation than we are zealous in preaching about it or skillful in arguing about it. Likewise, he is more generous with faith for healing than we can ask or think. His sovereignty does not reduce the miracles of healing, but is the basis for an abundance of miracles. Since God is sovereign, no theologian, no denomination, no religious tradition, and no heresy of cessationism can stop him from infusing his people with faith for miracles of healing. But woe to those who refuse to approach, and forbid others to enter!

God's sovereignty in the miracles of healing extend to other areas. For example, he often heals non-Christians. Of course, the non-Christians have no faith, although the Christians who pray for them would have faith. Some of these non-Christians would believe in the gospel after they are healed, as the goodness of God moves their hearts and leads them to repentance. However, there are others who would never believe even after they are healed. Since Jesus made atonement only for his own people, these non-Christians who never come to faith are healed not on the basis of the atonement, but by God's sovereign power. And

since they never repent, the miracles of healing become testimonies against them, adding to their final condemnation.

Moreover, God sovereignly endows some Christians with the gift of healing. They will often obtain more regular, complete, and spectacular answers to their prayers for healing. People endowed with the gift may be more effective in ministering healing to those with specific kinds of sicknesses, so that one may find greater success when praying for those with cancer, and another may find greater success when praying for cripples. However, success in one area should not produce a sense of limitation in other areas. God is the one who heals, so whether a Christian thinks he has the gift of healing, or whatever gift of healing he thinks he has, he should pray for people with all kinds of sicknesses, looking to God to stretch forth his hand to heal (Acts 4:30).

2. HEALING AND AUTHORITY

There is an incident in Matthew 8 that illustrates the place of spiritual authority in healing the sick:

When Jesus had entered Capernaum, a centurion came to him, asking for help. "Lord," he said, "my servant lies at home paralyzed and in terrible suffering."

Jesus said to him, "I will go and heal him."

The centurion replied, "Lord, I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. But just say the word, and my servant will be healed. For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, 'Go,' and he goes; and that one, 'Come,' and he comes. I say to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it."

When Jesus heard this, he was astonished and said to those following him, "I tell you the truth, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith. I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

Then Jesus said to the centurion, "Go! It will be done just as you believed it would." And his servant was healed at that very hour. (v. 5-13)

The centurion understands authority in military and social settings. He issues commands to his soldiers and servants, and since he has the right to command them, the soldiers and servants must obey him.

Then, he has a remarkable insight – Jesus has authority over sickness. Although human government could confer authority over soldiers, it can never confer authority over sickness. Yet the centurion realizes that Jesus has this divine authority. He also understands that, like his own natural authority, this supernatural authority could issue commands and compel obedience. Thus all he needs is for Jesus to give the order: "Just say the word, and my servant will be healed." Jesus answers, "I tell you the truth, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith....Go! It will be done just as you believed it would." Faith confesses and believes in the authority of Christ.

This understanding of authority also forms the basis for the Christian's ministry of miracle healing. Men could confer authority on the centurion to perform actions and issue

commands; likewise, Christ is able to confer his authority to his people, so that they could minister healing in his name. For example, Matthew 10 says:

He called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out evil spirits and to heal every disease and sickness....

These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: "...As you go, preach this message: 'The kingdom of heaven is near.' Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received, freely give." (v. 1, 5-8)

Jesus does not limit the ministry of miracles to the twelve, but he sends out many more disciples with a similar commission: "After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go....Heal the sick who are there and tell them, 'The kingdom of God is near you'" (Luke 10:1, 9). They return to report their success, saying, "Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name" (v. 17). The diseases and demons obeyed these disciples because they were ministering in the name of Jesus. In themselves, they did not have authority over diseases and demons, but they were effective because Jesus sent them to preach in his place.

After Jesus rose from the dead and ascended to heaven, the disciples continued to exercise the authority he conferred. For example:

One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer – at three in the afternoon. Now a man crippled from birth was being carried to the temple gate called Beautiful, where he was put every day to beg from those going into the temple courts. When he saw Peter and John about to enter, he asked them for money. Peter looked straight at him, as did John. Then Peter said, "Look at us!" So the man gave them his attention, expecting to get something from them.

Then Peter said, "Silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk." Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man's feet and ankles became strong. He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God. (Acts 3:1-8)

When the people express their astonishment, Peter says, "Men of Israel, why does this surprise you? Why do you stare at us as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk?...By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus' name and the faith that comes through him that has given this complete healing to him, as you can all see" (v. 12, 16).

In ourselves, we cannot heal the sick, and it is not because of our holiness that God heals us and enables us to heal. Healing comes through faith in the name of Jesus, and this faith does not come from ourselves, but it comes from him. Therefore, God receives all the credit when a miracle of healing occurs, because he is always the one who heals, even when he involves us in the process.

The religious leaders of that time were threatened by this faith and power that they did not possess. They portrayed themselves as the elite of spiritual knowledge and authority, but their credentials consisted of only the approval of men. Their lack of divine commission was exposed when God's hand endorsed others instead, even those who did not submit to their system. Their hold on the population began to erode as it became obvious that these disciples who preached the gospel and healed the sick were the ones who had true understanding and authority.

Today's situation is similar. Church leaders, theologians, and other self-anointed defenders of orthodoxy are threatened and embarrassed as God's hand endorses others, even those who have faith to declare the true orthodoxy, one that affirms the continuation of the manifestations of the Spirit. Their reaction is also similar. As the religious hypocrites are exposed and their hold on the population begin to erode, they persecute those who are more faithful to the doctrine and power of Jesus Christ. Thus they conspire against the Holy Spirit, and claim that they perform God a service.

Thus the religious leaders seized the apostles and demanded, "By what power or what name did you do this?" (Acts 4:7). The apostles replied, "If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a cripple and are asked how he was healed, then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed" (v. 9-10). Today's religious hypocrites continue to pursue those who demonstrate the kindness of Jesus Christ.

As in the days of the apostles, the most hostile and effective enemies of the Christian faith today are not the heathens, but the church leaders and theologians who claim to defend the faith and that miracles have ceased. They make so much noise about honoring the sufficiency and completion of the Bible, but then they persecute those who dare to believe and follow all of it, including its teachings on faith and miracles, and the manifestations of the Spirit. They are whitewashed tombs. They declare themselves innocent and faithful, even the watchmen of the church, but inside they are full of the bones of the prophets that they murdered. Woe unto you, theologians and cessationists, hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you: "These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men."

There is this relationship between authority and healing. Men in themselves have no authority to heal the sick, but the Son of God has conferred authority on his followers to minister healing in his name. Those who do not have faith in Christ cannot do this. In fact, it can be dangerous for them when demons are involved:

Some Jews who went around driving out evil spirits tried to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who were demon-possessed. They would say, "In the name of Jesus, whom Paul preaches, I command you to come out." Seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, were doing this. One day the evil spirit answered them, "Jesus I know, and I know about Paul, but who are you?" Then the man who had the evil spirit jumped on them and overpowered them all. He gave them such a beating that they ran out of the house naked and bleeding. (Acts 19:13-16)

All Christians continue to have authority to minister healing in the name of Jesus, to demonstrate his kindness and power in his place:

He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well." (Mark 16:15-18)

James writes, "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; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven" (James 5:14-15). The church members are commanded to request healing prayers, and the church elders are commanded to perform healing prayers, and in faith they should expect the Lord to heal.

Christians who do not request and minister miracles of healing are in direct rebellion against the Lord. If miracles of healing are not happening in our churches, it is not because God has ceased to heal, but because men have ceased to obey. If Christians would renounce the false doctrines and traditions that they hide behind, but would admit their unbelief and rebellion, and begin to pray for the sick in faith, then a new surge of divine healing power will flood the church and the world.

During Jesus' ministry on the earth, there was a man who used his name to work miracles without his direct authorization:

"Teacher," said John, "we saw a man driving out demons in your name and we told him to stop, because he was not one of us."

"Do not stop him," Jesus said. "No one who does a miracle in my name can in the next moment say anything bad about me, for whoever is not against us is for us. I tell you the truth, anyone who

gives you a cup of water in my name because you belong to Christ will certainly not lose his reward." (Mark 9:38-41)

The man could work miracles using the name of Jesus by faith without an explicit commission from him. So even when Jesus was on the earth, when he was there to physically point out his chosen disciples, those authorized to heal the sick and cast out demons were not limited to his immediate disciples, but anyone who had faith in him could perform these miraculous feats. As he said, if a man has faith, he can command a mountain to move, and it would obey him.

Jesus said that one who works miracles in his name is for him, not against him, and he must not be stopped. If a man has faith to heal in the name of Jesus, it shows that he is for Jesus and that he is authorized to heal. This is also the reason so many resist the ministry of miracles and persecute those who pursue it – it is because they have no faith. One who supports a man like this because he belongs to Christ will certainly not lose his reward. On the other hand, what would happen to the person who makes it his mission to criticize and discredit those who heal the sick and cast out demons by faith in the name of Jesus? He assaults Christ himself, because whatever he does to the least of these, he does to Christ.

Faith is God's ordination, heaven's degree. Human institutions can maintain order, but it can never confer spiritual authority. Without faith, a man can have a thousand degrees and ordinations, but he is still nothing. Faith is the badge of divine authority, and earthly credentials are worthless in comparison. If you have any zeal for God, and if you have any compassion for men, then take up the name of Jesus by faith, and minister healing to the sick.

3. HEALING AND MINISTRY

The ministry of healing often involves the laying on of hands. The one who ministers healing places his hands on the sick person, and this is usually accompanied by a prayer or a command for healing.

Jesus often laid hands on the sick during his earthly ministry: "When the sun was setting, the people brought to Jesus all who had various kinds of sickness, and laying his hands on each one, he healed them" (Luke 4:40). His disciples followed this example:

There was an estate nearby that belonged to Publius, the chief official of the island. He welcomed us to his home and for three days entertained us hospitably. His father was sick in bed, suffering from fever and dysentery. Paul went in to see him and, after prayer, placed his hands on him and healed him. When this had happened, the rest of the sick on the island came and were cured. (Acts 28:7-9)

As Jesus said, "And these signs will accompany those who believe...they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well" (Mark 16:17-18). This is one way to minister healing – the Christian can place his hands on those who are sick and ask God to heal them.

Sometimes when a Christian lays his hands on the sick, he would feel a surge of power in his hands. The sick might also feel it. Although this could cause some excitement, there is no biblical evidence that the intensity of God's power is measured by our sensations, and the absence of sensations does not suggest the absence of divine power. Faith is the essential factor.

The laying on of hands is a biblical and popular method for ministering healing, but physical contact is in fact unnecessary. God would also heal through a statement or command directed to the sick or the sickness.

Consider the example of Jesus and the centurion. The sick man was at another location, and there was no physical contact.

When Jesus had entered Capernaum, a centurion came to him, asking for help. "Lord," he said, "my servant lies at home paralyzed and in terrible suffering."

Jesus said to him, "I will go and heal him."

The centurion replied, "Lord, I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. But just say the word, and my servant will be healed...."

Then Jesus said to the centurion, "Go! It will be done just as you believed it would." And his servant was healed at that very hour. (Matthew 8:5-8, 13)

On another occasion, Jesus healed a man with a shriveled hand. He stood close to the man, but did not touch him:

Jesus said to the man with the shriveled hand, "Stand up in front of everyone."

Then Jesus asked them, "Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?" But they remained silent.

He looked around at them in anger and, deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts, said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out, and his hand was completely restored. (Mark 3:3-5)

The disciples often healed the sick in a similar manner, issuing commands for healing in the name of Jesus:

Then Peter said, "Silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk." Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man's feet and ankles became strong. (Acts 3:6-7)

She kept this up for many days. Finally Paul became so troubled that he turned around and said to the spirit, "In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her!" At that moment the spirit left her. (Acts 16:18)

All Christians are authorized to command miracles to happen in the name of Jesus. Faith is the evidence of authority. It is the only needed credential.

Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, if you have faith and do not doubt, not only can you do what was done to the fig tree, but also you can say to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and it will be done." (Matthew 21:21)

"I tell you the truth, if anyone says to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him." (Mark 11:23)

He replied, "If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it will obey you." (Luke 17:6)

The power belongs to faith. It is not associated with specific persons, such as Peter and Paul, or with special titles, like apostles and prophets. When this faith is there, a Christian can command healing to occur and sickness to depart.

However, it is also legitimate to offer prayers of petition for healing. The apostles sometimes prayed in association with other methods:

Peter sent them all out of the room; then he got down on his knees and prayed. Turning toward the dead woman, he said, "Tabitha, get up." She opened her eyes, and seeing Peter she sat up. (Acts 9:40)

His father was sick in bed, suffering from fever and dysentery. Paul went in to see him and, after prayer, placed his hands on him and healed him. (Acts 28:8)

Elijah and Elisha also offered prayers when they ministered healing to the sick or when they raised the dead:

Some time later the son of the woman who owned the house became ill. He grew worse and worse, and finally stopped breathing. She said to Elijah, "What do you have against me, man of God? Did you come to remind me of my sin and kill my son?"

"Give me your son," Elijah replied. He took him from her arms, carried him to the upper room where he was staying, and laid him on his bed. Then he cried out to the LORD, "O LORD my God, have you brought tragedy also upon this widow I am staying with, by causing her son to die?" Then he stretched himself out on the boy three times and cried to the LORD, "O LORD my God, let this boy's life return to him!"

The LORD heard Elijah's cry, and the boy's life returned to him, and he lived. (1 Kings 17:17-22)

When Elisha reached the house, there was the boy lying dead on his couch. He went in, shut the door on the two of them and prayed to the LORD. Then he got on the bed and lay upon the boy, mouth to mouth, eyes to eyes, hands to hands. As he stretched himself out upon him, the boy's body grew warm. Elisha turned away and walked back and forth in the room and then got on the bed and stretched out upon him once more. The boy sneezed seven times and opened his eyes. (2 Kings 4:32-35)

When Jesus taught about the faith that commands, he immediately applied it to the faith that asks. Following Matthew 21:21 and Mark 11:23 where he says that one who has faith can command a mountain to move, he adds, "If you believe, you will receive whatever you

ask for in prayer" (Matthew 21:22) and "Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours" (Mark 11:24). The faith that asks is not inferior, and it is as effective as the faith that commands.

God could cure cancers, restore amputated limbs, and raise the dead when we ask him to act. In fact, Jesus said, "You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it" (John 14:14). Since our works of faith are in fact the works of Christ – he is the one who does them – when we place a limitation on our faith or on what is possible based on times and titles, we assign such a limitation to Christ. For this reason, cessationism is blasphemy, as well as the notion that the strongest miracles were reserved for the prophets and the apostles. Miracles are promised to faith, and were never tied to times and titles. Christ is the one who does them, and he has no limitation.

Therefore, we must exercise our priestly access to the throne of grace, and make petitions for miracles of healing: "Stretch out your hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus" (Acts 4:30). When ministering healing to the sick, it is entirely legitimate to pray, "Father, I ask you to heal this person. Remove the sickness, and restore him to health." As James writes, "The prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up" (James 5:15). When we minister to the sick, we are expecting the Lord to heal. We are asking Jesus to do the same things that he did when he was on the earth (John 14:14). Thus Peter said to a paralyzed man, "Jesus Christ heals you" (Acts 9:34).

Abraham prayed for Abimelech, and God healed him and his household: "Then Abraham prayed to God, and God healed Abimelech, his wife and his slave girls so they could have children again" (Genesis 20:17). Isaac prayed for his wife, and God healed her of barrenness: "Isaac prayed to the LORD on behalf of his wife, because she was barren. The LORD answered his prayer, and his wife Rebekah became pregnant" (Genesis 25:21). Hannah was also barren, but she prayed for a child and God opened her womb (1 Samuel 1).

King Hezekiah was sick, and Isaiah told him that he was about to die. But Hezekiah prayed, and Isaiah returned to announce that God would heal the king and add fifteen years to his life:

In those days Hezekiah became ill and was at the point of death. The prophet Isaiah son of Amoz went to him and said, "This is what the LORD says: Put your house in order, because you are going to die; you will not recover."

Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed to the LORD, "Remember, O LORD, how I have walked before you faithfully and with wholehearted devotion and have done what is good in your eyes." And Hezekiah wept bitterly.

Before Isaiah had left the middle court, the word of the LORD came to him: "Go back and tell Hezekiah, the leader of my people, 'This is what the LORD, the God of your father David, says: I have heard your prayer and seen your tears; I will heal you...I will add fifteen years to your life.'" (2 Kings 20:1-6)

God exacted judgment on King Jeroboam so that his arm shriveled up, but God healed him when a prophet prayed:

When King Jeroboam heard what the man of God cried out against the altar at Bethel, he stretched out his hand from the altar and said, "Seize him!" But the hand he stretched out toward the man shriveled up, so that he could not pull it back. Also, the altar was split apart and its ashes poured out according to the sign given by the man of God by the word of the LORD.

Then the king said to the man of God, "Intercede with the LORD your God and pray for me that my hand may be restored." So the man of God interceded with the LORD, and the king's hand was restored and became as it was before. (1 Kings 13:4-6)

God's people have always prayed for miracles of healing as an integral aspect of their worship and religion, and often received spectacular results. God has conferred to all Christians the authority to minister healing, and among other things, this means that we could ask God to heal the sick: "Stretch out your hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus" (Acts 4:30).

Preaching can also bring healing to the sick. God has secured redemption through Jesus Christ, and he has ordained the doctrinal ministries to reveal this to us. As Paul writes, "How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?" (Romans 10:14). The ministry of the word is effective to deliver all the benefits of salvation, including healing. Of course, God's power is released by preaching that is full of truth and faith, not by unbelief, tradition, and the heresy of cessationism.

God's power is often manifested in the context of the ministry of the word. While Jesus was "teaching...the power of the Lord was present for him to heal the sick" (Luke 5:17). Many people were healed as Philip preached: "Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went. Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Christ there. When the crowds heard Philip and saw the miraculous signs he did, they all paid close attention to what he said" (Acts 8:4-6). When Paul preached in Lystra, "there sat a man crippled in his feet, who was lame from birth and had never walked. He listened to Paul as he was speaking. Paul looked directly at him, saw that he had faith to be healed and called out, 'Stand up on your feet!' At that, the man jumped up and began to walk" (Acts

14:8-10). Then, a man was raised from the dead in one of Paul's extended preaching sessions:

Seated in a window was a young man named Eutychus, who was sinking into a deep sleep as Paul talked on and on. When he was sound asleep, he fell to the ground from the third story and was picked up dead. Paul went down, threw himself on the young man and put his arms around him. "Don't be alarmed," he said. "He's alive!" Then he went upstairs again and broke bread and ate. After talking until daylight, he left. The people took the young man home alive and were greatly comforted. (Acts 20:9-12)

God sometimes releases his power even as the Christian preaches, so that the miracles occur as he speaks:

While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles. For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God. (Acts 10:44-46)

They went to Capernaum, and when the Sabbath came, Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach. The people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law.

Just then a man in their synagogue who was possessed by an evil spirit cried out, "What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are – the Holy One of God!"

"Be quiet!" said Jesus sternly. "Come out of him!" The evil spirit shook the man violently and came out of him with a shriek. (Mark 1:21-26)

Although the evil spirit did not leave the man until Jesus commanded it to come out, it was the authoritative preaching of the word that forced it to disclose its presence.

God is sovereign, and he could heal any person by any method he wishes. Sometimes people would be healed as I preach. They are surprised that it could happen without prayer, and I would not know about the healing until they tell me. God is also sovereign while we pray for the sick. Although people could be healed as I pray for them, sometimes they would be healed even while I interview them about their conditions, before I start to pray. God is the one who heals, and he is not an impersonal force, but an omnipotent intelligence. He does not have to wait for me or to ask my permission.

Paul's commands Timothy, "Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage – with great patience and careful instruction" (2 Timothy 4:2). This applies to the whole counsel of God, including ministry of healing. Moreover, Proverbs 4:20-22 says, "My son, pay attention to what I say; listen closely to my words. Do not let them out of your sight, keep them within your heart; for they are life to those who find them and health to a man's whole body."

If we will persist in preaching sound doctrine, encouraging faith and rebuking unbelief, then a harvest of healing miracles will break forth in our churches:

He also said, "This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. All by itself the soil produces grain – first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head. As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come." (Mark 4:26-29)

We may sow, and we may water, but it is God who causes the harvest: "I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow" (1 Corinthians 3:6-7). Christians can drive out sickness by reading and teaching the words of the Bible, accompanied by the laying on of hands and prayer for healing.

In Paul's discussion on spiritual gifts, he likens Christians collectively as the "body of Christ":

The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ....

Now the body is not made up of one part but of many. If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body.

The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!"...

Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. (1 Corinthians 12:12, 14-21, 27)

Since the passage comes in the context of a discourse on spiritual gifts, that is the actual topic. Thus it teaches that God endows each believer with spiritual gifts, and places him in the church to perform specialized functions.

The eye is designed to see by its very structure and equipment. Its inherent function or natural ability is to see. Although some organs could become more effective with conditioning, they do not need special effort or training for them to perform their designated function. Since the eye has been constructed to see, in order to exercise this ability, all it has to do is to be itself. On the other hand, the eye is not designed to hear or to smell. It cannot perform these functions no matter how much it tries. Nevertheless, it is sometimes possible for a part of the body to do what that it is not designed to do. For example, a person could use his hands to walk, but it is very likely that he would be inefficient at it. The organs do not assume their roles by their own decisions, but they are what they are because they are made that way.

From this, we can infer several things about spiritual gifts, whether we are talking about healing, teaching, evangelism, administration, or other functions. God is the one who chooses the abilities that you possess and the roles that you assume in the church. You should be able to exercise your gifts and function in your roles with relative ease and effect. Although instruction and training will enhance your abilities, you will experience less strain and more success compared to others who attempt the same things. The abilities might become dormant due to unbelief and neglect, but they could be reactivated by faith and action. Although it is possible to do something that you are not gifted to do, you will probably be less accomplished at it.

Healing comes easily to the one who has the spiritual gift, but all Christians has the ability to minister to the sick. Paul mentions the gifts of service, encouragement, giving, and mercy (Romans 12:7-8), but he certainly does not think that only those who are gifted in these areas should serve, encourage, give, or show mercy. Likewise, those who have the gift of healing will often experience greater success when they pray for the sick, and the Holy Spirit heals in a more powerful manner through them. However, all Christians have access to God through prayer, and could ask for whatever the Bible teaches.

We have missed the point if we allow the presence of a spiritual gift to become a limitation to all those who do not seem to have it. A gift is an expression of God's generosity – it is intended to enhance some of us rather than hinder the rest of us. Faith is the decisive factor: "I tell you the truth, if you have faith...nothing will be impossible for you" (Matthew 17:20). Then, love is the greatest drive – when you are moved with compassion for the sick, you have aligned yourself with Christ, and he has more healing power than anyone with the healing gift.

Although Christians are able to minister healing outside of an official church setting, if a church would obey the Bible and encourage the healing ministry, some believers could develop it into a powerful and permanent aspect of the congregation. This leads to the issue of church authority. The Christian minister must be "able to teach" (1 Timothy 3:2; also 2 Timothy 2:24). And Paul writes, "He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has

been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it" (Titus 1:9).

God rules the church by the Bible. It is the authority that dictates our thought and conduct. It follows that those who exercise doctrinal ministries have the greater authority in church government. As Paul says, "The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching" (1 Timothy 5:17), which indicates that the doctrinal ministers in the church should have preeminence over the others. Therefore, the ministry of healing must submit to the ministry of the word.

The doctrinal leaders of the church would often be those who also exercise the gift of healing, since James tells believers to call on their elders when they need prayer for healing: "Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him" (James 5:14). That said, in a congregation there would be those who have no doctrinal ability or function, but who have the gift of healing, and also some who wish to exercise this ministry whether or not they have the gift of healing. These people should function under the authority and direction of the church leaders and the teachers. One who has a doctrinal ministry in the church should always have authority over one who has only a healing ministry.

Of course, we are referring to how Christians ought to behave in the context of church functions and outreaches. In themselves, Christians are individuals who have direct access to Christ, and as such they are free to minister healing as they see fit when they are not acting as representatives of a congregation. If a believer meets a relative or a stranger on the street, he does not need the church's permission to pray for his healing, just as he does not need permission to preach the gospel to him.

Those who are less than exceptional in doctrinal knowledge must not teach classes on healing, even if they have the gift of healing. It is a mistake to think that those who are effective in the ministry of healing are necessarily correct in their thinking on the subject. God is the one who heals, and he heals because he is compassionate and generous. Thus success in ministry does not necessarily indicate maturity in character and knowledge. If a person exercises an effective ministry of healing, but has not also obtained an intellectual understanding on the topic, he is likely to teach from a flawed inferences of his experiences instead of from a sound interpretation of the Bible. Since people might consider him an authority on the subject, his false teachings could deeply penetrate and mislead them. Of course, the ignorance is not a result of the gift of healing, but the neglect of biblical studies. Those Christian leaders and academics who teach unbelief and heresy against the ministry of healing are far more harmful.

Since the healing ministry entails close interactions between individuals, there should be some guidelines to ensure effectiveness and accountability. For example, because the laying on of hands involves physical contact, we should observe several sensible principles. When the minister lays his hands on sick people, he should avoid touching their private or sensitive parts, especially when praying for those of the opposite gender. To place the hands closer to the afflicted area might offer a sense of directly applying God's power, but

in reality this often makes little difference. God's power is not subject to distance, and he can heal the sick even when there is no physical contact.

Avoid ministering healing to one of the opposite gender in private. In fact, it is wise to avoid being alone in the same room with one of the opposite gender, whether for prayer or counseling, unless there is a witness, or unless the session is recorded with the person's consent. When ministering to a child, there must be an adult witness, and the session should be recorded with the guardian's permission. If the one asking for prayer refuses to allow a witness or to allow the session to be recorded, then do not minister to this person in private. Of course, all recordings of private sessions should be viewed only by the people involved, by government officials, or to be presented as evidence in court.

Unless it is evident that the minister would be touching the people, as would be the case in public meetings where the laying on of hands is a standard practice, he should request permission to lay hands on a sick person. He could ask, "May I place my hand on your shoulder and pray for your healing?" Even in a public meeting, if there might be people who are unfamiliar with the healing ministry, then the minister should offer an explanation before he lays his hands on the people.

When several people pray for one sick person, they should not form a tight circle, but they should maintain some distance and leave enough space to allow observers. And it is probably best for only one person to lay hands on the sick person while the others join in prayer. This is so that the sick person would not feel uncomfortable, and the observers would see that there is no manipulation and no inappropriate contact. If the condition is visible, this also becomes an opportunity for them to witness a healing miracle.

When the minister lays his hands on the sick before an audience, it is best to allow as many people as possible to see where he touches the sick people. His actions should be visible and his words should be audible. If a sick person's spouse is present, allow him or her to stand close and observe the process. Respect the wishes of both the sick person and the spouse when it comes to contact. If for whatever reason it is not possible to observe these principles, then it is better not to touch the sick person. Just pray without the laying on of hands.

Although these guidelines might seem extreme, they could reduce misunderstandings, accusations, and legal problems. Ministers must remember that, even if we are above reproach in our conduct, we are often dealing with people that are selfish, ungrateful, and outright evil – and these are the Christians, or those who claim to be Christians. They would appear so reverent and teachable, but the moment they are displeased, they would turn against the ministers and even Jesus Christ himself. The reality is that we must protect ourselves from the people we serve. This applies to all aspects of Christian work, and not only the ministry of healing.

The ministry of healing should be performed without ambiguity, and it is important to show the people what is happening in a meeting. Many gatherings for healing are so noisy, emotional, and disorganized that some come away thinking that many people must have

been healed, when probably nobody has been healed. There should be some guidelines to ensure clarity.

When a sick person requests prayer, ask him to explain his condition. If he has visited a doctor, ask him what the doctor says about it, and what the doctor says must happen in this person's body for him to be healed. This is not because we believe the opinions of the doctors, since they often make mistakes, and we can always pray for a sick person without asking what a doctor thinks about the condition. Nevertheless, we ask for a doctor's statement to show that someone other than the sick person himself certifies that the condition exists. Accordingly, it would be even better if the sick person could produce medical documents on his condition. If the condition happens to be incurable by medical science, this also prepares the stage for God to heal that which doctors cannot cure. After this, the person can return to his doctor to secure documents that testify to the healing.

Whether or not he has visited a doctor, ask the person if he is experiencing the symptoms of his condition and if he would be able to tell the difference if he is healed. This is not possible with some conditions. After prayer, ask if he notices a difference, and if so, to describe the difference. Ask if he thinks that he is healed. In all of this, it is usually preferable to allow others to observe and hear the exchange. The exception is when this would somehow embarrass the sick person.

Never make the impression that a person has been healed when he is not healed or when there is no indication that he is healed. The exception to this is when God compels such a declaration by the gift of faith. This would not cause a problem, since in such a case, the person is indeed healed. If he has been healed through prayer, then see to it that God receives thanks for it. Yet if he does not appear to be healed after prayer, this does not necessarily mean that the prayer is unanswered, since the healing might be gradual. He must continue looking to God in faith.

Do not tell anyone to stop taking the medication prescribed by his doctor. This is for the sick person's safety, and it also serves to avoid legal problems. Also, do not offer a diagnosis to the person's condition.

We are to practice the ministry of healing in a way that honors God and the Christian faith. Some of these guidelines are not biblical principles as such, but are practical measures that could be adapted to suit specific situations, and churches might wish to formulate additional protocols according to their needs.

4. HEALING AND MEDICINE

Many Christians are very dependent on medical science, and almost never seek God for healing. Some pray for healing only in the most extreme cases, and others do not think to pray for healing even then. Few expect miracles. We must condemn this tendency to exclude God from the area of health. Although the Bible seems to allow the use of medicine, it does not explicitly encourage it. Also, it warns against looking to medicine as a substitute for seeking healing from God:

In the thirty-ninth year of his reign Asa was afflicted with a disease in his feet. Though his disease was severe, even in his illness he did not seek help from the LORD, but only from the physicians. Then in the forty-first year of his reign Asa died and rested with his fathers. (2 Chronicles 16:12-13)

As the preceding verses indicate, Asa had started to turn from God and his heart had become hardened (16:1-10). When a man's heart is hardened, he turns to human solutions instead of seeking God in faith and repentance. Thus as he trusted in human alliances in war, now he relied on the physicians in sickness.

This is the main drive behind the doctrine of cessationism. Those who assert this heresy claim to be zealous to defend the sufficiency and completion of the Bible, but they are liars, for if they care so much about the Bible, they would obey what it says about healing. Despite the overwhelming abundance of commands, promises, and examples on the subject, they remain determined to stop trusting in God's miraculous power for their health, but turn to the doctors instead. Moreover, they make it their mission to hinder others from trusting in God for healing miracles, and they do this even in the name of Jesus. Even as they honor God with their lips, their hearts are far from him. This is the spirit of unbelief and murder that Jesus condemned in the Pharisees, who crucified Christ in the name of God.

There are numerous attempts to justify the complete dependence on medicine and the lack of faith in biblical healing.

One of them states that most of the physicians were idol worshipers, and they would appeal to demonic powers to heal. Thus it was a sign of apostasy for Asa to seek the physicians, not because they were physicians, but because they were idol worshipers. Therefore, the argument is that our passage should not prevent us from looking to modern physicians.

This is a stupid excuse. Many doctors are Catholics, Buddhists, among other things, and they are idol worshipers. Even if many of the others are not idol worshipers in this traditional sense, they are atheists and evolutionists. Are atheists and evolutionists much better than Catholics and Buddhists? Certainly, many doctors are firmly anti-Christian in their beliefs, and they treat the sick on this basis. If looking to the physicians was wrong in

the past because they were idol worshipers, then it is arguable that looking to the physicians in the present is even worse.

Another argument is that medical science was too primitive. The physicians often did more harm than good because they lacked the superior theories and technologies of today. However, our passage states that Asa died because he did not seek God, and not because medical science was not advanced enough. This argument further exposes the spiritual sickness behind this perspective – the proponents forget about God and turn to a practical focus.

Medical science is often ineffective, and for many it remains inaccessible and unaffordable. The woman who suffered a bleeding issue "had suffered a great deal under the care of many doctors and had spent all she had, yet instead of getting better she grew worse" (Mark 5:26). Today, tens of thousands of people can still relate to this. This in itself might not be an argument against seeking help from medical science, but it shows that even if we are concerned only with practical effect instead of faith toward God, it still has not advanced to the point where we no longer need God to heal us. However, even if medical science is totally effective, accessible, and affordable, this still does not become an argument to seek healing from medicine rather than from God's power.

Then, some people claim that our passage does not prevent us from visiting the physicians, but it warns against depending on them to the extent of excluding God from the healing process. That is, if our primary dependence remains on God, then we may seek medical help in peace. Thus J. Barton Payne writes, "The king's sin lay in having recourse to [the physicians] 'only' and not seeking 'help from the Lord.'"⁶

However, the word "only" has been added in the NIV and several other translations, perhaps to accommodate this bias. The more literal translation of the NASB says, "And in the thirty-ninth year of his reign Asa became diseased in his feet. His disease was severe, yet even in his disease he did not seek the LORD, but the physicians" (2 Chronicles 16:12; see also KJV and ESV).

Nevertheless, even if we allow the word "only" to remain, this would emphasize Asa's complete dependence on the physicians, but it would not necessarily justify alternatives such as seeking healing from both God and the physicians, from God through the physicians, or primarily from God and secondarily from the physicians. Moreover, if our primary dependence is truly on God, then we should first focus on faith, prayer, and miracles instead of medicine. Thus this argument backfires. In any case, the passage distinguishes between seeking God and seeking physicians, so that Asa "did not seek the Lord, but the physicians."

There are a number of biblical passages that people distort in order to justify their dependence on medicine. We will first take James 5:14-15 as a representative case, since the discussion on this passage is also applicable to the others.

⁶ *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Vol. 4; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Corporation, 1988; p. 491.

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; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven.

Donald Burdick says that we should consider "this application of oil as medicinal rather than sacramental." After all, "it is a well-documented fact that oil was one of the most common medicines of biblical times...It is evident, then, that James is prescribing prayer and medicine."⁷

We should be happy that not all biblical scholars are so stupid and biased. For example, E. Gibson writes, "If...the oil was used as an actual remedy, (1) why was it to be administered by the elders? and (2) why is the healing immediately afterward attributed to 'the prayer of faith'? These questions would seem to suggest that oil was enjoined by St. James rather as an outward symbol than as an actual remedy."⁸ And Alexander Strauch writes, "James certainly is not naïve enough to believe that oil is curative for all diseases. We can assume that if oil were needed for medicinal purposes, it would have been applied long before the elders' visit....The elders' task is to pray for healing, and according to verse 15, it is the prayer of faith – not the oil – that restores the sick....The oil, therefore, must have had a symbolic significance."⁹

James does not say that the elders should pray for healing and the physicians should administer the oil, but that the elders should do both. If the oil represents medicine, then the modern application must be that preachers should prescribe medicines and perform surgeries on the church members. The text excludes the notion that God would heal through the oil, because it states that it is the prayer of faith that heals the sick, and offers the oil no credit in the healing. If the Bible teaches that God also heals through natural substances, it does so elsewhere, because this text does not say it.

If the oil is medicinal and sufficient to heal, then it would be unnecessary to pray for healing, but the passage credits only the prayer of faith for the healing. There is no implication that the oil has any part in making the person well. On the other hand, the Bible records numerous instances in which God healed the most extreme cases and even raised the dead in answer to prayer without the use of natural substances. Thus prayer alone is sufficient, and this means that it is unnecessary to combine prayer with medicine when receiving healing from God.

Even if oil has healing properties, it cannot cure all diseases, but James places no limit on the kinds of sicknesses that can be healed by the prayer of faith. Then, most people would agree that modern medicines are much more effective than an external application of oil to the body. However, James does not say to use medicine, but oil. It would be arbitrary to assert that we could obey the passage by using any medicine that we like for the situation.

⁷ *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Vol. 12; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Corporation, 1981; p. 204.

⁸ *The Pulpit Commentary*, Vol. 21, "The General Epistle of James"; Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers; p. 71.

⁹ Alexander Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*; Lewis and Roth Publishers, 1995; p. 258.

If a person forces the text to become the basis for the use of medicine, then it would allow him to use only oil. Instead of twisting the text to make it surrender impossible interpretations, it would be easier to admit that he does not have sufficient faith for healing and that he does not care to find a true basis for the use of medicine in the Bible.

There is no warrant to change "water" to "liquid" in baptism, so that we could use espresso, or to change "bread" to "food" in communion, so that we could have calamari instead. And there is no warrant to change "Jesus" to "entity" in the gospel, so that faith in Christ becomes the same as the worship of Satan. Nevertheless, when a biblical scholar is determined to advance his own desire, to accommodate the world, and to legitimize his unbelief and rebellion, espresso baptism, calamari supper, and the worship of demons could be the result. Thus "oil" becomes "medicine."

Indeed, it is not an exaggeration to mention false worship in this context. When the Israelites were bitten by venomous snakes, God instructed Moses to make a snake and put it on a pole, and when those who were bitten by snakes looked at it, they were healed (Numbers 21:4-9). The object had no power to heal the people, but it was symbolic of the coming atonement of Christ, who would become a curse on the cross so that he could save his people.

However, the Israelites made it into an idol and burned incense to it until the time of Hezekiah. It was a mere symbol, and the king was commended for destroying it (2 Kings 18:1-4). If a symbol becomes more than a symbol in people's minds and begins to share a place with God or to even take his place, then it would be better to destroy the symbol so that the people could look to the reality again.

As for those who encourage the people to look to the symbol as the reality or as sharing a place with the reality, they are by definition false teachers who promote idol worship. The oil in our text has no healing power, but it is a mere symbol to remind the sick person of God's power and presence, so that he may look to Christ, who took our infirmities and bore our sicknesses (Matthew 8:17). When biblical scholars elevate the oil into something that contains the reality of healing, even when a text credits only faith in the Lord to heal, then they have become false teachers who lead God's people to idol worship.

This is more subtle and sinister than the overt worship of idols. Moses was the one who made the bronze snake, but it becomes false worship when the people made it into something that it was not. Likewise, James was the one who instructed the use of oil, but it also becomes false worship when the scholars make it into something that James never intended. They have become Satan's agents to spread unbelief and rebellion. The notion that this might be an overreaction is evidence of the effectiveness of this kind of subtle deception.

The correct interpretation is that the oil is a mere symbol, nothing more. If the Bible allows the use of medicine, this passage does not teach it, but it teaches that God will heal when we pray in faith.

Another passage that some people use to justify their dependence on medicine comes from 2 Kings 20:1-7.

In those days Hezekiah became ill and was at the point of death. The prophet Isaiah son of Amoz went to him and said, "This is what the LORD says: Put your house in order, because you are going to die; you will not recover."

Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed to the LORD, "Remember, O LORD, how I have walked before you faithfully and with wholehearted devotion and have done what is good in your eyes." And Hezekiah wept bitterly.

Before Isaiah had left the middle court, the word of the LORD came to him: "Go back and tell Hezekiah, the leader of my people, 'This is what the LORD, the God of your father David, says: I have heard your prayer and seen your tears; I will heal you. On the third day from now you will go up to the temple of the LORD. I will add fifteen years to your life. And I will deliver you and this city from the hand of the king of Assyria. I will defend this city for my sake and for the sake of my servant David.'"

Then Isaiah said, "Prepare a poultice of figs." They did so and applied it to the boil, and he recovered.

Their argument is that God healed Hezekiah through the figs, so that it is appropriate to use medicine as a way to receive healing from God.

However, this interpretation suffers similar criticisms as the claim that James encourages the use of medicine. If the figs were sufficient to heal, the king's physicians would have applied them long before the prophet arrived. But if God's power alone was sufficient to heal, then it means that the figs were unnecessary.

In addition, it was the man of God who announced the healing and prescribed the figs, not the physicians. Thus the text refuses to accommodate those who wish to extract an endorsement of doctors and medicine from it. It simply does not teach what they want to force the Bible to teach.

Another example sometimes used to support the dependence on medicine comes from the ministry of Jesus:

As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth....Having said this, he spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man's eyes. "Go," he told him, "wash in the Pool of Siloam" (this word means Sent). So the man went and washed, and came home seeing. (John 9:1, 6-7)

Even biblical scholars, so accustomed to subvert the word of God in order to advance their tradition and excuse their unbelief, hesitate to claim that this is an instance where a natural remedy is applied in conjunction with divine power. If the mixture of mud and saliva can restore sight, or even help it a little, then even unbelievers should be able to perform the cure.

Perhaps the man was born without eyes, and Jesus created them as God created Adam's body from the earth, but there is in fact no need to speculate on the reason he used mud. It is evident that Jesus healed the blind man by supernatural power, and any natural substance could serve no medicinal purpose in a case like this.

Mark 2:17 is a popular verse used to support the dependence on medicine: "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick" (Mark 2:17). From this, it is argued that Jesus endorsed medical science. However, the passage addresses spiritual matters. Jesus was offering an analogy that people would understand – sin to the soul is like sickness to the body, and the fact that these were sinners made them the ones who needed him.

While Jesus was having dinner at Levi's house, many tax collectors and "sinners" were eating with him and his disciples, for there were many who followed him. When the teachers of the law who were Pharisees saw him eating with the "sinners" and tax collectors, they asked his disciples: "Why does he eat with tax collectors and 'sinners'?" On hearing this, Jesus said to them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners." (Mark 2:15-17)

Jesus' statement cannot be taken as his prescription for the sick, because he himself healed multitudes of people by miraculous power, and he never referred them to the doctors. Those who claim that the verse represents his assumption that the sick should look to the doctors must also insist that Jesus never practiced what he preached – not once. Thus the interpretation is blasphemy.

Moreover, Jesus commissioned his disciples to heal the sick and cast out demons. There is no record of them referring anyone to the medical doctors for healing and exorcism. If the verse affirms medical science as the normal solution to sickness, then Jesus and his disciples never followed through with it. That is, Jesus never practiced what he preached, and his disciples never obeyed what he commanded. The interpretation slanders the foundational figures of the Christian faith.

On the other hand, when the Bible addresses the sick person, it instructs him to call on the elders and ask for prayer. The prayer of faith will heal the sick; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven (James 5:14-15). It does not tell him to call on the preacher to help him receive forgiveness, and then call on the physician to help him receive healing.

When the Bible refers to doctors in the context of physical healing instead of in a mere analogy, it does not portray them as effective: "And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years. She had suffered a great deal under the care of many doctors and had spent all she had, yet instead of getting better she grew worse" (Mark 5:25-26). Did Jesus have this in mind when he said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick"?

Jesus did not mean that the Pharisees were not sinners, but he was telling them why he was eating with sinners – they needed him. The Pharisees hardened their hearts and refused to admit that they were also sinners, and that they needed him just as much. Likewise, those who attempt to hijack biblical verses to justify their dependence on medicine harden their hearts and refuse to admit that, despite advances in medical science, God is still performing miracles of healing, and that we need these miracles just as much as before.

Another popular attempt points out that Luke was a physician, and Paul referred to him as "the doctor" (Colossians 4:14). This is supposed to legitimize medical science. However, everyone had an identity or profession before his involvement in ministry. Peter was a fisherman who became an apostle, but this does not tell us anything about his profession as a fisherman.

Matthew was a tax collector who became an apostle, but his profession was openly despised. Since tax collectors were often dishonest and oppressive, even the Bible identifies them with sinners (Matthew 18:17). But in the list of the twelve apostles, he is still called "Matthew the tax collector" (Matthew 10:3). Then, Hebrews 11:31 and James 2:25 refer to "Rahab the prostitute" even in the context of her faith. As for Paul, he was a Pharisee who persecuted and murdered Christians, and who then became an apostle. All of this does not suggest that the Bible endorses fraud and extortion, prostitution, murder, and such things.

Therefore, the mere fact that Luke was a physician does not contribute to our discussion. It is possible that Paul mentioned Luke's profession only as a way to identify him. In the Bible, we are not told whether he continued to practice medicine – Luke himself recorded only miracles of healing – and his accomplishments are never associated with his profession as a doctor.

There are several passages that lend some support to the use of natural means; however, they still do not support medical science as much as people make of them.

A verse that might affirm the benefit of physical exercise is 1 Timothy 4:8: "For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come." The NASB says, "bodily discipline is only of little profit." It is possible that Paul is referring to the asceticism of false teachers. This would be consistent with the context. If this is the case, then the verse would have nothing to do with physical health at all. But for the sake of argument, we will assume that he has in mind physical training from a health perspective.

Physical training is inferior because its benefits never permeate "both the present life and the life to come." The spirit is more important than the body. Just how inferior is physical exercise? If I were to say, "Tommy has but a little strength, but Johnny is very strong," you would not think that Tommy is strong at all. Therefore, the purpose of this verse is not to support physical exercise, but to assert the superiority of spiritual fitness over physical fitness. Most people do not need any encouragement to see physical fitness as important; rather, they need to have a lower view of physical fitness relative to spiritual fitness.

Thus the proper use of this verse is to urge people to place less focus on physical fitness, so that they may pay more attention to their spiritual health. It is strange that it is sometimes used to validate physical exercise when it explicitly teaches that we should emphasize the spiritual. Nevertheless, the verse does not declare that physical training is without value. Paul could have written, "Physical training is completely useless, but godliness is beneficial for all times," but he did not. The verse certainly does not teach that physical exercise is sinful or harmful. Therefore, physical exercise is permitted as a preference, even a wise preference, but this verse does not prescribe or require it.

Philippians 2:25-30 is a passage from which we may infer something about the use of natural means for health:

But I think it is necessary to send back to you Epaphroditus, my brother, fellow worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger, whom you sent to take care of my needs. For he longs for all of you and is distressed because you heard he was ill. Indeed he was ill, and almost died. But God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me, to spare me sorrow upon sorrow. Therefore I am all the more eager to send him, so that when you see him again you may be glad and I may have less anxiety. Welcome him in the Lord with great joy, and honor men like him, because he almost died for the work of Christ, risking his life to make up for the help you could not give me.

Paul says that Epaphroditus became ill because he overworked. This implies that the problem was avoidable. If he had allowed himself to rest, he could have avoided the illness. Homer Kent agrees:

Epaphroditus's close call with death is to be explained in relation to his sickness (v.27), and was not the result of persecution or of adverse judicial proceedings. Furthermore, the ailment was directly due to his Christian labors on behalf of Paul. Perhaps it resulted from the rigors of travel and was compounded by his efforts to continue ministering to Paul in spite of being sick. It was not merely an unavoidable circumstance but was a risking of his life in the interests of his ministry.¹⁰

¹⁰ *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Vol. 11; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Corporation, 1978; p. 136.

Our decisions can influence our health. Rest could help avoid sickness. Nevertheless, this is an unnecessarily inference. The passage itself does not encourage healthy habits, but only offers the reason for the illness.

It is alarming that the passage is often used to diminish the ministry of healing, since it seems that he was not immediately healed even though he was with the apostle. However, this is an inference driven by the desire to draw out such a conclusion. The text itself indicates that Epaphroditus was rescued from the brink of death because God showed mercy. This could mean that God healed him with an instant miracle after a time, or that God healed him by a gradual miracle, or that the man recovered by apparently natural means. In any case, there is nothing in the text to diminish the ministry of healing or to endorse the use of medicine.

What is strikingly clear is that whereas Paul magnifies God's mercy in this passage and indicates that this resulted in healing, biblical scholars often attempt to diminish the ministry of healing with it. This is how a wicked heart of unbelief warps people's attitude and perception.

In a letter to Timothy, Paul writes, "Stop drinking only water, and use a little wine because of your stomach and your frequent illnesses" (1 Timothy 5:23). Perhaps this verse comes closest to a support for the use of natural means in health, but it remains for us to see how much support it offers to the use of medicine.

The Bible establishes as the norm that we should look to God for health and healing through faith (Matthew 8:17; James 5:14-15). The verse indicates that it is acceptable to adjust one's diet for health reasons, but it would be an obvious case of unbelief and prejudice to take this one verse written to a specific individual and force it to overshadow the overwhelming number of biblical passages that instruct us to trust God for health and healing. Christian scholars often attempt to deceive people with such a maneuver, but it is easy to see through it unless one wishes to accept the lie because it excuses unbelief.

If the Bible indicates that it is proper to use natural means as one way to maintain our health, as this verse seems to tell us, then we should accept this. However, we must consider how much encouragement it is really giving us to use natural means, and how much support it is giving to the use of medicine. Those who claim that it constitutes the norm and that it gives eager approval to the use of medicine deny the clear meaning of the text. Wine is not the same as medicine, and it is only an adjustment to the diet.

As Ralph Earle writes, "The word for wine (*oinos*) is sometimes used in LXX for...unfermented grape juice...Furthermore, it is generally agreed that the wine of Jesus' day was usually rather weak and, especially among the Jews, often diluted with water. Moreover, safe drinking water was not always readily available in those eastern countries."¹¹ Cleon Rogers agrees: "The command to abstain from drinking water exclusively may have been due to the fact that contaminated water contributed to Timothy's

¹¹ Ibid., p. 381.

indigestion."¹² Paul's statement amounts to an instruction for Timothy to adjust his diet to suit his specific situation.

If a friend has a specific health problem, and I advise him, "Stop eating only meat, but eat some vegetables," it would be a huge stretch to say that this constitutes explicit approval for the use of medicine. Thus any support that our verse offers to medicine remains very weak, indirect, and inconclusive. However, it remains that the verse indeed makes it acceptable to adjust one's diet for health reasons.

A common argument in support of the use of medicine is that natural substances are inherently good. As Wayne Grudem writes:

God has...created substances in the earth that can be made into medicine with healing properties. Medicines thus should be considered part of the whole creation that God considered "very good" (Gen. 1:31). We should willingly use medicine with thankfulness to the Lord, for "The earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof" (Ps. 24:1).¹³

However, this is a false inference from the Bible. Just because God's creation is "good" does not mean that whatever we do with created things are also good. If the argument is that we may use medicine because all created substances are good, then there is no reason to be selective about it – a poisonous mushroom is just as "good" as one that has healing properties.

This argument is also associated with 1 Timothy 4:4-5, which says, "For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer." This has been used to justify participation in the arts, sports, politics, all kinds of recreations and amusements, and made to support the notion that all activities are as holy as the gospel ministry. Some even combine this with other passages to establish a mandate to become involved in culture, so as to present themselves as more righteous and obedient than those who focus on spiritual matters.

However, verse 3 says, "They forbid people to marry and order them to abstain from certain foods, which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and who know the truth." Paul's focus is different. He is showing that no substance is ceremonially forbidden by God. He means that we are free to marry, and that we may eat pork, lobster, and all kinds of foods if we receive them with thanksgiving. Instead of honoring this message of freedom from ceremonial restrictions, Christians wrest the passage from him and force it to condone their worldly desires and ambitions. In any case, it offers no support to the use of medicine.

¹² Cleon L. Rogers, *The New Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament*; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1998; p. 497.

¹³ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, p. 1064.

The Bible does not endorse the use of medicine, but does not seem to forbid it. There are many attempts to extract an endorsement from the Bible, but all the arguments backfire on those who assert them, exposing their unbelief and hardness of heart. Still, it does not follow that we must abandon the use of medicine, but it means that we must drastically lower our view of it.

Jesus says, "He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous" (Matthew 5:45). All rain comes from God, but it is an effect of his ordinary providence, and we usually would not refer to it as a miracle. However, rain could sometimes be a miracle: "Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops" (James 5:17-18).

Likewise, healing through medicine could be attributed to God, but only in the sense that our daily food also comes from him. Our food comes from God, but usually not in the same sense that Jesus fed the thousands when he multiplied the fish and the loaves. We should be thankful for all natural provisions, but we should never confuse them with miracles.

An important difference is that the Bible makes healing through faith the standard instead of the exception (Matthew 8:17; James 5:14-15), so that it is unacceptable to consider it an optional aspect of Christian life and ministry. This is not to suggest that those who use medicine should feel condemned or that they should stop taking their medication. The point is that those who speak as if the Bible eagerly and explicitly supports the use of medicine are wrong – there is no such support in the Bible. Rather, it teaches us to increase in our faith for healing and in our dependence on God's power.