



Is Divine Healing Still for Today?

by the Rev. Archimandrite Fr. Eusebius Stephanou, Th.D.

Is physical healing God’s will for man? There seems to be great uncertainty about this matter among Christians. Many people in the church today – even the most religious ones – feel that it is not always in God’s will

for the sick to be healed. Some believe that sickness helps the Christian to come closer to God. Others feel that it is the cross that they have to bear for Christ.

In some churches it is held that healing was only for the infant church of the apostolic age and that it is not for our age. The very fact of miraculous healings taking place does not help to change their mind. It has become so bad that many attribute sickness to God and healing to the Devil.

Origin of Sickness

The first question we need to settle is that of the origin of sickness. Scripture clearly reveals to us that God created man whole and healthy. We are told that only good can come from God: “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above and cometh down from the Father of lights” (James 1:17).

“And God saw everything that He had made, and behold, it was very good” (Gen. 1:31). We need to look for the origin of sickness outside of God. Death, obviously, was the direct result of Adam’s disobedience: spiritual death which man’s separation from God resulted in physical death, that is, the separation of the soul from the body into the elements of the earth out of which it was taken.

Sickness and disease is part of the death curse that fell upon Adam in his rebellion against God. In other words, it was the disobedience and fall of Adam that introduced

physical disease into man’s life.

Death which resulted from the fall includes the gradual disintegration of man’s body that comes either with age or as a result of disease. Any physical disorder or abnormality that interferes with the normal function of the body marks a stage in the process of its breakdown and ultimate death.

The agent of death is Satan whose objective is to thwart God’s purposes for man, to make him in His own image and likeness. Fallen man is not only alienated from the quickening Holy Spirit of God, but he becomes uncovered, unprotected and open to the scheme of Satan and remains a prey to his machinations.

Sickness, therefore, is part of the curse that fell upon Adam. Sickness, as well as death, is the result of man’s rebellion against his Creator. Obviously they do not originate with God, because God cannot give man what is not His own intrinsic nature. He cannot give man what He does not have. God communicates to man only that which belongs to His nature: health, joy, blessedness, peace and immortality.

It is a simple law of nature. Separation from God’s Spirit results naturally in untold evils for man. To be in a state of banishment from the presence of God is to exist outside of God’s life of creativity, immortality and blessedness. The only life apart from God is the state in which Satan and His kingdom of darkness exist.

Satan: Author of Sickness

Sickness and disease (and this includes mental and emotional disorders), consequently, stem from Satanic influence. They are diametrically opposed to God’s purposes for man. They deprive him of the “abundant life” which is intrinsic to the very nature of God.

The Holy Spirit, is quickening, that is to say, enlivening. He creates, renews and makes alive in contradiction to what Satan does: to destroy, steal and kill. Satan’s job is to rob man of everything God gives him: health, wholeness, joy and life.

We read in the Bible: “The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly” (John 10:10).

We are instructed that physical sickness, as well as mental disease, is a curse, while on the other hand, health and physical well-being is a blessing from God. God warns His people that every conceivable disease will come upon them as a curse, if they chose to be disobedient to His commandments:

“If thou will not hearken unto the voice of the Lord thy God, to observe to do all his commandments and his statutes which I command thee this day, that all these curses shall come upon thee and overtake thee” (Deut. 28:15).

Mental and emotional illnesses are also among the curses that can afflict God’s people when they fall into a state of disobedience. The state of insanity is called “madness” (mania in the Greek). Rarely do psychiatrists or psychologists heal people suffering from such emotional or mental diseases. The only human help that is available is in the form of temporary relief, remedies and tranquillizers.

“The Lord shall give thee a trembling heart, and failing of eyes,

and sorrow of mind.” This is a direct reference to fears, anxieties and depression. Many of God’s people today are tormented by demon spirits of madness. Some of the most religious people in the church suffer from neurosis and other oppressive disorders. Their condition often deteriorates into psychosis. You can find neurotics and even psychotics among many otherwise fine and decent young people.

Are your children afflicted with chronic sickness? Have they strayed into the ways of iniquity with drugs, sexual corruption and rebellion against the authority of God and of parents?

It is clear that physical disease is one of the “works of the Devil.” But we know that the Lord Jesus Christ came into the world to “destroy the works of the Devil” (1 John 3:8). The plan of man’s redemption covers the body, as well as the soul. Otherwise, we would have to believe that fallen man is saved partially.

Resurrection Life in a Mortal Body

Since the whole man suffered the consequences of Adam’s fall, then naturally it is the whole man that is in need of the redeeming power of Christ. That which was incorruptible became corruptible. Disobedient man inherited corruptibility and death.

Of course, total incorruption will come with the resurrection of the body. It is then when our victory over Satan will be completed in terms of our bodily existence in its fullness: “So when this corruption shall have put on incorruption and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory” (1 Cor. 15:54).

Although the believer who is redeemed in the blood of the Lamb still has a mortal body, yet there is resurrection life that dwells in that body. It is the temple of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit quickens (makes alive) the mortal body of the born-again child of God. He dwells within that body

in order to enliven it, sustain and preserve it.

The Holy Spirit also slows down the aging process and keeps the body healthy and whole. The very Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead and which will someday raise our own bodies dwells from now in our bodies and from now begins His quickening (vivifying) work on our bodies.

“But if the Spirit of Him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, He that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by His Spirit that dwells in you” (Rom. 8:11).

The way you can stay healthy is to remain in a state of forgiveness and grace to confess constantly with your mouth that you are the temple of the Holy Spirit, redeemed and cleansed by the blood of Jesus. When you affirm your redeemed state in Christ and confess your privileges, then Satan will keep his hands off of you. It is the blood of Jesus and the good confession that covers you and protects you. Satan puts sickness and disease on the bodies of those who do not affirm their position in Jesus Christ and fail to confess their victory through His blood.

Christ Made a Curse for Us

In the divine plan for the redemption of the human race, the Cross becomes the basis for all of God’s provisions for man. Jesus, as the “last Adam,” took upon Himself all the curses that were due to sinful man. In fact He was “made a curse for us.” God “made Him to be sin for us.” We read in God’s word: “Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us, for it is written, Cursed is everyone that hangeth on a tree” (Gal. 3:13).

We have already considered the curses that fall upon wayward man in his state of disobedience and rebellion. They are: banishment, punishment, chastisement, sickness and poverty. Jesus took upon Himself each one of these curses. He paid the

sin-debt for us.

Why did Jesus become sin and curse for us? The answer is in Galatians: “That the blessings of Abraham might come on the gentiles through Jesus Christ” (Gal. 3:13).

The blessings to which God’s people are entitled are enumerated in Deuteronomy 28: 1-13: “And all these blessings shall come on thee, and overtake thee, if thou shalt hearken unto the voice of the Lord thy God.”

What I want to point out is that an exchange took place on the Cross of Calvary. Jesus took upon Himself all the curse and evils that were due to rebellious man. In exchange the believer who accepts His finished work upon the Cross receives all the Blessings that were due to Jesus Who was sinless, holy and righteous.

In 2 Corinthians 5:21 we read: “For He hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.”

The opposite of sin is righteousness. The opposite of “curse” is “blessing.” Jesus endured the chastisement and punishment on Calvary that the believer might receive forgiveness, reconciliation and righteousness: “But He was wounded for our transgressions. He was bruised for our iniquities. The chastisement of our peace was upon Him” (Isaiah 53:5).

If Jesus became sickness and pain for us. Disease of the body is included in the curse. In exchange for sickness that Jesus took upon His own body on the Cross, you and I receive the blessing of healing and health. Matthew quotes Isaiah on the occasion of the healing that Peter’s mother-in-law received at the hands of Jesus:

“And with His stripes we are healed.....Himself took our infirmities and bare our sicknesses” (Matt. 8:17, Isaiah 53:4).

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Among the covenant promises of God to His people is victory against their enemies. In the Old Covenant the enemies were primarily visible and physical. They were military enemies. In the New Covenant, however, the enemies are first and foremost, invisible. They are demon spirits over whom the Christian believer exercises authority and is empowered to defeat and vanquish through the blood of Calvary's Cross.

Healing: God's Supreme Will

Is it God's will to heal the sick? The answer by now is obvious. Yes. It is God's will to heal the sick. It is manifested in God's plan for the redemption of the whole man. I have already pointed out that Jesus became sickness that we might receive all the blessings of Abraham, including health and prosperity.

To doubt God's will about healing is to question the finished work of Jesus Christ on Calvary. Jesus said from the Cross: "It is finished!" He accomplished what the Father willed and brought to pass the undoing of the works of the Devil. The Cross became the basis of all of God's provisions for man.

If healing was part of the covenant promises in the Old Testament, how much more is it part of the inheritance of God's people in the New Covenant. If the blood of the Passover Lamb could save the children of Israel from the angel of death and set them free from the bondage of Egypt, healed and free from any physical infirmity, how much more power is there in the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ for physical healing. He is now our Passover Lamb. "I will put none of these diseases upon thee which I have brought upon the Egyptians" (Exod. 15:26).

God is in the business of healing. He is the God "who forgiveth all thine iniquities and who healeth all thy diseases" (Ps. 103:3). He has declared and made known to His people exactly Who He is and what His function is: "For I am the Lord who healeth thee" (Exod. 15:26).

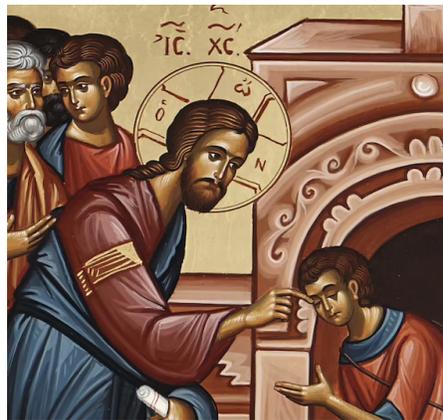
God is concerned with the whole man, body, as well as soul. That concern and love for the entirety of man's existence was manifested in His only-begotten Son. Our Savior Jesus Christ. Some six-hundred years

before the Lord of hosts foretold the coming of the Messiah as a Healer and Physician through the prophecy of Malachi 4, verse 2: "But unto you who fear My name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall."

Ignorance of our Privileges

If Jesus took all our infirmities and bore our sicknesses on the Cross, why do so many good and decent men and woman in the church today suffer chronic and even terminal diseases?

The principal reason is that they do not even know that they are entitled to healing. Satan exploits the ignorance of God's people. This is what made the Lord proclaim through the lips of Isaiah almost eight hun-



dred years before Christ: "My people are gone into captivity, because they have no knowledge" (5:13).

Even priests, bishops and professors of theology are not aware of the full-Gospel message concerning the healing of the whole man. When I was a student in the seminary, they taught me how to bury the dead, but not how to heal the sick. How easy it is for the ordained clergy to pass on their own ignorance to the following generation. This is why the Lord declares through Isaiah the prophet (5:14): "Their honorable men are famished and their multitude dried up with thirst. Therefore hell hath enlarged herself and opened her mouth without measure, and their glory, and their multitude, and their pomp, and he that rejoiceth, shall descend into it."

If the shepherds themselves are "famished," is it any wonder that "their multitude," that is, God's people are "dried up with thirst?"

Holy Spirit Baptism makes Healing Possible

When Jesus baptized me in the Holy Spirit it was then that I began to discover the marvelous power and love of God that are manifested in miracles of healing. That baptism was a baptism of power and a baptism of love. It was a real experience and not simply a doctrine of faith. It immerses you into a new experience of God's love and power and a new awareness of the atoning death of the Lord Jesus Christ. You begin functioning and ministering on a supernatural plane. You no longer minister in the natural.

This is true Orthodoxy, dear reader. It is the rediscovery of the Orthodoxy of the quickening Spirit! It is an Orthodoxy of power, the transforming power of the Holy Spirit!

I call upon every priest and bishop in the church to heed the full-Gospel, Orthodox message of healing and deliverance. It is part of the Apostolic Tradition of the church and it is the legacy of the Church Fathers. The prophet Ezekiel warned the shepherds in his own day and the same warning from heaven is directed to the pastors of the church of God in our day:

"Thus saith the Lord God unto the shepherds. Woe be to the shepherds of Israel that do feed themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flocks?" (34:2).

What does God mean by feeding the flock? The answer follows: "The diseased have ye not strengthened, neither have ye healed that which was sick!"

The people of God are being deprived of the bread to which they are entitled. When the Canaanite woman asked Jesus to heal her daughter, He answered: "It is not right to take the children's bread and cast it to the dogs." Then this gentile woman replied: "Yes, Lord, but even the dogs eat of the crumbs that fall from their master's table." Jesus marveled at her faith and her daughter was instantly healed.

Healing is the children's bread. We priests have no right to keep those who are sons and daughters of God from receiving that gift and to keep them undernourished. The shepherds

to whom God has entrusted His people are bound to feed the sheep with the provisions that He has made available.

Healing: Part of the Divine Commission

Jesus commissioned you and me to heal the sick, as well as preach the Gospel and baptize those who believe. To whatever city the Lord sends us He instructs as follows: "Heal the sick that are therein, and say unto them, The kingdom of God is come nigh unto you" (Luke 10:9).

Healing goes hand in hand with preaching. There is no Spirit-anointed preaching without healing the sick. Jesus could not have been clearer when He sent His disciples out into the world and expressly directed them to the following way: "He gave them power against unclean spirits, to cast them out and to heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease" (Matt. 10:1).

"As you go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand. Heal the sick. Cleanse the lepers. Cast out demons" (10:8).

The fact that the sick are being miraculously healed and the demonically oppressed set free is conclusive evidence of the arrival of the kingdom of God in the midst of His people. Do you believe, brother-priest, that your ministering is bringing the kingdom of God to your people? Demonstrate it by the standard Jesus set down for His Church to every generation.

Remember when Jesus said: "If I by the Spirit of God cast out demons, then the kingdom of God is upon you" (Matt. 12:28).

Christ never intended His Church to function only with apostolic doctrine. The Church needs apostolic power if it is to have any impact on the world. Its witness must reveal to the world supernatural power.

"The weapons of our warfare are not carnal." You can't fight Satan's kingdom effectively with natural means, relying on your own human wisdom, skill and intelligence. Our weapons "are mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds" (2 Cor. 10:4).

When the disciples of John the Baptist asked Jesus if He were truly the Messiah or should they keep ex-

pecting him to come, He did not reply by starting a theological discussion. He did not even point to the Old Testament prophecy to prove that He was indeed the Messiah. What I want to emphasize for our purposes here is that He fell back on the miraculous signs He was performing to demonstrate that He was truly sent by God:

"Go show John again those things which ye do hear and see: The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the Gospel preached to them" (Matt. 11:4-5).

If the Orthodox Church is to have heaven's authority behind it, as the true church of Christ, as it claims to be, then it must show forth the mind of Christ; it must follow the pattern of Christ's own ministry; it must demonstrate its own authority in the same way that Christ demonstrated His authority. The world will believe the claims of the Orthodox Church only when it hears and sees that in that church "the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear."

We pride ourselves on the seven sacraments with the emphasis on "seven" – no more, no less. However, in effect we have allowed the sacrament that was instituted by Christ for physical healing (Prayer-Oil) to fall into disuse. In the event a believer falls sick, the first thing he is instructed by Scripture to do is to call for the "elders of the church" and to have them minister to the sick person for healing. It is a familiar verse of Scripture:

"Is any sick among you? Let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord, and the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up" (James 5:14).

People in the church do the very opposite. As soon as they get sick they phone to make an appointment to see their family doctor. I do not think most of us realize what a grave act of disobedience we commit against the explicit letter of God's word. The Holy Spirit tells us to do one thing and we do another.

What have we done to the healing ministry in the Orthodox Church? Why have we thrown it out? The

Orthodox have drifted far from their inheritance and have remained destitute, left only to feed on husks, while all the while their Father has prepared for them a table laden with choicest food, waiting to be received and enjoyed.

There is much evidence that the healing ministry was intact in the early centuries of the church. The gifts of healing and miracles were in operation following the apostolic age. St. Irenaeus, one of the Church Fathers of the third century, states in his famous writing *Against Heresies* (II, 32): "Those who are in truth His disciples receiving grace from Him, do in His name perform miracles, so as to promote the well-being of other men according to the gift which each one has received from Him. "For some do certainly and truly drive out demons, so that those who have thus been cleansed from evil spirits frequently both believe in Christ and join themselves to the Church. "Others still heal the sick by laying their hands upon them, and they are made whole. Yes, moreover, as I have said, the dead even have been raised up, and remain among us for many years."

Healing, let me repeat, is the children's bread. When sons and daughters of God deprive themselves of what is rightly theirs, then it is Satan that has the victory. This is the reason why the Adversary who robs God's children of their health is disturbed never by sermons – even by the finest and most inspiring sermons. Even Satan can sit in a back pew of a church and enjoy a good sermon. What really shakes that kingdom of darkness is when miracles of healing and deliverance take place.

It is the fact of "signs following" that unnerve Satan. This is why Christ promised His disciples that He would work with them wherever and whenever they would proclaim the Gospel by "confirming the word with signs following" (Mark 16:20).

Let me close this article by pointing out the methods of healing set down in scripture: 1, The laying on of hands (Mark 16:16). 2, Anointing with oil (James 5:14). 3, The word of God (Psalms 107: 20). 4, A good confession (2 Cor. 5:7). 5, Holy Communion, since it is the Spirit-filled body and blood of Jesus Christ, it can heal the sick who receive it worthily.