

IS HEALING PROVIDED IN THE ATONEMENT?

By Denver Cheddie

Most Christians would readily agree that in some way or another, physical healing is included as part of Jesus' atonement. If it is not received in this life, definitely it will be in the next one. But the real question that causes division is, "Does the atonement of Jesus guarantee physical healing in this life?" When put this way, even the most diehard Pentecostal would admit to the contrary.

It must be noted that it is not necessarily a Pentecostal belief that physical healing is provided in the atonement. Renowned Pentecostal Bible scholar Gordon Fee does not hold to this view yet is very convinced that the gifts of the Spirit are still for the church today*. There is the possibility of remaining Pentecostal without believing in faith healing. Healing may be provided through the gifts of healing or through prayer. The difference is that, if physical healing is not provided in the atonement, then it is not guaranteed in this life.

There are basically 2 verses of scripture that are used to propagate the belief that healing is provided in the atonement – Isa. 53:4 & 5.

4. Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows: Yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted.

5. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by his stripes we are healed.

It is true that parts of Isa. 53 refer to the atonement. However verse 4 was quoted in Matt. 8:17 where it was applied to Jesus' earthly ministry. That scripture was fulfilled when Jesus was on earth healing the sick, not when he was on the cross dying. Verse 5 definitely refers to the atonement. But does it refer to physical healing or otherwise? In 1 Peter 2:24 it was quoted in the context of spiritual healing. Peter was discussing the subject of retaliation. Jesus was reviled yet did not retaliate, and he is our example to follow. He then quoted Isa. 53:5 to support his position. He certainly was not referring to physical healing, but rather deliverance from the tendency to retaliate. Thus in Isa. 53:5, spiritual healing (healing from our sinful propensities) is most likely what is being referred to.

It is also claimed that the word *salvation* (Gr. *soso*) carries the idea of total deliverance from sin and sickness. Perhaps the Greek word could mean all these things, however to claim that every single meaning of the word is intended whenever the word is used is contrary to common practice. This is called word loading – applying every possible meaning of a word every time it is used. The context is supposed to determine the meaning. The statement “I have my groceries in my trunk” does not mean that I have my groceries in my elephant, or my tree, or my small suitcase. Clearly a car trunk is the correct meaning as is clear from the context. Similarly when the Bible speaks of our salvation, it most often speaks of our deliverance from sin and the curse of the law, not from all sickness and disease and poverty.

Although I do not believe physical healing is provided in the atonement in the same way salvation is provided, all who are saved will achieve perfect health in the next life. Healing is available through the gifts

of the Spirit and the prayers of righteous men and women, but not guaranteed. Salvation is guaranteed for all who (genuinely) believe and thus it works every time without fail. People who believe are not always healed. Some are, some are not. 1 Cor. 15:42, 43 tell us that our natural body was sown in corruption and dishonor, but will be raised up incorruptible and in power. Right now it is subject to weakness and sickness, but after the resurrection, it will experience perfect health. But this is not guaranteed until then.

In the event that believers get sick, it is perfectly in order to pray for healing and to call for the elders. However faith does not imply that one should dispense with medical help. If the Bible says that a merry heart does good like medicine (Proverbs 17:22), doesn't it imply that medicine is good? I believe that the majority of sicknesses today are caused by natural means - poor diet or unhealthy lifestyle choices. Christians would be well advised to take care of themselves physically. This would involve getting sufficient rest, eating well rounded diets, and physical exercise. Prevention is always better than cure.

* See Gordon D. Fee, *The Disease of the Health and Wealth Gospels* (Beverly, MA: Frontline Publishing, 1985).

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