

By His Stripes We Are Healed

A Scriptural Look At Isaiah 53

Before reading this article ask yourself the following questions:

- 1) What is the final authority in my life? Is it the plain teaching of the Scriptures or is it something else? If your answer to this is "No", then don't bother reading any farther.
- 2) Do you believe that Bible is a logical and consistent book whose statements can be taken as authoritative and trustworthy, and that our interpretation of it should be done in a logical and rational way -thus we can look at words and statements in their context and weigh them in the light of the whole of the Scripture to find the meaning of a word or phrase? If you disagree with this then read no farther -you are wasting your time.
- 3) Do you believe that we should subject the teachings that we hear to the plumbline of Scripture to ascertain if they are true or not -no matter who said them? Once again, if your answer is no -read no farther and go on you own way.

If your answer to the above questions was "Yes", then you are in a good place to be. This is the kind of attitude that God commends.

And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea: who coming thither went into the synagogue of the Jews. These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so. (Acts 17:10-11)

How many times have you heard this Scripture quoted as a promise of "divine health". How often have we heard that "Christians should not be sick -being sick is through unbelief -We were all healed at Calvary!" . This particular teaching is very prevalent in the "Word of Faith" Movement. The question that needs to be asked though, is :Do the Scriptures really support that idea that through the Atonement we have been delivered from all sickness and disease while still in these mortal bodies? Let us look at the passage that is most used to support this contention.

He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. .

Now does this passage deal with the issue of physical illness at all? Yes it most certainly does. The Hebrew words translated griefs and sorrows can also mean sickness and pains. This is clearly demonstrated in the citation of this passage in Matt. 8:17

When the even was come, they brought unto him many that were possessed with devils: and he cast out the spirits with his word, and healed all that were sick: That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses.

On this occasion Jesus healed all that were brought unto him. On other occasions when sick people were present he did not so do (eg, Jn 5), it cannot be then concluded from this verse that this means "divine health" for all. For the Evangelists it was simply a prophetic statement concerning the earthly healing ministry of Jesus. It is however the second half of this statement that is the one used to build the doctrine of "divine health" upon.

But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.

Now that this verse refers to the Atonement at Calvary and not Jesus' earthly healing ministry is undeniable, in the New Testament it is always used in an atonement context. If then it can be shown that both Isaiah and the New Testament writers believed the healing mentioned here to be that of physical disease then we must logically conclude that the doctrine of "divine health" is true. Conversely however if it can be shown that the divine mind intended something else to be understood by this phrase then we must conclude that the "divine health" teaching is erroneous and must be rejected.

The "by his stripes we are healed" is clearly sandwiched between phrases that most definitely refer to forgiveness of sin. The immediate context does seem to imply that the healing is something other than physical. As however the previous verse does refer to physical illness, let us draw on further witnesses.

If we look at the meaning that the NT writers derived from this passage then we shall see more clearly. For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously: Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed. For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls.

It seems fairly clear from this that Peter saw the healing in the terms of forgiveness from sin and reconciliation to God, and not in terms of physical illness. The term "healing" is most definitely and indisputably used by the NT and OT writers to refer to forgiveness from sin and reconciliation to God rather than recovery from physical sickness or disease, in a number of places in the Scriptures.

In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. Above it stood the seraphims: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory. And the posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke. Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts. Then flew one of the seraphims unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar: And he laid it upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged. Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me. And he said, Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed.

Compare Mk 4:12: And he said unto them, Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God: but unto them that are without, all these things are done in parables: That seeing they may see, and not perceive; and hearing they may hear, and not understand; lest at any time they should be converted, and their sins should be forgiven them.

This is a most interesting citation of the Isaiah passage. It shows beyond any shadow of a doubt that the Biblical writers understood the term "healing" as a synonym for forgiveness in some contexts.

However, to further enforce this let us take a look at the following passages: Surely as a wife treacherously departeth from her husband, so have ye dealt treacherously with me, O house of Israel, saith the LORD. A voice was heard upon the high places, weeping and supplications of the children of Israel: for they have perverted their way, and they have forgotten the LORD their God. Return, ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings. Behold, we come unto thee; for thou art the LORD our God. Truly in vain is salvation hoped for from the hills, and from the multitude of mountains: truly in the LORD our God is the salvation of Israel. For shame hath devoured the labour of our fathers from our youth; their flocks and their herds, their sons and their daughters. We lie down in our shame, and our confusion covereth us: for we have sinned against the LORD our God, we and our fathers, from our youth even unto this day, and have not obeyed the voice of the LORD our God. (Jer 3:20-25)

O Israel, return unto the LORD thy God; for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity. Take with you words, and turn to the LORD: say unto him, Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously: so will we render the calves of our lips. Asshur shall not save us; we will not ride upon horses: neither will we say any more to the work of our hands, Ye are our gods: for in thee the fatherless findeth mercy. I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely: for mine anger is turned away from him. I will be as the dew unto Israel: he shall grow as the lily, and cast forth his roots as Lebanon.

These passages are self explanatory, it is self evident that "backsliding" is not a physical affliction.

And Hezekiah sent to all Israel and Judah, and wrote letters also to Ephraim and Manasseh, that they should come to the house of the LORD at Jerusalem, to keep the passover unto the LORD God of Israel. For the king had taken counsel, and his princes, and all the congregation in Jerusalem, to keep the passover in the second month. For they could not keep it at that time, because the priests had not sanctified themselves sufficiently, neither had the people gathered themselves together to Jerusalem. And the thing pleased the king and all the congregation. So they established a decree to make proclamation throughout all Israel, from Beer-sheba even to Dan, that they should come to keep the passover unto the LORD God of Israel at Jerusalem..... And there assembled at Jerusalem much people to keep the feast of unleavened bread in the second month, a very great congregation. And they arose and took away the altars that were in Jerusalem, and all the altars for incense took they away, and cast them into the brook Kidron. Then they killed the passover on the fourteenth day of the second month: and the priests and the Levites were ashamed, and sanctified themselves, and brought in the burnt offerings into the house of the LORD. And they stood in their place after their manner, according to the law of Moses the man of God: the priests sprinkled the blood, which they received of the hand of the Levites. For there were many in the congregation that were not sanctified: therefore the Levites had the charge of the killing of the passovers for every one that was not clean, to sanctify them unto the LORD. For a multitude of the people, even many of Ephraim, and Manasseh, Issachar, and Zebulun, had not cleansed themselves, yet did they eat the passover otherwise than it was written. But Hezekiah prayed for them, saying, The good LORD pardon every one That prepareth his heart to seek God, the LORD God of his fathers, though he be not cleansed according to the purification of the sanctuary. And the LORD hearkened to Hezekiah, and healed the people. And the children of Israel that were present at Jerusalem kept the feast of unleavened bread seven days with great gladness. (2 Chron. 30)

Nowhere in this passage does it say that any of the people were physically sick. Hezekiah asked for pardon for those who had not properly prepared themselves to eat the Passover and the LORD heard (i.e. answered) his prayer and healed (i.e. pardoned/forgave) the people.

What then can we conclude from the above? At the very least it must be said that biblical evidence to suggest that "By His stripes we are healed" refers to physical sickness is conspicuous by its absence. All the biblical evidence seems to point to this as being a glorious divine synonym for pardon and forgiveness. This does not mean however that God does not heal today. I firmly believe that he does indeed do so for He is he LORD and does not change, but "divine health" in this life is surely a fantasy based on a misinterpretation and a forcing of this precious scripture. If we try to force this Scripture to teach "divine health" then we have parted company with sound principles of biblical interpretation and are following after our own itching ears.