

Introduction

As you lay sick in bed, you ask yourself does God always heal today? You turn on the early morning TV evangelist show and the speaker says, "Jeeeeeee-sus doesn't want you sick!" The TV evangelist says as he nearly pokes his index finger through the camera lens. "When the devil comes to your door with disease, you just reeeeeee-buke him in the name of Jeeeeee-sus and the foul spirits will fa-leeeeeeee!"

The closing theme music begins to play as the camera moves in for a close up and he continues to say, "So, fa-riends, if you want to be permanently free from all diseases, write today. And for just a small donation of twenty-five dollars or more, I'll send you my latest book on how to..."

You take another Vitamin C and reach for a tissue as you change the channel and utter, "I wish getting over the flu was as simple as commanding, "Come out, foul spirits of post nasal drip!"

As we study God's Word, we are compelled to believe in divine healing. Psalms 103:3 reads, "*The Lord forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases.*" And 1Peter 2:24 says, Christ "*bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.*" But as I study God's Word, I realise there is more to these scriptures and more to just standing firm in faith believing you will be healed, and there are also those whose methods are undesirable.

There are those who are constantly casting out demons of asthma, blindness, cancer, diabetes, emphysema, flu, gout, heart attack and the rest of the anatomical alphabet

Romans 8:18-22 clearly points out that illness in *general* is a result of the fall and the human sin condition. But Matthew 4:24, 10:1 and 10:8 reveal that individual illnesses are *not* satanically inspired. Matthew makes a clear distinction between dealing with diseases and demon activity.

There are those who promise healing for every disease

The Apostle Paul definitely had the gift of healing. Acts 19:11-12 reads, "*God was performing unusual miracles through Paul. Even handkerchiefs and aprons he had used were taken to the sick, and their diseases were driven away, and the evil spirits would go out of them.*" Acts 20:9-12 states he even raised the dead! However, even though Paul was performing incredible miracles, God did not always answer his own prayers for physical healing. Paul advised Timothy, "*Stop drinking only water, and use a little wine because of your stomach and your frequent illnesses*" 1Timothy 5:23. In 2Timothy 4:20 we read that Paul "*left Trophimus sick in Miletus.*" And his three prayers for his "*thorn in the flesh*" were not answered with physical healing, 2Corinthians 12:7-10. So does God always heal?

There are those who use healing for fundraising

There is not one single occurrence in the Gospels or the book of Acts of any money being exchanged or donated during a healing. Instead, when Simon, a recent convert and ex-sorcerer, asked to buy the Holy Spirit's power to work miracles, Peter says, "*May your money perish with you because you thought you could obtain God's free gift with money! You have no part or share in this matter, because your heart isn't right before God.*" Acts 8:20-21. Yet despite this clear warning, we hear that recently, a famous faith healer boasted of making five million dollars annually from his healing ministry. This is certainly very different from Peter and John, who had no silver or gold, when they healed the man crippled from birth. Acts 3:6 reads, "*However, Peter said, "I don't have any silver or gold, but I'll give you what I do have. In the name of Jesus Christ from Nazareth, walk!"*"

There are those who make healing the focus of their public ministry

Thirty-seven accounts of healing are detailed in the Gospels and Acts. Only ten occurred with a crowd present. Twelve occurred in small groups and fifteen in *private* settings. Rarely today do we hear Christ's reproof to the healed, "Don't tell anyone!" Instead, we have weekly television programs featuring healing services, and monthly mailings with a plague of pictures of the healer. Genuine healers will be more concerned about God's kingdom being built up than their own. Jesus said in John 10:38, "*Even though you don't believe me, believe the miracles, that you may learn and understand that the Father is in me, and I in the Father.*" The Apostle John wrote that the purpose of miracles is "*that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and so that through believing you may have life in his name.*" John 20:31. If being healed draws attention to God and advances His kingdom, you could be healed. But if like the Apostle Paul, God can be glorified through emotional and spiritual, but not bodily healing, He may choose not to heal physically. Regardless of all this, it is His kingdom's advancement that must always be the focus.

And last, there are those who criticise medical treatment

The Bible shows the positive role of physicians and medicines. Physicians were needed in biblical times as they are needed now. Obviously they had limited knowledge, but the knowledge they had was used. And it was not just that they externally set bones and bandaged wounds. The following shows that there was knowledge and use of medicine and physicians without condemnation. See Job 13:4, Isaiah 1:6 and Jeremiah 8:22, 30:12-13, 46:11, Ezekiel 27:17 for some Old Testament examples.

In the New Testament there are various references to medicines and medical assistance. One of Jesus' parables tells of a Samaritan traveller who *"poured oil and wine on his wounds and bandaged them"* Luke 10:25-37. It seems there was nothing unusual about this and at the time it was a way of helping the healing process. Why would Jesus use this example of physical help if there was something intrinsically wrong with treating and binding up wounds? We might also ask why Jesus would use the following analogy of spiritual healing if there is something inherently evil or bad about medical practitioners and their work. Jesus also said in Luke 5:31 *"Jesus answered them, "People who are well do not need a doctor, but only those who are sick."* The comparison is with what Christ was doing spiritually. Verse 32 goes on to say, *"I have not come to call righteous people, but sinners, to repentance."* As doctors help the body overcome the effects of physical disease, so Jesus provides healing for the human spirit. But there is no suggestion here that doctors should be avoided. In fact quite the opposite, it implies they do something good.

We must acknowledge however, that there is a story in three of the gospels that shows sometimes physicians can do little if anything to help. In one example Jesus healed a woman who had suffered much from many physicians. Mark 5:26 reads, *"Although she had endured a great deal under the care of many doctors and had spent all of her money, she had not been helped at all but rather grew worse."* Here we see that God is able to heal when people can do nothing to help. At the same time we should take careful note that Paul travelled with Luke, whom he named, *"the beloved physician."* Paul did not refer to him as a *"former physician."* Doctors are only human and hence still make mistakes even today. We should ask God for guidance over the doctors we use.

A very interesting outcome is seen with a king who was told from God he would die from his sickness but God changed his mind and healed in mercy. In 2 Kings 20:1, Hezekiah was told he was, *"sick and near death"*. Isaiah was sent to him with God's message after the king had turned to God for help. Isaiah said in 2Kings 20:5, *"I, the LORD, the God of your ancestor David, have heard your prayer and seen your tears. I will heal you, and in three days you will go to the Temple. I will let you live fifteen years longer. I will rescue you and this city Jerusalem from the emperor of Assyria. I will defend this city, for the sake of my own honor and because of the promise I made to my servant David."* The one additional fact to be noted in this instance is that verse 7 goes on to say, *"Then Isaiah told the king's attendants to put on his boil a paste made of figs, and he would get well."* Here we have a combination of approaching God, answered prayer, and a physical remedy with recovery. The use of a remedy is interesting in itself. Why not just heal the king? This shows that sometimes even when divine healing is taking place physical intervention can be used.

Centuries later Paul gave Timothy advice about caring for his health in certain ways. Paul wrote in 1Timothy 5:23, *"Stop drinking only water, but use a little wine for your stomach because of your frequent illnesses."* Paul is saying that some wine can physical help with some illnesses. The same would be true for all types of physical help. Note that Paul is giving medical advice and not healing. Why is this? What would the proponents of the "name it and claim it" faith healing movement have to say to Paul about his medicinal advice? After all, Paul would have to be one of the greatest men of faith.

Common sense must prevail in that medical help is indeed essential at times. For example in accidents, pain relief or childbirth. Rachel died in giving birth to Benjamin. Genesis 35:19. If you were in a car accident and bleeding to death would you let the ambulance take you to hospital or would you refuse and wait on God? The fact is that God does heal in situations when there has been no medical help and also when there has been and continues to do so. It's also fact that He does not always heal immediately, and sometimes He doesn't heal at all and they await the resurrection.

The medical profession today is capable of many procedures that it was not in earlier times. This is a fact that makes the judgment of what we should do in various circumstances a far more complex issue than it used to be. Not all procedures are wise and some results clearly show that. Second opinions are often wise and advisable. God's wisdom is clearly necessary to guide us through the maze of options. Obviously, if there is no medical help available and we are in an emergency health situation, we should pray for God's help and get the medical help we need when available.

Opening Conclusion

God has given us wisdom to understand these remarkable and wonderfully made bodies and it is only logical for us to treat our bodies well and to take advantage of the medical knowledge and treatments our world possesses. Also, if we have been supernaturally healed, it should be humanly verified. Often when Jesus healed leprosy and other diseases, he ordered them to go the priests, who served as the public health officers of the day to have the healing verified. Therefore, if you believe you have been healed, do not make any changes in your activities or medications until a doctor can verify the healing. Very sadly, there are tales of diabetics who believed they were healed and pigged out on junk food to celebrate their miracle, and immediately went into a near fatal insulin coma. In conclusion, **there are faith healers** and **there are fake healers**.

There are fake healers that use actors in the audience. Some have mastered psychological techniques to make people believe they have been healed. Others use people's normal remission of disease as proof of their healing powers. Some have even performed real miracles using satanic power. Matthew 24:24 warns that "*false christs and false prophets will appear and display great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect.*" But the Holy Spirit will help us discern those who are using human or satanic powers to accomplish healings with two simple questions.

- ❑ **Who is getting the blame for the sickness?** If demons are getting all the blame and nothing else, he or she is probably not legitimate.
- ❑ **Who is getting the credit for the healing?** From Sarah giving birth to Isaac at ninety years of age to the dead who are raised in the book of Revelation, God and His power must always be the focus. Not the healer or the healed.

So the questions remain, does God always heal or does God heal today? There is no doubt we serve an awesome, loving and merciful God who continues to perform many miracles, but what we are going to look at here is whether they are as prevalent today as they were in the first century and misunderstood scriptures in reference to healing. I hope you will read on with an open mind and look at all aspects of this topic like the Bereans would, "*...every day they carefully examined the Scriptures to see if those things were so.*" Acts 17:11. The Bible translations used here are King James, Good News Bible, and the International Standard Version.

Physical healing or Spiritual?

This topic is covered in more detail later but I have included the following article in italics from CRI, which covers the subject very well while reinforcing the very reason for this document. This article is "Copyright 1994 by the Christian Research Institute" and we are grateful for allowing its use.

First Peter 2:24 says of Christ, "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed."

One of the primary rules of biblical interpretation which must never be violated is context. What is the context in 1 Peter 2? Answer: salvation. There is no way to interpret it in any other sense. The verse is talking about Jesus on the cross dying for us, enduring punishment and bearing our sins, thereby providing salvation for us.

When certain people get hold of this passage, however, they change the context from salvation to physical healing. Every time such people see the word "heal" in the Bible they assume it refers to the miracle of divine healing for the body, regardless of whether the context indicates otherwise.

A number of times in Scripture the word healing has specific reference to spiritual healing. There are diseases of the soul that have to be healed and the primary disease of the soul is man's unregenerate state, which is rooted in sin. The good news is that God has provided healing for this disease of the soul. And that is what Peter is talking about in 1 Peter 2:24. He is not saying that physical healing of the body is guaranteed to every believer.

Certainly, healing for the body is a benefit of Christ's death on the cross, a benefit for the church as a result of His atoning sacrifice. However, it is not it has never been in the history of the church a guarantee that God has to heal your body; He doesn't have to!

God does say He will graciously entertain our prayers. He says that if we exercise faith, and if our request is in accordance with His will, He will hear us. But He never said that the mark of true spirituality is that you would never sneeze.

Some within the church will try to tell you, "God's perfect will is that you are never going to be sick." Well, I'll tell you something: there are certain lessons if you are honest that you'll admit you never would have learned unless the Lord flattened you out long enough to get your attention. Sometimes God teaches us things through our suffering.

Moreover, I must say that sometimes a person, after praying for a healing, may receive a no from God a benevolent no, a kindly no, a protective no maybe, but no nevertheless. Tragically, however, there are teachers in the Faith movement, for example who have the colossal gall to tell people that if they were more spiritual, if they had more faith, if they believed like they believed, they would be well. Such faulty teaching can crush whatever faith these poor people have.

Now, I believe you should go to the Lord and believe Him for healing, and trust Him for healing, and pursue Him for healing. And I believe you should search your soul to make certain there is nothing in your life standing in the way of healing. But you must come to Him and lay yourself out on His conditions. The Scripture says, "This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us" (1 John 5:14). If perhaps God intends to teach you something through an illness, He might not heal you immediately.

So don't think you are being neglected by the Holy Spirit if you don't get healed. Don't assume that the Lord is against you. Don't conclude that you necessarily have an absence of faith or secret sin.

Take a good look at 1 Peter 2:21: "Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps." Circle the word example in this verse. Here we are told that Jesus suffered. And He left us an example. We are to follow in His steps.

And what is the meaning of Philippians 3:10, which refers to "the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings"? Let us be clear on this: suffering is an integral part of the fact of life, and is often used by God in the development and maturation of the Christian.

The apostle Paul had a greater standing with the Lord in terms of his ministry than I have or anybody else has ever had. According to 2Corinthians 12:1-10 Paul requested healing from the Lord three times. And three times he got an answer back: "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Translation: God said no to Paul's request for healing. And God had a purpose in saying no.

Did Paul have lack of faith? Rubbish! Was Paul suffering from some secret sin that he was carrying around? Do you see how utterly absurd this is? Do you see how it plays on people's emotions and lives? Do you see how it undermines faith in the absolute authority of Scripture and transfers it to a human being whose experience becomes the criteria?

This type of teaching eats like a cancer in the body of Christ and it must be resisted and opposed at every opportunity so that Christians will not have a cloud hanging over their heads all the time. Instead, they will realize that Jesus really does love them (despite their illness) and that any healing that may come is in His sovereign hands, not ours.

The three views on Healing and the Atonement

The most controversial issue centred on the topic of "does God always heal", is whether physical healing is in the Atonement. There are at least three major theories on healing and the atonement. I believe only one of them is really true to God's word and most importantly will give us an adequate framework to build a healing ministry in which we can minister holistically to everyone involved. Because the others are so prevalent and widely taught, however, it is important to understand them as well.

Before discussing these three different theories, we should clarify exactly what is meant by healing being "in the atonement," just to make sure we are talking about the same thing. First of all, the primary issue at stake here is physical healing, not spiritual, emotional, or other types of healing (although these issues are related). Secondly, the atonement refers to God's saving work for humanity through Christ's life, death and resurrection. So, when the question is asked, "Is healing in the atonement?" the question we are actually asking is, "Is *physical healing* guaranteed to followers of Christ as a result of his reconciling work in the same way that *spiritual healing* is guaranteed?" Having more adequately defined the question, let's consider the three theories.

The first theory we will discuss is that healing is not in the atonement. That is not to say that proponents of this view believe that physical healing does not occur. They believe it is in no way guaranteed by the work of Christ. When healing does occur, it is an "uncovenanted mercy." God has not promised us that it would occur and he is not obligated to heal. He simply has mercy, or reasons we do not understand, and sometimes heals someone when it is His will. One of the assumptions behind this theory is that people are divided into components; spiritual, physical, emotional, etc. The atonement is thus seen as having significance and saving power for our spiritual component only (by forgiveness of sins), which has already taken place through faith.

The main problem with this theory is that it does not really explain to people why only some are healed. Healing is seen just as a mysterious, seemingly random act of love contained in "God's sovereignty." While it is indeed an act of love on God's behalf, we are left with an image of a God who is capricious and unfair. People may think, "He healed Jane, but not me!" or "Why did Bob get healed and my dad die? Does God love that family more than mine?" This theory does not give an adequate explanation to people who are hurting when God does not always heal.

The second theory is that healing is in the atonement and that it can be appropriated or claimed here and now. This view states that it is God's will that we be healed here and now. A direct cause and effect relationship is drawn between faith and healing. If we have enough faith and pray hard enough, God will always heal. This is often part of a "health and wealth" gospel, which also claims our financial prosperity is guaranteed. It assumes complete spiritual and physical healing in this life. Proponents of this view claim to simply take the Bible at its word. In actuality, they read their twentieth century context into the Biblical texts, not considering the original intent, which results in poor or completely wrong interpretations of key passages. They also ignore many other texts and fall short of the overall New Testament picture. God does clearly stand on the side of healing as we shall see below, but many of Paul's writings also indicate times where the apostle Paul was himself not healed or he couldn't heal

others he was in contact with. See Galatians 4:13-15, Philippians 2:25-27, 1Timothy 5:23 and 2Timothy 4:20 etc. In none of these situations is there an indication of a lack of faith.

In addition to the faulty Biblical basis of this theory, it leaves us with many problems with the human side of the equation. The first theory could not explain why some people are healed and the second why most people are not healed! The explanation given is very inadequate when someone is not healed. It is because they have failed to appropriate the healing that God offered them. Either their faith, the faith of the people praying, or the faith of the community is not strong enough so they are to blame. The psychological and spiritual damage this teaching can cause is obvious. Even in faith, many times healing does not occur. What is the conclusion for the person not healed who has been taught this theology? They either grieve over their inadequate faith or they decide that God does not really care. Either can tragically destroy their relationship with God.

The third and final theory we will now discuss also states that physical healing is in the atonement. It is however, NOT guaranteed in this life. The healing we are guaranteed in the atonement is instead an eschatological reality. That is, it is something that will be completely fulfilled at the end of time, at the final resurrection, when God's Kingdom comes in all its glory. However, things which are eschatological in nature can also to a certain extent be present now in this life. When God the Son became man in the person of Jesus Christ, the Kingdom of God began to break in on earth. This view sees salvation for the whole person (physical, emotional, and spiritual) as eschatological in nature. Ultimately we will receive complete forgiveness of sins, total emotional healing, and perfect physical healing at the resurrection. We also have the Holy Spirit who ministers in and through believers and gives us assurance of these ultimate realities in this age. Through faith, we receive assurance of our forgiveness. Likewise, through faith we are to pray for healing, which will sometimes break in as a sign of the Kingdom here on earth. See Romans 8:23-24 and 2Corinthians 5:1-4.

In order for this third theory to be valid, it must answer the two related questions, which the above theories failed to answer adequately: "Why only some people are healed?" and "Why most are not healed?" Both questions are answered in an eschatological understanding of the atonement. When people are healed, they are healed as a manifestation of the Kingdom. This healing is not only God's grace for the person healed, but also proclaims God's glory. It is an affirming sign to the believing community and a witness to unbelievers. Why God does this in any particular case one could only guess. But because when healings do occur it is for the whole body of Christ, when people are not healed, this does not need to be seen as a lack of love for that person.

Another very important thing to remember here is that God has also provided what one could say are perhaps greater gifts through the Spirit for those that are not physically healed in this life. He gives them assurance of his presence and his strength in their life through their weakness. God said to Paul, *"My grace is all you need, for my power is greatest when you are weak. I am most happy, then, to be proud of my weaknesses, in order to feel the protection of Christ's power over me. I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and difficulties for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong."* 2Corinthians 12:9-10. See also Romans 8:26.

Christ identified with us in our suffering and pain through his own life as a human and his death on the cross. Even if we were healed of all our illnesses and infirmities, it can only be temporary as we all eventually die regardless of God's healing power. The result of Spiritual healing, relationship and the blessing of God's presence on the other hand, are eternal and much more important.

Too often ministries of healing have come from the perspective that physical healing is guaranteed in this life. The damaging results have been discussed above. But the Bible is clear that we should participate in the in breaking of God's kingdom by healing the sick through prayer, James 5:14-16. In the mystery of the tension we now live in with the Kingdom partially here, but not fully realized, some will not be healed when we pray. We also, very importantly need to minister God's love and peace. We must remind the unhealed, that God is there with them in their physical brokenness and pain, and that through relationship with him they can have great joy even in that place. This ministers holistically to everyone with validity and integrity and for the whole body of the Church.

Proving Healing in the Atonement

The atonement is perhaps the most important theme of the New Testament. If physical healing is indeed promised in the atonement now, one would therefore expect more teaching on it than just the alleged interpretation of one verse. And yet, every New Testament passage that has teaching on the atonement is significantly silent about healing. When Christ instituted the Lord's Supper, for example, He said, *"Drink ye all of it; For this is my blood of the New Testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins."* Matthew 26:27-28. The apostle Paul also states only one single purpose for Christ's death, *"For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures."* 1Corinthians 15:3.

The question that may be asked is "Why is there no part of Scripture which may be legitimately and indisputably interpreted to teach that Christ died for sicknesses?" The answer lies in the fundamental differences between sin and sickness. Sin is an insult to God's holiness and deserves the penalty of death. In no sense can the same be said for sickness. The absurdity of applying to sickness, all that applies only to sin is evident. Christ never forgave disease. He forgave sin. Jesus did not teach anywhere that sickness needed His death. Sin is the only thing that demands expiation by blood. If sickness needs atonement, then sickness implies a clouded conscience and broken fellowship with God as sin does. The most abiding spiritual lessons come from sickness.

That there is healing in the atonement is true in that all gifts and blessings come to us from the cross. "*Certainly not God, who did not even keep back his own Son, but offered him for us all! He gave us his Son---will he not also freely give us all things?*" Romans 8:32. There are many blessings in the cross, the fullness of time for the enjoyment of which has not yet arrived. Deliverance from death is ours through the atonement, yet death is still here. Calvary removed the curse of sin, but this curse is still upon the whole creation groaning to be delivered from such a state. 2Corinthians 5:4 says, "*While we live in this earthly tent, we groan with a feeling of oppression; it is not that we want to get rid of our earthly body, but that we want to have the heavenly one put on over us, so that what is mortal will be transformed by life.*" We cannot claim now all that is included under the atonement of Christ, or universal exemption from sickness on the grounds of the finished work of the cross.

If the atonement guarantees physical healing now, then Christians who are not healed would have good reason to doubt their salvation also, since proponents of the healing in the atonement view say both healing and salvation are derived from the same atonement and so it is as easy to be healed as it is to be saved and one who is truly saved should never fall sick or suffer pain, since Christ has endured these for us. A debt that has already been paid by Christ does not need to be paid again by us. These statements can and have absolutely devastated many Christians. So, how then should we regard Christians who seem to be paying the debt again by falling sick or suffering pain?

The primary purpose of the atonement of Christ was to cover sin. The secondary purpose was to begin to correct the effects of sin such as sickness and disease. We can categorically declare that all who turn to Christ by faith will find forgiveness of sins and a restored relationship with God. However, we cannot claim in confidence that all who turn to Christ by faith for healing will always obtain the blessing of health. For example, death is an effect of sin. While it was conquered in the atonement, we will not experience complete freedom from death until the appointed time. Therefore it is acceptable to say that healing is in the atonement, but it is presumptuous to assume that healing will always be experienced now like the forgiveness of sins.

Healing Scriptures that are quoted

We will continue this study by examining the Bible verses on healing that some use to prove that the atonement always guarantees physical healing now. We will start by continuing with 1Peter 2:24.

1Peter 2:24 says, "*He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to those sins and live for righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.*" This quote from Peter came from Isaiah 53:5 which says, "*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.*"

People who say that Jesus bore all the cancer and leprosy in the world, understate His agony and have an inadequate appreciation of the infinite weight and suffering that was involved in Christ taking upon Himself the sins of the world. The concept of a dual work on the cross, Christ's bearing our sins and sickness, is a serious misapplication of Scripture. Sickness is only one of the many ultimate effects of man's sin. Jesus took the cause (sin) of all of our sufferings upon Himself at the cross in order to rid us ultimately of all of its effects. It is illogical to affirm that for any or all of the effects to be abolished, it would be necessary for Him to bear any one of the effects (e.g. sickness) along with the cause. By dealing with the cause, (sin) He adequately dealt with all of its effects.

Jesus took care of the problem of sickness by bearing our sins on the tree. Galatians 3:13 "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us. For it is written, "A curse on everyone who is hung on a tree!" It was not necessary for Him to bear our sicknesses for us to be healed. We would never dispute that we are indeed healed by Jesus' stripes. But is the word heal (Hebrew "rapah") referring specifically to physical healing? Studying the Old Testament reveals that it was not often used to include physical healing, but in fact was more commonly used to imply spiritual healing e.g. Jeremiah 3:22, "*Return, O faithless sons, I will heal (rapah) your faithlessness.*" and Psalms 107:20 "*He sent His Word and healed them, and delivered them from their destructions.*" We also find that when the Pharisees murmured against Jesus for eating with sinners, "*...Jesus answering said unto them, they that are WHOLE need not a physician; but they that are SICK. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance*" Luke 5:31-32. Here Jesus refers to the righteous as being WHOLE but the sinners as being SICK and in need of Him as a physician to heal them from their sins.

When we study the context of Isaiah 53 we discover that we could not have a more spiritual theme. This is the great prophetic passage dealing with Christ's intercessory work between God and man. And when we examine the context of 1Peter 2:24, we see that Peter quoted Isaiah not in reference to physical healing, but spiritual.

Note the Bible translation used here is; "**The New Testament: An Understandable Version**" It reads verbatim as, "*Jesus took upon Himself our sins [when] His body was placed upon the cross so that we, [through] dying to [i.e., giving up] the sinful life, would live for righteousness. You were healed [from your sins] by His being brutally treated.*"

It is without a doubt safe to say that the healing Christ brought for us extends from the spiritual over into the emotional, mental, and physical planes, but as we will later consider more deeply, the actualising of this healing will not be fully realized until the resurrection, and hence there is no absolute guarantee of healing now. Healing is a benefit of the atonement, not an irrevocable gift.

Matthew 8:16-17, "*...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 Isaiah the prophet, saying, Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses.*" This is the second major passage used to support the healing in the atonement teaching. Since Matthew is quoting Isaiah 53:4 which as we have just seen, deals with the atonement quite explicitly, and he applies the text to physical healing and deliverance, many feel that this is irrefutable proof that healing is guaranteed in the atonement now. However, such thinking overlooks one extremely significant point. Matthew tells us that this passage of Isaiah is fulfilled right there in the healing ministry of Jesus, before the atonement ever took place. Take another look at Matthew 8:16-17 again. It clearly speaks of people being brought to Jesus for healing and it was these healings that fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah who said, "*He Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses.*"

The Greek in Matthew of Isaiah 53:4 is an exact translation of the Hebrew, and the same translation should have been made in both places. Isaiah fully states the doctrine of the atonement, or that the Messiah was to suffer for sin. The word translated "grief's" (Hebrew) in Isaiah, and "infirmities" (Greek) in Matthew, means in Hebrew and Greek, "diseases of the body." It does not refer to disease of the mind or to sin. To bear those griefs is clearly to bear them away, or to remove them. This was done by his miraculous power in healing the sick. The word rendered "sorrows" in Isaiah, and "sicknesses" in Matthew, means "pain, grief, or anguish of mind." To carry these is to take them away. The cause of all sorrows was sin, which He removed by the atonement. The passage in Isaiah and Matthew, therefore, mean precisely the same thing. Thus it is clear that while Isaiah 53:4 does refer to physical healing, its fulfilment was in the healing ministry of Jesus, as noted by Matthew, and not on the cross, and therefore it offers no guarantee of healing to us today.

While the atonement in Isaiah 53 is the central theme, the entire life and ministry of Jesus is also considered, extending even beyond the Second Coming. The final point of Isaiah 53:4 is that even though Jesus was seen healing the people, they still considered His execution to be a judgment against Him from God. "*Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.*"

Exodus 15:26 and Psalms 103:3 – Healing Scripture

Exodus 15:26 "*And said, If thou wilt diligently hearken to the voice of the LORD thy God, and wilt do that which is right in his sight, and wilt give ear to his commandments, and keep all his statutes, I will put none of these diseases upon thee, which I have brought upon the Egyptians: for I [am] the LORD that healeth (rapah) thee.*"

Psalms 103:3 "*Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth (rapah) all thy diseases;*"

After reading these two verses, it is easy to see that both have the key issue of iniquities or sin as the context. As the context is the same for both these verses, we will cover them together. Many people will not want to accept what I am going to say next, but I will demonstrate it to be true using various scriptures, i.e., the healing referred to in these verses is as per 1Peter 2:24 which is healing diseases of the soul or healing as a result of sin. As already discussed, the word heal (Hebrew "rapah") is not often used to include physical healing of the body. It was more commonly used to imply spiritual healing. We should note that "rapah" occurs 68 times in the Old Testament and does not often refer to physical healing. The Greek word used for physical healing in the New Testament for when Jesus healed people is "therapeu" and occurs 44 times and always referred to physical healing. This is because we received spiritual healing through Jesus stripes. 1Peter 2:24

From here we will use a few scriptures to further demonstrate that "rapah" refers mostly to spiritual healing. In Jeremiah 3:22 GNB it says, "*Return, all of you who have turned away from the LORD; he will heal you and make you faithful. You say, "Yes, we are coming to the LORD because he is our God."*" This on the surface again sounds like it implies physical healing but when we look at the King James translation, we can see how easily we can misinterpret scripture and how careful we have to be

interpreting different translations. Jeremiah 3:22 KJV, *"Return, ye backsliding children, [and] I will heal your backslidings. Behold, we come unto thee; for thou [art] the LORD our God."* Now we can see that this verse was referring to spiritual healing as the people had backslidden into sin.

Here is a similar example in Psalms 41:4 GNB which says, *"I said, 'I have sinned against you, LORD; be merciful to me and heal me.'" And again if we look at the King James we can see absolute proof that the word heal here is definitely that of a spiritual nature. Psalms 41:4 KJV, "I said, LORD, be merciful unto me: heal my soul; for I have sinned against thee."* Here the words *"Heal my soul"* means restoring the soul to spiritual health by forgiving the sin which is the cause of the sickness.

2Chronicles 30:20 KJV says, *"And the LORD hearkened to Hezekiah, and healed the people."* This scripture again is referring to spiritual healing due to sin which is probably best shown by simply reading the Good News translation which says, 2Chronicles 30:20 GNB, *"The LORD answered Hezekiah's prayer; he forgave the people and did not harm them."*

Hosea 11:3 KJV *"I taught Ephraim also to go, taking them by their arms; but they knew not that I healed them."* The healing here again is spiritual where healing in a spiritual sense generally signifies the forgiveness of sin, which the Lord's people may have and not know it. Are you starting to get the full picture now? All these verses involve sin and God desiring to heal us spiritually.

When we looking at the context of Hosea 7:1, we can again see that the issue is sin and God wants to heal the souls of His people of this deadly disease called sin. It says, *"Whenever I want to heal my people Israel and make them prosperous again, all I can see is their wickedness and the evil they do. They cheat one another; they break into houses and steal; they rob people in the streets."*

We have to get out of the mentality of taking the word healing as always meaning physical healing when mentioned in the Old Testament. The examples above are just a few of what could be cited to show that "rapah" was referring largely to spiritual healing. This being the case, why would "rapah" in the Old Testament be referring more to spiritual healing when we have the tendency to see it as physical healing? Let's stop and think about this for a moment. Why would God have so much emphasis on spiritual healing rather than physical in the Old Testament? Could it be that without spiritual healing our souls would be doomed to destruction in hell fire? I think perhaps giving eternal life is far more important to God than physical healing, whether it be cancer or the common cold. God has the emphasis on spiritual healing because without it, we would indeed die for our sins and be eternally separated from Him. God does not view physical healing as importantly because this can only result in the death of our mortal bodies. Spiritual healing is what is required now; God will deal with the physical later when he gives us new glorified bodies. See Philipians 3:21.

James 5:14-16 – Healing Scripture

James 5:14-16 reads, *"Are any among you sick? They should send for the church elders, who will pray for them and rub olive oil on them in the name of the Lord. This prayer made in faith will heal the sick; the Lord will restore them to health, and the sins they have committed will be forgiven. So then, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, so that you will be healed. The prayer of a good person has a powerful effect."*

This is indeed a difficult passage, because on the surface it appears to categorically state that healing will come if certain steps are followed. James said if anyone is sick he should call on the elders to pray for him and I agree 100% that we should always do this as the scripture demonstrates but not lose faith or become discouraged if God's will is different to ours. We should always trust that God's will for our lives is going to be best. Despite the clear words of this passage, as always, we cannot focus on just one passage and base our theology on this alone. We must always take all passages that are relevant to the topic and look at them as a whole to get the full picture of what the Bible tells us.

In the very early period of the New Testament elders existed. They were the recognized leaders of the Church. Not only were they instituted, but also elders were responsible to do certain things that not every member of the Church was. This prayer for healing is one of the things that elders were to do, and I would say that the elders to be called would require the gift of healing for consistent healing every single time. Paul said in 1Corinthians 12:28-30 not all had the power to heal. This also leads us back to the question of whether the gift of healing is as prevalent today as it was when establishing the Church.

This is what **The People's New Testament (1891) by B. W. Johnson** commented:

"Is any sick among you. In the early church, when miraculous gifts were imparted by the laying on of apostolic hands "as a sign to unbelievers," one of these was the gift of healing. In most early churches founded by the apostles some one of the elders would have this gift. There is no more reason for the descent of this gift to our times than of any other miraculous power. This passage, then, describes what was peculiar to the early church. The sick were anointed by the elders with oil, a symbol of the Spirit, which effected the healing, hands were laid, and prayer offered..."

In these verses, James outlines the steps for prayers for healing. First, these elders in keeping with God's institution pray for the ill person and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. After the elders anoint with oil and pray, verse 15 says that God will raise the sick person up if the prayer is offered in faith. This is a solid Biblical principle that should always be followed, and we should always stand firm in unwavering faith believing for healing, and as a result, there will be many times where divine healing will manifest. However, we must also consider some facts that some would rather not hear or believe, but they cannot be denied. The Bible states not all have the power to do miracles or heal, and Jesus said the reason for all the miracles was so people would believe and God's kingdom on earth would be established. Today the Church is well established and therefore this reason for the constant miracle on top of miracle no longer exists. This explains why today most cannot *indisputably* say that they know someone with the gift of healing, again leaving healing to God's Sovereign will and trusting Him always.

The Bible teaches that there will be death, illness, and affliction. If this verse is taken at face value, then obedient Christians could call the elders, be anointed, and be healed every time. This would cover illness and affliction, but James also knew that there would be times of such affliction. The opening chapter of James calls on us to count it as joy even when we have various trials and afflictions. Even the apostles were evidently unable to prolong their own lives by having such anointing. So the Bible does not lead us to expect that all illnesses will be removed until the time described in Revelation 21-22, which speaks of no more crying and no more pain and no more death.

Equally undeniable is this: The most sincere Christians in all ages have tried to apply this verse literally and universally, and still many died from illnesses and there are no credible claims that all illnesses can always be cured. When I say no credible, that rules out most of the flamboyant TV faith healers, who themselves cannot sustain a proof that they can heal all and every illness.

It is the universal experience of Christianity that even when we pray, even when we pray in faith, even when we have the elders standing with us in prayer, still sometimes, God does not always heal physically. It is true that he always answers prayer and that he ultimately heals. In fact, the word may mean, "*will make the sick person whole,*" and that would certainly happen if an ill person died, and at the second coming of Christ when "*this mortal shall have put on immortality,*" 1Corinthians 15:54. However, that is not what we are praying for when we ask for God's healing.

The best way to understand this passage is to acknowledge before we apply it that it must be *interpreted harmoniously with other passages in Scripture*. To do so, means that we understand that God only heals those whom he wants to heal according to His will. We may pray in faith, and we may anoint with oil, but all of this must be submitted to God's will. He does not heal at our whim or verbal command. He heals wonderfully in accord with his will. This verse gives confidence that God may heal, but it should never be thought of as guaranteeing healing simply because steps are followed.

In situations or circumstances where it is within God's will to heal, (see 1John 5:14) these verses make perfect sense. It is comforting, if we view it within the context of the other scriptural teaching. It will haunt us and lead us to doubt God if we take it out of its context. This particular promise does not belong to every situation, so much as it does to particular circumstances that are in God's will. Indeed, the final part of verse 15 helps confirm that this is the meaning. The final part being, that if a person has sinned, the "*sins they have committed will be forgiven.*" Interpreted similarly, a sinner should ask for forgiveness, but if that person is not a believer in Christ, the verse has little application for him. That prayer, like the one of healing, is limited by the sovereign will of God.

3 John 1:2 – Healing Scripture

3John 1:1-2 reads, "*The elder unto the well-beloved Gaius, whom I love in the truth. 2 Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth.*"

Some interpret 3John 1:2 as God saying that it is his desire for us to always be in health and prosper. From reading all of God's word, we can see that it is what God ultimately wants for us, but it is no guarantee that it is what God will give us right now. It will be according to his sovereign will.

We can clearly see this scripture is taken out of context when we read verse one before it. These two verses are John wishing that his friend Gaius whom he loves is in good health. It is no different to us saying to old friends, "Hi...how have you been? I hope you have been well." Paul also said in Galatians 5:12 ISV, "*I wish that those who are unsettling you would castrate themselves!*" Does this also mean that it is God's will for us to castrate ourselves? Of course not. God did not say it and it was not said to us. If we decide scriptures have double or extra meanings like this, then we can manipulate the scripture into saying whatever we want it to say. This is not a good practice. All of Romans 16 is based on greetings such as this and that is all they are, greetings and good wishes.

John 14:12 – Healing Scripture

John 14:12 reads, "*Truly, truly I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I am doing. He will do even greater works than these because I am going to the Father.*"

Some people use this verse in John as a basis of the belief that it is always God's will to heal all that were sick, and since He said we would do greater, not lesser works than He, if we have the faith we should expect everyone we pray for or those who touch us to be healed also. While it must be acknowledged that this argument sounds reasonable, there are certain inescapable flaws in it.

First, many good scholars have variously interpreted exactly what Jesus meant by "greater works". If Jesus was referring only to physical miracles and healings, what greater works could possibly be done than those that Jesus did (e.g. what could be a greater physical sign than raising the dead? It does not get better than that!) It would seem that any greater work would have to be predominately of a spiritual kind. Hence it is the opinion of many scholars that Jesus was anticipating the disciple's enactment of the Great Commission through which by the preaching of the gospel, men and women would be saved, and the Kingdom of God established on earth through the Church.

Jesus could not have been referring only to physical healing when He made this statement, otherwise He would be guilty of false prophesying. The simple fact is that the healing ministry of Jesus has never been duplicated in history; even by the Apostles (we shall see examples later). This fact is illustrated again and again even in the ministries of those who preach healing in the atonement is guaranteed. Many for whom they pray are not healed. We see from this that the healing ministry of Jesus was of a different order than that of the Church, to establish a unique purpose, i.e. the legitimacy of His claim to be the Messiah. See John 10:38 and John 20:31. However, even Jesus did not heal everyone. In John 5 we read that by the pool called Bethesda, Jesus found *"a multitude of those who were sick, blind, lame, and withered"* (verse 3). Yet, after selecting only one man Jesus *"slipped away while there was a crowd in that place"* (verse 13). He could have healed everyone, but as in John 9 He chose to heal only one and for the glory of God.

Mark 16:17-18 – Healing Scripture

Mark 16:14 reads, *"Last of all, Jesus appeared to the eleven disciples as they were eating. He scolded them, because they did not have faith and because they were too stubborn to believe those who had seen him alive. 15 He said to them, "Go throughout the whole world and preach the gospel to all people. 16 Whoever believes and is baptised will be saved; whoever does not believe will be condemned. 17 Believers will be given the power to perform miracles: they will drive out demons in my name; they will speak in strange tongues 18 if they pick up snakes or drink any poison, they will not be harmed; they will place their hands on sick people, and these will get well." 19 After the Lord Jesus had talked with them, he was taken up to heaven and sat at the right side of God."*

Mark 16:17-18 are indeed scriptures that are widely misunderstood. Having a detailed look at the context here, we see that Jesus was telling His Disciples to go into the world and preach the Gospel, in order that the Church would be established. If we look at the book of Acts we can see what Jesus prophesied here is seen to be fulfilled. Let's have a look at some of these points.

Firstly Mark 16:17 GNB says, *"Believers will be given the power to perform miracles,"* or in the King James; *"these signs will follow those who believe."* Jesus was not saying that every single one of these signs would follow every person that believed as some interpret, but these are signs you will see from those who believe which is verified by Paul in 1Corinthians 12:29-30 GNB, *"They are not all apostles or prophets or teachers. **Not everyone has the power to work miracles** or to heal diseases or to speak in strange tongues or to explain what is said."* And for final proof, Paul also said in 1Corinthians 12:10, *"The Spirit gives one person the power to work miracles; to another, the gift of speaking God's message; and to yet another, the ability to tell the difference between gifts that come from the Spirit and those that do not. To one person he gives the ability to speak in strange tongues, and to another he gives the ability to explain what is said."* The disciples were probably informed so they would not be surprised by what they saw, e.g., when Paul was bitten by a snake, the people around expected him to swell up and die. When he didn't they thought he was a God.

The book of Acts shows that some, but not all were given the power to do miracles as Jesus said. Acts 14:3 says *"The apostles stayed there for a long time, speaking boldly about the Lord, who proved that their message about his grace was true by giving them the power to perform miracles and wonders."* Paul and Stephen were certainly excellent examples to the apostles of some of the miracles or signs that were said to follow those that believed. Acts 6:8 shows *"Stephen, a man richly blessed by God and full of power, performed great miracles and wonders among the people."* And in Acts 19:11, *"God was performing unusual miracles through Paul. Even handkerchiefs and aprons he had used were taken to the sick, and their diseases were driven away, and the evil spirits would go out of them."* Paul also raised the dead, Acts 20:9-12.

On the day of Pentecost the prophecy *"they will speak in strange tongues"* was fulfilled. This is one gift that cannot be argued is still given to some spirit filled Christians, but it is still not given to all. Acts 2:3-4, *"Then they saw what looked like tongues of fire which spread out and touched each person there. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to talk in other languages, as the Spirit enabled them"*

to speak." When the apostle Peter first preached the Gospel to the Gentiles they also spoke in other tongues they had not learnt. Acts 10:44-46, "While Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit came down on all those who were listening to his message. The Jewish believers who had come from Joppa with Peter were amazed that God had poured out his gift of the Holy Spirit on the Gentiles also. For they heard them speaking in strange tongues and praising God's greatness."

Mark 16:18 Begins by stating, "if they pick up snakes or drink any poison, they will not be harmed." This was shown to be possible and true in Acts 28:3-6, "Paul gathered up a bundle of sticks and was putting them on the fire when a snake came out on account of the heat and fastened itself to his hand. The natives saw the snake hanging on Paul's hand and said to one another, "This man must be a murderer, but Fate will not let him live, even though he escaped from the sea." But Paul shook the snake off into the fire without being harmed at all. They were waiting for him to swell up or suddenly fall down dead. But after waiting for a long time and not seeing anything unusual happening to him, they changed their minds and said, "He is a god!"

Does anyone of us really believe today, that all Christians could be bitten by a snake and all be totally unaffected as Paul was? If it did it would be a fairly isolated case and by God's sovereign will.

Here is a final example of signs that did not follow someone that believed and why. Acts 8:18, "Simon saw that the Spirit had been given to the believers when the apostles placed their hands on them. So he offered money to Peter and John, and said, "Give this power to me too, so that anyone I place my hands on will receive the Holy Spirit." But Peter answered him, "May you and your money go to hell, for thinking that you can buy God's gift with money! You have no part or share in our work, because your heart is not right in God's sight." Now Simon believed but **none** of the signs followed and we can see why. We must also remember that Mark was not a witness to what he wrote here and that translating Greek or Hebrew to English is not an exact science.

Albert Barnes Notes on the Bible commented the following on Mark 16:17:

"Them that believe: The apostles, and those in the primitive age who were endowed with like power. This promise was fulfilled if it can be shown that these signs followed in the case of any who believed, and it is not necessary to suppose that they would follow in the case of all. The meaning is, that they would be the result of faith, or of the belief of the gospel. It is true that they were. These signs were shown in the case of the apostles and early Christians. The infidel cannot say that the promise has not been fulfilled unless he can show that this never occurred; the Christian should be satisfied that the promise was fulfilled if these miracles were ever actually wrought, though they do not occur now; and the believer now should not expect a miracle in his case. Miracles were necessary for the establishment of religion in the world; they are not necessary for its continuance now."

What does Scripture say about suffering?

Having considered the Scriptures most often used to support healing in general and healing in the atonement, we should now try to arrive at a more biblical understanding of the relationship between the atonement, physical health and suffering. The Bible teaches that although Christ's work on our behalf is finished, the total effect of our redemption is not yet complete. In Romans 8:30 we find that the redemptive work of God on our behalf includes predestination, calling, justification, and glorification. The first three have already happened, but the fourth, while assured, has not yet taken place. That is why we read in the same chapter in Romans 8:23-24, "But it is not just creation alone which groans; we who have the Spirit as the first of God's gifts also groan within ourselves as we wait for God to make us his children and set our whole being free. For it was by hope that we were saved; but if we see what we hope for, then it is not really hope. For who of us hopes for something we see?" What Paul is explaining to us here in very clear terms, is that the physical aspect of our redemption (glorification of our bodies, Philippians 3:21) is our great hope; something in the future that has not taken place yet. While Christ did buy perfect health for us at the cross by dying for our sins, it will not go into effect until the glorification of our bodies and cannot be claimed now.

It should be obvious that perfect health is not intended for us right now by the fact that all believers (including those who claim their healing) grow old and die. And how do we die if it happens over and over again? Is it by sickness, again itself being a form of disease? Thus, God has not ordained that sickness be totally removed from our experience yet, but it is a part of our hope that one day it permanently will be. Revelation 21:4, "And He shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there shall no longer be any death; there shall be no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away." Those who teach that it is always God's will to heal also advocate the doctrine that it is always God's will for us to be prosperous. And little wonder, for the same sentiment is behind both. It is a sentiment that is not patient to wait for the day described in Revelation 21:4, that is unwilling to face the full extent of the cross that God has called us to, during the brief span of our days here. It cannot quite accept the fact that God has called us to many sufferings for a season.

Scripture teaches that suffering is a central part of God's plan and a way of working with us here and now. Some Christians would rather disregard these scriptures or others that show we are not guaranteed a suffering free life, because they so desperately want to believe that they will always receive healing. This often appears to be an issue of fear. However, the Bible tells us to *fear not* as these times of trials are where we show God that no matter what happens we will still trust and have faith in Him knowing that He is there comforting us. The scriptures make it very clear that there are wonderful and glorious benefits for our sufferings, which will only be for a *short* while.

Let us imagine for a moment that God never allowed Christians to be sick or have any illness. What would happen if your non-Christian friend told you that they were extremely ill and in lots of pain? How could we have any compassion for them? Our response would probably be; "What is it like to be sick? What is pain?" Instead, we find that 2Corinthians 1:4-5 says, "*who comforts us in all our suffering, so that we may be able to comfort others in all their suffering, since we ourselves are being comforted by God. For just as Christ's sufferings overflow to us, so our comfort overflows through Christ.*" If we never experienced suffering, how could our characters ever have any depth? How could we ever have or understand hope? When we think about these things we understand what Paul says in Romans here.

Romans 5:3-4, "*Not only that, but we also **boast** in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, endurance produces character, and character produces hope.*"

How different are things today? In the time of Christ, they boasted of their sufferings and yet today some do not want to accept suffering because they want to believe it is never God's will for them to suffer in any way. Most spiritual and personal growth comes from overcoming adversities. Here are a few more samples of what could be cited to prove there are benefits for our sufferings:

- Romans 8:17-18 "*...we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory. For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed to us.*"
- 2Corinthians 4:17 "*And this small and temporary trouble we suffer will bring us a tremendous and eternal glory, much greater than the trouble.*"
- 2Corinthians 12:10 "*That is why I take such pleasure in weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and difficulties for Christ's sake, for when I am weak, then I am strong.*"
- 1Peter 4:13 "*Instead, because you are participating in the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that you may be glad and shout for joy when his glory is revealed.*"
- 1Peter 4:19 "*So then, those who suffer according to God's will should entrust their souls to a faithful Creator and continue to do what is good.*"
- 1Peter 5:10 "*And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, establish, and strengthen you.*"
- James 5:10 "*As an example of suffering and patience, brothers, take the prophets, who spoke in the name of the Lord. We consider those who endured to be blessed.*"

If the prophets were examples to us, then shouldn't we follow in their footsteps? One wonders what the prophets would have thought of a doctrine that says it is *always* God's will for us to prosper physically, and it's our own fault if we don't, especially when one reads Hebrews 11:35-38, "*...Others were brutally tortured but refused to accept release, so that they might gain a better resurrection. Still others endured taunts and floggings, and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned to death, sawed in half, and killed with swords. They went around in sheepskins and goatskins. They were needy, oppressed, and mistreated. The world wasn't worthy of them. They wandered in deserts, mountains, caves, and holes in the ground.*" These men hardly illustrate the current concept of spirituality which is measured by one's wardrobe and car. This is not to deny that God does often prosper His children. Paul exemplified a well-balanced perspective when he wrote; "*I know how to be humble, and I know how to prosper. In each and every situation I have learned the secret of being full and of going hungry, of having too much and of having too little.*" Philippians 4:12.

When the Scriptural basis for healing in the atonement is proven faulty, its advocates often fall back upon the sentiment that it is inconceivable for our heavenly Father to ever will that we be sick. To this we must add, why would He not will us to be sick, except to spare us from suffering? We have just seen clearly that it is His will that we suffer in many ways during this life. Our suffering is inextricably connected to our mortal bodies and sin. As Paul said in 2Corinthians 4:10, "*At all times we carry in our mortal bodies the death of Jesus, so that his life also may be seen in our bodies.*"

All diseases find their completion in death, and yet God has not removed physical death from the experience of His children. It is ludicrous and without basis to suppose that the same God who ordained that we suffer for a short time in these degenerating, death bound bodies would at the same time ordain that we have perfect health. It seems obvious that if God wanted us to have perfect health now, He would have given us a glorified and immortal body now. See Philippians 3:20-21.

Job said, *"Man, that is born of woman, is of few days and full of trouble."* Job 14:1. This truth holds for both believer and non-believer, yet some seek to escape the many troubles of the world by denying their very existence. Many of these Christians believe one or more of these three points. (1) Denial of sickness, (2) belief that it is always God's will that we prosper, and (3) inflexible belief that through the power of the spoken word one creates his own experience, either positive or negative. These Christians refuse to acknowledge the obvious existence of their own ailments, offering some explanation. They often say, *"I've been healed. What you see are only the symptoms lingering on."* No one has ever offered a satisfactory explanation as to what good it does to be healed of a cold if the symptoms remain! It becomes clear that because such people refuse to acknowledge reality they begin to live in a world of unreality. Sadly, they wonder why their beliefs don't work and then become totally confused and disillusioned rather than just trusting God.

The Bible said the time would come when people would not listen to sound doctrine and would only hear what tickles their ears. This *faith* movement falls into this category. Many do not want to hear that we may suffer in this life. They would rather hear that God always heals now. 2Timothy 4:3, *"The time will come when people will not listen to sound doctrine, but will follow their own desires and will collect for themselves more and more teachers who will tell them what they are itching to hear."*

Those who deny that it could ever be God's will for us to be sick insist also that Satan is always the author of sickness. It is true that we need to be discerning about sickness, for Satan could be its source, Luke 13:16. However, it is unbiblical to say that God Himself has never sent sickness upon people. As it turns out, there are many more instances in Scripture where God is identified as the source of physical affliction than there are instances of Satan being so identified. The big question is, does God still send sickness upon His own? Let's now consider this question in detail.

The relationship between Sin, Sickness, Forgiveness and Healing

The New Testament shows the ministry of Jesus included preaching, teaching and healing. He came to restore a broken relationship between man and God. He preached the forgiveness of sin and healed the wounds of the people. Our own interaction with God is one of recognition and repentance of sin, healing, restoration and forgiveness. As we see the character of God through Jesus, we see a relationship between sin and sickness and between healing and forgiveness.

What is Sin?

- ❑ Sin first occurred through Adam by disobedience to God. (Romans 5:12-19; 2Corinthians 11:3)
- ❑ God observed that man's heart was tainted by evil. (Genesis 6:5)
- ❑ All mankind is affected by sin. (1Kings 8:46)
- ❑ Sin is evidenced by the breakdown in relationship of man to God.
- ❑ Sin is revolt against the holiness and sovereign will of God.
- ❑ It is both a condition of the spirit, soul and body (Isaiah 29:13; Jeremiah 17:9) and the practical outworking of that condition in thoughts, words, and deeds.
- ❑ The wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23). Sin results in spiritual and physical death.
- ❑ The root of sin is in the human heart. (Mark 7:20-23, Romans 6:15-23)
- ❑ Man is individually accountable for his own sin. (Ezekiel 18:4, 19-20)

What is Sickness?

Sickness or disease is the absence of health. Absence of health may be physical (i.e. viral or bacterial infection or a broken bone as a result of an accident), emotional (i.e. anxiety or depression) or spiritual i.e. from satanic attacks, (Acts 10:38, Luke 13:16) or from God's discipline.

- ❑ Psalms 119:67 *"Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep Thy word."*
- ❑ Psalms 119:75 *"I know, O LORD, that Thy judgments are righteous, and that in faithfulness Thou hast afflicted me."*
- ❑ Psalms 119:91 *"It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I may learn Thy statutes."*

What is Divine Healing?

Divine healing is a full restoration of health from the sickness concerned, by a direct interaction from God. It has no connection with the natural laws of healing i.e. through the use of medicine, surgery, or other natural means, in that there is a supernatural component to the restoration of health. Divine healing involves more than just positive thinking or a prayer of faith, James 5:15. The Bible records numerous instances of divine healing in both Old and New Testaments.

Where does Sickness come from?

According to the Bible, sickness first came into the world with the fall of man. In Genesis 2:17, God told Adam that if he ate from the tree of knowledge he would surely die. When Adam ate from the tree of knowledge his human spirit became separated from God and physical death became a reality. Genesis 3:17 and Romans 5:17. So back to the big question, does sickness come from God or Satan or are there any other possibilities? The Bible seems to give at least three answers to this question.

God and Sickness

Scripture shows numerous instances that while living in Old Testament times before the cross that God brought disease upon his people as a punishment for their *flagrant* acts of disobedience. On a number of occasions, God specifically warns his people about the diseases that he will bring upon his own disobedient people. In Deuteronomy 28:22, He even names the types of disease he will bring upon them: "...with wasting disease, with fever and inflammation..." While it was the disobedience that caused the disease, it is still clear that God was responsible, or at the very least allowed disease to attack his people. Here are just a few of those numerous examples:

- ❑ Exodus 4:11 *"And the LORD said to him, 'Who has made man's mouth; Or Who makes him dumb or deaf? or seeing or blind? Is it not I, the LORD?'"*
- ❑ Exodus 15:26 *"He said, "If you will obey me completely by doing what I consider right and by keeping my commands, I will not punish you with any of the diseases that I brought on the Egyptians. I am the LORD, the one who heals you."*
- ❑ Numbers 11:33 *"While there was still plenty of meat for them to eat, the LORD became angry with the people and caused an epidemic to break out among them."*
- ❑ 2Kings 15:5 *"And the Lord struck the King, so that he was a leper to the day of his death."*
- ❑ 2Chronicles 21:14 *"As a result, the LORD will severely punish your people, your children, and your wives, and will destroy your possessions. You yourself will suffer a painful intestinal disease that will grow worse day by day."*
- ❑ Isaiah 10:16 *"The LORD Almighty is going to send disease to punish those who are now well-fed. In their bodies there will be a fire that burns and burns."*

Satan and Sickness

In Job 2:7, Satan is responsible for terrible skin boils all over Job's body. It should be well noted that Satan was not able to inflict any harm onto Job or his family without God's permission and was not permitted to take Job's life. See Job 1:7-12 and 2:2-6. Further mention of Satan's role in sickness is seen in Acts 10:38 and throughout the New Testament where Jesus and the apostles restore people to health in opposition to Satan. In Luke 13:11-13, Jesus heals a crippled woman who had been affected by a spirit belonging to Satan for eighteen years.

Sickness from undefined causes

The third category of sickness seen in the Bible is where neither God or Satan are responsible. In John 9, a blind man comes before Jesus. His disciples ask *"Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind? Jesus responds neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus, "but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life."* It is clear from Jesus' words that the man's blindness was not from a source of sin, which also implies that some sickness then was a result of sin.

The relationship between Sin and Sickness

Is all Sickness from God as result of Sin? Based on the scriptures and John 9 the answer is NO. It is however, obvious that sin can cause sickness that is not brought directly from God such as AIDS from adultery or cancer from smoking as the body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. Psychological conditions such as anxiety or depression can produce illness of the mind and the body.

Some would argue that there must be sin buried deep within the mind or the history of the person that explains their lack of health or that a lack of faith (which becomes a sin in itself) is responsible for not recovering from sickness. Some would also see an absence of healing due to unconfessed sin, or would say admitting physical symptoms is a "negative confession" that forfeits healing. Some say it is wrong for us to have diseases in our body when Jesus is said to have borne our griefs (Isaiah 53:4 previously discussed and explained.) and that the believer who is not healed is out of God's will, due to unbelief or sin. Some would say that because Matthew 9:2 says, *"All at once some people brought him a paralyzed man lying on a stretcher. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralyzed man, "Be courageous, son! Your sins are forgiven."* and because James 5:15 reads, *"And the prayer offered in faith will save the person who is sick. The Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed any sins, he will be forgiven"* that sickness is a result of sin even despite what is written in John 9. What is being overlooked here is that the most important thing to God is spiritual healing, as without that we are doomed for eternity. So would Jesus heal you physically and say *"well your physical sickness is gone but I am sorry to say your soul is still sick so you are doomed?"* Of course not! The point is that spiritual healing is obviously far more important and therefore goes hand in hand with the physical healing. He won't do one without the other. Note that James 5:15 says, *"...and if he has committed any sins"*. Hebrews 12:6-9 shows that God disciplines the children he loves, as do our own fathers. As a father or mother would you discipline your own or anybody else's children for that matter by inflicting sickness on them? As for myself, I would never consider such a thing and I would also never consider that our loving, merciful heavenly father would do that to us either living under His grace.

Just imagine, if God did punish all His children by sickness today even while under his unmerited and undeserved grace, I think it would be pretty safe to say that all Christians would be fairly consistently sick most of our lives. A biblical perspective reminds us that not all sickness is caused by sin.

Does Sin always cause Sickness?

Sin can certainly cause damage to spirit, soul and or the body. If a person takes illegal drugs, injury inevitably occurs and emotional and physical health will most likely suffer. Loss of appetite, neurological damage, and even death occur because of the physical harm sustained. The damage is directly attributable to a sinful lifestyle. Obsession with pornography and sexual immorality produces damage to the emotional health of an individual. Feelings of guilt, secretiveness, and lying may not produce physical harm initially (although there is plenty of material that links guilt with all sorts of physical disorders) but can certainly produce forms of emotional disturbance.

There are many circumstances where people feel that sickness was a result of Satan. This does not mean that every sickness needs deliverance, but rather that Satan was involved directly or indirectly in the breaking of laws which opened the door for sickness. Almost all sickness can be traced to the result of laws broken, either in the spirit realm, the soul realm, or the physical realm.

Does God still punish Sin by Sickness?

As we have already seen several times now, sin is often spoken of as a disease and redemption from it as a restoration from a deadly bodily disease. The apostle Peter said in 1Peter 2:24, "*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.*" As previously explained, the healing here referred to, is spiritual healing, or healing from sin.

Forgiveness of sin and restoration to the favour of God are not infrequently represented as an act of healing. The figure is derived from the fact that awakened and convicted sinners are often represented as crushed, broken, bruised by the weight of their transgressions, and the removal of the load of sin is represented as an act of healing. Sin is not only a crime for which we were condemned to die, and which Christ purchased for us the pardon of, but it is a disease which tends directly to the death of our souls, and which Christ provided the cure for. The apostle Peter was referring to Isaiah 53:5 when he wrote, "*...by whose stripes ye were healed...*" To understand this fully, refer also to Matthew 8:16-17 which says, "*...He drove out the spirits with a word and healed all those who were sick. This was to fulfill what was declared by the prophet Isaiah when he said, "It was he who took our illnesses away and removed our diseases."* Matthew was quoting Isaiah 53:4 when he wrote this which says, "*Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows...*" and the healing ministry of Jesus fulfilled this. The word Grief here means disease or sickness. As sickness was sometimes the result of sin, it refers to Christ bearing our grief's and sorrows, which were not for his sins but his people; and so the apostle interprets them as Christ bearing our sins in his own body on the tree. Galatians 3:13 says "*Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree.*"

To further clarify, Isaiah 53:4 says that he bore our sicknesses, and Isaiah 53:5 says how, by his stripes we are healed of sin by Jesus being wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities. Under the theocracy of Israel, God ruled the people directly and commanded punishment immediately for certain *flagrant* acts of disobedience. As Christ freed us from the consequences of sin at Calvary, today punishment is delayed until the Day of Judgment for those without Christ.

Forgiveness and Healing

Just as love comes from God (for God is love, 1 John 4:7-8) and demonstrates not only God's nature but also his pattern for our own lives, so also do we see a need to pattern our lives around his forgiveness. Ephesians 4:31-32, "*Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.*" See also 2Corinthians 2:5-11 and Hebrews 12:14-15.

In every aspect of man's interaction with God throughout the Old and New Testament we see an aspect of forgiveness in the character of God. Some of the most striking examples are seen in the life of Jesus, for example where he saves the adulterous woman from being stoned. John 8:3-11. At perhaps the most shameful time in human history, Jesus, whilst dying on the cross, asked his heavenly father to "*...forgive them for they do not know what they are doing*" Luke 23:34. When we forgive, the character of God is seen, and something special happens, a form of Healing.

As children of God, the more we know the Father the more we become like Him. Love and forgiveness become part of our nature. However, this is not necessarily an automatic thing. Our emotions, attitudes, or current situations often produce the opposite of love or forgiveness. Forgiveness allows healing and enables God to work in people's lives that have been hurt. Illness on the other hand affects both mind and body. We must choose our response to a situation.

In conclusion to this topic, while there is a connection between sickness and sin, the relationship between the two varies with each individual and each circumstance. A balanced view will provide for different types of relationships. Sin is present in all mankind but may or may not induce sickness to man (body, soul or spirit). Some would say that all sickness ultimately has its roots in sin. The Bible teaches that whilst all have sin, that not all sickness is directly caused by sin. The origin of sickness is not always clear, it seems to be a tool that is frequently attributed to Satan, more often than not wrongly, and used to be punishment from God. We can clearly see that God wishes us to have wholeness and health, but is more important to Him to heal us of sin than of physical illness.

Does Scripture show that God always heals today?

The key point of difference with Kenneth Hagin, Ken Copeland and the others in this guaranteed healing movement, is that we are convinced from our study of Scripture that healing is not simply a mechanical process of the believer repenting (if necessary), believing, and receiving, which if we're not healed makes it undoubtedly our responsibility. There is also an element of the sovereignty of God in all this. As John says, *"If we ask anything according to His will, He hears us."* 1John 5:14.

The undeniable biblical truth is, it is not always God's will to heal us because at times He has a positive purpose in affliction. God allowed affliction to come upon Job for the purpose of proving the genuineness of Job's commitment to Him. Job 1:6-2:10. Some argue that while God may bring affliction upon us for a positive purpose, physical disease is not included among the ways in which He deals with His children, except in judgment. However, God Himself stated that Job did nothing to deserve the trials that came upon Him Job 2:3, and yet Job's most severe affliction was a physical disorder, *"sore boils from the sole of his feet to the crown of his head."* Job 2:7. It may be countered that this incident was in the Old Testament, before the atonement guaranteed perfect health for all, as they believe. However, it appears the Apostle James did not see things this way. He showed God's dealings with Job, and Job's endurance through them, as a pattern and example for New Testament believers. James 5:10-11, *"My friends, remember the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. Take them as examples of patient endurance under suffering. We call them happy because they endured. You have heard of Job's patience, and you know how the Lord provided for him in the end. For the Lord is full of mercy and compassion."* To any who doubt that the Lord had a hand in Job's afflictions, Job 42:11 shows clearly what the inspired author (not Satan or human error) says concerning Job, *"...They expressed their sympathy and comforted him for all the troubles the LORD had brought on him..."* Therefore, we see that for a constructive purpose God brought or permitted physical affliction to come upon Job.

Another undeniable fact is that God also allowed affliction to come upon Paul, not answering his prayer for deliverance, so that Paul would not become too high minded as a result of the visions and revelations he had, 2Corinthians 12:7-10. Some people's response to this passage, which is typical of the healing movement is; *"That was Paul's estimate of the situation. God did not tell him that He gave him that to keep him humble, but Paul was a man who was prone to brag and boast. Therefore he took it upon himself to believe all of this that was coming upon him was going to help him to stay humble."* In this statement, we find an alarming lack of respect for the authority of the inspired authors of Scripture. See 2Timothy 3:16 There is absolutely nothing within the context of this passage to qualify this statement of Paul's as being merely his own opinion. See Galatians 1:11-12.

Paul makes the statement with the full authority that by virtue of inspiration was rightfully his. If by our human rationalizing that Paul was one prone to boast about himself (Paul said he does not and therefore this finds no basis in Scripture), we have the freedom to dismiss what he said in verse seven as being misguided and we can also then dismiss anything else he said that does not fit into our doctrinal scheme. Once this happens, our basis of trust in the Scripture has become effectively undermined. However, we find that Paul derived this estimate of the situation from the Lord's answer to his prayers: *"My grace is all you need, for my power is greatest when you are weak."* (Verse 9)

Paul learned to be content with his affliction, for the Lord taught him that at the very moment that he was weakest in himself, the power of the Lord would be most evident through him, bringing glory to God rather than Paul (verses 9-10). This lesson desperately needs to be learned by many who are being influenced by the false doctrines that claim healing and prosperity always now.

There have always been times, even in the Bible, when God's people have had to accept and live with illness. Paul gave medicinal advice to Timothy rather than saying to him, *"Timothy, claim your healing."* Instead, what Paul said to Timothy in 1Timothy 5:23 was, *"No longer drink water exclusively, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and frequent ailments."*

This verse should have special significance to those who think the Bible supports some of the extreme teachings of our day. Where is Paul's word of faith and positive confession? By giving medicinal advice and telling Timothy he has frequent ailments (thus acknowledging their ongoing existence rather than speaking healing into being) Paul is completely out of line with the current wind of doctrine.

As Kenneth Hagin puts it, *"People confess their lack and build up a sense of lack in themselves. As they confess these things, these lacks gain ascendancy in their lives."*

This is not to deny that there is some psychological truth in what Hagin is saying. However, many have tried to turn this into an unyielding spiritual principle that is so exacting that one must always be *painfully* conscious of every word he or she says, for fear of speaking something destructive into being. With a little research on the occult, one can see that such a belief in the creative power of human words is much more related to occult philosophy than Biblical theology.

Paul also wrote, *"I left Trophimus in Miletus, because he was sick."* 2Timothy 4:20. In both cases, we find that sickness had an effect upon the ministry of the apostles, even as many have to make adjustments in their ministries because of sickness today.

Also, Epaphroditus was sick in the presence of Paul and Paul implies no expectation of his healing, but rather states that his recovery was due to the mercy (and not obligation) of God. Philippians 2:25-27, *"I have thought it necessary to send to you our brother Epaphroditus, who has worked and fought by my side and who has served as your messenger in helping me. He is anxious to see you all and is very upset because you had heard that he was sick. Indeed he was sick and almost died. But God had pity on him, and not only on him but on me, too, and spared me an even greater sorrow."*

There will be some people who will no doubt want to argue that Paul was unable to obtain healing for Trophimus because of Trophimus's lack of faith, as some say that one must have faith for his own healing, and the great faith of another cannot overcome one's own belief. However, the same people are at a loss to explain why Paul himself had to endure an illness, and it would be out right stupidity to doubt Paul's faith. Galatians 4:13-15 says, *"You remember why I preached the gospel to you the first time; it was because I was sick. But even though my physical condition was a great trial to you, you did not despise or reject me. Instead, you received me as you would an angel from heaven; you received me as you would Christ Jesus. You were so happy! What has happened? I myself can say that you would have taken out your own eyes, if you could, and given them to me."*

Paul's reference to his eyes is a clear indication that his illness had something to do with his eyes, and the concern and sympathy of the Galatians indicates that he had not been healed. Perhaps when Paul says that they did not despise his bodily condition, he means that they did not allow an unhealed illness to prevent them from receiving the authority and authenticity of his apostleship.

To some, the only answer to the above verses that could be given in defence is an insult to Paul. It is suggested Paul was walking in unbelief. One can only respond that Paul is an example for all believers to follow. 1Corinthians 11:1, *"Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ."* How could Paul, the person who received the Gospel directly from Christ, possibly lack faith? Galatians 1:11-12, *"Let me tell you, my friends, that the gospel I preach is not of human origin. I did not receive it from any human being, nor did anyone teach it to me. It was Jesus Christ himself who revealed it to me."* If Paul could not reach the level of faith required to live according to the current teaching, then what hope do we have? Jesus tells us that a disciple is not above his teacher, but it is enough for him to become as his teacher, Matthew 10:24-25. If Paul, our example, could not pass the test of faith, then there is something wrong with God's program. Did Paul really lack faith? Nonsense! This undermines the authority of Scripture and makes the experience of human beings become the criteria for the truth. Did God say to Paul he would never suffer? No! Acts 9:15 says, *"But the Lord said to him, 'Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name to the gentiles and their kings and to the descendants of Israel. For I am going to show him how much he must suffer for my name's sake."*

The issue of Faith

Those who believe God always heals say that those who do not get healed lack faith. Yet, all those that came to Jesus or even managed to touch Jesus were healed. Did anyone ever come to Jesus for healing and not get healed? Does the Bible show any instance of Jesus saying, *"sorry, your faith is not strong enough, you will just have to remain sick?"* All those that came to the apostles were also healed where it was to glorify God and advance His kingdom. Acts 19:12 records that *"God was performing unusual miracles through Paul. Even handkerchiefs and aprons he had used were taken to the sick, and their diseases were driven away, and the evil spirits would go out of them."* Acts 20 tells us he even raised the dead! And in Acts 5 people carried their sick into the streets on stretchers so that Peter's shadow might fall on them and they would be healed.

Some say not all had enough faith to be healed based on Matthew 13:54-58. It states, *"He went to his hometown and began teaching the people in their synagogue in such a way that they were amazed and said, 'Where did this man get this wisdom and these miracles? This is the builder's son, isn't it? His mother is named Mary, isn't she? His brothers are James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas, aren't they? And his sisters are all with us, aren't they? So where did this man get all these things?'"* And they were

offended by him. But Jesus told them, "A prophet is without honor only in his hometown and in his own home." He did not perform many miracles there because of their unbelief."

Regardless of which Bible translation you read on Matthew, it does not say that Jesus *could not* it says he *did not*. It was a personal choice. God does not force us to accept him or his healing if we do not want it. He gives us the free will to choose. It wasn't that they had no faith for Jesus to heal them as they did not even approach him for healing because they rejected him. This situation is not very different from expecting an atheist to go and ask Jesus for Healing, it simply just does not happen. This is obviously totally different from a convert asking Jesus for healing and not having enough faith to receive it. It was not unbelief for healing but unbelief in who Jesus was and it wasn't that His power was limited by the belief or unbelief of people but they were so *prejudiced* against him, that they were not in a condition to be convinced. They would have said any miracles were sorcery, or of the devil. See John 10:20. It would have been of no use, therefore, in proving to them that he was from God by working miracles. He gave *sufficient* proof of his mission, and left them in their unbelief without excuse. The fact Jesus was not limited by unbelief is shown by Matthew's statement, "*he did not perform many miracles*" which implies that he did perform some miracles. Mark tells us, "*...He laid his hands upon a few sick folk and healed them,*" Mark 6:5.

Almost, if not one hundred percent of people that came for healing in the time of Christ were healed. In my lifetime I have seen a multitude of people prayed for with some saying they are healed but have not yet seen one *totally indisputable* divine healing. Quite a contrast! Either people in the first century had remarkable faith and people today have little faith or God is not doing as many miracles today. I believe it is the latter and that a broad look at scripture shows us why.

Why were there more miracles in the time of Jesus?

The scripture leaves us with no doubt whatsoever that Jesus performed miracles in order that people believed that he was the Son of God. If not for the miracles we would not have the Church today, as none would have believed he was Lord. John 4:48 says, "*Jesus said to him, "None of you will ever believe unless you see miracles and wonders."* Here are a few scriptures from the book of John and one from Mark that show clearly the reasons for miracles:

- John 2:11 "*Jesus performed this first miracle in Cana in Galilee; there he revealed his glory, and his disciples believed in him.*"
- John 2:23 "*While Jesus was in Jerusalem during the Passover Festival, many believed in him as they saw the miracles he performed.*"
- John 3:2 "*He came to Jesus one night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that God has sent you as a teacher. No one can perform the miracles you perform unless God is with him."*
- John 6:14 "*Seeing this miracle that Jesus had performed, the people there said, "Surely this is the Prophet who was to come into the world!"*
- John 10:38 "*But if I do them, even though you do not believe me, you should at least believe my deeds, in order that you may know once and for all that the Father is in me and that I am in the Father."*
- Mark 16:20 "*The disciples went and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with them and proved that their preaching was true by the miracles that were performed.*"

After Jesus ascended to the Father, the disciple's work was to *go into all the world and preach the gospel* and establish the kingdom of God on earth, which of course is the Church. The disciples were going to meet with the same problem Jesus had in that people would not believe unless miracles were performed. As it was the Pharisees wanted to kill Peter and John for healing the crippled man at the temple gate, but they could not because of the miracle. So all the Pharisees could say was, "*What shall we do with these men?*" they asked. "*Everyone in Jerusalem knows that this extraordinary miracle has been performed by them, and we cannot deny it.*" Acts 4:16.

Not long before Jesus was crucified, Jesus began to prepare his apostles for the Great Commission. In a private conversation Jesus had with his apostles He said, "*And I will do whatever you ask for in my name, so that the Father's glory will be shown through the Son.*" John 14:13. This promise was made to his apostles alone and not to us and is shown by the fact that they could in Jesus' name heal all the sick, raise the dead, cast out demons and many other miracles as they were so empowered, Luke 9:1. This was done so that many would believe. Today all Christians are not performing these same miracles as freely as Jesus' apostles could which no one can deny.

Those who believe God heals all the time say that we all have the same power of the apostles and can all do the same miracles. The Bible shows us clearly that we do not all have the same power, and that it was given, where necessary in order that the people believed and the Church would be established. Before Jesus sent his disciples out to preach the kingdom of God and heal the sick, in Luke 9:1 he "*called the twelve disciples together and **gave them power and authority** to drive out all demons and to cure diseases.*"

Acts 6:8 shows "*Stephen, a man richly blessed by God and **full of power**, performed great miracles and wonders among the people.*" The apostles also had the authority to give this power to others for the same reason as shown in Acts 14:3 which says, "*The apostles stayed there for a long time, speaking boldly about the Lord, who proved that their message about his grace was true by **giving them the power** to perform miracles and wonders.*"

Paul also clarified to the Church in Corinth that not all people were empowered by God to do mighty miracles. Miracles were indeed a primary tool used by God to get people's attention, and have them believe so that he could achieve His plan for us. Paul says in 1Corinthians 12:29, "*They are not all apostles or prophets or teachers. **Not everyone has the power** to work miracles.*"

Studying the book of Acts it can also be seen that God's hand was on the situation as we see how He constantly saved the lives of Peter and Paul and the number of times that he sent Angels to release them from jail. Why was John the Baptist not freed from jail? Why was Stephen stoned to death, while Paul was stoned and yet miraculously lived? Why was James killed with the sword? I can't easily back up my thoughts with scripture but believe the answer is obvious in that their work was complete and so God allowed them to rest until the resurrection were they would spend eternity in His loving arms.

Peter and Paul on the other hand were undoubtedly key persons in establishing the Church and so God protected them from death until such time that their work was done. Peter had made a confession that Jesus was the Messiah the Son of the living God, Matthew 16:16. His confession of the divinity of our Lord was the first made by man. Peter was given the keys of the kingdom of heaven, (verse 19) i.e. God chose him among all the apostles, that people should first hear the Gospel and believe. Peter first opened the kingdom of heaven to the Jews in his sermon at the great Pentecost and to the Gentiles when he preached to Cornelius at Caesarea. As for Paul, he established the Church in many locations as shown by all the books he wrote in the New Testament. To summarise all this, God utilises miracles and people accordingly where it benefits His kingdom. Here are a few more scriptures that further emphasize the effects and reasons for the miracles:

- ❑ Acts 2:22 "*Listen to these words, fellow Israelites! Jesus of Nazareth was a man whose divine authority was clearly proven to you by all the miracles and wonders which God performed through him. You yourselves know this, for it happened here among you.*"
- ❑ Acts 2:43 "*Many miracles and wonders were being done through the apostles, and everyone was filled with awe.*"
- ❑ Acts 8:13 "*Simon himself also believed; and after being baptized, he stayed close to Philip and was astounded when he saw the great wonders and miracles that were being performed.*"
- ❑ Acts 8:6 "*The crowds paid close attention to what Philip said, as they listened to him and saw the miracles that he performed.*"
- ❑ 2Corinthians 12:12 "*The many miracles and wonders that prove that I am an apostle were performed among you with much patience.*"
- ❑ Hebrews 2:4 "*while God added his testimony through signs, wonders, various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.*"

The effects on all who saw the miracles were obvious by the number of people believing the gospel. Even as the Church was just beginning to be established the number of people who believed was already in the thousands. Acts 2:41 says, "*Many of them believed his message and were baptized, and about three thousand people were added to the group that day.*" Acts 4:4 says, "*But many who heard the message believed; and the number grew to about five thousand.*"

What would happen if all these miracles were done today?

It is easy to see in scripture that without the large number of healings and other miracles that the Church indeed would not have been established. But what about today? What would happen if we had the same power that was given by God for the establishing the Church? Remember **all** that came to Jesus or the disciples were healed so that his name would be glorified.

I would say it would be safe to say that the first problem would be a worldwide crisis, starting with unemployment. All hospitals would shut down putting thousands of office staff out of work. All doctors and nurses and surgeons and other medical personal would be out of work. This would no doubt run into hundreds of thousands of people. What would happen to all the empty Hospitals?

The next thing that would happen is also obvious in that the media would be running non-stop footage for weeks, talking about all the amazing miracles of everyone healed and all the morgues being empty as all the dead were raised. The reports would be something like "*God does exist, people all over the world that were sick are now well, the blind see, the deaf hear, the lame walk and all the dead have been raised.*" This would also produce a population problem, as everyone that died could be raised from the dead. People would not have any doubt that God existed and faith would no longer have its rightful place, as almost all would have no doubt that God existed.

The next thing of course is that the Churches would not be able to take the numbers, as all would be constantly flocking to the Church for their miracle every time they were sick or in need of some other miracle like raising the dead, regardless to whether they loved God or not. One might say that this is a good thing as many would be saved and Churches could be held outdoors and in houses to cater for what would be almost the entire population. Many good people no doubt would be saved, and would accept Christ as their Lord and saviour. However, there would also be evil people that would not love God and would just want eternal life, which they would not get. This cannot be what God wants or he would do it, and the fact that he does not shows that it is not his will as the Church is now established and God would rather we come to him in faith and love.

Here are just a few scriptures, and there are hundreds that show how important faith is to God. He wants us to love and worship Him for whom He is, not because of what He can give or do for us.

- Hebrews 11:1 *"Now faith is the assurance of things we hope for, the certainty of things we cannot see."*
- Hebrews 11:6 *"Now **without faith it is impossible to please God**, for the one who comes to him **must believe that he exists** and that he rewards those who diligently search for him."*
- Romans 1:17 *"For the gospel reveals how God puts people right with himself: it is through faith from beginning to end. As the scripture says, "The person who is put right with God through faith shall live."*
- 2Corinthians 5:7 *"For our life is a matter of faith, not of sight."*
- Romans 5:1 *"Now that we have been put right with God through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."*
- Romans 10:17 *"So then, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message comes through preaching Christ."*
- John 20:29 *"Jesus said to him, "Is it because you have seen me that you have believed? How blessed are those who have never seen me and yet have believed!"*

The Problem of believing that God always heals us

One very real problem is that the emphasis that is placed upon Christ bearing our diseases at Calvary undermines the biblical emphasis upon Christ bearing our sins. Whereas the preaching that we read in the New Testament is always centred around Christ's death or our sins and resurrection for our justification, Romans 4:25. One finds that the preaching and even the casual conversation of this current movement is dominated by the subject of bodily healing. Followers of the movement display practically an obsession with the topics of healing and confession, as though these subjects were the gospel and there is little else in the Bible worthy of much discussion. Even if these doctrines were Biblical, many who hold them would be guilty of being extremely unbalanced, not giving enough attention to many important aspects of Christian faith and living.

The most devastating result of all is that people can lose their victory in Christ, and become so shaken in their faith that they lose hope altogether and even their salvation because someone's formula for healing didn't work. Some will always look for a quick and easy way out of their problems rather than the slow and sometimes painful process of sanctification by the Holy Spirit. When we blame absence of healing on our faith, our spiritual growth is retarded. All that went to Jesus had enough faith to be healed, why should we be any different? By knowing God sometimes says "no" or "wait" we can go on to achieve so much more, rejoicing that our faith is strong enough.

To have the audacity to tell one of God's children that if they are sick it is because of their own sin or lack of faith is to abound in presumptuousness, and be bankrupt in compassion. In my life, I have heard of more than one person who demonstrated this insensitivity until God dealt with them by laying them flat on their back, and when none of their *principles* would work they suddenly developed empathy for those they had once judged. We never see it portrayed anywhere in Scripture that perfect health is the sign of spirituality. To set up such a standard is to divert God's people from the spiritual standard that Scripture does set forth such as in 2Peter 1:5-9.

Ken Copeland and others teach that we must resist sickness in the same way that we resist sin. This is very disturbing, as we have seen too many good Christians striving to believe their sickness away, and finally collapsing into self-condemnation and utter discouragement over their lack of faith or the sin in their lives. There was probably a divine purpose for that sickness in their lives and it would have been a lot easier for them, if after they prayed in faith and nothing happened, to have stood firm in faith and ceased striving and simply rested in the comforting sovereignty of God.

There are always going to be those that quote Mark 11:23, that says that we should believe that we have received and to just stand in faith and wait for the manifestation of the healing. To exercise your faith like this is good practice, but these people should not ignore the fact that the scripture shows us very clearly that God does sometimes say no. Some people so strongly want to believe that God will always say yes to healing, that they find ways to justify away in their own mind these scriptures and

see only what they feel comfortable in seeing. While standing in faith however, we must consider that God may choose to heal us gradually keeping our faith in action.

Summary

Does God always heal when asked? No! An outstanding example of this is Paul. In 2Corinthians 12:7-9 we have Paul's account of his infirmities. Paul asked three times that he be healed, and the Lord told him, "No." God told Paul why he said no and it was definitely not due to inadequate faith.

Did Biblical people suffer illness? Yes. Look up the following for a reminder. Galatians 4:13, Philippians 2:25-27, 1Timothy 5:23 and 2Timothy 4:20. We cannot put our focus just on the verses related to healing that we like and say that God always heals and ignore the scriptures that show clearly He does sometimes say no. We must look at the Bible as a whole to fully understand God's sovereign will in this area.

Does God still heal today? Of course He does, but only when our prayers are in line with His will, 1John 5:14. I believe that God would also think it wise to seek what medical help is available to us and if we choose that path, we should ask for God's blessing on the work of the physicians.

For those who still believe that God *always* heals *now* today, here are some questions to think very seriously about. If God says No, won't His answer have a perfect reason? Isn't it a good thing to learn endurance, patience and develop compassion? Aren't there eternal benefits with waiting for the time when there will be no more crying, pain or death? Isn't it a good thing to learn what hope is by looking forward to this time of glorification of our bodies? Knowing God sometimes says wait, when we don't receive healing won't we have more peace knowing that our faith is strong enough and God has purpose in our temporary suffering? If this suffering is improving our character and teaching us valuable lessons, isn't that a good thing? Would you rather have life handed to you on a silver platter and not have any appreciation for eternity to come? The Bible says we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory and that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the tremendous and eternal glory that will be revealed to us. Our current time here on Earth in these mortal bodies of ours is but a mere microscopic speck in time.

God may use sickness and pain as opportunities to build in us the virtues of humility and dependence upon Him. Many have testified how sickness afforded them opportunities for proving and improving their faith as well as proving God's love and faithfulness to them. This is something that I can personally speak of from my own experience. I would not be on fire for God in the way I am today if God chose to heal me instantly. We can happily pray in faith, but it will ultimately be God's will that will be done, not our will be done. For there are circumstances in which God allows illness. Matthew Henry said, "*Sometimes Christ sees that we need sickness for the good of our souls more than healing for the good of our bodies.*"

As for the name it and claim it *faith healing* movement, many Christians are deeply involved. They truly love the Lord and want to serve Him. Yet the evidence is clear that the message being taught by leaders of the movement is unbiblical. It is spiritually dangerous to sit under the teaching of anyone who distorts the basic gospel message. This is especially true when we consider the progressive, evolving nature of these teachings. The ultimate extent of error that the *faith* teachers will reach has not likely been revealed yet. The Church must not tolerate teaching that simply sounds good to the ears. We need sound doctrine and instruction in the truth, 2Timothy 4:3-5. False teachers must be silenced because they are upsetting whole families, teaching things they should not teach, Titus 1:7-11.

After being motivated to go to this extent to demonstrate that it is not always God's will to heal, we do want to close on a positive note that divine healing is for today. We see no Scriptural basis to doubt that we can expect to see healing take place here and now. Healing should be a regular part of the life of all Churches James 5:14-16. We also believe that faith plays an important part in receiving healing, and that the Church has much to learn about faith, and how to more effectively receive it for healing. We feel that many who saw this need embraced the healing in the atonement doctrine because it seemed to offer a more solid basis for faith. Unfortunately however, this basis is not the Scriptural basis and has therefore created more problems than one could ever imagine.

If we have no guarantee that it is always God's will to heal, how then can we pray in faith for healing? In the same way that we pray in faith for other things which Scripture does not specifically promise us. We may pray that the Lord would give us a job at a certain business, but we cannot know for sure if it's His will that we work there unless He personally assures us of it through His Spirit. Faith is a supernatural gift (Ephesians 2:8) that begins with God. Thus when it is God's will for a healing (which I believe it often would be), if we are open and receptive to Him, a supernatural assurance from Him will come upon us. Christians need to learn to be more receptive and responsive to the prompting of the Holy Spirit working in our faith, so that through a sovereign act of God, many will continually be healed and the name of the Lord Jesus Christ will be glorified. I pray this gives clarity on does God always heal.