



Healing In the Atonement?

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The man on the radio emphatically stated, “It is never God’s will for a child of God to be sick or ill.” He went on to say that the reason Christians are to never be sick or ill is because all sickness and disease is an effect of sin and that all the effects of sin, both spiritual and physical, are done away with in salvation.

Of course, the radio host did not want us to take his word for it. He read Isaiah 53:4-6 as proof that there is healing in the atonement:

“⁴Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. ⁵But 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. ⁶All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.”

The man reiterated the phrase, “and with his stripes we are healed.” When we receive salvation, he said, all the effects of sin, physical and spiritual, are dealt with. When we received the forgiveness of sin we also received deliverance from the effects of sin, meaning not only spiritual healing but physical healing as well. That, he said, was what atonement was all about.

A few moments later, a caller asked, “Please pray for me. I’m suffering from diabetes and high blood pressure.” This led to a discussion of the various ailments that both the host and the caller had personally suffered from over the years since becoming Christians and the importance of praying for one another. I found this discussion interesting since both the caller and the host had previously agreed that God is not willing for His children to suffer illness and disease.

Of course, this got me to thinking. If there really is physical healing in the atonement, it must only be temporary. After all, the host and the caller, who both asserted that “with his stripes we are healed” clearly means physical healing, were both asking for prayer for physical sickness and ailments that they were struggling with. Nevertheless, I suppose that even if we did get a clean bill of health at salvation, we still have to live in this world, exposed to all the diseases and disorders that seem to stalk us at every turn. Even if there is healing in the atonement, then perhaps, just as clean clothes get dirty with wear, our newly cleansed physical bodies likewise become dirty with wear. However, as I thought more on the idea of physical healing in the atonement, I realized that, in addition to being temporary, it must also be limited. After all, it is clear that not all physical sickness and disorders are done away with at the moment of salvation.

The rationale behind the idea of physical healing being an integral part of the atonement apparently stems from the fact that the curse of sin is both spiritual and physical. It is spiritual in that sin brings spiritual condemnation and death. As John 3:36 says,

“He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.”

In addition, the curse of sin also brings physical sickness, suffering, and death according to Genesis 3:17-19:

“¹⁷And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; ¹⁸Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; ¹⁹In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.”

Consequently, when we put our faith in Jesus Christ as our Lord and Saviour we are delivered from spiritual death and no longer under condemnation. Likewise, as the teaching goes, we are delivered from the physical curse of sin as well. Ergo, at the moment of salvation we are healed both spiritually and physically.

But is this so? Can it be verified?

I began thinking back to people I have seen saved over the years, myself included. It quickly became apparent that, while people were being delivered from the spiritual aspects of the curse of sin, they were not being delivered from the physical aspects. For instance, I have had occasion to share the gospel with people who were dying. In no case have I known of a person to put their faith in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour and then suddenly leap up out of their deathbed physically healed and completely rejuvenated. I have, however, seen those who were anxious and frightened suddenly become peaceful and relaxed as they looked by faith into the loving eyes of their newfound Saviour. But, if the healing in the atonement crowd is correct, shouldn't we see those on their deathbeds suddenly restored to perfect health?

On a related note, I have also seen a number of elderly individuals come to salvation. Now, since the aging process is a result of the curse of sin, if there is physical healing in the atonement, why don't the elderly suddenly become young again? Oh, they may look younger and healthier when they come to Christ because they often become less fretful and more relaxed, but I have never known an elderly person to get saved and suddenly have the years melt away such that they suddenly appear to be in their 20's again. But, if the healing in the atonement crowd is correct, shouldn't we see the elderly suddenly become young again at salvation?

I even considered myself when I got saved. At the time, I suffered, as I still do, with poor eyesight. In fact, I suffer from a form of near-sightedness that is the result of a genetic abnormality. Genetic abnormalities, of course, are a result of the curse of sin. When I put my faith in Jesus Christ as my Lord and Saviour, I instantly received the spiritual blessings of salvation. My sins were forgiven, the Holy Spirit of God took up residence in my heart, sealing me unto the day of redemption, and I was immediately passed from spiritual death unto life. However, I did not suddenly receive healing in my eyes. But, if the healing in the atonement crowd is correct, why didn't I suddenly receive perfect eyesight?

Maybe, just maybe, the healing in the atonement crowd is incorrect. Maybe, just maybe, the phrase, “and with his stripes we are healed” only applies to spiritual healing and has nothing to do with physical healing. If only there were another passage in the Bible to clarify the meaning of Isaiah 53:4-6 for us.

Well, thankfully, there is. It has been said that the New Testament is the best commentary on the Old Testament. With that in mind, look at 1 Peter 2:21-24:

²¹For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: ²²Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: ²³Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously: ²⁴Who 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.”

Here, Peter relates Isaiah 53:4-6 directly to Christ. In doing so, Peter brings out how that Jesus took our sins upon Himself and makes it clear that the whole passage has to do with the spiritual effects of our atonement and nothing to do with the physical effects. Jesus suffered on the cross to pay the spiritual debt of our sins, not the physical; “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.”

So, while there is spiritual healing in the atonement, complete physical healing will have to wait until the day of redemption when we will receive a new, glorified body. When, according to 1 Corinthians 15:51-57:

⁵¹Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, ⁵²In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. ⁵³For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. ⁵⁴So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. ⁵⁵O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? ⁵⁶The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. ⁵⁷But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

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