

What if God Doesn't Heal?

by Pastor Marty

Most of you recognize I like to use titles with shades of meaning. In this case, there are two different ways this title can be read. The first and most obvious way is, "What if I pray for healing and am not healed?" That is a valid question, which will be somewhat addressed in this newsletter. However, there is a different understanding of the question, and it addresses our preconceptions about God and the way He works. This question asks, "What if healing is not something God does?" I know some may be aghast that anyone even raise such an inquiry. However, I ask you to be patient as we explore what it means in this case—remembering how I prefer to ask questions with shades of meaning. Reading the question might make you think of Deism, a worldview that says miracles are not possible. A Deist reinterprets the Bible so that miracles are just myths. We are not bothering with that view right now. Instead, we will look at the way most of us read the question—as if it says, "What if healing no longer takes place?" If you have read a lot on the subject, the word *Cessationism* might pop into your head. It was a Calvinist doctrine that declared that all the gifts of the Spirit and miracles were for the early Church until the New Testament was written. After that time, miracles ceased. Proponents of this view often quote the scripture, "When the perfect comes, the imperfect is done away." In effect, God did miracles to prove the Gospel was true, and when Scripture came, signs and wonders were unnecessary. Miracles were imperfect; the bible is perfect. Interestingly, in the first 3 centuries of the Church, miracles were as common as in Acts, and Christians used the same scripture to argue that the gifts of the Spirit were here until Jesus (Perfect) returned.

The early Church argued that miracles were here until the final Second Coming.

Anybody who knows me knows that I am not about to describe any of the miracles in the Bible as myths (though there is a valid way to do so with the understanding that they are a unique type of myth because they are factually true and actually took place—but that is more of an academic discussion). I am also not about to promote the doctrine that miracles no longer take place; I have seen far too many to make such a claim. This brings us back to the title of the newsletter. What if God doesn't heal? If miracles are real, and they still take place, how can I ask this question? I could try rephrasing it to read, "What if healing is not something God does?" However, that may not be much clearer, but it may help. Logically, if (1) I am not denying the existence of miracles, and if (2) I recognize that people are still healed today, then the only possible conclusion is (3) I am asking if healings are indeed acts of God. This is actually the real point of the newsletter: to examine what we all believe about those miraculous events in which a person is supernaturally restored to health. I am NOT implying that healing and miracles are of the devil, so don't worry about that; what I AM suggesting is that maybe . . . just maybe . . . we view healing in a way that doesn't quite line up with everything we know about The Father.

What if our preconceptions about how healing occurs is fundamentally wrong?

Before we begin, it is important that we remember the first two words of the questions: "What if." We are considering a possibility, not espousing a doctrine. However, evaluating our preconceptions is necessary at times. What we are doing is pausing and taking a step back for a moment to look at how we view healing when we pray for it, whether or not the healing does or does not actually happen. As we do this, we need to remember that the Christian Church at

times has been affected by ideologies which do not conform to Scripture. One such philosophy was Gnosticism, a pernicious heresy that crept into the Church as far back as the time of Paul, John, and Peter. The Gnostics believe matter is evil while spirit is good. In the Church, believers sometimes adopted this view, assuming that sin is directly connected to human beings having a physical body. Greek philosophy added to this by perceiving everything related to God in the terms of thought and will, making Him exempt from any type of emotion. They believed if God experiences emotions, He could be affected by them—even to the point of changing His mind or responding out of compassion, and if God were to ever change His mind, it means He is not already perfect in the first place. In other words, if God were ever affected by our pain or suffering to the point of being motivated to do something about it, He is not totally perfect. For God to be perfect, He must be unmovable.

Is God perfect if He is motivated to act in response to our pain and suffering?

Of course, Jesus coming in the flesh is a sure sign that God is moved by the suffering of His creation. However, Gnostics were not about to give up easily, so they redefined it in terms of God making mental decisions and choices in His providence. Therefore, God sent His Son to save the world because He had always planned to do it that way; it never had anything to do with any emotional response to suffering in the world. Problematically, this has continued to be a thorn in the side of the Church. Even in the Gospels, when we see Jesus healing the sick as He is “moved by compassion,” some will claim He did all those miracles primarily as signs to prove the validity of the gospel message; it was not actually about alleviating suffering. We see two Gnostic beliefs at the root of this theology: God operates according to mental choices, not motivated by emotion, and spiritual things are intrinsically more important than physical ones.

When it comes to healing, the same Gnostic views are often given consideration. When a person prays for healing, there may often be an underlying belief that God is deciding (a mental evaluation) whether or not to grant the healing according to whether the person will be better off with or without the sickness (spiritual health being far more important than physical health). We are essentially operating under a belief God is the ultimate pragmatist constantly evaluating or prioritizing one good over another. However, the problem is that there is very little scriptural basis for perceiving God as constantly choosing the lesser of two evils; instead, Jesus resisted ALL evil—and commanded us to do the same.

God commands us to resist all evil, and Jesus gave no place for the devil's work.

When Christians approach God with the Gnostic belief that physical healing carries less value than spiritual healing, they have bought into a sinister lie: it has to be one or the other, but it cannot be both. In other words, we tend to approach God as if He is a genie of a lamp, and we only have a certain number of wishes. However, the Bible shows us a very different image of God. When Abraham spoke with God about Sodom, God agreed not to destroy it if 50 righteous people could be found. Instead of just accepting that, Abraham persisted and got the number down to 10 righteous people. Moses went back to God over and over again for the people of Israel and repeatedly got grace upon grace for them. Certainly, we read about times when God said “no” to requests, but except in the case of sinfulness, those refusals were rare. This is most clearly shown in the Gospels. As we see, Jesus spent a great deal of His time going around and healing the sick. It was actually one of the major acts associated with His ministry. We often think of Him spending most of His time preaching and then doing some healing as an add-on, but a careful review of the Scripture reveals that He spent much more time healing

the sick and casting out demons than any other thing. For example, the Sermon on the Mount or the major teaching at the end of the Gospel of John can be preached in less than two hours, but there are numerous accounts of entire days being devoted to healing and deliverance. Also, references to healing almost amount to double the number of specific mentions of preaching.

In the Gospels, healing and deliverance seem to take priority over preaching.

The point here isn't that physical healing is more important to God than spiritual healing, social justice, or emotional wholeness. Instead, the point is that God cares about every single part of a person's life, and He desires good in every area. The concept that God is constantly prioritizing one good over another makes Him seem more like a genie than God, more like a Vulcan than a Divine Creator. Human parents may often be in a position where they do have to choose one good over another, but God does not ever have limitations on His grace or mercy; He never is faced with having 100 grace points to spend, and since a physical healing costs 65 and restoring a relationship takes 82, He makes the choice of the one over the other. That type of thinking minimizes His nature of extravagant love and compassion. If He loves us so much He would send Jesus if we were the only one to be saved—which we often tell people—then how can we believe He withholds good from us? It is a theology built out of Gnosticism, devaluing all physical healing and de-emotionalizing God. In fact, He is so full of love and compassion that a disciple who knew Jesus more intimately than all others said profoundly that "God is love." In effect, the "either or" thinking claims to lead us to trust in God, but in actuality, it remakes God in our image and undermines faith by making us constantly doubt His willingness. It results in a prayer life that is not only double minded but also resistant to boldly going before the throne.

If we doubt His willingness, we become double-minded and forfeit our boldness.

If we see God as emotionally moved by our sufferings, desiring every good for us, and having unlimited grace, then it brings us back to the original question: what if He does not heal? It is this conflict that becomes the source of our doubt so that we cannot "believe without any doubting" as James says. How do we believe if we see evidence that contradicts our faith? The key may be in our perception of how healing is accomplished. If we view healing as something God chooses to do, then it means that He also may choose not to do it. What if both are false statements? What if healing is not an action at all? Too often, we think of healing (or prayer in general) as a 3-step process: (1) we submit the request to God, (2) He evaluates the request in light of infinite variables, such as the future, our attitudes, our worthiness, and whether or not we tithe as much as we should (I be sarcastic), and (3) He responds with the answer. When we discuss healing, we may even think of it as if He has a giant light switch next to the throne: if He turns it on, healing power comes, but if it is off, nothing happens. Depending on your theology, the light switch may include a dimmer circuit so that partial healings take place. The problem is that as long as we view healing in terms of a big light switch, God's willingness will be an issue.

As long as we view healing in terms of a light switch, God's willingness is in doubt.

For the rest of this newsletter, I want to suggest a different perspective on healing. Let us think in terms of God's creation instead of a human invention. Our lights work by harnessing electricity and channeling it through bulbs with a light switch. However, contrary to ancient or medieval perspectives, science has told us the sun does not have a light switch—it does not turn off at night and back on in the morning. It constantly and continually shines forth, giving

both heat and light. It is the way God made it. At night time, the sun is still shining, but we are in a planetary location where that light doesn't reach us. Likewise, when we walk into a house, the sun still shines outside even if we don't see it. Our environment may directly affect our own personal experience of the sun's heat and light, but nothing has changed as far as the sun is concerned—it is still shining light and radiating heat. I suggest the scriptures that state, "God is light" refer to light like the sun and not a lamp. In other words, when John says "God is light" and "God is love," He means a constant and continual emanation from Him. He never stops shining in the darkness and loving His creation.

God never stops being light in the dark, and He never stops loving His creation.

My suggestion for this newsletter is that we momentarily consider how it would change our theology, our perception of God, our faith, and our practice if we viewed healing not as a thing He does as much as a natural result of His Presence contacting our bodies, minds, and our hearts. When a person with cancer goes in for chemotherapy, the doctor does not have to beg the radiation serum to work; the radiation does what it does on cancer cells by its very nature. In the same way, what if God's nature naturally transforms whatever it touches? If we diverge into scientific concepts and look at the gospels, we know that people were healed by touching Jesus' garment, suggesting a radioactive power had saturated it. In Acts, people were healed by handkerchiefs taken from Paul, implying the same type of energy. In the Old Testament, we even see a man resurrected from the dead by touching Elisha's bones! What if—again in our theoretical consideration—God's Presence is so perfectly loving and holy that when it touches anything damaged by the devil, including this fallen world, it inherently works healing on it? If this is true, it radically changes our perspective on prayer and healing. Instead of healing being

something we ask God to do, healing becomes a result of our entering into God's Presence and allowing that Presence to transform our bodies.

Instead of healing being something God does, healing results from His Presence.

If this is true, it changes everything. All healing—physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, social, sexual, and even financial—is a natural result of entering before the throne of God and allowing His Presence to penetrate and radiate into and through us and our lives until it brings forth redemption. The healing may not happen immediately: chemotherapy doesn't kill cancer cells overnight, antibiotics take time to fight off infections, and physical exercise (regrettably) requires more than a single try to eradicate fat cells and improve health. In the same way, we begin viewing every moment in His Presence as getting another dose of healing wherever it is most needed. Suddenly, we may find our faith rising to a whole new level because we believe God is really for us. Instead of prayer being a request for God to act, it becomes a period of making ourselves available for God to do His works in and through us, partnering with Him. It changes how we pray for others, making it an adventure in being His hands and feet. Now, we are describing redemption here, which means transforming broken things into whole things. The Gospel is inherently about God restoring His creation to what it was originally intended to be. There are types of prayer that do not involve this type of transformation; however, if we begin to view prayer as entering God's Presence and soaking in it until we become bit-by-bit transformed, it will absolutely affect our faith and how we pray. We can honestly face it when our healing is not complete while having strong faith that His power is still working in us, moment by moment redeeming even our faulty physical bodies. We begin to understand Paul's statement of focusing on Jesus, and the result is being changed "from glory to glory" in this life.