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DIVINE HEALING, DOCTORS, AND MEDICAL SCIENCE

It is always fitting to *define* terms, also the *purpose*, for which an article is written. By "divine healing," we mean healing that comes from God through faith and prayer, apart from natural means or medical science. Our *purpose* will be to show that believing in divine healing does not require an opposition to medical science.

Many scriptures, especially in the New Testament, speak of healing. Over the centuries, there have been numerous outstanding examples of healing through faith in God. There are good reasons to believe in divine healing.

There have been some, however, who have carried divine healing to a confusing and fruitless extreme. They teach that it is wrong to go to doctors or receive medical treatment. Some, especially in years past, supposed their refusal of medical treatment was a sign of spirituality, a faith "standard." They would affirm: "We don't go to doctors, we don't take medicine, we trust God!"

Back in the 60s, I heard a preacher in the Los Angeles area make this statement: "I would rather my children *die*, than to *disobey God* by taking them to a doctor!" He said this to ridicule another pastor whose son was going to have his tonsils taken out.

In James 5:14, 15 we read: "Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him....the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up." I have actually heard preachers quote this verse and add: "It says to call the elders for prayer; *it does not say to call the doctor!*"

I have before me a little booklet on divine healing that has been in my possession many years. The author quotes Exodus 15:26: "I am the Eternal that heals you," pointing out that the Hebrew wording means "God Healer." He then cites Exodus 20:2, 3: "I am the Eternal thy God...Thou shalt have no other gods before me." The implication is that if one goes to a doctor seeking medical help, he has chosen "another god" and is committing *idolatry!*

It was because of this very teaching that a pastor related to a friend of mine refused surgery for his son whose appendix had ruptured. The young boy died as a result. Fortunately, in time, that church took a more sensible position, but that did not bring back a life that was lost.

As a young preacher, I met a man who told me this heart-breaking story:

When he and his wife were new Christians, they came under the influence of a man who preached against doctors. Believing him to be a prophet of God, neither would go to a doctor even though she was several months pregnant. As a result, she died giving birth to twins, tragically bleeding to death.

John Alexander Dowie (1847-1907) who founded Zion, Illinois, preached against doctors. In his attempt to make Zion a holy city, he did not allow liquor, tobacco, pork, card playing, doctors or hospitals.

Today, the radical ideas against doctors are no longer promoted in Zion. In visiting with a pastor of the large central church a few years ago, he told me their community now allows doctors and even has a *hospital!*

Back in the 1950s, Jack Coe (1918-1956) became well-known as a *healing* evangelist, along with men like William Branham and Oral Roberts. While still in his 30s, he became very ill with bulbar polio and died at Parkland Hospital in Dallas.

It may be of some interest to note it was at this *same* hospital, only a few years later, that President John F. Kennedy was pronounced dead; this is the hospital in which Lee Harvey Oswald died; *and*, some years later, Jack Ruby, the man who shot and killed Oswald, also died at Parkland Hospital.

Unlike Branham or Roberts, Coe preached against going to doctors. He, reportedly, had told his wife Juanita that if he ever became ill, not to put him in a hospital. But as his condition quickly worsened, she felt he should have hospital care.

Back at the time, a man told me he believed Jack Coe died because his wife *disobeyed God* by admitting him to a hospital!

With these scattered thoughts as a background, we will now take a look at what the Bible says about doctors, medicine, and medical science. Some points are well-known, but others are in the less-known category.

We first read of physicians in the book of Genesis. When Jacob died, Joseph had Egyptian physicians embalm him (Gen. 50:2). After this, in grand procession, his body was carried to the land that would later be known as Israel. There he was entombed with his father Isaac and grandfather Abraham.

In 1987 Arlene and I were able to visit the huge shrine that marks the burial place of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob at Hebron, even though it is not on the usual tourist route because of Muslim tensions.

While the term “*worthless physicians*” appears in Job 13:4, this does not mean *all* physicians were considered worthless. *Some* were. It is like when the Bible uses the term “*false prophets*.” It did not mean *all* prophets were false. To the contrary: if there was a *false*, a *true* is implied.

Some who have opposed doctors have quoted 2 Chronicles 16:12, 13: “Asa became diseased in his feet, and his malady was very severe; yet in his disease he did not seek the LORD, *but the physicians*...and died.” Did he die because it was a sin to go to a doctor? No. He died because he did not seek the LORD. His life was out of order. He had imprisoned a prophet and oppressed people. He was not healed because the physicians were unable to do so.

On the other hand, when King Hezekiah faced death, he prayed unto God, and received this message through Isaiah: “I have heard your prayer, I have seen your tears; surely I will *heal* you...and I will add to your days fifteen years” (2 Kings 20:5, 6).

While medical knowledge centuries ago was much inferior to what is known today, still physicians did provide a helpful, howbeit limited, service even back then. Otherwise the analogy spoken by Jesus would be without meaning:

“Those who are well do not need a *physician*, but those who are sick” (Luke 5:31).

In the oft-quoted verse, “I am the LORD who *heals* you” (Exod. 15:26), the word translated “*heals*,” *rapha*, is the *same* word that is translated “*physician*” (Strong’s Concordance, 7495). So it could be worded, “I am the LORD your *physician*.” If “*physician*” was considered to be a negative or evil word, this linkage would be difficult to explain.

The words of a hymn from long ago come to mind:

*The Great Physician now is near;
The sympathizing Jesus;
He speaks the drooping heart to cheer,
Oh, hear the voice of Jesus!
Sweetest note in seraph song;
Sweetest name on mortal tongue;
Sweetest carol ever sung:
Jesus, blessed Jesus!*

It was a physician who wrote the gospel of Luke and the book of Acts. Paul referred to him as “Luke the *beloved physician*” (Col. 4:14). This would be a strange term to use if doctors were of the devil!

“Beloved” is a very loving, honorable term, as numerous scriptures show. It is the same term the Heavenly Father used regarding his Son Jesus (Matt. 3:17; 12:18; 17:5; 2 Peter 1:17). “Beloved” is not a word that would be used for someone with a dishonorable profession. We would not say “the beloved crook” or “the beloved horse thief”!

When Luke recorded the healing of the woman with the issue of blood, he did not hesitate to mention she “had spent all her livelihood on physicians and could not be healed by any” (Luke 8:43). He acknowledged the limitation under which physicians labored.

Like this woman, there have been people doctors were unable to help, but who have been healed through faith. It is also true there have been people who were prayed for, who were not healed, but received help through medical science.

My own mother, Florence, provides an example. When I was about 12 years old, for quite some time she suffered with pain in her side. She believed in divine healing, was prayed for a number of times, obtained prayer cloths, etc. but was not healed. Finally she had surgery which corrected a problem caused by a kinked intestine. She never had that problem again.

Years ago I heard a preacher, who was well-known at the time, say that people who go to a hospital to have surgery, may leave there *demon possessed* that under the anesthesia they are powerless to resist a demonic invasion of their bodies!

No doubt many of the people listening to him had been prayed for and were not healed. What were they to do? If they tried to get help through surgery, they might become demon possessed! This was a *fear* message, not a *faith* message.

I was in a meeting one time at which a speaker taught that women who have their ears pierced make an opening whereby demons can enter! The supporting scripture that was used (*misused*, actually) was Deuteronomy 15:17.

In opposition to surgery, some have quoted Leviticus 19:28, “You shall not make any *cuttings* in your flesh.” But the verse goes on to say “for the dead,” showing these cuttings involved heathenistic, superstitious rites.

Obviously not *all* cutting in the flesh was forbidden. Circumcision (also mentioned in Leviticus 12:3) required a “cutting in the flesh”!

In Genesis we read:

“The LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam... and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place. Then the rib which the LORD God had taken from man he made into a woman” (Gen. 2:21, 22).

In a sense, this was a case of surgery. An incision was made in the man, a part was removed, and the opening was closed back up. I don’t suppose stitches were used or that

Adam walked around in pain during a recovery period. I think it is safe to say the incision was closed up by God and healed immediately. If so, this would have been the first case of divine healing mentioned in the Bible. It was also the first case of surgery.

What about the use of medicine?

Generally speaking, the word medicine is used in a good sense in Scripture:

“A merry heart does *good like a medicine*” (Proverbs 17:22).

If using medicine was *bad*, why would the Scriptures call it “*good*”? If using medicine was going against God, the comparison in this verse would make no sense at all.

In Revelation 22:2 we read about the tree of life and that the leaves of the tree were for the *healing* of the nations. The imagery is based on Ezekiel 47:12: “Along the bank of the river, on this side and that, will grow all kinds of trees.... Their fruit will be for food, and their leaves for *medicine*.” Again, the word medicine is used in a good sense.

Paul certainly believed in divine healing; miraculous healings were a vital part of his ministry (Rom. 15:18,19; Acts 28:8,9). Yet, he was not against medicine. He told Timothy to use a little wine for his often infirmities (1 Tim. 5:23, 24).

It should be carefully noted that Paul did not pray for him, in this case, but told him something *he* could do to help himself.

I remember the words of a devout Christian lady I knew years ago. Even though she was a strong believer in divine healing, she said: “God could brush our teeth and comb our hair, but there are some things he expects *us* to do!”

The Good Samaritan treated the brutally beaten man with oil and wine (Luke 10:34). The alcohol content in the wine could fight infection; the oil could soothe the wounds. Having done this, he took the man to a place where he would be cared for and contributed money in his behalf.

To the Laodiceans, Jesus said they needed *eye salve* (Rev. 3:18). Granted, he was speaking of their *spiritual* eye trouble, but if the use of eye salve were wrong, these words would not make the intended point.

I recall fondly a man who used to come hear me preach whenever I was in his area. When he was younger he had been a preacher. “Me and the Mrs. have trusted God for over 30 years,” he testified. “We have not taken any medicine, not even an Aspirin.” But then he added: “We do take a little laxative now and then just to keep us regular.” So not everyone draws the line the same place!

In their opposition to the use of medicines, some have pointed out that the word “pharmacy” is based on the Greek word *pharmakeia*, the word translated “witchcraft” (Gal. 5:20). In that context, drugs were linked with the black arts, magic potions, etc. But today a pharmacy or drug store may sell all

kinds of items. Some “drugs” are helpful; some “drugs” are harmful. The same word can be taken two different ways.

To illustrate: While attending a Bible Conference in San Diego, one afternoon between services, we went over into Mexico with a pastor and his wife. When we returned, at Customs we were asked what we were bringing back. “Only some drugs,” the pastor answered, evidently not realizing how this could be taken. Seeing the stern look of the inspector, his wife immediately chimed in: “*Prescription* drugs.” He had filled a prescription in Mexico because the price was much lower south of the border.

“Balm” is defined as a fragrant ointment or preparation used to heal or soothe the skin. Its use for the relief of pain is alluded to in Jeremiah 51:8. Mentioned as early as the book of Genesis, it was a product being exported by camel trains from Gilead to Egypt (Gen. 37:25).

Gilead, had become well-known for this medicinal balm, causing Jeremiah to say words that are now proverbial:

“Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there?” (Jer. 8:22).

The “mandrake,” literally “love plant,” was anciently regarded as an aphrodisiac, also as an aid to fertility. The following passage is from the book of Genesis:

“Now Reuben went in the days of wheat harvest and found *mandrakes* in the field and brought them to his mother Leah.... When Jacob came out of the field in the evening, Leah went out to meet him and said, “You must come in unto me, for I have surely hired you with my son’s *mandrakes*.” And he lay with her that night (Gen. 30:14-16).

Mandrakes are also mentioned in erotic Hebrew poetry:

“Come, my beloved, let us go forth to the field... let us see if the vine has budded, whether the grape blossoms are open, and the pomegranates are in bloom. There I will give you my love. The *mandrakes* give off a fragrance, and at our gates are pleasant fruits...” (Song of Solomon 7:11-13).

In the ending portion of the book of Ecclesiastes, the challenges of old age are poetically described. English translators, speaking euphemistically, use the words “and *desire* fails” (Ecc. 12:5). But the Hebrew word translated “*desire*” (in this one verse) is actually *caper-berry* (Strong’s Concordance, 35). This was used “to stimulate both appetite and sexual *desire*” (Gesenius’s Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon). But finally, in old age, even this would fail.

How effective mandrakes or caper-berries were can be debated. But the point we would make is simply this: If their use (or the use of other medicines) was a sin, it seems this would have been mentioned.

As blood transfusions began to be used, we can understand why some Christian groups looked on the practice with skepticism. It seemed gory, even sinful. If only they could find “scripture” against it! In that attempt, they came up with verses

like Leviticus 7:26, 27: "You shall not eat any blood in any of your dwellings, whether of bird or beast. Whoever eats any blood, that person shall be cut off from his people."

But these verses imbedded among numerous rules and regulations of Mosaic law had to do with eating blood from an *animal*. Giving a transfusion of *human* blood in an attempt to save life, is an entirely different matter. But once a doctrine becomes established, there will be those who feel obligated to defend it. As a result, there have been people who have *died* because they refused a blood transfusion.

I know of a Christian minister who was in a horrible car accident and lost a lot of blood. He was rushed to a hospital and given blood transfusions. As he described it, receiving the transfusions felt like "life" entering into his body. He believed in divine healing, and often prayed for the sick himself, but was grateful for the help provided through medical science, very possibly saving his life.

A pastor in New Jersey I knew some years ago, was part of a group that went to Nigeria on a missionary outreach. The medical establishment highly recommended a vaccination as protection against malaria. He was vaccinated, but some in the group refused. They said they did not need a vaccination "the Lord would take care of them. Sadly, two of them died.

Many years ago, Congregationalist minister Timothy Dwight (1752-1817), eighth president of Yale, preached a sermon against vaccinations. He reasoned that if God has decreed that certain men should die of smallpox, an attempt to prevent it would be a frightful sin.

Back at that time, some opposed the use of a lightning rod on a church steeple on the same grounds.

There was a time when many people were afflicted with polio, including President Franklin Roosevelt. But through the development of a vaccine, within a few years this dreaded disease was almost totally defeated.

Admittedly, procedures like blood transfusions or vaccinations are not perfect. What helps one might cause an allergic reaction in another. But the *overall* benefits should be considered.

There is no doubt that seat belts have saved many lives. But I heard about a couple that had a wreck in their motor home which caught on fire. The woman, unable to undo her seat belt, perished in the fire. Her husband was badly burned, but escaped after desperately trying to help her. But an exception like this should not be the basis for a conspiracy theory against wearing seat belts!

I have no problem believing in God's miracle working power. After all, he is God! But if his purpose is accomplished in some other way, that is no reason to reject it. Consider this:

When Joshua led the Israelites across the Jordan River into the Promised Land, the water was held back *miraculously* and they crossed on dry ground (Josh. 3:17). But at the time

of David, a ferry boat was operating at this location. David and some others with him crossed the Jordan by this means (2 Sam. 19:18).

Were people who used a ferry boat less spiritual? Did the use of a ferry boat mean that God no longer performed miracles? No; years later we read that Elijah and Elisha miraculously crossed the Jordan on dry ground (2 Kings 2:8, 14).

I have crossed the Jordan River four times, but it was not by a miracle. It was on a bridge!

We recall how Jesus fed multitudes by a miraculous multiplication of loaves and fish (Matt. 14:15-21). Was God able to repeat this miracle years later? Of course. But as we read through Acts and the New Testament, there is no record of it ever happening again. What we do find is Paul who certainly believed in miracles "spending considerable effort to provide food for famine stricken people in Jerusalem (1 Cor. 16:1-3; Rom. 15:24-28).

When Jesus fed multitudes by a miracle, it was God's work. When multitudes were fed because people donated and did what they could, this was God's work also. We applaud ministries like the Salvation Army and others who do what they can to help the hungry and homeless.

We recall the words of Jesus commending the actions of a certain woman: "She has done what she could" (Mark 14:8). It is important that we *do what we can* to help others—with or without a miracle.

During a ministers' conference, a pastor and I were talking as we drove to the evening service. Very sincerely he said to me, "Ralph, I *believe* in divine healing; this does not mean I *understand* divine healing!" We *don't* understand why some are healed through prayer and others are not.

But if healing does not come directly through prayer, and is obtained through natural means, a different diet, change of climate, exercise, medical science, or surgery, so be it. All of these things can be within God's gracious provision. · RW

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