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GOD'S HEALING TOUCH
A Study of the Doctrine of Divine Healing

By

Vernon L. Wilcox

*“Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without
which no man shall see the Lord” Heb 12:14*

Spreading Scriptural Holiness to the World

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Beacon Hill Press
Kansas City, Missouri

First Printing, 1968

Printed In The United States Of America

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ABOUT THIS BOOK...

Is divine healing in the atonement? What does the Bible have to say about the subject? Have there always been miracles of healing? How authentic is the ministry of the so-called "faith healers"? Is divine healing for me?

These and other gnawing questions on this pertinent but neglected subject are dealt with in this volume. Of particular help is the analysis of a questionnaire sent out to a representative group of ministers, and a chapter that is filled with actual testimonies to divine healing.

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DEDICATED

To

Elizabeth Anne
Whose life is an inspiring
Example of God's healing touch

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Chapter 1
WE DO BELIEVE IN DIVINE HEALING

A leading pastor was once asked: "Do you believe in divine healing?" His answer was, "Yes, I believe in anything that's divine." It is in the conviction that the word "divine" is the key word in the doctrine and practice of healing that we shall proceed in this brief study.

To be sure, there are other varieties of healing than divine. Some primarily emphasize attitudes of mind and appeal to the more sophisticated. Others go to the opposite extreme and become almost superstitious in their methods, so that the human is often lifted up until the "healer" himself becomes all-important. Perhaps in fairness it should be stated that this may not always be intentional.

It is wise and scriptural to take a middle-of-the-road position on doctrines that cannot be said to be absolutely essential to salvation. As examples, consider the matter of the mode of baptism, particulars regarding the second coming of Christ, and divine healing. We must avoid on the one hand cold formalism and the "mind-science cults" and on the other the false teachers who make secondary matters central in their teachings. Among the latter are the "faith healers" who capitalize on the gullibility of people to whom their statements of absolute assurance are often taken as equivalent to a "Thus saith the Lord." For a large segment of our population healing does not have to be experienced or proved to be accepted — it has only to be promised and professed. While not being skeptical, we must steer away from fanatical claims and unethical methods.

We maintain that God does heal the body today — that there is nothing too hard for Him who made us physical beings. We believe in the miracle-working power of the Lord Jesus, that by faith it can be experienced in our lives today. Many have testified to physical healing, many others to being helped by prayer. There is no question as to the fact that miracles are possible in this age, if only we have faith to believe.

What is a miracle? Some scoffers would say that there is no such thing — that belief in miracles is belief in the unreasonable. For others, oriented much more closely to the Christian faith, miracles are primarily confined to physical change, to that which is spectacular and demonstrated to be supernatural. To explain to a person that a certain healing was caused by God's touch upon the mind and attitude of the person healed is somehow to take away from the miracle. This of course is an unsound conclusion, for often the change in mental pattern is truly more miraculous than any purely physical change could be.

A miracle is really the intervention of a higher power at a lower plane. When the peach tree takes the minerals from the soil and produces a peach, it is in a sense performing a miracle as far as the mineral kingdom is concerned. When a boy climbs the tree and picks a peach before its time to fall, he is performing what to the vegetable kingdom is a miracle.

Jesus' miracles were of this order. He made water into wine. As someone has pointed out, the water would eventually go into the soil and help produce the grapes from which the wine would be made — He just hastened the process. It is significant to note that Jesus did not turn bread into wine. Yet He did turn a few small loaves of bread into enough to feed a multitude. God does not do absurd things, and it is well that we remember this when we pray. He keeps His own laws, though sometimes He suspends them or supersedes them for His own purposes. He never breaks His laws, for they are an expression of His being and character.

Now health is God's ideal for humanity. Sin, disease, and death are not His plan — they never were. They were the devil's idea. Someday, by God's good grace, we shall be glorified and come to the measure of the stature of Christ-perfection. Not only spiritual holiness, but physical and mental wholeness, pleases Him who made us in His own image. This brings us to the truth that He wants His children to be healthy. Because of this we are in divine order when we use the human means at our command such as medicine, physicians, and hospitals to help us get well. The most skillful writer of the New Testament was a physician, and the most brilliant and useful preacher of that day was his patient.

However, good as these means are, it has evidently pleased the Lord from time to time to lay His immediate or gradual healing touch upon the body. Many thousands will testify to this fact in their lives. In so doing God has hastened the healing process which otherwise might have taken years, or which in some cases would have had to wait until the dawning of eternity. We bow our heads in humility and profound praise to the Lord of all life, who has done as it has pleased Him to do. We give Him thanks when He works through human means to heal us. We praise Him when He transcends these means to give us in a moment what otherwise He would give us later. Why should we hesitate to believe for it and accept it now when He reveals that this is His will for us at a given time?

In the following pages an effort will be made to ascertain just what the Bible has to say about divine healing, and how the emphasis on this doctrine has risen or fallen through the Christian centuries, with special attention to the current scene.

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Chapter 2
HEALING IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

To the superficial reader of the Old Testament, it may come as a distinct surprise to find the many references to divine healing. True, they are not all directly applicable to the healing of the body, and there are some that are doubtful in their emphasis. Yet there remains a considerable body of healing literature in the Old Testament which cannot easily be set aside.

Far back in the mists of patriarchal history appears the first biblical reference to divine healing. It is at the same time one of the most dramatic and direct answers to prayer to be found in God's Word. The story is well-known. Abimelech had taken Sarah without knowing she was the wife of Abraham, and God not only warned him that he and his entire house would be destroyed if he did not restore Sarah to her rightful husband, but it is at least implied that the women of the household became barren as a result (Gen. 20:18). At the request of Abraham, who directly prayed for him, "God healed Abimelech, and his wife, and his maidservants; and they bare children" (Gen. 20:17).

This is only the beginning of a long story of God's healing purpose and power as demonstrated among His people Israel and, occasionally, the surrounding nations. One of the strongest statements is to be found in Exod. 15:26: "If thou wilt diligently hearken to the voice of the Lord thy God . . . I will put none of these diseases upon thee, which I have brought upon the Egyptians: for I am the LORD that healeth thee." In this verse Israel is addressed as a person. The nation is promised exemption from the evil diseases that afflicted Egypt on the condition that the people would follow God and "do that which is right in his sight, and . . . give ear to his commandments, and keep all his statutes." We may well consider this promise and statement from God to be a universal law. It seems to be in the same category as the oft-quoted verse: "The title is the Lord's; it is holy unto the LORD" (Lev. 27:30). There is no time limit — no date line — no exception noted — and no excuse tolerated. So we are assured in the former verse: "I am the LORD that healeth thee." Any theology of healing must take into account this early but distinct testimony God gave of himself and His relationship to His people.

There are several references in the Pentateuch to a ceremonial healing which does not particularly concern us today, for it has to do with the pronouncement of cleanness in the case of leprosy. The cleansing seems to have come about through natural means, especially that of sanitation and isolation from the community, and doubtless with whatever medical or semi-medical help that was available. We merely mention these in passing, with their location: Exod. 21:19; Lev. 13:18; 14:3, 48.

Located in the midst of this wilderness story of Israel, however, is to be found one of the truly great incidents of divine healing. Moses' sister, Miriam, had joined with his brother, Aaron, to condemn Moses for what they considered a misalliance "because of the Ethiopian [Cushite] woman whom he had married" (Num. 12:1). She had been suddenly stricken with leprosy, to the dismay of

Aaron, who was equally guilty of sin. The heart cry of Moses is recorded in Num. 12:13: "Heal her now, O God, I beseech thee." The prayer was answered, a certain temporary punishment issued, and a healthy fear instilled into the hearts of the wandering Israelites. But the main purpose of this story for us is that Moses definitely prayed for healing and was accorded an immediate and complete answer to his prayer.

Before leaving the Pentateuch we note two more verses: Deut. 28:27 and 32:39. In the first passage Moses threatened Israel with skin diseases from which they could not be healed, along with many other terrible punishments for their disobedience. In the second we have another statement directly from the Lord: "I wound, and I heal: neither is there any that can deliver out of my hand."

Leaping forward several centuries we come to the well-known incident of the Philistines being healed of their "emerods" or tumors (I Sam. 6:3) after they had sent the ark of the covenant back to Israel. Later on we have the story of the healing of the waters by Elisha (II Kings 2:21). In neither of these cases can we deduce any relevance to the subject at hand.

The healing of Hezekiah (II Kings 20 and Isaiah 38) is one of the best authenticated stories of healing recorded in the Old Testament. Not only is it given in detail in two books, but the case is presented in a detail that would gratify a modern historian. In the Isaiah version, Hezekiah's soliloquy and hymn of praise after his healing (Isaiah 38:9-20) is one of the most poetically beautiful passages in the early portion of the book. The facts are clear: Hezekiah was mortally ill; he was warned by God to prepare for death; he prayed earnestly to be given additional time, setting forth his faithfulness and integrity: "I have walked before thee in truth and with a perfect heart." God sent him word by the prophet that He would add 15 years to his span of life — perhaps the only time in history that a man has ever been sure of life for a given period! God also promised him deliverance, along with Jerusalem, from the oppressor Assyria. And, perhaps most important for our study, the Lord gave Hezekiah a remarkable and visible sign of his healing, the controversial but scriptural promise that the shadow on the sundial should return by 10 degrees.

The healing of Naaman the Syrian (II Kings 5) is one of the more familiar stories in the Bible. As different from the healing of Hezekiah, this miracle was wrought almost against the opposition of the man involved. With the greatest reluctance Naaman overcame his prejudice and bathed in the river Jordan, fulfilling this basic requirement for God's blessing. Naaman's healing was dramatic, immediate, and permanent; it resulted in a change of heart and spiritual allegiance, which true scriptural healing always brings about. It is right to note that physical healing with no accompanying relevance to spiritual victory, no matter how popular it may be in the modern world, is not a scripturally based doctrine.

Any study of suffering must take into account the patriarch Job. His long battle with physical problems, as well as with fair-weather friends, is well-known to all Bible students. While his healing is not actually recorded, we must infer from the account of his complete restoration that he was physically healed as well as economically and domestically rehabilitated.

A number of prayers for healing are found in the Psalms. David cries: "O Lord, heal me; for my bones are vexed" (Ps. 6:2). The marginal reading is "withered." He thanks God for healing: "O

LORD my God, I cried unto thee, and thou hast healed me" (Ps. 30:2). We read: "He sent his word, and healed them" (Ps. 107:20). In praising the goodness of God the Psalmist says: "Who healeth all thy diseases" (Ps. 103:3).

A controversial verse is Isa. 53:5, where in a profound poem on the future suffering of Christ it is said: "With his stripes we are healed." Doubtless healing from the hurt of sin is meant here, but are we to eliminate the healing of the body altogether?

An obscure reference to the healing of the Egyptians is found in Isa. 19:22, and a promise of healing is given in Isa. 57:19, but it is doubtful that healing of the body is meant. There are also references in Jeremiah (30:17; 6:14; 8:11; 14:19; 15:18; 51:8-9) but these refer to a different type of healing of a nation's ills, etc. The prophet does pray in one instance: "Heal me, O LORD, and I shall be healed" (Jer. 17:14).

In the minor prophets the term is used to denote national healing of moral and spiritual ills. Hosea, Zechariah, Nahum, and Malachi all refer to this. There is one rich verse which surely has a transcendent meaning, but perhaps it might also carry a promise of help for the physically distressed: "But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings" (Mal. 4:2).

Admittedly it would be poor biblical interpretation to claim that all these verses promise divine healing for the body, or that they all even refer to it. However, they do direct our attention to the all-wise and all-powerful Heavenly Father, who is concerned with every need of His children, and who can and does, on occasion, heal them from their bodily infirmities.

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Chapter 3
HEALING IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Coming to the New Testament we have no difficulty in locating the subject of healing. The problem is rather to keep in proper perspective what the Gospel writers have to say about it. The three synoptic Evangelists, of course, often write about the same instances — but they also refer to great crowds being healed at a time, perhaps running into the thousands.

In opening His public ministry "Jesus went teaching . . . preaching . . . and healing" (Matt. 4:23). In His first recorded sermon He told His listeners at Nazareth: "He hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted" (Luke 4:18). Whether this has reference to physical healing is open to debate. In a more definitive verse (Matt. 8:17) we read that He "healed all that were sick," to fulfill Isaiah's prophecy, "Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses" (Isa. 53:4).

When Jesus sent the 12 apostles out to preach, He commanded them to "heal the sick" (Matt. 10:8). He gave them authority "to cure diseases," sent them to "heal the sick," and we are told that they did heal everywhere (Luke 9:1-2, 6). Mark confirms this, adding that they "anointed with oil many that were sick," perhaps the first time this had been done with a spiritual significance. When Jesus commissioned the 70, He told them to "heal the sick" (Matt. 10:8). These passages show us the importance He placed upon this aspect of the ministry of His disciples as they faced the problems of needy humanity.

In giving evidences of His messiahship to two of John's disciples, Jesus cited various types of healing which were being constantly performed in His ministry (Luke 7:22). Matthew has 18 incidents of definite healing; Mark has 15; and Luke, the physician, has 21. Often it is the healing of a multitude that is described, so that there is no way to know, even by estimation, how many found physical health under the ministry of our Lord during His short time on earth.

A number of observations may be made at this point with regard to Jesus' practice of healing.

1. He had no rigid mold into which every act of healing had to be poured. It was sometimes mental or psychological healing rather than being primarily physical. There seems to have been no difference made here, either by Jesus or by His followers. Why should we think it less a miracle when there is a healing of the mind than if it had been purely physical? Surely the physiologically caused diseases are no more troubling or disabling than those ailments which are based on psychological or neurological causes. We need to raise our sights on miracles to the New Testament level. A miracle is "the intervention of a Higher Power on a lower plane." When Jesus healed the insane man, He was restoring him to health as surely as if He had cured him of blindness or lameness.

2. Often, if not always, someone's faith was required for healing to be performed. We might raise the question as to whether this was true of the multitudes who came to Him. However, the very fact that they came to seek healing presupposes that they had some measure of faith. An evident exception to this principle is the incident of the restoring of Malchus' ear (Luke 22:51), when there seems to have been no exercise of faith on anyone's part — just the infinite compassion of our Lord extended even to the victim of His disciple's misguided enthusiasm.

3. Sympathy and a congenial atmosphere were sometimes required by Jesus, especially when a difficult case confronted Him. Perhaps the clearest example of this is His expulsion of the wailing mourners and the scoffing unbelievers from the chamber in which Jairus' daughter lay (Luke 8:54). This is not to say that He could not, or would not, have raised her up with these adverse influences present in the room. It is plain, however, that He desired an atmosphere about Him which was conducive to the divine power He planned to exercise. In this connection, could it be that the reason Jesus groaned and wept openly at the grave of Lazarus was that He was combating the unbelief of all those about Him, including His closest followers? Any study of John 11 must reveal that no one expected a miracle on that day. There was absolutely no hope in their hearts, not to mention faith. Jesus, tender and sympathetic, longed for at least one of His friends to believe, but was disappointed.

4. The healing ministry of Jesus required the expending of much physical and nervous energy. On occasion this depletion of His resources was so great that He took public notice of it, as in the healing of the woman who touched His garment. "Virtue is gone out of me," He said (Luke 8:46). On other occasions He required rest periods following the healing of multitudes, as well as periods of prolonged prayer ahead of time. The meeting of human needs, whether of individuals or of crowds, demands something which it does not restore. Jesus wisely took this into account, praying before and resting afterward — both forms of mental relaxation.

5. The Master always 'made physical healing a concomitant of preaching the kingdom of God. It was never a ministry in itself, divorced from the salvation proclamation. Sometimes He combined the two, as in the healing and forgiving of the man sick with palsy (Luke 5:24). Sometimes He intentionally slipped away from the crowd so that He might get on with His more important work of training His disciples. The most notable example of this is His leaving the multitudes that had come from long distances to be healed in order that He might give the Sermon on the Mount to 12 men.

6. There were no artificial limitations to the cures performed by Jesus. Social position, sex, nationality — these things seem not to have entered into it. However, we may note that there were few if any older people healed, as far as any distinct information is given. This may be a reflection of the fact that relatively few people in that non-medical, unsanitary age ever lived to be old. Or it may be that Jesus was recognizing the fact that people cannot be healed of old age — a fact which we need to keep in mind today.

7. Often, if not always, physical healing in New Testament times carried with it rehabilitation. A man who was lame or blind was healed so that he could make his own living, carry his own bed, return to his family and friends. Jesus never encouraged deadbeats. He had compassion on those who

could not make their own way and gave them health so that they could so do. There is no "something for nothing" philosophy reflected here.

8. Healing, in Jesus' estimation, was a spiritual service, worthy of being performed on the rigid Jewish Sabbath (Luke 13:16). In fact, there was no specious distinction between secular and spiritual in Jesus' mind and life. All He did was to glorify His Father, and to help poor, suffering, sinful humanity back to God. Every day of the week was a holy day to Him, and the petty measuring of how much one could do on the Sabbath, or the ascertaining of the exact moment of the Sabbath's beginning and ending, meant little or nothing to Him. In Jesus' thinking, the sick person needed to be healed right now — why make him wait until tomorrow?

9. Perhaps this is more difficult for us to accept, but Jesus plainly said that at least sometimes illness is produced by Satan. We read that "a woman had a spirit of infirmity" (Luke 13:11, italics mine). Does such a spirit come from God? Jesus said not. He said, "This woman . . . whom Satan hath bound, lo, these eighteen years." If illness is "the will of God," as we so often hear, then are doctors combating God's will when they cure it? And are they winning a victory over God's will? Are churches opposing God's will when they conduct healing services to eliminate illness? We cannot answer all the questions, and we cannot probe all the mysteries surrounding this subject, but we can say for certain that Jesus fought the power of disease with the power of God, and overcame it.

JESUS' PHILOSOPHY OF HEALING

Our Lord felt that physical well-being was essential to a full life. We do not have a single reference to any kind of sickness in His own life. We have every reason to believe that He was physically perfect. We might say with good reason that He was affronted by the ever present disease about Him, and that He waged a lifelong campaign against it. Disease offended His idea and ideal for humanity.

When Jesus saw a palsied man, or a blind man, or a deaf man, or a leper, or a demoniac, He felt that He must rectify this perversion of God's plan. There was laid upon Him a compelling obligation to destroy this abnormality. On the few occasions when He seemed reluctant to heal (as the Syrophenician woman's daughter in Mark 7:26 ff.), He had a reason for it which did not controvert His primary purpose of helping the person in need.

While we are nowhere in the New Testament told that to be sick is a sign of spiritual lack (an unthinking, cruel presupposition often held by modern "healers"), yet the New Testament ideal is that of health. In the beginning God planned no disease; death was to have been probably some sort of painless transition, a fitting close to a well-spent life. Is it too much to believe that this is still His highest will for His people?

We have complicated the situation with our accident-prone society and our soft living which has removed many of the barriers against disease. This is not to say that the Bible teaches that a Christian will never catch a disease or suffer a fatal or crippling accident, for he is not immune from being human. But it is to say that this is not God's first plan for His people.

The Lord does not always see fit to set aside the various man-made and circumstance — conditioned factors which govern much of our lives. When a Christian comes into contact with a germ he has no automatic immunity, although his clean living plays an important part at this point in fighting against sickness, as many can testify. When a Christian unwittingly is involved in an accident, he is not necessarily kept from injury just because he is a Christian. We are heirs to the problems common to humanity.

There are a few examples (but they must be thought of as exceptions) in which sickness seemed to glorify God, at least for the time being. Paul's "thorn in the flesh," whatever it was — and there are many and bizarre speculations — seems to have served a higher spiritual purpose. This case still baffles Bible students, and many conjectures have been made concerning it. Perhaps we shall never be sure in this world even of what the thorn consisted, whether it was primarily physical or psychological in nature. The phrase "thorn in the flesh" in this case proves nothing, as any proper understanding of Romans 8 will tell us. This could mean a thorn in the personality, or in the mind, or in the body. Also, Lazarus' sickness and death, and the infirmity of the man born blind (John 11 and 9, respectively) both contributed to a greater spiritual good that far outweighed the temporary problems. And we must remember that in both cases Jesus ultimately handled the physical situation. This seems to leave Paul's case as the one instance in which permanent healing was denied — but for a higher goal, with abundant grace given to bear the unlifted load. Even Paul would agree that "it is better to have a thorn and abounding grace than to have no thorn and no grace."

THE BOOK OF ACTS

There are a number of outstanding cases of healing recorded in Acts. There is a "stand out" quality in these stories, perhaps reflecting the keen insight and compassionate attitude expected of a writer whose profession was that of healing. Apart from our belief in the divine inspiration of the book, there is the ring of authenticity in these records.

The first, and perhaps best known, instance of healing in Acts is that of the lame man at the gate of the Temple (c. 3). Here was a hopeless case immediately and dramatically cured through the name of Jesus of Nazareth. We note that Peter and John used this incident to preach the gospel — not to start a healing cult.

Multitudes were healed "every one" (5:15 ff.). Sick people and demoniacs were included in this mass display of divine power. Healing was a part of Philip's ministry at Samaria (8:7). Peter's healing of Aeneas (9:33 ff.), Paul's experience with the cripple at Lystra (14:8-10), with the demon-possessed girl at Philippi (16:18), and with Publius' father and others on Melita (28:8 ff.), show the personal concern of the leading apostles with the needs of individuals. Paul, as well as Peter, was also instrumental in the healing of multitudes (19:11 ff.).

It is at least of interest to note that handkerchiefs and aprons were taken from Paul to the sick to aid in their healing. Perhaps this finds its counterpart in Peter's ministry (5:15), for we are told that the sick were placed so that even his shadow might pass over them. There seems to be no effort on the part of the writer to suggest that these methods were ordained of God, or necessary to healing. They are rather, it would seem, interesting and authentic sidelights on the diverse ministry of these

men, as recorded by Luke. The Lord uses many methods to reach people with His divine help, even when these methods seem to be rooted in superstition. Again the psychological factor, never very far from the Bible accounts, is noted.

In closing this study of healing in the New Testament, there is one more passage with which we must deal. This is the one so commonly used in modern healing services — Jas. 5:13 ff. As this seems to be something of a formula to be used, and as it will be discussed at length in a later chapter, we merely note it in passing.

The New Testament is a Book of healing — or better, a Book of health. The needy found physical, mental, and spiritual health when they sought it in faith. Almost without exception they were healed. They were not turned away. With the one notable exception of the Apostle Paul, they were not told that it was God's will that they should suffer. Universally, disease was held to be a perversion of God's plan for human beings. The power of the mind in producing, and in helping to cure, psychosomatic illness is not overlooked. Finally, the salient truth shines forth that the compassionate, tender ministry of Jesus and His followers is a reflection of the mercy of our Heavenly Father toward His sick and sinful creatures.

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Chapter 4
HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT THROUGH THE REFORMATION

The Post-Apostolic Era

When the pristine fervor of the Apostolic Church began to wane, its dynamic doctrines began to crystallize into rigid formalism. This did not happen all at once, nor is it possible to set a date or series of dates for its development, except in a very general way. Slowly, almost imperceptibly, the power of the Holy Spirit was supplanted in the Church by the authority of the hierarchy. As their spiritual force waned, it became increasingly easy for those early Christians to rationalize their situation, to relegate miracles to the days of the apostles, and to spiritualize healing. This is not to say that none of the Early Church fathers believed in healing or prayed for it. But healing became the exception instead of the accepted and expected thing, and gradually the idea that God wills sickness (an idea very foreign to the apostles' teaching) became current and has persisted until this day.

It would be a mistake to conclude that the Post-apostolic Church lost its interest in people and their ills. From the very beginning of Christianity until this present hour the followers of the Great Physician have endeavored to help the needy and to alleviate the sufferings of the sick. Medical science owes an incalculable debt to the Christian philosophy of the value of the individual life. In the earliest Christian centuries there were those who devoted their lives in the most unselfish manner to ministering to the sick and helpless.

It would be more in order to say that, while the Church kept its compassion, it lost its power. As with most generalizations, this statement is not factual in every respect. The exceptions, while not numerous, are noteworthy. The doctrine of divine healing, though somewhat on the wane, was never completely eclipsed in the Early Church.

Irenaeus (120-202) mentioned the gift of healing in his writings, and even claimed that it was used for non-Christians as well as for believers. ^[1] He wrote: "Those who are in truth the disciples receiving grace from him do in his name perform miracles so as to promote the welfare of others. . . . Others still heal the sick by laying their hands upon them, and they are made whole." ^[2] Irenaeus "stresses the acts of healing that only Christians are capable of accomplishing. And he mentions such acts as: restoring sight to the blind and hearing to the deaf; casting out all kinds of devils; healing the weak, the paralytic or those afflicted with other physical diseases; and even raising the dead." ^[3]

Bishop Dionysius (190-265) wrote that during the plague at Alexandria "many of our brethren . . . visited the sick . . . and treated them for their healing in Christ." ^[4] Origen (185-253) rather disdained, though he did not forbid, the use of medical help in sickness. He wrote: "The name of Jesus can still . . . expel demons, and also take away diseases." ^[5]

Tertullian wrote: "Many men of rank, to say nothing of the common people, have been delivered from devils and healed of disease." [6] Clement instructed those visiting the sick as follows: "Let them, therefore, with fasting and prayer, make their intercessions, and not with the well arranged and fitly ordered words of learning, but as men who have received the gift of healing confidently, to the glory of God." [7] Justin Martyr wrote: "Many of our Christian men, exorcising them [demons] in the name of Jesus Christ . . . have healed and do heal, rendering helpless and driving the possessing devils out of the men, though they could not be cured by all the other exorcists and those who used incantations and drugs." [8]

Augustine, while seemingly repudiating the possibility of miracles in his earlier ministry, witnessed forcefully to their continuance later on, especially in his great work, *The City of God*. "He enumerates at great length miracles, chiefly those of healing, which he believed to have been wrought in his own time, and coming more or less within his own knowledge." [9] Augustine relates the story of Innocentius of Carthage, who was instantly healed of a painful affliction which had required repeated operations to no avail. After earnest prayer on the part of his Christian friends the surgeon who was to operate again could not find any reason for doing so. In Augustine's words: "He first looks for it, then examines by the touch; in a word, he makes every possible trial, and finds the place perfectly healed. The gladness, the praise, the thanksgiving to a compassionate and all powerful God, which, with mingled joy and tears, now burst from the lips of all present, cannot be told by me. The scene may more easily be imagined than described." [10]

A contemporary student of divine healing, Gertrude McKelvey, writes: "The early church fathers from St. Justin Martyr (100-165) to St. Jerome (340-420) still reported some healings through anointing with oil (often that from the lamps of the church, which was blessed), through the laying-on-of-hands and the use of holy water. All these methods, of course, were supported by prayers for the sick." [11]

The New Testament method of anointing with oil was used often, if not always, when prayer for healing was offered. Also, the sacrament was given to the suffering Christian. A prayer (from the fourth-century "Sacramentary of Serapion") reads as follows: "We invoke . . . and pray Thee to send healing power of the only-begotten from heaven upon this oil, that it may become to these who are being anointed, or are partaking of these Thy creatures, for an expulsion of every evil spirit . . . for a medicine of life and salvation, for health and soundness of soul, body and spirit." [12]

During The Middle Ages

The medieval period was a time of great suffering, widespread plagues, interminable wars, and general misery. We are hardly able to comprehend the liabilities to life that were taken as a matter of course. The average life expectancy for a male born in northern Europe at this time has been given as 19 years. The constant warfare, of course, had much to do with this low average lifetime. Medicine was quaint and amateurish, with sanitation practically unknown, and superstition almost universal. With some notable exceptions the Christian Church had deteriorated greatly from its original purity and spiritual power. Nevertheless, there were many who wanted to alleviate human suffering. Within the framework of their knowledge (or perhaps we should say their ignorance) they devoted themselves to this task, often heroically and in a spirit of self-denial.

It was during these centuries that the great monastic orders flourished. With all their faults and excesses they were still perhaps the brightest aspect of the Medieval Church. It would seem that they had practically forgotten the New Testament teaching on divine healing, or that they had come to the place where they did not any longer believe it was for men of their time. They did, however, give themselves to caring for the sick and building hospitals. Superstition abounded, and belief in the relics of saints became widespread. The sick were taught that these bones and other relics had mystical power to heal disease, and even that sleeping in holy places would assist in their recovery. Confession and penance were also enjoined as exercises that could help them. There is to be seen here, rather faintly, the therapeutic value of confession and repentance for sin which are so often essential to physical and psychological health, and so taken for granted in our day.

One of the characteristics of this era is the change in the significance of the anointing oil. Originally it had been a sign of life, used with prayer that the sick person might become well. Eventually in the middle ages it became a symbol of death, "extreme unction," and was elevated to the status of a sacrament.

As students of this historical era know, the Waldensians were an oasis of spiritual strength in a desert of formalism. They were able to preserve their integrity, purity, and simplicity when all around them religion had become shallow, hollow, and complex. It is not surprising that on the subject of divine healing they had also kept the scriptural emphasis. In the Confession of 1431 they affirmed: "Therefore, concerning this anointing of the sick, we hold it as an article of faith, and profess sincerely from the heart that sick persons, when they ask it, may lawfully be anointed with the anointing oil by one who joins with them in praying that it may be efficacious to the healing of the body according to the design and end and effect mentioned by the apostles; and we profess that such an anointing performed according to the apostolic design and practice will be healing and profitable."^[13]

To sum up a millennium of Christian history, even as regards one doctrine, in a few paragraphs, may seem shallow treatment. However, we must remember that the light was burning low, and the presence and power of the Holy Spirit were practically unrealized, except for a few believers here and there who rose above their training and environment and approached their Lord in a personal sense — sometimes through the ceremonies of the Church, but more often in spite of them.

The Reformation Period

That time of intellectual and spiritual ferment known as the Reformation tore away the graveclothes of formalism and bade the slumbering Church arise. As with all revolutionary movements, there were excesses and inconsistencies, but at least the sleep of death was interrupted, and a fresh breath of celestial air blew in upon the Church.

The Reformers were intensely practical men. They were rebelling against superstition and hypocrisy, which were so often bound up with belief in miracles. It is not surprising then that they did not place as much emphasis on healing as a more mystical group might have done. In spite of this, there are definite cases of healing reported among them. One of these is the recovery of Melancthon, who was in a dying condition when Luther prayed earnestly for him in one of the most importunate petitions on record, and was healed. Luther in his prayer urged the promises from

Scripture, and insisted that God "must hear and answer now if he would ever have the petitioner trust in him again." [14]

A number of such instances were recorded in Luther's life. Some of the healings were dramatic, some gradual, but the great Reformer stood staunchly by his belief that God does heal the sick in keeping with His promises. He wrote: "How often has it happened and still does, that devils have been driven out in the name of Christ, also by calling on his name and prayer that the sick have been healed." [15]

Calvin, while admitting the possibility of healing, evidently did not believe that it was likely to take place in his day. He looked upon the healings of Christ and the apostles as "temporary gifts of God for the purpose of establishing the authority of Christ and the Church on earth." [15] While not expecting any frequent demonstrations of healing power, Calvin does however say: "The Lord is undoubtedly present with his people to assist them in all ages; and, whenever it is necessary, he heals their diseases as much as he did in ancient times; but he does not display those visible powers, or dispense miracles by the hands of the apostles; because that gift was only of temporary duration, and was soon lost, in some measure, by the ingratitude of men." [16]

As we look back over the 1,500 years from the apostolic age to the death of the original Reformers, some facts stand out and give force to some conclusions. Perhaps we shall not want to go quite as far as do some who feel that the ultimate measurement line of the spiritual life of the Church has been its healing power. Yet the careful observer of Christian history must be struck with the fact that spiritual power and healing power have gone together.

It is also certain that the more prosperous and powerful (in the political sense) the Church became, the less dependence was placed on God, and consequently the less spiritual life was to be found — this being demonstrated in various ways, including the doctrine and practice of healing.

The lessons are easy to read but hard to learn. The Church in every age has tended to lose its spiritual life when it has become accepted in society and, especially, when it has become involved in political change. It is ironical that the very virtues that contribute to prosperity and respectability — honesty, thrift, and integrity — eventually create a favorable climate in which the Church lapses into a sleek, self-satisfied complacency that finally defeats her purpose and deteriorates her soul. A high church official was once heard to say, "No longer can the church say, 'Silver and gold have I none,'" and the answer came, "Neither can she say, 'In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk.'"

GOD'S HEALING TOUCH
A Study of the Doctrine of Divine Healing

By
Vernon L. Wilcox

Chapter 5
RECENT TRENDS

We are aware that any division of history into ancient, medieval, and modern eras must be to some degree artificial and arbitrary. However, for this study we think of the close of the Reformation period as the beginning of the modern era.

The first centuries that followed the age of Luther and Calvin did not produce a great deal of enthusiasm for divine healing in any widespread sense, although of course there were numerous instances of God's healing touch upon individuals. This may be partly due to the Protestant reaction against superstition (although Protestants were far from being delivered from this evil, as witness the witch hunts and other like persecutions). It may also be a reflection of the rather legal cast which Protestant Christianity took on after the first flush of its deliverance from Romanism had subsided. Rome's overemphasis on the human ability to secure favor from God (through saints, relics, indulgences, and penance) was overcompensated by the Reformers' overemphasis on the absolute sovereignty of God. Neither extreme encouraged the interaction between divine and human which is essential to an experience of healing, or for that matter to any experience of grace.

There is not much to be learned along this line from a study of Wesley, though he did not follow in the direct line of the sixteenth-century Reformers. There is one reference to the doctrine of healing in the 14 volumes of *The Works of John Wesley*. It is contained in a letter to Dr. Middleton. That there were healings in those days from time to time is true, but the great weight of emphasis fell on getting people out of the clutches of Satan.

One of the leading proponents of the doctrine of divine healing in the early twentieth century was A. B. Simpson, who wrote and preached extensively on the subject. His own experience of healing, which was quite wide for his generation, is the basis for much of his teaching on the subject. He said little about healing in historical perspective, but gave much attention to the miracles of Jesus. His book *The Gospel of Healing* ^[17] has considerable impact on the reader, and magnifies the goodness and power of Christ and the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

Simpson was a man of great faith and deep devotion. While he avoided the use of medical help himself, he seemed not to condemn others who used it. His thesis seems to have been that all believers may be healed of all diseases during the course of their natural expectancy of life, and that the ideal end of a Christian's life would be natural rather than caused by disease. Simpson was not a fanatic, but he was emphatic at the point that all will be healed who will believe for it. While he would have denied that healing is the gospel, yet he made it a very large part of the gospel.

Many who believe in healing would decline to go as far as he did in urging people to dispense with physicians, but all would be benefited by having some of the spirit of trust evidenced in the life

of this great man. His belief was that physical redemption was not mere healing of the body, but a higher kind of life which could be kept only by constantly abiding in Christ. He felt that healing is a right of redemption, to be accepted simply on the basis of our inheritance purchased by the blood of Christ. With some modification (especially at the point of healing for all believers) Simpson's views and especially his practice might be said to be fairly typical of the interdenominational holiness movement which preceded the organization of the modern main-line holiness churches. They believed in healing; they prayed for it; they expected and in many cases received it.

When we come to the contemporary scene we are bewildered by the almost unbelievable variety of movements that have made healing a major feature of their ministry and their main point of appeal to the public. Men and women of admitted gifts and intellect and personality have gained national renown as "faith healers." Some have maintained a fairly balanced program in which they have preached salvation, with healing as a kind of by-product. This balance is hard to maintain, however, human nature being what it is. Others have gone to an extreme which at times is difficult to believe, frankly appealing to the senses by the use of physical roughness and highly emotional services. They have promised the "faithful" a complete deliverance from all ills, including financial troubles. This word "deliverance" has become a shibboleth in the far-left sector of the healing wing of Christianity, which is almost always associated with speaking in tongues.

The financial element has been all too often a prominent feature of such campaigns. Some healers have opened themselves to accusation for very unethical practices, to say the least. That this has not been true of all does not remove the stigma that is generally attached to so-called "healing evangelists." Unabashed appeals over radio broadcasts, while not limited to these groups, have nevertheless become associated with them in many minds until the great Bible doctrine of divine healing has been dragged in the mud of opportunism and religious racketeering.

Even to name those who clutter the modern field would take more time and information than we have. Some of the best known (and perhaps most reputable) have become international figures. Others are to be found in nearly every city from time to time. To say that no one is healed under such auspices, would not be fair or true, although it must be admitted that very few healed persons can be found in any survey following such campaigns. One pastor reported that a former funeral director told him that his ambulances had taken stretcher cases to the campaigns of a prominent healing evangelist and that without exception he had brought every one of the cases back as he had taken them. This of course proves nothing except that there is a widespread attitude of skepticism prevailing among conservative believers today. They do not doubt that God heals; they do doubt that very many are healed in the services where healing is given the most prominent position.

Far removed from these meetings, but in some ways remarkably like them, are the mind-cure religious groups. Seeming to be philosophical in their approach, they still appeal to the sick and the easily influenced, though usually working in a high income and intelligence bracket. The groups are numerous, some having attained great prominence. Usually they are of high moral character, and with the exception of a few cultish movements have not often been accused of poor finance ethics. According to their teaching, healing, while attributed to God in a general sense, is produced largely by the power of mind over matter. Again, it could not be said that healings do not occur. Many diseases are caused by the mind, and may be cured by the mind. Even the great psychologist Jung

said that all his patients over 35 years of age had become ill because they had lost what religion has to offer, and that none had been genuinely healed unless his religious outlook was restored.

The most notable development on the recent religious scene is the vigorous renewal of the doctrine of healing among some of the older established and more formal denominations such as the Episcopal and Lutheran. Some Episcopal churches schedule regular weekly services which are kept on a dignified level, but in which people are anointed with oil and prayed for that they might be healed. The Book of Common Prayer includes a prayer to be used in an anointing service which is very much like the prayer any evangelical minister might pray under these circumstances.

There is in the Episcopal church a movement known as the Order of St. Luke the Physician. The order operates on a fourfold program: (1) a healing service at regular times in every parish church; (2) healing literature in the vestibule of every parish church; (3) a healing mission once a year in all the leading cities; (4) the opening of healing centers in larger cities. The director of the order is Dr. Alfred Price, rector of St. Stephen's Church, Philadelphia. His work is backed by a spiritual upsurge and is not carried on for publicity. Right mental attitudes and proper attitudes toward others are stressed as essential to physical healing. Each week, in the parish bulletin, testimonies of healing are carried under the caption: "These Signs Shall Follow." One of Dr. Price's healing missions was conducted some time ago in Chicago, and 1,000 came forward for prayer.

Among the numerous recent books on divine healing the one that has received as favorable reception among us as any is *Finding God's Healing Power*, by Gertrude McKelvey.^[18] The book is extremely valuable as a source of information. Written from the modern scientific point of view, with full verification of all claims, the author yet approaches the subject with reverence and a spiritual sensitivity that makes one want to draw nearer to the Lord, who heals. The larger portion of the book, both theoretically and factually, draws from the spiritual life and experience of the "established Church." It is a startling revelation of the great place healing has in some of the older churches, and would seem to indicate that holiness churches have not sufficiently emphasized this ministry.

The author of this book impresses one as having had a personal and rewarding experience of God's grace, first mediated to her through healing of the body. At no time is physical healing given precedence over spiritual help. There is a remarkably fair balance struck between the two, and the dependence of the physical on the spiritual is always maintained. An open mind is kept as to modern faith healing, evangelistic healers, and so forth. There is no snobbery or patronizing air as to other methods than those used in the established churches, though naturally she favors these more conservative methods. The intelligent approach through teaching ministry is emphasized. The work of the Holy Spirit is lifted up and the crucial need of prayer set forth. Dependence on Christ at all times is strongly urged.

This book is only one of a great number which have recently appeared. Whereas a few years ago books on healing were almost unknown, except for a few pamphlets, today there are numerous such books being written by psychiatrists, doctors, and laymen, as well as by preachers of all religious groups. By and large they stress the necessity for right thinking, right treatment of others, adherence

to the laws of health, but above and through all the need for faith in the God who created the body and is able to heal it.

Religious leaders like Norman Vincent Peale have combined spiritual treatment with psychiatry and psychology. They emphasize the importance of eliminating resentments and all personality-destroying factors from mind and heart. Along with this there must be a willingness to accept God's will and an absence of self-centeredness. While these methods are professionally sophisticated, they are religiously simple and uncomplicated and are permeated by genuine interest and compassion.

Healing services are also held in Presbyterian and Methodist churches, although perhaps not quite to the extent that they are in the modern Episcopal renewal. Leslie D. Weatherhead, longtime pastor of City Temple in London, carried on for years a highly successful ministry to the sick. Before coming to this Congregational pastorate he was a Methodist minister. His book, *Psychology, Religion, and Healing*,^[19] has been widely read. He cites examples of healing which cannot easily be gainsaid. The United Presbyterian General Assembly of 1960 published a booklet entitled *The Relation of Christian Faith to Health*, which put this denomination on record as being favorable to the truth of healing.

We should not overlook the fact that the Roman Catholic church has emphasized healing through the centuries. The famed shrine at Lourdes, famous as a place of physical cures, is the best known of Catholic shrines. Protestants may be somewhat inclined to discount the cures claimed here, but some are unquestionably performed. They stand as testimonies to the healing power of God demonstrated in the lives of those who exercise true faith in Him. There is no other basis for true healing, no matter what the setting may be. Recently an effort has been made to show that the sacrament of extreme unction is not merely a preparation for death but actually a prayer for healing. How widespread this idea is among Catholics it would be impossible to estimate, but one of the prayers in the "last rites" following the anointing with oil does beseech God for physical healing.

The surface has scarcely been scratched, but perhaps enough has been said here to show that the contemporary church scene displays every color in the healing spectrum. The position of the modern, mainline holiness movement will be discussed in the following chapter. While we do not presume to speak for other denominations we believe that Nazarene opinion on this subject will for the most part parallel that of other holiness groups.

GOD'S HEALING TOUCH
A Study of the Doctrine of Divine Healing

By
Vernon L. Wilcox

Chapter 6
WHAT WE BELIEVE ABOUT DIVINE HEALING

Uniformity of belief about any doctrine not considered essential to salvation would be unreasonable to expect and probably undesirable to achieve. Perhaps the only completely unanimous vote on this subject would be that healing is not essential to receiving eternal life. From this general position there are many degrees and varieties of expression on the subject.

Article 15 of the constitution of the Church of the Nazarene as recorded in the Manual reads: "We believe in the Bible doctrine of divine healing and urge our people to seek to offer the prayer of faith for the healing of the sick. Providential means and agencies when deemed necessary should not be refused."

This short statement is general enough that it does not force a narrow view upon the tolerant or mock the more conservative with disdain. It is discriminating without being discriminatory. Some flexibility of thought is allowed for and encouraged. The divergence of opinion thus invited is actually a sign of strength. There is enough resilience in our position to allow for stress without breaking. A rigid view of healing either makes for narrow, even cruel, uniformity or drives thoughtful people to the opposite extreme of doubt or repudiation of the doctrine altogether. Our founding fathers were wise in allowing latitude of belief on nonessential doctrines within an overall framework of generally accepted truth.

The church does not insist that all people must be healed or else admit a spiritual disability. On the other hand, we do not count out the possibility of anyone being healed of any disease at any time God wills it. We do not counsel people to throw away their medicines and to refuse the help of physicians, for we believe that God has ordained such for our good, and that the practice of medicine is a part of His healing process. On the other hand, we would not cast any aspersions on either the faith or the judgment of those who feel that they can and should dispense with such "providential means and agencies" and who believe that God is so directing them.

We will all agree that God can heal the body, that He often does heal, that healing is dependent on faith, and that if we could or would exercise stronger faith we would have more healing power demonstrated in our midst.

A questionnaire was submitted to a selected and representative group of pastors, administrators, teachers, and evangelists. The purpose was to find the position of these leaders of the church on various aspects of the healing doctrine, and thus to arrive at something of a corporate "stand."

The sequence of questions may not be important, but for the most part they progressed from the general to the specific. The questions, along with representative answers, were as follows:

1. What is your feeling about healing being in the atonement? If you do believe this to be so' to what extent, and in what way?

A few gave an unqualified "no" to this question, a very few an unqualified "yes," while most shared a modified view: that healing is in the atonement, but not in the same way or to the same degree as salvation from sin.

Healing is not universally offered as is salvation, so that "whosoever will" may come without exception. If bodily healing is in the atonement (meaning by this that it was purchased by Jesus' sacrifice on Calvary), then one could not be truly Christian without seeking for and receiving such a blessing. Disease is not necessarily present in every life, so that healing may not be needed in some cases, whereas sin is universal and every person needs to be saved.

Representative answers included the following:

"Healing is in the atonement eventually, for all glorification of the body comes as the result of the atonement."

"If healing is in the atonement in the same way salvation is, then God would have to heal."

"Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that healing is a by-product of the atonement rather than a direct result of the atonement."

"If it were [universally in the atonement], then no person would ever be ill if he were in the will of God."

"It is one of the blessings God has for His children, and at times may even grant to those who have not yet reached full reconciliation with Him in salvation."

"Sin and sickness are related, but not necessarily in an individual. There is no doubt in my mind but that sickness is the result of the cosmic effects of sin. In this sense, then, the atonement may provide for healing sickness, but not in the sense that the atonement is for all men, whosoever will."

Because physical healing is a secondary benefit, it is only at best a secondary result of the atonement. While salvation from sin is essential to eternal life, physical health is not; therefore they cannot be put on the same level of importance.

However, while we cannot demand healing as a privilege, we can accept it as a gift when it pleases God to give it to us. This should not deter us from seeking God's healing power, because we take His will always to be best for us at any given time under any circumstances. But even God's will along many lines is not always done in us because we have not faith. Therefore we should pray and believe for God's healing touch upon our bodies, thus putting ourselves in the place where He can bless us as He sees fit.

2. Do you think that our church in particular, or holiness churches in general, have been too reticent about emphasizing healing? If so, what do you think should be done?

There seemed to be a fairly definite feeling that we have been somewhat reticent in the matter of emphasizing the truth of divine healing in the main-line holiness churches. However, quite a sizable minority expressed themselves as believing our emphasis is about right. It is only fair to say that, almost without exception, those who felt that we needed to give this doctrine added emphasis were moderate in their statements. There was apparently no disposition on anyone's part to make healing a central teaching or to devote a great deal of time to it.

Our absorption in the matter of winning souls to Christ, having revival campaigns, and generally building the Kingdom as represented by the church, have seemingly shunted this truth to the sidetrack. We have reacted to some extent against the "healing professionals" and the hobbyists. As some expressed it, "we have been frightened by them." There was a fairly general conviction that we have allowed the marginal groups to take from us an emphasis which we should recover, at least to a modified extent.

What then can be done about this lack? We need more preaching and writing on the subject. We should pray and be more sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit on the matter. Small prayer groups might be organized. District seminars or clinics in key areas could be set up. Several church leaders feel that a healing service should be scheduled in each evangelistic campaign.

Perhaps we might sum up by saying that we are far from "going overboard" at this point. Most of our churches have healing services only occasionally, and then only when requested, but there would be no opposition to offering prayer for healing for anyone at any time who desires it. The mood might be called mild, and the temperature cool. The watchword seems to be: "Let's get on with the main business of saving souls, and pray for healing when convenient and desired."

3. Have you ever had a clear-cut case of divine healing in your ministry? Was there medical verification subsequent to the healing?

At this point there was a strong preponderance of affirmative answers, indicating that God has performed many outstanding healings among us over the years. If this was a fair sampling of ministers, then we must conclude that genuine healings have not been lacking in our church. We have not said too much about them, and have been careful not to over-publicize them, but there are many examples of God's power in definite healing.

Medical verification was not available in every case, but in about half of the healings noted there was such verification. Noteworthy is the fact that the diseases or afflictions mentioned were physical rather than psychological, that they were serious and in some cases critical, and that the healings were usually entire and instantaneous or nearly so. Cases of polio, cancer, leukemia, crippling arthritis, and total blindness were among those noted. Some of these thrilling testimonies will be found in the following, concluding chapter.

There is clearly a firm belief among us that God can heal the body, and that He does heal from time to time. It is not a problem of skepticism at this point — just negligence in presenting it and in availing ourselves of God's provision.

4. Would you give your idea of the meaning of Jas. 5:13-16 at the following points:

a. Who are meant by "elders of the church"?

b. What is the significance of the use of oil?

c. Does the consequent forgiveness of sins here mean, in your opinion, all sins committed prior to the healing, or such sins as may have brought on the sickness?

d. To what extent is the confessing of faults a necessary factor in divine healing?

e. What do you think the prayer of faith to be? Can it be prayed by all Christians on all occasions, or otherwise?

Jas. 5:13-16 is, of course, the classic scripture passage regarding healing. It has been used multiplied times as a basis for encouragement and as an assist to faith. Many of us would scarcely think of conducting either a private or a public healing service without reading these verses aloud before prayer. Here are the words:

Is any among you afflicted? let him pray. Is an" merry? let him sing psalms.

Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord:

And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sin', they shall be forgiven him.

Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.

Perhaps in some cases this scripture passage has been used as a formula, with the method hardened into a pattern that cannot be changed. Surely it was never meant to suffer this fate. The verses are suggestive rather than stifling. We can best fulfill their purpose by exercising freedom in our approach to God for healing, treating this passage somewhat as we do the Lord's Prayer, using it but not being exclusively confined to it. We do not bypass the Lord's Prayer, but we do pass by it to other forms of supplication. So, while using these scriptures regarding healing, we shall also use any other methods to which we are directed by the Holy Spirit at any given time.

a. Generally, the "elders of the church" are understood to be the ordained ministers and spiritual leaders of the church — at times including godly laymen. No rigid pattern is here seen which would

limit those who are to help in such a service to the ordained ministers, although they will usually be in the majority.

b. The use of the anointing oil bears a number of interpretations. Of course no one would attach miraculous properties to the oil itself. The predominant idea is that oil is a biblical symbol of the Holy Spirit, whose power must be released if healing is to come.

Another widely accepted idea is that we should use the oil because it is commanded — thus as an act of obedience. However, it may be possible to interpret the words, "Let them" anoint, as an exhortation rather than a direct command.

The use of oil is also an aid to faith, both for the candidate and for the ministers. It is a visible symbol of the power of the Spirit which is expected, somewhat as baptism is a symbol of the cleansed life of the regenerated believer.

A very interesting sidelight on the use of oil is the observation that it was a healing medication in Bible times, and therefore that this verse means that we are to seek the best medical help to be found. P. F. Bresee is reported to have held somewhat to this belief.

Whichever of these explanations we may accept (and one can accept all of them), it remains true that faith is strengthened by visible, tangible symbols which interpret God's ways to us. To catch infinite power in a finite container such as our frail minds requires all the help we can get. The Lord has never disdained to use even homely things to support or to illustrate His truth, as for example, in the use of clay upon the eyes of the blind man. If the use of oil will help one sufferer to find firmer ground on which to stand when seeking the healing power of Almighty God, then it will have served its purpose. God wants to reach and help His needy children and this is one of His methods of getting to us with His divine grace.

c. Most of those answering the questionnaire hold that all sins are forgiven when healing is performed — in other words, a sinner who is healed is also saved, so that his greater need is not overlooked in the filling of his lesser need. This would be in line with Jesus' practice as shown by His healing of the palsied man in Mark 2, when He forgave the man's sins and then empowered him to rise and walk.

Some feel, however, that this refers to sins which are connected with the illness and which helped to bring it about. We must recognize the fact that most people who come to be healed are already living the Christian life, which is covered by the "if" in the verse.

d. Considerable divergence of opinion was found at this point of confession of faults one to another. This is thought to mean faults as they concern relationships with other people. The fact that confession of faults induces humility, which is absolutely essential to receiving anything from God, is important. We must also remember the therapeutic value of confession in relieving the mind of condemnation, which keeps us from God's blessing in any realm. It would probably be correct to assume that this admonition is the least followed of any in this passage by those involved in healing services.

e. The prayer of faith for healing will of course bring results, as will the prayer of faith along any line. The key words are "of faith," without which we receive no spiritual blessing from God. While there may be some who have a "gift of healing," as mentioned in I Cor. 12:9, yet the intent of James seems to be that this kind of prayer may be offered by any Christian. Perhaps no one will know ahead of time who will pray the prayer that will reach through to God — but this too may be in God's will, considering our tendency to lionize those with special gifts.

There seems to be a mystery here, and it may be connected with the sovereignty of God. There is an almost mystical conviction that comes on occasion to a certain person that generates faith for the healing of a sick person. It comes with great power, and often with no preliminary warning, which indicates that faith for healing is a gift conferred at specific times by the sovereign will of God. We would all admit that God does not heal everyone every time, and in the very nature of things that He does not plan or promise to heal every time we pray. Human experience bears this out so clearly that only those who refuse to see miss this fact. It is our place to seek to ascertain the will of the Lord in a given instance, and to adapt ourselves to it, rather than trying to bring God to our terms.

This does not discourage us from praying for healing — in fact it encourages us. This verse tells us that there is such a thing as a prayer of faith, and that we may pray it. Our duty and privilege are to find God's will and to fit our lives and ministry to that will. We shall find, as millions have found, that "the sweetest place in the world is the center of the will of God."

5. Give your opinion on modern-day "faith healers," with special reference to their long lines of candidates for healing, their physical handling of the patients, the use of prayer cards, handkerchiefs that have been blessed, etc. This is not intended to be a "loaded question," but we want to deal with commonly heard points of criticism or commendation of such work.

At this point almost universal distaste seemed to be the reaction among thoughtful ministers. At the same time there was a restraint that would not categorically condemn all such types of ministry. But there was an overall feeling that this is not God's way to heal, and that there are many drawbacks in this kind of ministry. The words "capitalize," "commercialize," "emotional manipulation," "exploitation," "sensationalism," "fakery," and "self-glorifying" are common enough to make us question whether the work of God is really being done or the human lifted up. Honest doubt was expressed as to the ethical and moral integrity of some so-called "faith healers," and it was pointed out that such methods are not scriptural, or when scriptural (as in the case of handkerchiefs being sent from the person of Paul) that they were a passing phase.

While most seemed to take a moderately adverse position, some were outspoken in their conviction that the modern healing cults are not worthy of the gospel of Christ. One wrote: "I feel the 'faith healers' have produced one of the worst spectacles of the modern evangelical movement. It is a combination of religion, witchcraft, and demagoguery served up in modern style to the discredit of evangelical Christianity." Another said: "I have always felt that they are an exploitation of a sacred trust." Another: "In my judgment 'faith healers' are playing on the needs of humanity for publicity, money, and power." Yet another: "All the mechanical devices used by 'faith healers' are so much trivial psychology."

Others expressed similar sentiments, such as:

"I consider most of the modern-day 'faith healers' to be religious racketeers."

"I am not for it, not in sympathy with it, don't believe in it, have been in such meetings and have been disgusted by the carnal promotion of the person in leadership."

"It is my opinion that the modern 'faith healers' are an affront to the gospel of Christ. They run a gospel sideshow."

Not all express themselves so sharply. On the plus side, one church administrator wrote: "A Christian doctor said, 'What the mind can cause, the mind can cure.' In my opinion this explains many of the 'healings' seen in the 'lines.' The healers do encourage and inspire faith and can help one to mind-cure a mind-caused illness." Others expressed similar sentiments.

The consensus seemed to be that we do not want anything spurious or that feeds upon and encourages credulity. We stand strongly against any kind of "merchandising of the gospel," whether it be the gospel of healing or of spiritual blessing. We react, almost violently at times, against those who build personality cults upon the practice of healing. At the same time we refrain from harsh criticism, for the most part, and leave the matter to the judgment of God.

6. Does the fact that many seem to be healed in these campaigns contribute to the preaching of the gospel of salvation? Do you think there are more people converted to Christ in healing campaigns than in distinctly evangelistic campaigns?

Several of those giving their opinions emphasized the fact that not very many really get any permanent healing in such campaigns, except from mind-induced illnesses. This would of course be a debatable point, but the feeling persists that the number of those genuinely healed is greatly overstated.

Most felt that the preaching of salvation is not enhanced by the healing campaigns. A few would differ, one asserting that some are converted because of the healing of a loved one or friend. Another commented that in many campaigns there is a clear invitation to be saved. Another remarked that God has promised to bless His Word wherever it is expounded and that doubtless sincere people are saved in these meetings.

There was a unanimous conviction that distinctly evangelistic campaigns bring more persons to Christ than those that put their strong emphasis on healing. Several mentioned Billy Graham by name, with the statement that campaigns such as he conducts are more fruitful, as far as conversions are concerned, than the others. There is no disposition on our part to detract from the work of anyone who leads anyone to Christ at any time in any place. But people are won to Christ most often when the primary purpose of the campaign is to win them to Christ.

7. Is there any connection between so-called divine healing and the betterment of cases by a change of thought patterns? Do you feel that a sizable percentage of these campaign healings are of this psychosomatic nature?

The answers were generally affirmative but this was felt to be a good thing. The Bible is the best Book on psychology ever written, and we are given definite teaching in its pages on the importance of right thinking.

Many functional disorders are caused or encouraged by wrong thought patterns. Whenever God's power is brought to bear upon the human mind, an upturn in the body may be expected. This does not mean that organic diseases will always be thus eliminated from the body, but the healing process is hastened by this influence. Medical doctors will confirm this.

The fact that so much illness is psychosomatic in origin would give us every right to believe that changing thought patterns for the better will result in the betterment of the sufferer. This is wholly in line with Jesus' procedure and the teaching of the Bible in general.

Let us then thank God for every method and person He sees fit to use to lessen the mental, physical, and even imaginary, suffering of His children. The Lord is our Friend, not our enemy, and He does not receive any pleasure from any unnecessary suffering we may endure.

Some of the comments made to this question were as follows:

"God uses many means to heal and it is true, 'As ... [a man] thinketh in his heart, so is he.'"

"This may be one of the greatest benefits of such meetings; they do give a release which in many cases works a benefit physically."

"This kind of illness is real and thus the healing is also real. Thought patterns contribute to better health, but rarely to what we call miraculous healing."

"It is my personal opinion more help is received by sincere souls in the correction of emotional and spiritual ills than physical sicknesses."

"Physical problems often have their cause in anxiety, worry, and guilt. Healing may come through a change in thought patterns, attitudes, and relationships. I feel that such healing is a miracle of God."

"My physician son says that perhaps 75 percent of the people who go to the doctors' offices are in this [psychosomatic] category."

8. What is your thought as to our churches having regularly scheduled healing services (apart from camp meetings where it is commonly done)? Or should we wait for a request from those who desire it for themselves or others?

A fear was expressed that a regular time for healing services could be a snare. There was, however, a feeling that we could announce occasional times of prayer for the sick, and particularly that a healing service could be made a part of every evangelistic campaign.

For the most part it was agreed, though not adamantly, that we should wait until someone asks for a healing service, in keeping with the admonition of James 5. This would mean, of course, that we should encourage people to call for the elders, and we should preach more on the subject and emphasize its value more often.

The strongest opposition to regularly scheduled healing services came from the sections where so-called faith healers have been most prominent. In areas where the questionable procedures have not been so much in evidence there was less aversion to such services. This may not have any valid significance, but from the sociological point of view it is worth noting.

It is quite obvious that the church, by and large, has not overemphasized healing, and probably has been remiss in not giving sufficient attention to it. We believe in it without question, but this belief has not gone deep enough into our thinking to affect our public services very much.

It is time that we reevaluated our practice. Our position may be about right, but our exercise does not seem to measure up to our belief. God does heal — we know this for sure. So let us say more about it and give definite opportunities for such services more often. No experience is ever much enjoyed until the supporting doctrine is much presented.

9. Should healing services, if held, be wholly devoted to this aspect of Christian privilege or be an adjunct to a regular service?

No dogmatic position was taken here, but rather a feeling that we should do what seems right for the time, and the occasion. The preference was to present healing as an adjunct to another service, generally at the close. Some, however, affirmed that once a year or perhaps oftener there should be a service devoted to this ministry. This tolerant attitude was expressed by one as follows: "I would not object to either approach except I would not want to see us become weighted or lopsided in the presentation of a well-rounded biblical message."

One pastor answered this question by relating the following experience: "Recently I was led to preach on the subject of faith. As I was leaving the parsonage for the church, I was impressed to pick up a small bottle of anointing oil which was in my car in the garage. God's Spirit gloriously manifested himself. At the conclusion of the message I related the fact that I had been inspired to pick up the bottle of oil and invited those who had faith to please come forward for prayer. There followed one of the richest experiences of my ministry. Between 40 and 50 people came forward and there followed such enabling of God's Spirit that it would be difficult for me to describe. An interesting postscript on this occasion came a few days ago when one of the good ladies in the church told me that she had fasted and prayed each day for approximately eight hours a day. I am convinced that this is the secret of God's miracle power."

The heart of the matter was expressed by another in these words: "Either way; healing is not a separate, all-by-itself spiritual thing. It is part of God's expression of love to us, and our faith in Him ought to be treated as such. A child does not wait for scheduled special times in which to present his physical needs to a parent. It is part of the communication of love and trust between them — thus with the Christian."

10. Have you ever had a definite case of specific, identifiable healing for yourself? Were the results medically verified?

With the exception of some who seem to have enjoyed extraordinarily good health, the answers were affirmative and filled with thanksgiving to God for His healing touch. By no means were all the cases supported by medical evidence, but in each case the person healed definitely testified to the Lord's work being done. Some of the testimonies are included in the closing chapter.

11. In your own personal experience with people, would you say that definite healings have any connection with either low or high intelligence, limited or advanced education, more or less emotional religious background? Have you witnessed more healings in some of these categories than in others? Please specify which.

The consensus was that there is little or no difference between these categories — that simple, trusting faith is the essential to healing, and that it can be, and is, exercised by people of all levels of society. One missionary wrote: "I believe that it is purely a matter of faith. I have known some very brilliant people to be healed as well as some whom the Africans would classify as those having only a few birds!"

A few were of the opinion that persons of higher intelligence or education may be more liable to emotional instability and thus more in need of "psychosomatic" healing. One minister stated that in his experience more persons of high intelligence and good education had been healed than from other groups. Several observed the opposite in their experience: that a lower educational or emotional status tends to cause people to trust the Lord more for healing. One even suggested that income may have something to do with this — that those who cannot afford medical help are more likely to pray and believe for healing. Outnumbering all these together were those who believed that there is practically no connection between these considerations and divine healing.

The statement was made that among the strong advocates of divine healing are to be found medical doctors. This observation is enlightening, in view of the concept some people have that healing is largely for the ignorant and the gullible.

A definitive, middle-of-the-road view is that given by Dr. Eugene L. Stowe: "I do not feel that intelligence or emotion are truly determining factors. Rather, I believe that one's faith makes the difference. It may be that in some cases education may tend to reduce faith and prompt one to trust reason more than faith. However, I have had some highly trained college faculty members exercise healing faith. Also, some healings which I have witnessed have come without benefit of any unusual emotional demonstration. Therefore I do not believe that either intelligence or emotion are

contributing factors, as either helps or hindrances, to healing except as they may individually affect one's faith."

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Chapter 7
I WAS HEALED!

The following testimonies concerning experiences of divine healing are representative of many which could be given. They are given here as a witness to the validity of the doctrine and as an encouragement to the faith of those who are seeking God's healing touch.

A well-known missionary writes: "With vision of 25 percent in one eye and 50 percent in the other, I was about to return to college for my second year. The Sunday before I was to leave, the evangelist spoke almost entirely on divine healing. At the close of the message he said that in all the years he had preached from that text never once had divine healing been mentioned. The Holy Spirit very definitely whispered in my heart, 'That's for you.' Now I'd only been a Nazarene 14 months. There had burned in my heart a prejudice against divine healing in our day. But God had spoken! The matter was settled. After lunch I walked to the parsonage and quickly explained why I had come. The minister and his wife and I knelt. Each of them prayed a short prayer; then he asked if I wished to pray also. My answer was, 'No, sir, I believe God has healed my eyes.' Then I opened them, having removed the strengthens glasses when I knelt to pray. Lo, everything stood out in clear detail! Thanking them, I left and literally ran, glasses in hand, to announce the good news to my family. Never once did I feel any eyestrain or any temptation to doubt that the work was complete. College was finished and nearly five years in the pastorate also passed while I awaited the opening of the door to the mission field. Along with the commission came the blanks for medical examination, including an eye test. When I had read the print perfectly down to the line just above the last one, the optometrist stopped me, exclaiming, 'What kind of eyes do you have? That is better than normal vision!' God's work stood the test."

A district superintendent gives this testimony: "When I was a teen-ager I suffered from a severe case of Spanish influenza. This left me with an enlarged heart. According to X rays my heart was flabby around the edges and twice its normal size. The doctor said it would never be reduced to normal size, although careful living might firm it up. He advised against ever taking strenuous exercises. Since my maturing, X rays and all other examinations reveal a perfectly normal heart. I believe this to be definitely an answer to prayer for healing."

A brief but clear witness to healing is given by a pastor: "As a child, yes. My father is a doctor and my mother a nurse. They prayed and my fever broke as they prayed."

An evangelist writes: "I personally have had definite healing from amoebae, contracted while evangelizing in India, when all medicines administered by our physician there produced a toxic reaction. God then gave me the definite word it was His will and power to heal me without medication, which He did completely. Tests taken by my own physician after returning to the States verified this healing, and it has been absolutely permanent from then until now. Praise the Lord!"

A pastor gives the following testimony: "I was healed in 1951 after the doctors had told my wife that I had only a short time to live. I am sure that I don't need to tell you about this, for you were there and one of the ministers who prayed for me." (The writer should add that on this occasion a number of ministers and a devoted layman converged on the hospital where this pastor lay sick, just in time to find that he was being sent home to die. We had come at the prompting of the Spirit, it seems without question, for this was about 200 miles from our homes, and we had not all come together. We went to the pastor's home, where earnest prayer was made for his healing from a malignancy which was considered hopeless. God came and healed him in such a definite way that he would have got up from his bed then and there, except that he was advised to be careful. That has been over 16 years ago, and he is a busy and successful pastor today in a nearby city, doing all the work of his calling with vitality and joy in the Lord.)

An evangelist writes: "In 1950, I was taken to the hospital with a high fever and a severe pain in my lower right side. After examination revealed an extra high blood count, they started getting me ready for an appendectomy. In the meantime my wife called the pastor. They anointed me and the prayer of faith saved me from surgery. The next morning the surgeon read the chart and the report was: temperature and blood count normal. The doctor came into the room and said, 'Reverend, you may go home. A Higher Power has had mercy on you.'"

Another testifies: "Yes, I have been definitely healed. In 1944 doctors in _____ were quite definite that a virus pneumonia, which would not respond to treatment, was based on a tubercular condition. We exhausted all possible medical aid and combined with this our prayers and the prayers of friends in widespread areas. Finally, daring to believe God, both my wife and I acted in accordance with what we felt was faith in God (eliminating all medications and bed rest) and full recovery began immediately. Within a month the doctor pronounced me radically improved and repeated examinations since have shown no recurrence. Within two years of the illness I went from a sunny, warm climate to a rigid winter climate with the full blessing of a lung specialist who had been my doctor."

A layman, who is a well-known writer, gives this testimony: "In 1935, He healed me at the end of a 12-hour period of praying one line of scripture, and with no prayer help that I know of. I was stricken with a deadly infection. I cannot describe the pain and the chills. Physicians and nurses came and went in a stream, all day long, and I shivered, groaned, rolled my head from side to side, and repeated, 'Where is the Lord God of Elijah?' Healing came instantly at the end of 12 hours."

A church administrator speaks of a remarkable healing which took place in a camp meeting in 1964 under his observation: "A young man who was totally blind and was receiving state aid was converted in the Sunday afternoon service. During the invitation at the close of the evening service he was instantaneously healed and regained his sight. There was no healing service or emphasis upon healing, but he was marvelously healed."

A retired minister who has served the church with distinction writes: "My wife was having gallstone attacks every few days. She suffered excruciating pains. On this particular occasion of attack the morphine pills she was taking seemed of little help in relieving the pain. We were in special services in the church at the time. I called the brethren to prayer. While we were praying she

fell asleep and from that hour until her departure to glory some 30 years later she never had another attack. Again in later years she became a victim of diabetes. Many were praying for her healing, and it is difficult to determine who offered the prayer of faith. Upon a blood-sugar check it was found that she was completely free from sugar. To Christ be the glory."

A city pastor tells this story: "In T_____ a young lady dying with cancer (in the last stages) was healed and restored to perfect health. She was so emaciated and weak she had but a few days to live. However, her restoration was complete and she was able to live a normal life as a young mother with a family."

A district superintendent writes: "About two years ago a young lady had an acute case of pancreatitis. Her two doctors told her husband and me it was hopeless. We called the church to prayer and her husband and I went to the church to pray. Marvelous healing took place. She is well today."

A pastor gives this statement: "A mother and teen-age daughter came forward to be saved on a Sunday morning. After they had been saved, the mother asked if we would pray for her daughter, who had been told by specialists that she had a very weak spot in the wall of her heart and that it would be unlikely if the girl would live beyond 15 years of age. Those at the altar joined in praying for the girl and we anointed her for healing. Some two weeks later the mother and daughter came up to me in haste in a grocery store to tell me that the girl had been back to the doctor and he could find no trace of the aforementioned condition."

Another pastor writes: "I had the privilege of anointing a young man that was suffering from a lung hemorrhage. The doctor stated that unless the hemorrhaging was stopped he would not live. We were in revival services at the time. The evangelist went with me; we anointed him and prayed for him. That afternoon the bleeding had stopped and from that time no further trouble was encountered."

Yet another pastor gives this testimony: "In S_____ a young man of 25 was stricken with muscular dystrophy. This diagnosis was confirmed by two trips to the hospital. One Wednesday evening at the close of prayer meeting I felt impressed to have him come to the altar for prayer. The Lord came near as we prayed and all pain left him at once. A few weeks later he returned for more tests and every sign of the dystrophy was gone. He told me that he had no more pain following our prayer. He works every day with no recurring problem."

A number of cases of outstanding healing have come under my personal observation. One that is very recent is that of a young pastor who suffered a completely disabling accident a year ago, in which the nerve centers were so damaged that he could not speak coherently. Extensive tests and treatment in a large hospital were not able to cure him. In a pastors' prayer meeting one Wednesday noon the district superintendent asked him if this was the time for healing. The young man came forward to the altar and was prayed for. His healing was immediate and dramatic. He began preaching in various churches with the blessing of God, our church being one of them. He is today the pastor of a nearby church, and speaks as fluently as anyone could desire.

These witnesses to genuine and permanent healing on the part of reliable persons could be continued on and on. There is no doubt whatsoever of the fact that God has performed many, many healings. We have not advertised these, and perhaps we have been too reticent to do so. Nevertheless the church, both officially in its statement of belief and in its practice of anointing and praying for the sick, stands firm in its belief that God does heal the body. It may not in every case be His will to heal immediately, and there are times when He never heals — a higher purpose being served through the affliction. But His ideal for His people is holiness of heart, wholeness of mind, and health of body. Our responsibility and privilege are to appropriate by faith the blessings our Lord has for us. We will find, as always, that His will is best.

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ENDNOTES

Chapter 4

1 Paul C. Warren, et al., *The Relation of Christian Faith to Health* (Philadelphia: United Presbyterian Church, 1960), p. 27.

2 A. J. Gordon, *The Ministry of Healing* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Christian Publications, Inc., 1961), p. 60.

3 Bernard Martin, *The Healing Ministry in the Church* (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1960), p. 37.

4 Warren, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

5 Martin, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

6 Gordon, *op. cit.*, p. 61.

7 *Ibid.*

8 *Ibid.*, p. 60.

9 Trench, *Notes on the Miracles*, p. 59.

10 Gordon, *op. cit.*, p. 91.

11 Gertrude D. McKelvey, *Finding God's Healing Power* (Philadelphia: J. D. Lippincott Co., 1961), p. xii.

12 Warren, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

13 Gordon, *op. cit.*, p. 65 (*italics mine*).

14 *Ibid.*, p. 93.

15 *Ibid.*, p. 92.

16 Warren, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

Chapter 5

17 A. B. Simpson, *The Gospel of Healing* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Christian Publications, Inc., 1915).

18 See quotation, pp. 27-28, and note 11, p. 32.

19 Leslie D. Weatherhead, *Psychology Religion, and Healing* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1952).

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