



THEOLOGICAL STUDY PROJECT

THE CHRISTIAN

DOCTRINAL STATEMENT

A Christian is a person who believes Jesus Christ is God Incarnate, has accepted Him as Lord and Savior, and is committed to following His teachings. He or she has been reconciled with God through the sacrifice of Christ and experienced regeneration through reception of the Holy Spirit. The individual, knowing that God has declared him or her righteous through the removal of past sins, fully embraces the responsibility to bring every aspect of his or her life into conformity with God's law of righteousness.

Romans 8:9; 1 Corinthians 12:13

DOCTRINAL EXPOSITION

The early disciples of Jesus Christ strove to imitate His actions, teachings, and way of life. It was for this reason they were labelled as "Christians" (i.e., followers of Christ) by nonbelievers to whom the disciples' way of life was obvious (Acts 11:26). During the time of the early New Testament apostolic Church, the term "Christian" was certainly in every way accurate—for the disciples were indeed imitators and followers of the person and teachings of Jesus Christ. But today in the 21st century, the word "Christian" is extremely loosely and inaccurately used, the description being frequently applied to any person or group that simply professes a belief in the person of Christ and acknowledges Him as the Savior. The appellation "Christian" is even applied to all people, irrespective of their religious convictions, who are simply born and reared in a

"Christian" culture. These usages are far from adequate when we consider the original meaning of the term "Christian," which is: "one who actually follows the life and teachings of Christ in detail." Even a cursory examination of our ostensibly Christian culture in general and the many purportedly Christian groups in particular brings out little dependence on the teachings of Jesus Christ and even less resemblance to His actual life.

To be a Christian, a person must have God's Holy Spirit dwelling within him. "Any one who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to Him" (Rom. 8:9). Before one can be baptized and receive this Spirit, he must repent of his sins, express faith in Christ, and then accept Him as his personal Savior. This deep identification with Christ must precede the receipt of the Holy Spirit.

In addition to having the Holy Spirit, one must live and act by the teachings and values of Christ if he is to be considered a Christian. He must live "by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (Mt. 4:4). "He who says he abides in Him ought to walk in the same way in which He walked" (1 Jn. 2:6). The greatest expression of that obedience is a wholehearted demonstration of love toward God and toward neighbor. In this regard, Christ said His disciples would be known by their love, especially for one another (Jn. 13:35; 15:10–17). Ultimately, it is through the Holy Spirit that one can obey God and express love. In turn, God will give His Spirit only to those who are willing to obey Him (Acts 5:32). Therefore, the basic qualities of Christianity go hand in hand with being a true Christian and cannot be separated.

Christianity is a Way of life. It is more than just believing. It is the attitude of mind, which leads an individual to follow God's directives for social conduct and personal behavior. Indeed, before the name "Christian" took over as common terminology, it was their way of life that set Christians apart as different (Acts 9:1–2; 19:9; 24:14).

Christianity revolves around clear, demonstrable

actions that reveal the intents and beliefs of a person trying to live as Jesus lived. Mere belief in a name or title in and by itself, as James points out, is valueless: “You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder” (Jas. 2:19).

A Christian is one whose whole outlook and frame of mind is in the process of transformation from “carnal” to “spiritual.” When one rises from baptismal waters he becomes a “new man” by taking on a whole new spiritual lifestyle, created after the likeness of God in “true righteousness and holiness” (Eph. 4:24). Whereas before his conversion he was armed to face life with his own pride, ego, strength, and intellect. But now, the true Christian adds the “whole armor” of God—wearing the girdle of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the shoes of the gospel, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Word of God (Eph. 6:13–17).

These fruits or characteristics of the Holy Spirit become progressively more manifest in the life of a Christian. Hate is replaced by love, anxiety by peace, fearfulness by faith, indulgence by temperance, and pride by meekness. All these and other fruits of the Spirit work together to overshadow the natural, carnal characteristics of adultery, idolatry, strife, envy, wrath, and the many other aspects and variations of human nature.

As the Christian begins to express godly qualities, he grows in the appreciation of their superiority over his own human qualities. From this appreciation grows the goal of expressing more and more of the righteousness of Christ living within him (Gal. 2:20) while he roots out, with God’s help, his own disobedience and self-righteousness. He struggles to move closer to the basic essence of “pure and undefiled” religion: an outgoing concern for others with no thought of recompense for the self; this godly attitude is exemplified in James’ admonition in 1:27: “Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.”

The Christian will strive to avoid some of the pitfalls of close human associations. Judging one another (Rom. 14:13), making spiritual comparisons (2 Cor. 10:12), offending those who are weak, gossiping and spreading rumors (Jas. 3); none have any place in true Christianity. On the contrary, each

Christian must do his or her best to “never...put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother” (Rom. 14:13), to compare ourselves only with “the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Eph. 4:13), to strengthen those who are weak, and to “bear one another’s burdens” (Gal. 6:2).

Likewise, the Christian will grow in the knowledge of God’s Word and begin to express the wisdom which comes from this knowledge as understood through God’s Spirit. The Spirit of God united with the “spirit of man” within him opens his mind to comprehend godly things (1 Cor. 2:9ff). It gives him understanding and insight and redirects his values and priorities so that God and His knowledge are now first in his life (cf. Prov. 1:7).

Having God and His plan primary in one’s life in no way denigrates the physical cares and requirements of normal living. Quite the contrary, a Christian addresses himself to these things with new understanding of their place in his goal of following God’s way in this present physical life as he strives toward gaining eternal life and entering the God family.

The Christian knows that one who will not provide for his house is worse than an unbeliever (1 Tim. 5:8). Thus, the physical cares of life are no longer an ephemeral end in themselves, but are a means of developing and expressing love through giving. Christians should certainly be the greatest examples of both spiritual and physical success. For a Christian to accomplish less in his physical life than he is able is not only a waste of his own abilities, but also a neglect of his God-given potential.

For most people, completing school and entering the workforce are keys for building a successful life. Additionally, the opportunity to become professionally accomplished and prosperous by the world’s traditional standards—to gain a good reputation in one’s field, a position of responsibility, social recognition, and financial rewards—are not only good but desirable, as long as God and His laws always come first. God wants His children to be successful in all aspects of their physical lives. To develop the full range of our God-given human potential as responsible, mature, effective adults is something all Christians must strive for. Indeed, a successful Christian makes a powerful witness to the practical, efficacious veracity of God’s way of life as revealed in the Bible.

A Christian life is thus in no way passive. It is full

of challenges, both physical and spiritual. It requires great resolve to obey God, to shun both the overt and the subtle evils and influences of human society.

The true follower of Jesus Christ will strive to prove the superiority of a godly way of life through his own example. A Christian does not pursue endless religious bickering and arguments; he does not try to twist arms of people into believing as he does, nor does he try to “convert” them in an antagonistic manner (2 Tim. 2:15–16). He is, however, prepared and happy to answer questions about his beliefs when asked by an interested person. As Peter stated, “be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear” (1 Pet. 3:15). A Christian strives to be a “light” to the world by allowing his actions to speak for themselves. It is also the privilege of a Christian to not be silent, but to witness (when appropriate) to those around, of the great things God has done in our lives (Matt. 4:19; John 15:16). He knows that one who tries to love his neighbor as himself will win that neighbor’s love in return and may, according to God’s will, encourage that neighbor toward following Christ as he himself does.

Thus, a Christian has many positive qualities. The most basic summary of these qualities is to say they comprise a life of giving as opposed to getting, of serving others instead of being served, of loving instead of selfishness, and of accomplishing and building instead of tearing down and destroying. It is the way spoken of by Christ in the beatitudes and in the Sermon on the Mount. It is the way naturally produced by the motivation of God’s Holy Spirit. It is the way Jesus lived and acted; and a Christian is one who follows Christ in this way.

But the requirement for a Christian to adhere closely to the principles of Christ does not mean all Christians must be totally identical in personality, personal tastes, or preferences. Quite the opposite is true. God, as the Creator of mankind, was the One who designed the potential for wide differences in human proclivities and personalities, likes and dislikes, and even in our physical and mental makeup. He intended from the beginning that differences in environment and heredity should allow (and even cause) great variety within the human species. And God intends that these differences should be expressed (within certain limits).

We are required to lead a life of personal responsibility and character before God and our fellow man—a life that is pleasing and obedient to our Creator and one that enables the individual to find and reach his greatest personal potential and fulfillment.

God’s great love for man has given man the basic guidelines for a full, abundant physical life and the growth of godly character in every pursuit and activity. These fundamental instructions, as revealed in the Bible, allow for great individual variation so that all can still maintain their own personal identity, preferences, and individuality.

The two overriding principles one should consider in applying God’s law to the everyday cares and pursuits of life involve the continuing and conscious recognition that 1) Christianity is a way of life; and that 2) everything we do as Christians should be done as if under the scrutiny of Christ (Col. 3:17). In different areas of life, these principles take on different meanings.

For example, the Bible clearly recognizes the arts as representing some of the highest expressions of man’s potential. Obviously any art form that encourages the breaking of any of God’s laws is wrong, but beyond this, the Bible makes little distinction as to “right” or “wrong” in art, music, literature, poetry, architecture, etc., other than to emphasize positive purpose in their expression. The application of God’s laws in these areas of artistic expression is more complex today than it was in biblical times. The key principles, applying the fundamental standards of God’s Word, are balance and beauty, elegance and harmony, inspiration and skill, sensitivity and creativity. (Cultural differences may necessitate that certain criteria, “beauty” and “quality,” for example, are subjectively determined. What is beautiful music to one person may be discordant to another, and vice versa. The unifying principle is to be found in an affirmative answer to the question, “Is it edifying to the individual Christian?” As in other matters, each person must use wisdom and discretion based upon these general guidelines and make his own decisions for himself.)

A godly way of life must include the basic aspects of physical health: good nutrition in a balanced diet, proper amounts of exercise and sleep, living in accord with public health ordinances and principles, and taking care to avoid bodily injury. While

eschewing faddism or fanaticism of any kind, the church encourages everyone to eat healthful foods as much as possible and to avoid excessive “junk” foods that can have debilitating physiological effects. In this context, a Christian will avoid the use of tobacco or harmful drugs in any form and drink alcoholic beverages only in moderation. If illness or injury should occur, a Christian has a great advantage over the nonbeliever; he can ask for God’s help in healing, in addition to seeking the most competent medical aid available.

In matters of dress and style, the church teaches and emphasizes the biblical principle of modesty. Balance, good taste, quality, and modesty are stressed in the use of all clothing and bodily decorations such as hairstyles and makeup. How a person looks and what he wears is a personal matter, but an individual should attire himself in such a way as to be presentable to Christ. We are told in 1 Corinthians 10:31: “Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.” The church encourages its members to look “normal,” in keeping with the styles and customs of their times and places. Church members should not look overtly different from other people in their immediate surroundings, though they should always be striving to improve themselves, being representatives of God, in all areas of their lives. In all such matters the members are encouraged to avoid extremes and to use common sense. This sound-minded, temperate approach is what a Christian will develop as he grows in God’s Spirit (2 Tim. 1:7; Gal. 5:22–23). The use of balance in these areas is essential, though the Church does not police its members’ personal lives.

In the area of celebration of nonreligious holidays, the Church of God, Independent Ministries has never taken any stand against the observance of various and sundry days during the course of each calendar year, whether they are national or personal. In all countries around the world, our members keep non-religious days, which are special to their countries or themselves. For example, the majority of American church members celebrate Thanksgiving Day, the Fourth of July, Labor Day, Memorial Day, Columbus Day, Washington’s Birthday, and the like. Other personal days have long been commonly observed by Church of God members, days such as Mother’s Day, Father’s Day, and wedding anniversaries. These are commonly observed either

through the exchanging of gifts (as in Mother’s and Father’s Days), the celebration over a family meal (as in Thanksgiving), or merely abstaining from work or going on an outing (such as Labor Day, or the Fourth of July, etc.).

The CGI Ministries, likewise, has no statement of doctrine condemning the common custom of the celebration or the observance of birthdays. The Bible itself keeps careful track of the ages of the patriarchs and of the kings of Israel and Judah (especially at the beginning of their reigns). Levites worked in the service of the tabernacle of the congregation from thirty to fifty years old (Num. 4:23). Our society also requires that we continually list the date of our birth in everything from job applications to the national census.

To some families, the passage of the birthday of a child at age six is quite an important occasion with congratulatory hugs and kisses and the sending of a proud little boy to his first day in grade school. Perhaps, in other families, the event is comparatively unimportant, and there is no special note taken of the passage of any particular year. In all of our memories, it is safe to say that some birthday observances have retained special meaning: perhaps it was a particular plateau of life at which a certain achievement or accomplishment may have been on the horizon, such as entering into teenage or reaching the age of legal responsibility.

Of course, these national or personal holidays should never overshadow the observance of God’s holy days. They are not on a par with, nor should they be elevated to, the importance of the festivals of God, which reveal His plan and thereby convey great spiritual significance.

Taken all together, the Christian life is one of deep religious conviction coupled with vigorous activity, serious accomplishment, sound-minded balance, and common sense. As he applies God’s principles to every facet of his life, the Christian strives to meet the challenges of becoming fully successful while living above reproach before both God and man.

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THE CHRISTIAN'S RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

DOCTRINAL STATEMENT

The Christian's relationship with God begins with repentance and faith and is nourished and continually deepened through prayer, Bible study, meditation, fasting, and serving fellow human beings. As we use the tool of communication, a warm personal relationship is established that gives us peace of mind, spiritual confidence, and faith that comes from knowing the Designer, Sustainer, and Ruler of the entire universe.

Matthew 6:5–13; Acts 2:38; Romans 8:15–16; Hebrews 1:1–2; 2:10–18; 1 John 1:3; Daniel 6:10

DOCTRINAL EXPOSITION

Salvation is an individual matter between a person and God. God will grant salvation as an unmerited gift of mercy if the individual has the proper relationship with Him. God will forgive our sins if we, in sincere repentance, ask Him to do so in prayer. God will greatly reward those who diligently study His Word and meditate on His way for the purpose of better serving Him. Thus, it is of profound importance that one attain the deepest and closest possible state of personal fellowship with God.

But the Christian does not merely seek to build and nurture this close relationship between himself and God because he feels forced. Rather, the true Christian finds the developing rapport with his spiritual Father to be a uniquely satisfying and joyous experience that transcends any physical friendship or association. This warm, personal relationship gives the peace of mind, spiritual confidence, and faith that can only come from knowing one really has contact with the Designer, Sustainer, and Ruler of the entire universe.

The intimate relationship a Christian has with his God is that of a family—the affinity is that of a son or daughter with his deeply loving and concerned father. “As a father has compassion for his children, so the LORD tenderly sympathizes with those who revere him” (Ps. 103:13, Modern Language Bible). The tie between a Christian and God far transcends the “blood” relationship of physical families—it is the relationship of God's Holy Spirit (1 Jn. 1:3). It is through this spirit that we can have contact with God when even words cannot express our feelings (Rom. 8:26). It is through this spirit we are begotten as God's sons; through it we gain the right to know God, and indeed call Him our “Father” (Rom. 8:15–16); and it is also through God's Holy Spirit we gain brotherhood with Jesus Christ so that He becomes our spiritual elder brother (Heb. 2:11).

As a physical and biological creation, man is constantly in need of food, air, water, and other necessities of life to maintain and strengthen his body. In like manner, the Christian's life as a spirit-begotten son of God also requires proper maintenance. The spirit of God is nurtured and grows within our minds in much the same fashion as our muscles are nurtured and grow within our bodies. Constant, constructive activity of a spiritual nature is essential if a Christian is to thrive and reach his fullest potentialities. Personal and private devotion includes prayer, Bible study, meditation and fasting. These serve to initiate, and then augment and enhance, a person's relationship with God.

Prayer is man's personal communication with God. When one prays, he utters verbally or mentally his praise for God, his thanks for God's blessings, and also his requests from God for himself and for others. Biblical example shows one should maintain close prayerful contact on a daily basis—even several times daily (Dan. 6:10). The Christian's prayers are an offering to God; they are described as incense stored in golden bowls before God's throne (Rev. 5:8). A Christian's prayers are not mere repetitions or imposed or stylized prayers, but rather heartfelt, personal communication with the Creator, analogous to communication with an intimate personal friend. A Christian shares his hopes, dreams, frustrations, needs, and desires with God as he would with a physical father whom he loves and who loves him.

Jesus' instructions in Matthew 6:5–13 are the clearest in the Bible regarding prayer. We are told to

pray to our Father in secret; not to heap up empty phrases; to address God as our Father; to hallow His name; to pray for His Kingdom to come; to ask that His way be followed and His will be done; to thank Him for our sustenance and other blessings; to forgive us for our sins; to help us forgive those who sin against us; to keep us from temptation; and deliver us from Satan; and to help us understand, appreciate, and look forward to the majesty, power, and glory of God.

While no one can dictate the amount of time one should spend in personal prayer, Paul's admonition "be constant in prayer" epitomizes the proper mental attitude for the Christian is to always be close to God. Although praying on one's knees is a common biblical example (Acts 20:36; 21:5), there is no official posture or position of prayer. One can pray at any time, in any place, with any position and for any reason, and know with full assurance God is listening. Of course, the *attitude* of the individual is critical in determining how God reacts to our prayers. On the one hand, God states it is our iniquities and sins that separate us from Him, so that He will neither hear nor answer our prayers (Is. 59:2). On the other hand, when we go to God in faith, with a humble and contrite spirit, He will both hear and spiritually revive us (Is. 57:15).

In order to pray, we must realize Jesus Christ is our Mediator (1 Tim. 2:5), our Intercessor (Rom. 8:34), and our High Priest (Heb. 2:17–18). He sympathizes with our weaknesses and understands our problems, because He was "in all points"—"in every respect" (RSV)—"tempted as we are" (Heb. 4:15). It is only through Jesus Christ and His sacrifice that we can approach God the Father in prayer. This is a remarkable reality, truly an awesome opportunity to literally come into the presence of God and have His full attention, interest, and concern. This is why the veil into the Holy of Holies (where God symbolically dwelled) was ripped apart when Jesus died, as direct access to the Father was suddenly made available for all mankind for the first time (Mt. 27:51; Heb. 9, especially v. 8). But even more than this, our direct contact with God the Father can be *bold* and with *confidence*. Through Jesus Christ our high priest, we can "come boldly before the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Heb. 4:15). Though God is the very Creator of this vast unfathomable universe, He wants us to speak to

Him strongly, directly, honestly, and resolutely. This means that Christians should pray to God with confidence (1 Jn. 5:14), asking Him to forgive them for their sins and to provide them with their spiritual and physical necessities. But we *must ask* in our prayers; we must make the conscious effort; we are part of the process. We must take the active step of aggressively importuning God in faith. As Jesus told His disciples:

"Ask, and it will be given you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.... If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him" (Mt. 7:7, 11).

In the same way that prayer can be defined as communication with God, so can Bible study be defined as God's communication to man through His written Word (Heb. 1:1). The Bible is God's instruction book on how man should live his life. It is also the record of how God has dealt with men and mankind in the past, and how God wants human beings to respond and react to Him. The Bible is the handbook to salvation, the textbook of eternal life. Certainly no Christian could say he knows God if he has not read about God in God's holy Word. He must learn to rightly divide the word of truth (2 Tim. 2:15). While the Bible may be and should be studied from different angles and points of view (e.g., in a technical manner to understand doctrine), the most important Bible study for a Christian is to humbly approach God's Word to learn how he can live more perfectly before his Creator. A Christian studies the Bible with the full recognition that God is instructing him to personally apply biblical laws, precepts, principles, and directives in his daily life. A true Christian seeks "training in righteousness," and this can often come about only through correction of error; consequently, the true Christian must search the Bible for God's correction in his life. As Paul wrote to Timothy: "All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:16–17).

Closely related to and practically inseparable from prayer is meditation. Meditation in the Bible is simply concentrated thinking on a spiritual topic. It may include focused attention on a particular bibli-

cal concept or passage in order to probe its deepest message or meaning (Ps. 1:2), or God's wonders and work (Ps. 77:12; 143:5). Meditation can also mean thinking before God, as it were, on a topic about which we need to grow and understand. Similarly, meditation can be any personal thinking with the conscious awareness that God is listening and concerned. Hence, meditation is closely akin to prayer, and often indistinguishable from it. (The original words are often capable of meaning either "pray" or meditate.")

Fasting is illustrated throughout the Bible as a tool by which a Christian can stimulate his personal relationship with God. It is not a means of penance, but rather a type of self-inflicted trial that reminds one of his own humanness and humbleness before his great Creator God. It is by definition a specified period of time in which an individual goes without food (and perhaps without water) in order to remind oneself of his ephemeral, fleeting existence. Fasting forces us to focus full attention on drawing close to God. The examples of fasting in the Bible generally involve grave crises, but fasting was also recognized as a complement to prayer and was used, appropriately, in periodic devotions to God. One should fast occasionally—even when not facing an emergency—as a means of humbling oneself before God and thereby nourishing one's relationship with Him.

Prayer, Bible study, meditation and fasting are not ends in themselves. Rather, they are means through which we gain the spiritual strength and endurance necessary to face the trials and tribulations common to all humanity. The human problems of survival, health, happiness, family, marriage, success, and other such activities of normal life become challenges to the Christian rather than merely tests of endurance. It is through facing and handling personal problems and even tragedies that a Christian builds faith and develops the essential strength of character necessary for salvation. He views life as a training ground where he can develop the positive qualities of love, patience, faith, hope, and the other traits of God's Spirit.

Likewise, the Christian understands the purpose of godly correction and punishment. He knows God's ultimate purpose is to reproduce Himself through man, to elevate man from human nature to God's own nature, from mortality to immortality. He realizes that at times God must correct His chil-

dren to stop them from hurting themselves with evil and direct them into the godly obedience that produces character and happiness. The Christian realizes that all humans at one time or another need God's loving correction, and thus he responds to this correction in his own life with repentance and submission to the laws that are intended for his happiness. God is a loving Father who will, when the occasion arises, correct us—not in anger or out of spite—but rather for our own good.

The twelfth chapter of Hebrews exemplifies God's attitude, His great fatherly love, in correcting His children. We are told "not to regard lightly the discipline of the Lord" (v. 5), because "the Lord disciplines him whom He loves" (v. 6). God is treating us as sons (v. 7), and if He did not correct us, we would be "illegitimate children and not sons" (v. 8). God's motivation in correction is clear: "He disciplines us for *our good, that we may share His holiness*" (v. 10).

In the last half of Matthew 25, Jesus Christ explains how we should be developing a progressively more personal relationship with Him. He told His disciples that when we *serve others*—when we give food to the hungry, drink to the thirsty, clothing to the naked, welcome to the stranger, and company to the sick—we are actually serving Jesus Christ Himself.

When we extend ourselves and do good to the least of His brethren, then we are credited as though we had done those same things to Jesus Christ personally. It is a profound point. It shows a Christian's relationship with God must expand beyond internal spiritual thoughts and express itself in an attitude of outgoing concern and compassion for one's fellow man by external physical actions.

Serving human beings is indeed one of the most spiritually penetrating concepts revealed in the Bible. Only by loving one's fellow man can prayer, Bible study, meditation, and fasting have any real meaning.

James put it succinctly: "So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead...and I by my works will show you my faith.... You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone" (Jas. 2:17, 18, 24).

It is with this overall understanding of God's ultimate plan deeply embedded in his mind that the Christian, as a truly begotten son, can now actually develop his intimate relationship with his spiritual Father through prayer, Bible study, meditation, fast-

ing, and the full living of the active Christian life.

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THE CHRISTIAN'S RELATIONSHIP WITH FELLOWMAN

DOCTRINAL STATEMENT

Just as man has an obligation toward his Creator, he also has responsibilities toward his fellowman. A Christian must love his neighbor as himself, regardless of his neighbor's racial, ethnic, religious or social background; he must be a light to the world by setting a proper example, and must do good toward all men as opportunities arise.

Exodus 20:12–17; Deuteronomy 22:1–4; Matthew 18:15–17; 22:39; 25:34–40; Philippians 2:2–4; Luke 10:29–37; Hebrews 12:14; James 2:8

DOCTRINAL EXPOSITION

Christians do not live in this world by themselves. They are just one segment of humanity, and are surrounded by people of other religions, backgrounds, nationalities and creeds. In fact, all humans must face the reality that they live in a world consisting of other humans of greater or lesser degree, different from themselves. The Christian fully recognizes this reality and strives to live in harmony and peace with all men everywhere.

The apostle Paul set some basic guidelines, instructing a Christian on how he should respond to the world he must live in (i.e., function within the society in which he finds himself) but not be a part of those practices, actions or attitudes that are con-

trary to God's way of life (1 Cor. 5:9–10). John wrote, although Christians must be "in" the world, they are not to be "of" the world. Jesus did not pray that God should take His disciples out of the world, but rather that God should protect them from evil (Jn. 17:15).

Race Relations in the Church

Jesus Himself laid down the highest standard for a human in relation to his fellow man when He described the second most important command: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Mt. 22:39). This love for neighbor must transcend the human barrier of racial, ethnic, and social background. It rises above the human weaknesses of jealousy, envy, hate, and bitterness. It teaches man how to hate the sin (Rom 6:1–2) but have compassion for the sinner, and it must increase to where a man will have love for his enemies even when they are persecuting him (Matt 5:44).

Of course, Christ Himself, who gave His life for all sinners, was the ultimate example of Christianity for all generations and times. Philippians 2 shows He emptied Himself of His power and glory as a member of the Godhead and came to earth, not to be served or waited upon, but as a servant of all mankind. His every action and thought while on earth depicted the epitome of true Christian outgoing concern; this serving attitude is perhaps best illustrated by His willingness to die pitifully on a tree between two criminals. Thus Jesus Himself personified the greatest love a Christian can have for another which, by Jesus' own words, was to lay down one's life for a friend.

Loving one's neighbor means that a Christian must not harbor racial prejudice within his heart. The official doctrine of the Church is discrimination toward persons because of race or ethnic origin is wrong and totally contrary to the teachings of the Bible. Almighty God is the Creator of all the races of mankind. He puts no spiritual distinction between these races (Acts 15:9; Gal. 3:28; etc.). In the Kingdom of God, there will be no racial stigma of any kind. Consequently, the Church of God strives to reflect the coming Kingdom of God in its attitudes toward race at the present time.

God is no respecter of persons; He shows no partiality (Acts 10:34–35; Jas. 2:2). He deals justly with all men. There is no double standard with the

Almighty: "There shall be one law for the native and for the stranger who sojourns among you" (Ex. 12:49; cf. Num. 15:15–16).

How to deal justly and how to love one's neighbor is set forth plainly by Paul in Philippians 2:2–4:

"Complete my joy, by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord, and of one mind. Do nothing from selfishness or conceit; but in humility count others better than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others."

The giving of esteem, one to another, is a two-way street. To love one's neighbor is to be concerned for his spiritual and physical welfare. To love one's neighbor means to respect him or her, to admire their accomplishments. The point of Philippians 2:2–4 is a Christian must radiate the attitude and actions of unselfish service toward his fellow man. He must esteem his fellow Christians better than himself, because he knows his own weaknesses in contrast to his brother's accomplishments. It is this attitude of love and concern that is imperative if we are to have healthy and proper individual and group relationships.

Ethnic integration of the races is as much a factor of modern western society as was integration of various ethnic groups in the Roman society of the first century. The example of the early history of the New Testament Church was to show no partiality between Jew, Greek, or any other ethnic group (Col. 3:10–11). Women, too, were to be respected as spiritual equals (Gal. 3:26–29).

"Truly I perceive," said the apostle Peter, "that God shows no partiality, but in every nation everyone who fears Him and does what is right is acceptable to Him" (Acts 10:34–35). And again, God has "made no distinction between us and them" (Acts 15:9; Gal. 2:11–16).

While the political situation in some few areas of the world may require a limitation of social integration, this is not a doctrine or overall policy of the Church. In matters of church fellowship and office, there is no discrimination because of racial or ethnic background. Different ethnic groups are free, of course, to preserve their own culture and identity, including having church-sponsored ethnic socials as a Latin dance, German evening, or an ethnic folk night. But the Church does not teach or practice

regular segregation of different ethnic or racial groups in its general services or social and fellowship events. Members are encouraged to get to know everyone in its services. Members are encouraged to get to know all the members of all the groups. Only then can they appreciate the qualities of others and practice love, one to another, which is the central message of the Bible.

In matters of church fellowship and office, there should be no discrimination because of ethnic/racial background. The criteria for baptism are repentance and belief. Ordination to the ministry—at whatever level—is based on those spiritual criteria indicated in the Bible, such as conversion, calling, and service. Ethnic or racial origin is no factor. This is the belief and practice of the Church, and it holds this to be in accord with the Bible and the mind of God.

Over the years, the term "integration" has been tarnished with the corrosive taint of emotionally loaded epithets. *Webster's New World Dictionary* defines "integrate" in the primary sense to mean: "to make whole or complete by adding or bringing together parts...(secondarily) unity."

God has integrated His church to teach us His way of assimilated harmony between peoples. It is this Christian unity, the Christian culture and the mind of Christ, rather than the rigid ideas and entrenched biases of men, which unites rather than separates us and which will determine how "integrated" or fitly framed together we (the Church of God) really are (see 1 Cor. 12:12–27).

Misunderstandings have often arisen from incorrectly interpreting another's thoughts or motives about what is true integration. When the topic of race relations is brought up, many in the white community tend to think immediately of interracial marriage. The black and other minority communities, by contrast, are more concerned about having the same opportunities for education, work, advancement, and economic reward that the average white citizen has, than about interracial marriage or ethnic assimilation.

Minority people perceive their struggle for justice, fair play, and racial equality to be life and death attempts to stay afloat in a competitive society while shooting the rapids of racial prejudice and injustice. Human cultures have their inherent weaknesses. So long as this present evil world stands, there will always be unjust weights and measures—something God Almighty hates (Prov. 20:10).

Church history reveals the attitude of contemporary society has, to one degree or another, always been reflected in religion. But we in the Church of God cannot allow society to determine our racial mores and standards, nor to force us into its mold of racial bigotry and social injustice. Our conduct is rather to be exemplary of the principles set forth in the pages of the Bible. Our unity cannot be artificial, but a clear expression of Christian love.

Race relations in the Church can be termed human relations—the attitude, respect, appreciation, and brotherhood that should be expressed among all races. We are admonished by the Word of God to be willing to lay down our lives for our brethren: not just loving in word or speech, but in deed and in truth. And who are our brethren? Christ clearly answers this for us: “For *whosoever* [regardless of race] does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother, and sister, and mother” (Mt. 12:46–50). God does *not* see as man, nor does He look on the outward appearance.

The integrated Church of God is the herald of God's Kingdom and a new culture, wherein God's perfect government will at once banish racial discrimination, while urging all families of the human race to develop to the fullest of their unique racial and ethnic human potential.

Wise marriages are those that match people suited for each other. Compatibility may be determined by consideration of the many different traits of personality, cultural background, intellect, character, and even physical features. A marriage in which neither partner properly understands the other's language is not likely to be the most fulfilling. The same general considerations come into question when people of two obviously diverse racial or ethnic backgrounds consider marriage. Two people could, hypothetically, be compatible though of diverse racial backgrounds. In actual practice, such differences usually imply other important differences, which will compete with rather than complement each other. Clearly, picking a mate is a very personal and subjective choice and requires patience, prudence, and a variety of considerations that come with maturity, which usually may take time to manifest—that's really at the heart of this subject—when one considers a marriage partner.

The Church cannot and does not forbid people of the *same* race or ethnic background to marry even when unsuited for one another. Likewise, we cannot

and do not forbid people of *different* racial or ethnic backgrounds to marry even though such marriages may face unnecessary societal challenges that unfortunately come from racial or ethnic tensions. The Church simply does not attempt to regulate in these matters of marriage. (And no stigma must ever be attached to children that may result from a mixed union—though in the world they may well face social tensions, struggles, and heartaches.)

There is no limit to what the Holy Spirit can do through the individual that submits to God. God's church is exhorted to break the bonds of prejudice by putting on the “new man” which is renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created him: “Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision...bond or free: but Christ is all, and in all” (Col. 3:9–10ff). It is the responsibility of each church member to repent of past wrong attitudes toward those of other race or ethnic groups. We are all one in Christ and must have that Christian love for all, which only God's Spirit makes possible.

Christian Responsibility in the Community

A Christian must set an example in all areas of life. He is not blind to the evils of this society. He sees the vast majority of nations and individuals are living and acting in opposition to God's perfect law. The effects of crime, pollution, and immorality are all obvious—the poor are oppressed, wars are waged, hatred between peoples flourishes. But a Christian must differentiate between sin and the sinner, between evil and the evildoer.

The proper attitude for a Christian is to hate the deeds of the evildoer, but to retain love for the individual. Jesus set a perfect example in this regard by deprecating sin and by giving His life for all sinners at the same time (Jn. 3:16). This love for the evildoer is not a self-righteous or condescending attitude, but rather distinctly *compassionate* for the one who is essentially ignorant of his own spiritual blindness. Indeed, every Christian himself was and is part of this society and has been, and unfortunately all too often still is, a partaker of its sins.

But to condemn everything the world has ever done as “evil” would be short-sighted in the extreme, and would broadcast one's ignorance of the vast advances mankind has made in the areas of science and technology, medicine, art and literature,

and also the good millions have done through charity. Nevertheless, Christians are admonished to avoid "worldliness." "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world...For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world" (1 Jn. 2:15–16). Worldliness is partaking of the norms of society (vanity, false pride, greed, envy, lust, strife) instead of the godly values of love, concern, giving, and helping one's neighbor. A Christian should avoid those activities and attitudes of mind, which oppose God's law in its letter and in its intent.

The Church places great stress upon the need for Christians to serve their fellow man: "...by love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word...love your neighbor as yourself" (Gal. 5:13–14). The obligation for us to "look on the needs of others" (Phil. 2:4) extends beyond the family and the Church to embrace all of one's neighbors—indeed humanity as a whole, who do not as yet have the blessing of knowing God's truth. Christians should "always seek to do good to one another and to *all*" (1 Thess. 5:15), and be zealous for good deeds" (Tit. 2:14). A Christian is thus ultimately known by what he *does*, and not alone for what he professes. "Pure religion," as defined in James 1:27, "is to visit the fatherless and widows." Caring for the needy, or neglecting to, is tantamount to doing the same to Christ, according to Jesus' own words (Mt. 25:31–46). The church acknowledges the need to serve one's fellow man should be filled both by the individual himself and by the collective body of believers, the church. All persons need to be "rich in good works, ready to distribute" (1 Tim. 6:18) in their own private lives.

One outstanding example is that of the "good" Samaritan in Luke 10:29–37. This story was used by Christ to expound the second great commandment and define "who is my neighbor"; thus, the Christian learns whom he should serve. Jesus' point is anyone in need is our neighbor, and believers have a duty to help others in such spontaneous one-on-one situations. We are encouraged by God's Word to earn extra money for the sole purpose "that he may have to give to him that needeth" (Eph. 4:28). Likewise, those employed in certain service-oriented positions in society should use their individual opportunity to exert extra effort to improve the welfare of their fellow citizens within and with-

out the Church of God.

Jesus told His disciples—and by direct extension He is telling all Christians—"You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hid. Nor do men light a lamp and put it under a bushel, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 5:14–16). What "good works" is Jesus referring to? It cannot be the "good works" of prayer, Bible study, fasting, etc.—these must be done in private and not before men (Matt. 6:1–2). Obviously, the "good works" that Christians can do that non-Christians will praise must reflect a genuine, unfeigned *outgoing concern* for other people (Matthew 25:34–46).

The Church as a whole has an affirmative biblical responsibility to serve the nonbeliever by demonstrating its collective *outgoing concern* for the surrounding community. Since the Church is a body with "many members," it develops the strength from those members to accomplish with an integrated, organized structure much more good for society and civilization than could its individual members accomplish by themselves.

The local church congregation, as the microcosm of the whole Church of God in the local community, should extend itself in whatever way will best serve its neighbor such as through programs to help the elderly, the sick, and the blind. Such activities may vary from two church members simply volunteering their time to major church-sponsored events. During time of disaster, emergency, or other special need, the membership should be willing to help with whatever physical and spiritual needs are made manifest. Each congregation should strive to establish itself as a respected, *giving* part of the community, whose every motive and action is that of helping, serving, and encouraging—in every way setting a positive example of the true Christian way of life. The Church strives to carry out the apostle Paul's admonition: "As we therefore have opportunity, let us do good to *all* men" (Gal. 6:10).

A Christian is also aware of his civic responsibilities and privileges. Paul wrote that Christians should be subject to the constituted human authorities. This included paying taxes and rendering due respect to the symbols of that authority (Rom. 13:1ff). Jesus Himself paid a tax, which He legitimately could have avoided (Matt. 17:24–27).

Joseph and Mary went to Bethlehem because of the edict of the Roman emperor. The New Testament is filled with such examples of complying with government legislation and national custom where they did not conflict with God's laws. Church of God members have always shown patriotism by saluting the flag and singing the national anthem of their own country.

In some countries, voting is put on a par with other governmental requirements. The New Testament no more prohibits voting than it does paying taxes. The Church does not attempt to legislate in the matter of voter registration or voting in local, regional, or national elections—this is left up to the individual member as they determine what is right for their conscience (Romans 14:23).

The Church as an organization does not enter into this world's political affairs. It does not support any political party, nor attempt to influence its members to support or not support a candidate. Of course, the Church's *values* are well known in the community, and its very existence should therefore strengthen the support for moral decency, obedience to the constituted authorities, and civic pride. The Church continues to stress the transient nature of earthbound political institutions. The Kingdom of God is not going to be voted in by men, but forcibly established by Jesus Christ. When the time comes, "The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of the Lord, and of His Christ; and He shall reign for ever and ever" (Rev. 11:15). This is the ultimate goal of the Christian—to be a part of that kingdom—and it is toward that eternal kingdom that he should expend his greatest efforts.

Jesus Christ said, "My kingdom is not of this world." The kingdom a Christian looks and longs for is an eternal kingdom or government, not a temporal, physical, human one. Yet when Jesus said His disciples are not *of* this world, He also recognized that all Christians are citizens of one of the many countries in the world. Neither does this negate the principle of having our "citizenship [state or country]...in heaven" (Phil. 3:20, NIV). The apostle Paul, who wrote the preceding statement about our true citizenship, was himself a physical Roman citizen (Acts 22:25–28).

Another area of civic concern is that of holding public office and serving on juries. The church in no way prohibits its members from such activities, and

indeed the community would be well served by having true Christians fulfilling these functions. There are cautions here; Christians may find making certain judgments and rendering specific decisions difficult, because the laws of God can conflict with the laws of men, and their primary responsibility must be, to the former. Also, one who may serve (or wish to serve) in an elected governmental capacity must not get involved with unchristian practices commonly associated with politics. No Christian should ever consciously compromise his inviolate values of love for God, fidelity to God's law, and love for one's neighbor equal to himself. Nonetheless, the biblical examples of Joseph ruling Egypt and Daniel ruling Babylon are powerful statements about the capacity and opportunity of a true servant of God to serve (albeit rarely) in responsible governmental positions, even though their governments were still of this world.

Associated with jury duty is the question of whether a Christian should seek legal redress through the legal system. First Corinthians 6:1–9 categorically states that a Christian should not go to court against a fellow Christian. It says to do so is a "shame" (v. 5) and the one who does so has "[done] wrong" (1 Cor. 6:8). Matthew 18:15–20 adds that a Christian who feels he has been wronged by his brother should approach that brother personally to resolve the problem. If the brother will not hear, he should take one or two witnesses and approach the man again. If he will still not respond, the injured party should take the matter to the officials of the Church where a judgment can be made. (There are, of course, areas over which the civil authorities have total authority, i.e., the legal granting of divorce; in such cases, the civil courts must be resorted to, but only after all Christian duties toward a brother or a sister have been fulfilled.)

The question of whether a Christian should take a non-Christian to court is more complex. Obviously, a Christian should still use the same basic approach outlined in Matthew 18—first trying to resolve the issue between him and the offending party. However, it is equally obvious a non-Christian will not necessarily abide by, or submit to, the authority of the Christian's Church. This means if a matter is still unresolved, a Christian may take a legal dispute to the recognized civil authorities (to whose authority the non-Christian will, of course, have to submit). The question of whether a Christian *should*

take one to court under these circumstances must be an individual decision, based upon a balance between the principles of Christian forgiveness and the man's responsibility to maintain his own integrity and rights before the laws of God and of man. But understandably, justice is the right of all individuals, and holding someone accountable for an injustice they have committed is not inappropriate—but keep in mind, God is holding us accountable.

Questions also arise about a Christian's responsibility toward military service. The Church of God, Independent Ministries recognizes the paradox involved with the desire of a Christian to be anti-war, and yet the recognition that there is a time to fight. Clearly, *human* warfare, and the attitudes behind it, is often the exact opposite of God's law and the Christian way of life (Jas. 4:1–2). Yet Jesus (Luke 3:14) did not instruct the soldiers to change their vocation. Peter (Acts 10:22, 44) saw the Holy Spirit come upon a Centurion who was devout, and had a good reputation among the Jews. Paul also recognizes the lawful authority (from God) for rulers and countries to deal with evil (Rom 13:4). Rather than a blanket statement on military service, the Church recognizes some choices are “decisions of conscience,” as Paul explores in Romans 14, where he speaks of different beliefs Christians might have, about subjects ranging from vegetarianism, abstaining from alcohol, and opting to keep special observances. Our ministry can offer scriptural counsel to help members decide a proper course in their lives regarding military service, with the understanding that the choices might be different, for different individuals, based upon factors including their personal convictions. Paul acknowledges this conviction of conscience when instructing “Let each be fully convinced in his own mind” (Rom 14:5) while also cautioning us to not judge our brother in these matters of conscience (Rom 14:10). Whether deciding to participate in military service or not, a Christian certainly has feelings of loyalty to his country, and the desire to take part in positive Christian service for his country. In all things, a Christian's first loyalty is to God (Acts 5:29).

In summary, we as Christians and brothers of Christ must follow His example of genuine outgoing concern for our neighbor in our thoughts, actions, and attitudes. This love for our fellow human being is far from being merely an emotional

feeling in our hearts, but it is the very real act of living as servants by following the examples of Jesus Himself.

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THE CHRISTIAN FAMILY

DOCTRINAL STATEMENT

The marriage relationship is the basis of the family, which in turn is core to a stable society. As the primary physical analogy of God's plan for mankind, marriage, child rearing, and the family are given preeminence in the teachings of the Bible and Church. Although the roles of a man and woman are distinctly defined within the marital institution, both have equal spiritual potential before God.

Exodus 20:12; Malachi 4:5–6; Ephesians 5:22–29; 6:1–3; 1 Timothy 5:8; 1 Peter 3:7

DOCTRINAL EXPOSITION

The church believes and strongly teaches that marriage, which is a covenant between one man and one woman, as defined by God at creation (Gen. 1:27), is of divine origin and is a sacred institution. Marriage and the family picture the family relationship of God. God is revealed as a family presently composed of two persons—Father and Son—which is now reproducing itself through mankind by the addition of sons and daughters. In like manner, mankind physically demonstrates this God-plane relationship through this divine institution, which God defines as marriage. Man, like God, can build

a family and add to it while experiencing the joys and happiness that family life produces. Paul refers to this analogy between marriage and the family and God's purpose and plan of reproducing Himself through Christ and the Church as "a great mystery" (Eph. 5:32)—Why? Because it reveals the very purpose for which God created mankind.

True happiness and personal fulfillment for both sexes can result from a proper understanding and application of God's instructions concerning the roles of men and women. All people—regardless of race, nationality, social status, or sex have the same ultimate goal and are spiritually equal before God. "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28). God's purpose of reproducing Himself through mankind clearly applies to both male and female, because all shall be "sons and daughters" of God (2 Cor. 6:18).

When it comes to the marriage and family relationships, however, both male and female have certain roles and responsibilities that are not interchangeable. In procreation, the male and female roles cannot be switched. In the less mechanized and specialized societies of past millennia, the strength of the male made him better suited for hunting and defending the community, while the activities for which the female was most suited generally centered around the home and children. The children could take their place in the family and community as they matured. It was never a question of superiority or inferiority but of contributing to the common goal in the way each was most able.

The modern family also requires each of its members to fulfill a certain role, whether that of husband, wife, or child. Someone has to have the final say when a decision is required. On the other hand, the sharing of responsibility based on physical strength is no longer so essential in most modern societies. Therefore, the wife should contribute fully to any decision, even though the husband is the one who bears final responsibility (Col. 3:18; 1 Pet. 3:1–7).

Furthermore, just as the husband is shown in Scripture to have the final responsibility for family decisions, he must also shoulder the task of seeing to their needs. He is a leader, not a taskmaster; a father and husband, not a boss; one who looks out for the welfare of his entire family and puts them before himself. He should be respected because he

has earned respect. The wife and children should be willing to submit to his decisions because he has demonstrated wisdom and sound judgment and has taken their desires and suggestions into account. The wife is content to have her own desires overruled on occasion because she knows her husband will give preference to her judgment when it is clearly correct. The husband should be the leader of the family, showing the same love and respect for his wife as Christ shows for the Church. A husband is instructed to love his wife as Christ loves the Church—that is, to be willing to sacrifice himself for her in every way, for her benefit (Eph. 5:25). This basic principle can be expanded by analogy and comparison with Jesus' life and death for humanity to every conceivable aspect and area of life. Women are instructed to "be subject to your husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church.... As the church is subject to Christ, so let wives also be subject in everything to their husbands (Eph. 5:22–24). Paul then follows this admonition to wives with an equally strong admonition to husbands that they must love their wives just as much as they love their own bodies (Eph. 5:28); to indeed nourish and cherish their wives (v. 29). Husbands and wives are therefore to be joined to each other as "one flesh" (Eph. 5:31, quoting Gen. 2:24). It is interesting to note how much the Bible is ahead of its time in championing and upholding the equal position of women in marriage and society.

The very analogy of God's Church as the "mother" of Christians illustrates that from God's point of view both father and mother have specific roles. Both are absolutely essential. The spiritual responsibility of the church to nurture, protect, care for, instruct and even discipline God's spiritual children is analogous to the wife's responsibilities to nurture, care for, instruct and discipline the family's offspring. This, of course, no more negates or diminishes the husband's responsibilities in such matters than it does God's responsibility as a spiritual Father toward His children. In addition, the Bible describes a fundamental responsibility of a wife is to sustain the home environment ("keepers at home," Titus 2:5 KJV, "domestic," RSV).

But Proverbs 31 reveals that a woman's area of responsibility and opportunity is far broader than those who might interpret "domestic" responsibilities as only scrubbing floors and cleaning bath-

rooms. Instead, the ideal wife is pictured as one who has creatively developed her talents and interests. She is fully trustworthy, skilled with her hands, hard working and industrious, intellectually stimulated, wise, and kind. She has a keen sense of financial risk and responsibility (Prov. 31:16), has sharp business acumen (v. 18, 24), and is a competent administrator (v. 15). Such a woman is depicted as being “far more precious than jewels” (Pro. 31:10). (Once again, this passage reveals the presence of biblical superiority over other ancient literature in promulgating an expanded role for women, thus foreshadowing and anticipating our modern era.)

Even in contemporary society, it is still mutually advantageous (in addition to being biblically proper) for the wife to maintain and build the domestic area while the husband maintains a job or business. But at times, such as when the husband is unemployed or pursuing an education, it may be necessary to share or exchange certain duties, which would usually be done by the other partner. The important thing is that family activities be conducted in mutual love with respect and appreciation for the needs and wishes of the other (Eph. 3:21–33), and in accordance with the basic biblical principles. Many wives are completely fulfilled in caring for their homes and children. Those who have adequately fulfilled their domestic responsibilities (e.g., whose children are grown or in school) and who feel the need for further self-expression should be given the opportunity to the extent their family situation allows. Improper suppression of any human’s potential—male or female—is both physically unwise and spiritually contrary to the plan of God.

The Bible also teaches that a healthy and joyous sexual relationship should be present within Christian marriages. God created the sexual differences and attractions between male and female for several reasons. Besides the obvious purpose of procreation, sexual relations within marriage are God-ordained as a means whereby a husband and a wife can express their love for one another (1 Cor. 7:3–5; Heb. 13:4). Any sexual relations other than with one’s marriage partner (such as premarital intercourse, adultery, homosexuality, bestiality, etc.) are condemned in God’s Word.

Within marriage the bed should be “undefiled,” meaning not corrupted by adultery or immorality (Heb. 13:4, RSV). Aside from the common-sense

instruction that couples should abstain from sex when fasting (1 Cor. 7:5), or during a woman’s menstrual period (Lev. 18:19), the Bible—and hence the Church—has no proscriptions against specific acts of sexual relations except to teach that they must express mutual love, concern, and be consistent with basic biblical principles. (Sodomasochism, for example, would be clearly contrary to such principles.)

The Church recognizes that even as God determines how large His family will become, a couple has the right to mutually agree upon, and to determine, the size of their family. Unlike the doctrine of some churches, the Church of God, Independent Ministries does not see scriptural support for doctrines against using non-abortifacient methods of contraception. The Church promotes the sanctity of life and suggests that members seek to counsel with proper medical authorities to select suitable birth control methods that cannot adversely affect the body. Because of the sanctity of marriage, the Church of God strongly discourages divorce among its members. As a last resort, there are only *three scriptural reasons* why church members may divorce—with subsequent rights to remarry.

(1) *Fraud*: This amounts to an annulment, though divorce is usually required to terminate the marriage. The marriage covenant was made under a false pretence. One party later finds out he or she has been defrauded and decides to take action (Deut. 22:13–21). (The spirit of this scripture may be applied to a variety of fraudulent acts besides the pretext of virginity.)

(2) *Illicit Sexual Activity*: In Matthew 5:32 and 19:9, Jesus Christ states, “whoever divorces his wife, *except for unchastity [porneia]* and marries another, commits adultery.” The Greek word *porneia* includes fornication, adultery, harlotry, homosexuality, etc.; it is best-translated “unchastity” as in the RSV. When *porneia* has been committed, the offended party may break the marital bond (Deut. 24:4; Mt. 5:31–32; 19:9). However, a Christian should surely be counseled to explore what possibilities there are to be *forgiving* towards their mate.

(3) *Desertion*: If one member of a marriage is or becomes an “unbeliever,” and deserts his or her mate—not being “pleased to dwell” with her or him—the offended party is freed from obligation. He or she may formalize the separation and any

subsequent divorce gives the right to remarry since “in such a case the brother or sister is not bound” (1 Cor. 7:15).

If no adequate scriptural grounds for divorce are present, the Church strongly recommends the couple not divorce though they may choose to live separately. If they do divorce, they should not remarry (Mt. 5:32; Lk. 16:18). Reconciliation should be achieved as soon as possible. If this is not possible, they should remain single. If adequate biblical grounds for divorce are present, the couple may divorce if they have first exhausted all other attempts to resolve their differences.

While the Church allows its members to divorce and remarry under the above biblical conditions, it does not generally recommend it. God says He hates divorce (Mal. 2:16), and that should be the attitude of the Church, its ministry, and each of its members. The Church insists every possible effort be made to *reconcile* offended parties. *Forgiveness* is an intrinsic part of the Christian character (Mt. 6:14–15) and must be given a prominent role in possibly resolving marital problems. The Church lends its counseling services to aid in achieving such reconciliations.

Effective child rearing is also basic to the building of a strong and healthy family unit. It is as important as marriage in portraying the plan of God in that the relationship between parent and child is the physical type of the spiritual relationship between God and man.

As in other areas of the Christian life, God’s Word allows great latitude in the rearing of one’s children within the general biblical guidelines. Of course, it is self-evident that a father and mother must clothe, feed, and shelter their youngsters as best they can within their means. For a parent to ignore these basic responsibilities is, in God’s sight, to be “worse than an unbeliever” (1 Tim. 5:8). But the principles of proper child rearing must be far more inclusive than the basic necessities of life.

The Bible’s primary admonition is for parents to show deep love and manifest real affection toward their progeny, just as God does for us. This love will take many forms: protection from harm, instruction, encouragement, respect, participation in family activities, and balanced correction when necessary. The Church especially stresses the need for parents to express their love for their children in both work and play. Likewise, great emphasis is placed upon

the need for parents and children to communicate and show genuine interest in each other by active listening. To this end the Church encourages its members to set aside at least one day a week for a “family night” of planned activities and recreation together.

Parents have a responsibility to provide moral and spiritual guidance for their children and to establish values consistent with the goals of Christianity, through their example as well as by formal religious instruction. The establishment and nurturing of true values and moral behavior will at times necessitate moderate disciplinary measures, such as removal of privileges (“grounding,” “time out,” etc.), for wrong-doing. All such punishment is done in *love* only (never in uncontrolled anger), is always reasonable, consistent, and *never* injurious to the child emotionally or physically.

The proper balance in discipline of one’s children is important to achieve. Two scriptures that help define the boundaries of such balance are Proverbs 13:24 and Ephesians 6:4. In the former, parents are instructed, “He who spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him”; in the latter, parents are cautioned never to “provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.” Thus parents are entrusted by God to generate and nurture physical, mental, moral, and spiritual growth in the children that He grants to their care.

Likewise, children have responsibilities toward their parents. While it is true that the obligation is first the parents are to properly rear their child, it is also true the child is responsible for his own actions after a certain age. A child is required by God to positively respond to his parents. He must love, respect, honor, and obey his genitors and guardians. In so doing, he will contribute to harmony within the home and receive for himself the blessings of obedience. Indeed, the fifth commandment, “Honor your father and your mother,” is called “the first commandment with a promise” since God states that as a result of obedience, “it may be well with you and...you may live long on the earth” (Eph. 6:2–3).

Although the building of a family is and can be a training ground for learning important spiritual lessons, God in no way commands everyone to marry. On the contrary, the apostle Paul states in 1 Corinthians 7:25–40 that at various times and for

various reasons some may find it better not to marry. Indeed, these verses indicate some unmarried persons may find a better opportunity to serve the Church physically and spiritually because of greater amounts of available time and fewer personal cares and concerns. Neither the married nor the unmarried state has any inherent spiritual superiority over the other, however. Everyone should evaluate his own circumstances and make his own decision in this very private and personal matter.

God is working out a great purpose here below. He has given men and women great latitude of roles and responsibilities within certain basic guidelines so they may reach their ultimate physical and spiritual potential.

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HEALING

DOCTRINAL STATEMENT

Divine healing is a miracle that God in His mercy and love may extend to those who call upon Him in time of need, according to faith and/or other factors. Christians are encouraged to appreciate this special benefit from God as well as to do everything they can for themselves in times of illness or injury by seeking the most competent professional help. Faith in God for healing does not conflict with the use of modern medical science. The healings of Jesus Christ demonstrate and represent His power to express compassion, to forgive sin, and ultimately, to resurrect the dead and establish the Kingdom of God on earth.

Matthew 9:1–7; James 5:14–15

DOCTRINAL EXPOSITION

Healing is a continuous theme running through the Bible from Genesis to Revelation. Yet it cannot

be denied that God has extended the miracle of healing in different degrees for different purposes at different times. People have not always been healed with the same regularity or for the same reason.

There are few healings recorded in the Old Testament. The very fact that God gave laws of quarantine to ancient Israel proves He did not instantly heal every disease, even in His theocratic state.

During Jesus’ time, and during the apostles’ early ministry, God poured out the gift of healing much more than He ever has. Jesus’ miracles of healing also helped establish His absolute credibility as one sent from God. It built faith into those who saw His healings firsthand and into many who read of them later. Healing was also utilized for expressing Christ’s power on earth and for quickly attracting public awareness of the gospel.

It is quite evident that God is not healing today in the same manner or to the same degree that He did in early New Testament times. It is equally evident that the physiological knowledge and medical expertise in the end of the twenty-first century is far advanced over that of the middle of the first century (and certainly unrelated to the magical rites and potions of even earlier centuries). Consequently, Christians today can take full advantage of the latest information in health maintenance and the most modern techniques in health care, recognizing that such proper physical concern in no way detracts from one’s faith in God.

The Biblical Meaning of Healing

Healing may assume various forms in the Bible. The actual biblical usage of the English word *heal* (and the Hebrew and Greek words from which it is translated) is quite broad. It can mean the healing of the body, but is not limited to the physical body: it can refer to the healing of the mind or the emotions (Ps. 147:3); it can have the metaphorical connotation of healing the land (2 Chron. 7:14), God’s people as a whole (Jer. 6:14; 8:11), the nation of Israel (Lam. 2:13; Hos. 7:1), the gentile nations such as Egypt (Is. 19:22), and Babylon (Jer. 51:9); it can refer to healing inanimate things such as the earth (Ps. 60:2), water (2 Kings 2:21; Ezek. 47:8–9), and even the “altar of the LORD that was broken down” (1 Kings 18:30, where exactly the same Hebrew word that is usually translated “healed” is translat-

ed “repaired”); it can allude to abstract concepts such as the healing of faithlessness or backsliding (Jer. 3:22; Hos. 14:4); it can also be used for spiritual healing, the healing of the “sin-sick soul,” as it were (Ps. 41:4; 2 Chron. 7:13–14; Is. 57:19; Mt. 13:15; Acts 28:27).

Of course, most of the places where the term *heal* is used refer to the miraculous, though physically oriented, healing of an illness or injured human body.

In Exodus 15:26, where God states, “I am the LORD, your healer,” the Hebrew word translated “healer” is *rafa’*. It is exactly the same word used in Genesis 50:2, which refers to Joseph’s “servants the physicians.” The passage in Exodus could as easily be translated, “I am the LORD, your physician,” as could the passage in Genesis be translated Joseph’s “servants the healers.” Note that the “physicians” or “healers” are not condemned, but are specifically called Joseph’s *servants*.

Rafa’ is also the same word found in Exodus 21:18–19:

“When men quarrel and one strikes the other with a stone or with his fist and the man does not die but keeps his bed, if the man rises again and walks abroad with his staff he that struck him shall be clear; only he shall pay for the loss of his time, and have him thoroughly *healed*.”

This shows an individual who caused an injury was responsible to have the injured person “healed,” indicating that healing (*rafa’*) is not limited to God. Second Kings 8:29 (also 9:15; 2 Chron. 22:6) reads: “And King Joram returned to be healed in Jezreel of the wounds which the Syrians had given him at Ramah....” Again, healing (*rafa’*) is used in reference to what men can do for themselves. The contrast of “a time to heal” with “a time to kill” in Ecclesiastes 3:3 strongly suggests a natural healing process.

There are two scriptures that indicate, although their usage is certainly metaphorical, that the term healing can be used to describe the natural bodily processes that can be aided by external medicines. In Jeremiah 51:8, balm is suggested as a possible way for Babylon to be healed (“give her medicine; perhaps she can be healed”—*Living Bible*); in Jeremiah 30:13, the lack of medicine is equated with the consequent lack of healing. From God’s

statement to Ezekiel showing Pharaoh’s broken arm was not healed because it was not bound with a bandage (Ezek. 30:21). This logically follows that the arm would have healed had Pharaoh bound it up. This confirms the physical body’s normal mechanisms of recuperation and repair as part of its overall definition.

In the New Testament there are three Greek words translated “heal” in the King James Version: *Therapeuo*, meaning “to heal” in the New Testament, and “to care for, wait upon, treat (medically), heal or restore” in Greek literature outside the New Testament; *iaomi*, meaning “to heal, cure or deliver”; and *sozo*, meaning “to save from death, to free from disease, to make whole, to save from eternal death, or attain salvation.” *Sozo* is especially interesting in that, while it is clearly used to describe physical healing in Mark 5:23, Luke 8:36, and Acts 14:9, it is the same word appearing about one hundred times in the New Testament to describe the process of spiritual salvation—suggesting some conceptual relationships between healing and salvation.

Healing in the Bible: A Conditional Promise

The miracle of healing is an act of God’s divine grace, which must not be taken lightly. It is therefore important one understand the topic of healing in context of the entire Bible. If one approaches scriptural references to healing without the full biblical context, and out of the context of human experience, he may fix upon them a meaning not supported by logic, common sense, or proper biblical exegesis. In this regard, we should consider some important scriptures.

Among the blessings God offered to the nation of Israel was the removal of diseases from among them. Several statements made to the Israelites in the wilderness show this; perhaps the most familiar is Exodus 15:26:

“If you will diligently hearken to the voice of the LORD your God, and do that which is right in His eyes, and give heed to His commandments and keep all His statutes, I will put none of the diseases upon you which I put upon the Egyptians; for I am the LORD, your healer.”

Notice that the promise is conditional; it is predi-

cated on obedience. God also says He will refrain from putting diseases upon the nation.

Exodus 23:25–26 adds to this:

“You shall serve the LORD your God, and I will bless your bread and your water; and I will take sickness away from the midst of you. None shall cast her young or be barren in your land; I will fulfill the number of your days.”

The converse of these blessings promised for obedience are the curses pronounced for disobedience. Instead of removing sickness and disease, God would allow these afflictions—along with many other curses—as the natural consequences of man’s ways apart from the ways of God. Deuteronomy 28 enumerates these curses in great detail (see especially verses 21, 22, 27, 28, 35, 59–61). The promises are conditional. Blessings come only with obedience; curses automatically follow transgression. But notice these promises are *national* rather than individual. Sickness would be removed from the nation to the same extent barrenness, miscarriages, and premature death were taken away. Healing as such is not really promised in these verses except as implied generally in the promise to remove sickness.

Healing in the Bible is not a simplistic algebraic equation relating faith and healing. God healed for different reasons in different circumstances. God healed Abimelech and his household after Abraham prayed for them (Gen. 20:17), thus ratifying Abraham’s position as a servant of the Eternal. God healed Hezekiah from a deadly sickness and added fifteen years to his life because He respected Hezekiah’s heartfelt prayer in which he recounted to God, with tears, his utter loyalty, sincerity, and uprightness. God healed Naaman, the commander of the Syrian army, of leprosy at a time when there were numerous lepers in Israel and Syria who were not healed. The full story in 2 Kings 5 not only indicates that the healing was a major factor in Israel’s international relations with Syria at that time, but also conveys many powerful lessons for people of all time.

The story of Elisha is similar, yet it has a “twist ending.” Elisha was a remarkable individual. He asked for and received a double portion of Elijah’s spirit (2 Kings 2:9). A great number of miracles are recorded in his name. Even after his death, Elisha’s

bones brought a man back to life (13:21). Yet Elisha died of a *sickness* (verse 14). Despite the great powers bestowed and miracles performed through God’s Spirit, Elisha himself was not healed from some sort of sickness but actually died from it.

Several examples of non-healing are also recorded in the New Testament, even during a period when special gifts were possessed by some and astounding healings were being performed by various apostles. Paul writes that Epaphroditus was very ill, almost to the point of death (Phil. 2:25–27). But God had *mercy* on him. Healing was here given as an example of mercy, not of faith or obligation (or at least not of these alone).

On another occasion, Paul mentions he had left Trophimus ill in Miletus (2 Tim. 4:20). He does not elaborate on the situation, but illness is taken as a matter of course rather than some sort of unexpected occurrence. In fact, in an earlier letter to Timothy, the apostle Paul refers to Timothy’s “frequent ailments” (1 Tim. 5:23).

Paul himself had a “thorn in the flesh” (2 Cor. 12:7ff.). He does not describe it exactly, but there is a likelihood it was something physical. The Greek term *astheneia*, translated “weakness” in verses 9 and 10, is often used specifically of physical weakness, sickness, or disease (e.g., Acts 5:15; 28:9; Luke 5:15; John 55). If Paul’s thorn was indeed some physical defect, ironically, he was suffering from the very thing he was healing in others.

Physicians and Medicines in the Bible

It is true the Bible often condemns ancient practitioners who relied on pagan gods, amulets, incantations or other forms of magic. But one cannot extrapolate from ancient superstition, demonology, and ignorance to modern scientific medicine. In biblical times the medical arts, primitive by today’s standards, were often associated with pagan religions and mystical rites; the line between such “black arts” and pure medicine was hazy.

One example is the reference to Ahaziah in 2 Kings 1:2:

“Now Ahaziah fell through the lattice in his upper chamber in Samaria, and lay sick; so he sent messengers, telling them, ‘Go, inquire of Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron, whether I shall recover from this sickness.’”

This passage does not mean that Ahaziah went to Baal-zebul for healing. First, if he had wanted to be healed he would have gone personally rather than just sending messengers. Second, he was only trying to inquire whether he would live or die, nothing more. This implies he was consulting an oracle to try to find out the future, disobeying God's law in the process, just as Saul did before his final battle with the Philistines.

Professor John Gray, in his commentary on Kings, states: "*Daras* (literally, 'to seek') is used specifically of seeking divine revelation by consulting an oracle, cf. Amos 5:5." Ahaziah should have sought to God concerning his future—therein lay his mistake.

There are a number of other biblical allusions to physicians, healing, and medicine. Exodus 21:19, as discussed above, hints at the beneficial, fully accepted use of "healing arts" within Israel; Isaiah 38:21 gives an example remedy for boils that Isaiah himself prescribed. Perhaps it could be said that this "cake of figs," which Isaiah said was to be applied to Hezekiah's boil "that he may recover," was only symbolic since God was going to supernaturally heal Hezekiah. Yet the fact remains that Isaiah did state that such an external, physical healing-type medicine was to be applied. Such "medical" help (within the medical technology of the time) not only wasn't condemned but was actually a fundamental component to the healing process. It certainly would appear this laudable example of Hezekiah's beseeching with full faith in God for healing did not exclude his simultaneous utilization of external "medical" aids. In fact, by *requiring* it as part of the process, Isaiah corroborates the view that man should do the most he can for himself, while asking God to do that which he cannot.

Other references to physicians are used metaphorically. Jeremiah 8:22 gives no sense of condemnation. Many, in fact, read it very positively regarding its allusion to the role of a physician: "Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why then has the health of the daughter of my people not been restored?" Job 13:4 does not refer to all physicians. In 2 Chronicles 16:12, Asa is censured for *not seeking God* for help in his illness. The questions of whether the act of seeking the physicians was itself condemned in this case or whether these "physicians" were really priests and

magicians of a false religion (and thus to be condemned) cannot be settled here alone, considering the lack of biblical data. In any event, the primary point is that clearly Asa erred in consulting only physicians to the deference of God.

In Matthew 9:12, Jesus states: "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick." This saying is used in a metaphorical sense, yet it and other similar sayings imply no feeling of condemnation of physicians. As Rendle Short writes:

"Our Lord several times mentions physicians.... [None] of these sentences give the impression that the physician was generally looked upon, in Palestine at that time, as a pagan, a charlatan, or hopelessly incompetent" (*The Bible and Modern Medicine*, p. 30).

In Luke 4:23, Jesus quoted the proverb, "Physician, heal thyself," and applied it to Himself with no hint of denigration of physicians in the process. Luke is called "the beloved physician" by Paul in his letter to the Colossians (Colossians 4:14). The Greek word used here for "physician" is *iatros* and means "one who heals" (cf. the verb *iao-mai* meaning "to heal" which is used in reference to Christ's divine healings many times in the Gospels). Since *iatros* was the normal word for "physician" used throughout the Greek world at the time, there is no indication Luke was any different from other physicians. Nor is anything said about his giving up his pre-conversion practice. Indeed, the reference to Luke as a physician, beloved at that, can be dated at A.D. 62–63, over thirty years after the resurrection.

What about medicines and drugs? Revelation 21:8 says that "sorcerers" (Greek: *pharmakos*) shall have their part in the lake of fire. The clear evidence indicates the word *pharmakia* referred to cult worship and the use of drugs to induce spells, rather than modern medicines and drugs. Medicines used to heal sickness are not condemned in the Bible. Passages alluding to the use of medicines or similar preparations for healing purposes (e.g., Is. 38:21; Prov. 17:22) do not condemn them. As seen above, the metaphors in Jeremiah 30:13, 51:8, and Ezekiel 30:21 alluding to the use of healing medicines or physical methods of healing may either be stated sarcastically or as an accusation, but the allusion is nonetheless positive as far as the benefits of medicines are concerned. The words used in these scrip-

tures are derived from *rafa*’ and evidently have the meaning “that which heals.”

Ezekiel 47:12 is especially interesting since it shows the continuing *positive* use of healing medicines—made from special leaves from trees which are nourished by waters from the new Temple—in the Millennium after the return of Jesus Christ. Corroboration can be found in Revelation 22:2, where it relates that healing preparations shall still be used after the New Heaven and New Earth are established. Whatever the understanding or fashion of usage (literal and/or metaphoric)—which is presently well beyond our range of knowledge—even the reference to the healing preparations must surely be taken as a very positive sign since they shall have their part in this magnificent environment.

Health Principles

God’s earnest desire is for all human beings to live an abundant life in perfect health. This attitude is reflected in the words of the apostle John: “Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth” (3 John 2). The Bible refers to health as a positive standard metaphor with which other things are likened (“the tongue of the wise” in Prov. 12:18; “a faithful ambassador” in Prov. 13:17; “pleasant words” in Prov. 16:24). To this end, the Bible gives basic principles of health, which, coupled with common sense, experience, and modern knowledge, would prevent many health problems plaguing modern man.

Common sense and experience should make the basic principles of health quickly available to everybody. The old saying, “an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure,” is absolutely valid. This realization should lead to an attitude of genuine care and concern for the health of one’s family and oneself. Such a conscious awareness would go a long way toward securing good health. A vital component for a good health program is a balanced diet, which includes wholesome, natural foods and excludes (as much as is practical in our society) processed foods such as sugars, starches, and artificially flavored and preserved foods. The right amounts of exercise, sleep, and relaxation are all likewise important. Maintaining a positive mental outlook and a peaceful mental attitude by eliminat-

ing (or at least attenuating) stress and flares of emotion is being increasingly recognized by modern health specialists as an essential health principle, considering the enormous effects (called “psychosomatic”) that the mind exerts on the body. Caution should always be taken to prevent accidents and bodily harm (without becoming obsessive or paranoid in the process). Finally, a regular program of routine physical examinations by a qualified doctor is also important in recognizing and solving any potential problems before they become serious.

God has designed the human body to function in good health for the full span of one’s allotted years. Unfortunately, mankind has so polluted the environment and human beings so often ignore the basic rudiments of health that imbalances occur, with sickness and disease becoming the natural result.

The degree that a person disregards the obvious physical principles of health is generally the degree to which one suffers ill health. The obvious exceptions to this are accidents and inherited diseases, or affliction. Even these two cases are often the result of mankind harming himself, because many accidents are the result of carelessness and could have been avoided, and inherited illnesses can be the result from the nutritional, environmental, or even medical shortcomings of previous generations. Some obvious examples are the limbless offspring of mothers who ingested the drug thalidomide during pregnancy; the children who are born deaf because their mothers had a disease during pregnancy; and those that have organic brain deficiencies due to malnutrition. It is evident many of man’s health problems are self-generated.

Radiant health has always been a prime concern of the Church. Indeed, the Church strongly teaches that individuals must care for their bodies physically, just as they must care for their minds mentally and spiritually. For, in the final analysis, physical, mental, and spiritual health cannot be isolated from one another—we are enmeshed in a physio-chemical existence that has a bearing on our mental, emotional, and spiritual condition—it’s psychosomatically connected.

Even though physical life is not the primary object of Christian commitment, it is important, and God expects us to take care of our bodies and stay in balance. Consistent with this is making good use of available knowledge about the human body, its functions and processes. In addition to showing

how to maintain good health, specialists can aid the body in time of injury or bad health. This human aid in no way hinders God if He decides to intervene miraculously and do what cannot be done physically.

Church Instructions for Times of Illness

No matter how much we take care of ourselves, almost all of us become ill or sick occasionally or suffer a misfortune such as an accident. At such times, the biblical record makes plain God can and will intervene on behalf of the sick and heal them according to faith and/or other factors. This divine healing process is apart from, and not in conflict with, anything a person can do to help himself. Healing is a “special benefit” that God makes available to His Church. But it is not part of His spiritual-moral law, as it were; and not being healed, therefore, is not a sin. Those who are sick should look to man for what physical help he can receive but should also look to God for what man cannot do—supernaturally intervene and divinely remove the illness, sickness, or disease.

The basic instructions followed by the Church are found in James 5:14ff. These verses state the sick person should call for the elders of the Church, who will lay hands upon his head, pray over him, and anoint him with oil. This ceremony is richly symbolic. The oil is a symbol of God’s Holy Spirit (cf. Ex. 30:23–25; Mt. 25:1ff.; etc.). The act of one having hands laid upon him shows the person’s desire to be set apart by God through His Spirit for the special miracle of divine healing.

The Bible teaches that God “wrought *special miracles*” by the hands of I the apostle Paul, healing individuals in distant places by placing “handkerchiefs or aprons” on them over which, apparently, Paul and/or others had prayed (Acts 19:11–12). Many churches, especially those in the so-called “electronic” church (utilizing internet and television), have followed this practice because individuals living in scattered regions called upon them for anointing, and the churches or radio-television ministry did not have any elders close enough to physically lay hands on the sick person and anoint him according to James 2:14.

There exists proof in the testimony of thousands that God has, in some cases, honored this kind of “special miracle” in recent history. Experience also

shows that not every individual receiving such an “anointed cloth” is healed. Some are and some are not—God always reserves the prerogative according to His will for that person at the time.

The Relationship Between Sickness and Sin

Physical sickness and illness can be caused by different factors. At times it is the general result of violating the principles of health, or perhaps the direct result of a person’s own sin (Mt. 9:1–7; John 5:14). At other times sin is not involved; and the illness or infirmity is inherited (Jn. 9:2) or the result of injury or accident (Lk. 13:1–5).

Whenever sin is involved, healing includes the forgiveness of that sin (Mt. 9:1–7). The final statement in James 5:14 illustrates the point: “And *if* he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him.” The construction used (the Greek particle *kan* with the subjunctive) expresses uncertainty and doubt. The person *may* have sinned; on the other hand, he may *not* have sinned. If the individual is only ill, he shall be healed. But if he has also sinned, his sins shall be forgiven too.

In John 9, Jesus confirms that physical debilities are not necessarily caused by sin. The relevant points for our purpose are contained in the first few verses:

“And as He passed by, He saw a man blind from birth. And His disciples asked Him, saying, ‘Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he should be born blind?’ Jesus answered, ‘It was neither that this man sinned, nor his parents; but it was in order that the works of God might be displayed in him’” (vv. 1–3).

It is important to notice that the assumption of sin was made on the part of the disciples. Job’s friends made the same mistake—which has a definite superstitious ring to it—by assuming that Job’s physical problems were due to his sins. Jesus did not say that either the blind man or his parents had sinned. On the contrary, He denied sin was involved in this case even though He did not elaborate further.

In another context, Jesus reinforces the fact that time and chance are not necessarily related to some extraordinary degree of sinfulness:

“Now on the same occasion there were some present who reported to Him about the Galileans, whose blood Pilate had mingled along with their sacrifices. And He answered and said to them, ‘Do you suppose that these Galileans were greater sinners than all other Galileans, because they suffered this fate? I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. Or do you suppose that those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them, were worse culprits than all the men who live in Jerusalem? I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish’” (Lk. 13:1–5, NASB).

The Bible nowhere speaks of “physical sin.” Sin is surely discussed a great deal; and from the numerous biblical references it is possible to piece together the various acts and attitudes that constitute sin. But all of these fall under ethical, moral, or mental categories—and are all, therefore, *spiritual* in nature. Indeed, the penalty for sin—eternal death in the lake of fire—proves sin is spiritual only, because “breaking” a physical principle of health (e.g., stubbing one’s toe, not getting enough vitamin C, ingesting too many refined sugars, or fats, etc.) will not lead toward eternal death. Although, as previously explained, much if not most illness is self-generated through ignorance, error, or neglect; it is not proper to label such physical mistakes “sin” in the strict biblical sense. Thus, to speak of “physical sin” is an actual contradiction in terms and likely to be confusing.

If, however, the illness or injury is directly or indirectly caused by the breaking of one of God’s laws—two obvious examples would be venereal disease, resulting from unlawful sexual behavior, and liver disease, resulting from overconsumption of alcoholic beverages—then the cause of the problem is indeed sin in its true biblical meaning. It is rarely possible to discern when illness or injury is the result of sin (the breaking of God’s law in the letter) and/or stems from a sinful attitude (the breaking of God’s law in the spirit). If a physical practice is known to be detrimental to one’s health, it should be stopped—as common sense would dictate—irrespective of whether or not the Bible specifically identifies the practice as sin.

To be sick, therefore, is not necessarily to have sinned. Sickness is *sometimes* the result of sin and healing *sometimes* includes the forgiveness of sin.

But at all times, whether sin is involved or not, healing is a manifestation of God’s mercy and love.

The Healings of Jesus Christ: Purpose and Power

Though there were several notable healings in the Old Testament, by far the most important and consistent healings in history were associated with the ministry of Jesus Christ. Some examples (with references) of those healings follow. By both their quality and quantity, they demonstrate the enormous importance that the New Testament places on the healing miracles of Jesus Christ. Some examples of those healings include:

- The *leper* (Mt. 8:1–4; Mk. 1:40–45; Lk. 5:12–16)
- The *paralytic* (Mt. 9:1–8; Mk. 2:10–12; Lk. 5:17–26)
- The *multitudes* (Mt. 4:24–25; Mk. 3:7–13; Lk. 6:17–19)
- The *centurion* (Mt. 8:5–13; Lk. 7:1–10)
- Peter’s mother-in-law* (Mt. 8:14–15; Mk. 1:29–31; Lk. 4:38–39)
- Jairus’ daughter* (Mt. 9:18–26; Mk. 5:21–43; Lk. 8:40–56)
- The *blind men* (Mt. 9:27–31; 20:30–34; Mk. 10:46–56; Lk. 18:35–43)
- The *Canaanite woman* (Mt. 15:21–28; Mk. 7:24–30)
- The *deaf-mute* (Mk. 8:22–25)
- The *blind man at Bethsaida* (Mk. 8:22–25)
- The *10 lepers* (Lk. 17:11–19)
- Sabbath healings* (Mt. 12:10–13; Lk. 13:10–17; 13:1–6)
- The *official’s sick son* (Jn. 4:46–54)
- The *restored ear* (Lk. 22:50–51)

Understanding the significance of all these healings is essential to salvation since they are a direct verification that Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ. Healing was one of the foundational signs God employed to demonstrate the power and to ratify the office of His Son (Mt. 8:16–17; 11:2–6). Undoubtedly, healing was also a fundamental part of the *work* of Jesus Christ on earth. Jesus’ primary object in performing the numerous healings He did throughout His ministry—as it would be recorded in the New Testament for all peoples and for all times—was to give an absolutely certain, physical-

ly verifiable demonstration of His spiritual power.

Note that Scripture warns miracles alone are not a guarantee that something is “of God,” as in warnings about lying wonders in 2 Thessalonians 2:1–12. We know Jesus and His miracles and healings are of God because Jesus never spoke against God or against God’s laws, as deceivers do (Dt. 13:1–3; Mt. 7:23).

The first reference to healing in Matthew’s account is in direct association with Jesus’ “preaching about the gospel of the Kingdom of God”; indeed, healing and Christ’s message of the coming Kingdom of God were almost inseparable.

“And He went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every infirmity among the people. So His fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought Him all the sick, those afflicted with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics, and paralytics, and He healed them” (Mt. 4:23–24).

Many other verses confirm the close interdependence between healing and the full scope of Jesus’ gospel of the Kingdom (e.g., Mt. 9:35). The association is profound: Healing returns the body to its original, pure, wholly sound state; and so it is with the Kingdom of God, which shall return the earth to its original, pure, wholly sound state (referred to as “the times of restitution of all things” in Acts 3:21). Jesus’ power to accomplish the former—the physical evidence of His healings was immediate and startling—was the clear demonstration that He likewise had the power to accomplish the latter, and establish the Kingdom of God on earth. In this context, Jesus’ frequent casting out of demons as part of the healing process foreshadowed His binding of Satan in establishing the Kingdom of God. Jesus’ healings were spectacular; no one ever doubted when the crippled walked, the maimed were made whole, the blind saw, the deaf heard.

“And great crowds came to Him, bringing with them the lame, the maimed, the blind, the dumb, and many others, and they put them at His feet, and He healed them, so that the throng wondered. When they saw the dumb speaking, the maimed whole, the lame walking, and the blind seeing; they glorified the God of Israel” (Matthew 15:30–31).

Healings were the clearest demonstration of God’s power in Jesus Christ, which could literally flow from Him (Mk. 5:30; Lk. 6:19; 8:46). Indeed, Jesus’ healings represented to the world the absolute power God had given Him *over* the world. Healing likewise corroborated Jesus’ power over Satan and his demons (Mk. 3:15; Acts 10:38).

Jesus also used healing to show His authority over other aspects of God’s universe, such as, for example, the Sabbath day. When the religious leaders told the man Jesus just healed he should not be carrying his pallet on the Sabbath, the man answered them (probably with great confidence and conviction), “The man who healed me said to me, ‘Take up your pallet, and walk’” (Jn. 5:11).

But the most important aspect of Jesus’ spiritual power that His healing demonstrated to the world was His power to forgive sin, and, ultimately, resurrect the body from the dead. As noted, the word used in Mark 5:23 to indicate Jesus’ physical healing of Jairus’ daughter (*sozo*) is the same word used in about one hundred passages to represent spiritual salvation. Jesus’ ability to efficaciously heal the flesh proved His equal ability to assuredly grant salvation in the spirit, thus showing the profound relationship between Jesus’ healings and salvation.

Many of the people whom Jesus healed were lepers. This dread disease was the epitome of uncleanness. Interestingly, the word “cleanse,” utilized in reference to Jesus’ healing of lepers (Mt. 8:3; 10:8; 11:5; Mk. 1:42; Lk. 7:22; 17:14, 17) was, the same word chosen occasionally to describe what should happen to sin and how it should happen. “Let us *cleanse* ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit” (2 Cor. 7:1); and more directly, “The blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin” (1 Jn. 1:7). Thus, Jesus’ supernatural miracles of literally cleansing lepers in the flesh during His ministry writes the record for all human history and beyond, confirming Jesus as the One who can literally cleanse sinners in the spirit. And, just as the *faith* of the leper and the *mercy* of God were intrinsic to healing (Lk. 17:13, 19), so the faith of the sinner and the mercy of God is intrinsic to the forgiveness of sin.

In John 11, Jesus once again gives a physical demonstration of His spiritual power. This time it is His power to resurrect the dead, which is the ultimate miracle of healing. Jesus sets the stage by dis-

cussing the subject with Martha, who is grieving for Lazarus. He tells her: “I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live” (v. 25). Jesus then presents tangible proof of His assertion—proof that would resound throughout the millennia of history—by resurrecting Lazarus back to physical life.

Healing thus foreshadows the resurrection when God shall recreate those who have died and transfigure those who will be alive. Just as Jesus instantly changed sick bodies into healthy bodies, so shall Christ instantly change mortal bodies into immortal bodies. The situations where Jesus actually brought a human corpse back to physical life, as with Lazarus and Jairus’ daughter, reinforce the analogous and symbolic relationship between healing and the resurrection. We should remember, since physical healing foreshadows the resurrection to spiritual life, the analogy can be extended by viewing sickness as foreshadowing the resurrection to eternal death—and Jesus’ power to do the former gives us the ultimate victory over the latter (1 Cor. 15:54–58). Healing, then, is the clearest physical counterpart of this great spiritual event when human mortality shall be swallowed up by godly immortality resulting in mankind being born into God’s family.

Though Jesus did not heal everybody all the time, He often responded positively to people’s faith in Him. Jesus emphasized He healed according to an individual’s *faith*. Such an intimate involvement of faith is wholly consistent with healing portraying the cleansing of our sins at conversion and the transformation of our bodies at the resurrection—since faith is absolutely essential to both processes. So it is a person’s faith in Jesus Christ that is a critical and necessary element—in healing, in the forgiveness of sin, in conversion, and ultimately, in the resurrection from the dead. As such, it is completely logical that healing should center around and emanate from Jesus Christ, giving great credence to His office, His authority, and His commission.

Healing, then, is in essence the physical representation of the spiritual cleansing, restitutory, and regenerative power of God through the person of Jesus Christ. This is why healing figured so prominently in the ministry of Jesus Christ and so much less so at earlier times in biblical history, or at later times in church history. The healing of the physical body, radically and miraculously altering it from a

state of sickness to a state of health, symbolizes what God can do through Christ to our minds, hearts, and spirits. Our sins are forgiven, our minds are changed, our hearts are made pure, and our spirits are made whole. Just as Jesus could heal the sick and make the lame whole before men, so Christ heals our minds and enables us to live righteous lives before God.

Though healing was a vitally important aspect of Jesus’ ministry for what it spiritually represented, Jesus’ *personal* motivation for healing was more simply human. He empathized deeply with the human misery and suffering that illness and injury brought, and consequently did what He could to ease the misery and alleviate the suffering. Jesus was “moved with compassion” (Mt. 14:14) toward people who were sick; He “pitied them” (Living Bible) and “felt deep sympathy” (Modern Language Bible) for them. So, notwithstanding all the other reasons, Jesus healed because He loved people.

“By His Wounds You Have Been Healed”

Jesus Christ as our Paschal Lamb was intimately acquainted with suffering and sorrow. He suffered the penalty of our sins through His beating, crucifixion, and death that we might be relieved of all our infirmities, whether physical, mental or spiritual:

“He endured the suffering that should have been ours, the pain we should have borne.... Because of our sins He was wounded, beaten because of the evil we did. We are healed by the punishment He suffered, made whole by the blows He received” (Isaiah 53:4–5, Today’s English Version).

Or, in more familiar words, “He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities, the chastisement of our peace was upon him; *and with his stripes we are healed.*”

In quoting this very passage, Peter states, “Christ Himself carried our sins in His body to the cross, so that we might die to sin and live for righteousness. It is by His wounds that you have been healed” (1 Pet. 2:24, TEV), “*by whose stripes ye were healed*” (KJV). Though healing can take various forms and though by His supreme sacrifice Jesus made all healing possible—spiritual, mental, physical, and

even environmental—still, the primary intent of Isaiah’s prophecy and Peter’s reference to it refer to the healing of our physical bodies and minds. This is clearly shown by the context. This same passage is once again quoted in Matthew 8:14:17, after Jesus healed Peter’s mother-in-law:

“That evening they brought to Him many who were possessed with demons; and He cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all who were sick. This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah, ‘*He took our infirmities and bore our diseases.*’”

Furthermore, the Greek word used for healing in 1 Peter 24, *iaomai*, is used almost exclusively in reference to physical healing (yet the context of the verse would not exclude a spiritual understanding as well).

In giving the Corinthian church instructions on ways to observe the Lord’s Supper (while correcting their errors), Paul showed how the wrong manner or attitude toward the body and blood of the Lord (symbolically represented by eating the bread and drinking the wine during the Passover memorial service) had resulted in many church members remaining weak and ill, with some having died.

“Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord. Let a man examine himself; and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For any one who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment upon himself: That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died” (1 Cor. 11:27–30).

Paul’s precise reference and analysis in verse 30 may be difficult to discern. But what is immediately clear is that physical ills do result from spiritual problems. Some commentators think physical sickness and death were a direct result of the Corinthians’ sins in profaning the Lord’s Supper, or were a judgment from God. There is a variation on this theme, however, which could equally apply. This would involve healing—or, more precisely, the absence of it.

To investigate this possibility we should consider two “simultaneous equations” and then solve them

together. In the first equation, “the body of the Lord” (vv. 27, 29), which a Christian must discern in order to eat the bread and drink the wine in a worthy manner, is the same “body” that Peter (quoting Isaiah) said was wounded so that we could be healed. In the second equation, the profound appreciation of, and personal identification with, the sufferings and sacrifice of Jesus Christ, which are vital elements of the healing process, is also an important part of the Passover service. What emerges from the two equations is the strong suggestion that it could well have been the lack of physical healing in the church, caused by a lack of appreciation for the fact that Jesus was wounded for our healing, which was Paul’s point to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 11:30)—an admonition that should not be lost on the Church of God in any age.

Healing in the New Testament Church

In commissioning His disciples, Jesus told them they too would “heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, and cast out demons” to accompany and corroborate their preaching that “the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matthew 10:8). As Luke recorded it: “Whenever you enter a town and they receive you, eat what is set before you; heal the sick in it and say to them, The Kingdom of God has come near to you” (Lk. 10:8–9; cf. 9:2, 11).

Jesus kept His promise to His disciples. After His resurrection and the sending of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, the apostles performed astounding miracles.

“And more than ever believers were added to the Lord, multitudes both men and women, carried the sick out into the streets, and laid them on beds and pallets, so as Peter came by at least his shadow might fall on them. The people also gathered from towns around Jerusalem, bringing the sick and those afflicted with unclean spirits, and they were all healed” (Acts 5:14–16).

The healings Jesus performed were miraculous and spectacular—many in full public view. “And great crowds came to Him, bringing with them the lame, the maimed, the blind, the dumb, and many others, and they put them at His feet, and He healed them” (Mt. 15:30). Likewise, the apostles performed miracles such as the healing of the congen-

itally lame man (by Peter and John) at the gate of the Temple (Acts 3:1–11), and the healing of the congenitally crippled man (by Paul) in Lystra (Acts 14:8–11). In both cases, it was the stunning and incredible aspect of the healing—withered limbs instantly regenerated, strengthened, and made whole—that gave the apostles the opportunity to preach the gospel boldly and proclaim it loudly before large, otherwise hostile crowds.

But, as the years went on, the initial surge of spiritual power began to wane. In later decades, dedicated church members are seen sick and dying, and the days of astounding miracles of healing ended. Paul talks about some in the church having “the gifts of healing” (1 Cor. 12:9), yet “healers” are mentioned behind apostles, prophets, teachers, and workers of miracles in verses 28–30, and verse 10 seems to indicate those at the higher levels of responsibility in the Church did not necessarily have the gifts of healing. Paul did not exercise such a gift for Timothy, for instance, but told him to take “a little wine” for his “oft infirmities.”

During the time of Jesus and the apostles, there were several major healing miracles. Why are there fewer major healing miracles now? There are a couple reasons that have some support in Scripture. Clearly miracles were a powerful tool to spread the fame of the new Church as a place where God was working (Acts 5:16; 28:9). Providing credibility for this young Christian movement was important at the beginning. Additionally, some believe spectacular healings are now rare because there has been a decline in the faith of the ministry and the members. Jesus pondered this point when He asked, “When the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?” (Luke 18:8). Others believe that it is not part of God’s plan for His Church to grow very large (Lk. 12:32; Mt. 7:14)—that is not His purpose in this age—so God apparently withdrew His tremendous power to perform spectacular public healing. Finally, others teach that God *is* involved, and God does heal today, but because of scoffers and disbelief, people marginalize God’s involvement, for God is not acknowledged in the secularized social and humanistic environment most of us are surrounded by. As Peter said, “Scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts” (2 Pet. 3:3). This naturally undermines the very concept of God.

Overall Principles

To understand the *practical* application of healing today, several complex interrelationships (such as between faith and healing, and faith and medical procedures) need to be considered. The following points help project the proper perspective.

1. *Physical life is intrinsically temporal.*

A human lifespan is only intended to be temporary since Adam. Whether it be 969 years, seven decades, three months, or one day, each physical life will eventually come to an end. The human body was designed to die. It may come by accident; it may be by disease; or perhaps the body will just wear out. But statistics have never dropped below 100 percent.

God could preserve physical existence eternally, but He has not chosen to do so. We know of no case where He has maintained physical life indefinitely, patriarchs and prophets included. Yet God has many times chosen to extend physical life *temporarily* by healing a disease or repairing an injury.

God has healed; He does heal; He will continue to heal as long as there is physical life extant. But the reasons for doing so are never to grant physical perpetuity.

2. *Eternal spiritual life is the hope and priority of the Christian.*

Once this physical life ends, healing ceases to be a concern, since the body of the resurrection shall be a spiritual one. Healing, therefore, pertains to this life alone and is a short-term, although important, concern. One should never forget the real hope of all true Christians—both for the healthy and for the sick—is *eternal spiritual life* through the resurrection and not prolonged physical life through healing.

Furthermore, one’s ultimate reward is neither determined nor affected by whether he was or was not healed during his physical lifetime. The fact that we can know by the written record of God’s Word that Jesus Christ performed the most amazing and incredible healings during His ministry, and that those healings manifested God’s power through Him, should give us great confidence. It is through our faith in the reality of Jesus’ healings that we can be assured, through this same power, that God has promised to forgive us our sins, heal our minds, and, ultimately, resurrect our bodies from the dead.

3. *Healing is not an indicator of righteousness;*

nor is it a test of spirituality.

Even the most righteous and most spiritual eventually die of something physical. Healing is an example of God's mercy, a product of God's wisdom. When He chooses to intervene and heal, we should be grateful. When He does not, we should not necessarily assume lack of faith, unrighteousness, insufficient spirituality, and/or abandonment. In Acts 3:1–8, God healed, through Peter and John, a man who had *no idea* he was about to be healed; he desired money, and was totally shocked when healed. Surely the healing of this man wasn't indicative of his righteousness or spirituality.

God sometimes heals the new convert and the spiritually immature, while He may withhold it from the mature Christian. And we shall all, regardless of our spirituality, eventually die of some physical condition that God does not correct and heal. If healing had been an indicator of righteousness or a test of spirituality in the case of the apostle Paul, his thorn in the flesh would not have remained unhealed.

4. Faith is not the sole criterion for determining whether a person shall be healed.

One main prerequisite God requires for healing is the faith that God does exist and can heal us of our illnesses (Mt. 9:28–29). One must not forget that the people whom Jesus healed during His earthly ministry had, for the most part, already heard numerous accounts from far and wide of His miraculous intervention in other people's lives to heal them. It would not require much effort on their part to believe Christ could—and, indeed, would—heal them. This means that those whom Jesus healed by no means had to possess great faith—very possibly it was just the opposite. As Jesus Himself said, “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe” (Jn. 20:29).

The Bible also shows that other factors, at times known only to God, enter into His decision regarding whether, when, why, and how to heal the sick. God may heal to show mercy (Lk. 17:13), to express love, to encourage the spiritually weak, to reinforce faith, as a witness of the gospel, etc. Furthermore, the object of God's purpose may not always be the sick person himself: God sometimes heals for reasons other than solely to restore someone to health (e.g., as a witness to those who see the sick person healed, etc.).

God is intensely concerned with an individual's

mind and heart—attitudes that are always obvious to God, though often not apparent to others. In the matter of healing, it may be one's attitude as much as one's faith that may influence what God will do. “But this is the man to whom I will look, he that is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my word” (Is. 66:2). Anyone seeking to be healed, to show others his righteousness or favor with God, or who may desire vindication of his position, or craves recognition of his spirituality, will be sadly and sorrowfully disappointed.

The New Testament refers to “gifts of healing” (1 Cor. 12:9, 30), which apparently differed from the normal function of elders anointing the sick. Only a few had this unusual gift of healing; it was not the possession of everyone. In the church today, we see no evidence of such a gift having been bestowed on any individual, certainly not as a permanent thing. Perhaps God will give this gift in the future, but He has yet to do so.

Since the Church recognizes these individual circumstances, it teaches there is no way of knowing in advance whether any particular person will be supernaturally healed—unless God provides such knowledge, as he sometimes does in Scripture (2 Kings 5:10; Acts 3:6). Similarly, the Church teaches with equal vigor that its ministry must not attempt to influence the person in any way regarding what type of action he should take for his health other than recommending each person seek the most professionally competent specialists available for consultation or procedure. Certainly we can go to medical sources and take advantage of the scientific advances they have to offer, with the full confidence this positive act on our part in no way interferes with God's ability to heal supernaturally, should that prove to be His will.

5. The relationship between healing and faith is complex, necessitating an understanding of the whole Bible and current, practical experience.

The numerous healings of Jesus Christ show the clear, active involvement of the faith of the individual (Mt. 9:22; Mk. 9:23; Lk. 8:48–50). Yet, the man healed in Acts 3 obviously had no faith whatsoever but was completely healed nonetheless. Likewise, the slave of the centurion was healed because of the centurion's faith—the slave himself probably did not realize why he suddenly got better (Mt. 8:5–13).

The Bible shows that there are different “kinds” of faith, or at least different levels of faith. There is

a faith all Christians are required to have for salvation, but this is not necessarily the same needed for healing. Jesus said if we had enough faith we could literally move mountains (Mt. 17:20). Yet no living Christian we know has had such faith. It is impossible to “work up” the faith involved in healing. Only God can supply this faith. It is *His* sole responsibility, and *if* an actual healing occurs, it must never be viewed as a straightforward indication of an individual’s righteousness, spirituality, or favor with God. On the other hand, it is our responsibility to yield to God and His Spirit so we may grow in this God-given faith. We should beseech God to do what the apostles asked of Jesus in Luke 17:5, “Increase our faith.”

Faith is the belief that God shall heal. But our years of experience, going through our own trials and empathizing with the trials of others, sometimes adds enormous complexities to faith. Knowledge itself—and all human knowledge is partial—can sometimes militate against faith. Faith cannot be faked, and with the many demands and multifarious distractions impacting the Christian, faith may just not be there. The examples of faith in the New Testament seem simple. These people did not have time to develop the faith we think is necessary—they just immediately believed and were healed. Maybe there is a lesson here.

6. *The lack of faith is not sin, nor is the lack of healing a sin; healing is rather a special benefit from God, which is neither commanded nor required.*

Healing is a special benefit from God—a gift from our Father in heaven through Jesus Christ. But healing is not a part of God’s spiritual-moral law, and as such, is neither commanded nor required by God. Consequently, it cannot be a sin if one is not healed. The fact that one person decides to seek anointing for the healing of a physical condition while another, suffering from the same condition, does not should not be taken to mean the first person is righteous or the second person is unrighteous. It just means the individual who asks for anointing is simply seeking this special benefit from God.

Everyone, in some manner, lacks faith. This is not an indictment; it’s simply an admission we are all human. How many have the faith to move mountains! Yet no Christian feels spiritually inferior because he cannot do so. The same equally applies to healing.

Sometimes the misconception occurs that if something did not happen as hoped it was due to lack of faith. As a blanket assumption, this is untrue. What is faith? It is total *belief*. But even *absolute* belief in something contrary to God’s will won’t bring it about. God *may* honor faith or belief in something not contrary to His will. Conversely, He will not honor a request contrary to His will, *no matter how much faith* the requester has (for example, the death of David’s and Bathsheba’s first child). Jesus Christ—our perfect example of faith—requested the cup of suffering and death be taken from Him. It was not removed—not because He lacked faith, but rather, because God ordained it otherwise.

A person can have “absolute faith” when he asks for healing and still be denied it, because God in His wisdom may think it is better for that person not to be healed—He is the sole judge of that. Healing is not just a matter of faith—it is also a matter of mercy. God said, “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion” (Rom. 9:15, citing Ex. 33:19). Healing is an extension of God’s *mercy*; it is not an absolute promise according to one’s faith. Faith usually does—but does not forcibly have to—have something to do with it.

7. *Faith must not be confused with desires, fears, or pressures.*

A person’s faith—even one’s own faith—is difficult to assess. It is not “godly” or “spiritual” for a person to overestimate his own faith, and then make drastic decisions based on this misjudgment. “Hoping” or “wishing” to be healed is NOT the same as having the actual faith God must give to *really* be healed. *Neglect* is not faith; neither is fear of doctors and hospitals.

It is natural—although surely not wise—for humans to delay undergoing a medical diagnosis to determine the cause, nature, or extent of an illness because they *fear* what might be learned. Some even confuse this fear of diagnosis—the unwillingness to face the reality of their condition—with faith. Fear and faith are not equal; they are opposites. For some it is a fear of the unknown; for others it may be the fear of knowing, which might prevent them from having the courage to face it. But acting based on fear, and convincing yourself that is faith, is brutal self-deception which can yield unhealthy physical and/or spiritual results.

Similarly, it is simple to confuse faith with stubbornness or pride. Peer pressure can also loom as a powerful force, imposing itself as a surrogate for faith, inhibiting the individual from doing what should be done. Likewise, for some to suffer rather than seek relief can fulfill certain psychological needs. Having a martyr complex—enjoying watching others watching you languish—is far from the simple faith of those Christ healed. Dying in stubbornness or pride, continuing to suffer in order to uphold one's own self-righteousness or self-image, is just another manifestation of human nature. Thus, it is possible for a person to neglect medical help because of subconscious factors or vanity, while convincing himself (and/or trying to convince others) it is because of faith and spirituality.

A Christian must walk in continual faith. This faith is demonstrated in many ways. If God allows a person to die, this may be a demonstration of faith. But, if one can live many long and useful years in God's service through an operation, rather than be debilitated by disease or even die in agony, that cannot be condemned as a lack of faith. To refuse the operation may be only fear, peer pressure, neglect, or ignorance—not faith.

It is likely that God would heal more people, if more people had more faith to be healed. One of the biggest factors blocking a person from receiving more faith is his own erroneous belief he already has enough faith when he does not. As previously stated, it is not enough to “think” or “hope” one has the proper faith, or “wish” that he had it. One reason people are not healed is because they do not have the appropriate faith. This does not mean they should pretend to have this faith. For a person not to acknowledge his lack of faith in this area would be folly.

8. *Healing and faith are private matters between a person and God.*

Anointing for sickness is a solemn ceremony. It is an expression of the faith of Jesus Christ and an affirmation of our faith in Him—the recognition of God's sovereignty over our life and well-being. It is thus a very personal thing between the individual and God, similar to prayer, though the minister is an important part of the process. No one should take upon himself the role of spiritual judge over another's actions in this regard. To do so is to usurp that person's God-given right of free moral agency. Therefore, any reasonable request for anointing

should be honored, regardless of the illness or affliction and regardless of whether the person is consulting a physician or what treatment they may be undergoing.

On the other hand, some people's requests for anointing border on superstition. To anoint for every sniffle or mild ache is a mockery of divine healing and Christ's suffering. There is an extremely important caution here. A minister cannot put himself in the position of a medical diagnostician and refuse to anoint because he regards the person's illness as “minor” or “not life-threatening.” What at first may appear to be the most insignificant symptoms can later turn out to have been early manifestations of a serious illness. More than one person has died of pneumonia, which started out as a cold, or cancer of the colon, which in earlier stages seemed only a minor digestive problem. Hence, although the minister himself should preach publicly about the solemnity of anointing and about taking Christ's sacrifice seriously, he should nonetheless respect the judgment of the sick person who feels he needs anointing.

9. *It is neither possible nor profitable to determine why God has or has not healed an individual.*

One can seldom say with certainty why a person has or has not been healed. To conclude one person was healed because of his spiritual uprightness is no more accurate than to conclude another was not healed because of his spiritual inadequacy. The biblical example of Paul and others negates such reasoning and renders any such exercise fruitless. Healing may relate to any number of factors—the person himself, his immediate family, his close friends, his wider acquaintances, the minister involved, the timing, the circumstances, etc. —and it is pointless to try to discern why something did or did not happen with respect to healing. The additional uncertainty of not knowing what “the gifts of healing” (1 Cor. 12:9) were and how they worked—and how they may apply today—adds further complexity to our understanding of the application of healing.

Since all must eventually die, it is inevitable many will suffer from incurable diseases. If the best physical knowledge cannot help and God chooses not to intervene, then “blessed are the dead who die in the Lord.” If that is the way God allows one to serve, so be it—perhaps, ultimately, that is the real

test of faith—to die confidently in Christ, entrusting Him with the life He gave us. Death may in some cases be a greater sign of faith than life and healing. Nevertheless, one should not prejudge their condition by assuming you should die, thereby neglecting proper medical aid as a consequence. If God’s will is for a person to die, it should be in spite of his best efforts to recover, not because of his stubbornness to avoid professional healthcare. God chooses who His martyrs will be; we cannot and must not make this decision for ourselves. Martyrs did not volunteer.

It is both offensive and inaccurate to say that one who is not supernaturally healed (or who seeks medical aid) is a “weak Christian.” He may have weak faith, but that does not mean he is a weak Christian. He may be far more spiritually mature than most in the congregation. Indeed, God may not be healing him because he can take it—he has enough spiritual maturity to endure the trial.

In the final analysis, faith is only one aspect of the Christian life, and it is not even the greatest; this honor is reserved for love (1 Cor. 13:13). “If I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing” (v. 2). Conversely, a person who is weak in faith but strong in love is a far greater Christian in God’s sight.

10. *It is entirely within biblical principles and common sense to seek competent medical help and still rely on God for healing at the same time. Healing through faith in God and the modern health sciences is not a contradiction or a combination of opposites. Instead, what God can do for man as a special blessing should work together with what man can technologically do for himself.*

God *has* healed; God *does* heal; God *shall* heal. There are no limitations on God’s ability to heal any and all sickness and bodily defects—supernaturally, miraculously, completely. But does this mean a Christian has no responsibility to help himself if he becomes ill or injured?

Biblical examples and common sense teach us God expects human beings to do what they can to help themselves. Just as little children depend on their parents, we as Christians must depend on God for certain things. But God also expects us to grow and mature. If we can stand on our own feet, we should. If we can do something for ourselves, we are derelict in our responsibility if we do not. God’s Church has taught this for years.

If a person has a badly decayed tooth, he *should* have it repaired or removed. This in no way usurps God’s power of divine healing. If one has a headache, he might take a painkiller. If one has a broken bone or an open wound, he *should* have it set or sewn as required. These are physical measures that can and should be used. They are not an affront to God our Healer; nor do they contradict faith.

In fact, asking God to supernaturally do for us what we can naturally do for ourselves may begin to undermine the vital representational analogy between healing and the forgiveness of sin, conversion, and the resurrection from the dead (since no human being can ever do any part of the latter). In Matthew 4:5–7, it was Satan who tempted Jesus by setting Him on the pinnacle of the Temple, challenging Him to throw Himself down so that God would save Him. Jesus’ answer was, “You shall not tempt the Lord your God” (verse 7). What is tempting God? Is it trying to entice God into a position where He “must” do something “good” to “save” us? If so, could we ever, though being sincere, put ourselves into a position of tempting God by asking Him to do for us what we can and should do for ourselves?

Only God can “heal”—if we define “healing” as a miraculous, supernatural removal of an affliction or illness. Physicians are only mortal men and can only work with the laws God designed to function in the human body. Medical science can work to speed, enhance, or aid recovery. As such, the roles of God and man do not conflict; in fact, they can complement each other. In the same manner that healing is not a test of righteousness, so also is going or not going to a physician a test of righteousness. Going to a physician neither shows a lack of faith in God’s ability to heal nor prevents God from performing a miracle. Faith in God and scientific confidence in man are not in conflict.

Faith in God is a matter of the heart between a person and God. It is entirely possible to receive medical help—and have a positive trust in that technological help—without having this trust or confidence supersede or negate one’s faith in God. However, it’s also possible to have no faith in God and superstitious-like faith in man’s scientific knowledge. But, in either case, the technical utilization of modern medical science is not the factor that must decide where one’s faith is. Faith is fully

determined by the person's attitude in his private relationship with God.

Luke 8:43–48 records the story of “a woman having an issue of blood twelve years, which had spent all her living upon physicians, neither could be healed of any....” Note that Jesus in no way upbraided the woman for having gone to the physicians. Furthermore, and even more relevant, He did *not withhold* healing from her because of it—even though, it appears, she came to Him as a last resort. Indeed, Jesus said she *did* have faith to be healed (v. 48). Thus, this verse serves as an example of one who had gone constantly to physicians and yet *did have faith* to be healed. Certainly one could not immediately conclude she was weak in faith because she had used the medical services of her time. Also, this is a commentary on the state of medicine *at that time*, not here and now. Very possibly, a similar problem could be successfully treated today.

There is no reason why the judicious use of physical methods should interfere with either one's faith or the ability and desire of God to heal. Faith says God can heal; it is not a guarantee that God shall heal in every individual situation. It is surely not a sign of faith to neglect appropriate physical methods, which can cure a disease, slow an illness, or relieve suffering. It is also not a sign of faith to seek obscure second-class treatment when competent first-class health care is readily available.

The scientific and technological progress of the health sciences has been remarkable, especially over the last few decades, with increasing sophistication and effectiveness of technique, combined with a decreasing incidence of complications and side effects. For such achievements man should give God the credit; for it was God who created the human mind, empowering it with the creative brilliance to constantly attain to new heights of achievement in the physical world.

The Church is not in the health business. Consequently, it is not the Church's responsibility to endorse or condemn any particular treatment or procedure. Each individual has the same responsibility to examine alternative proposals, and seek and evaluate advice from several professional sources, before making a decision in a serious health matter.

Faith is demonstrated in various ways. If one can live many long and useful years in God's service

through an operation, rather than wasting those years by suffering in agony, how can that be condemned as lack of faith? To have the operation may indicate greater commitment to God, because one believes in the importance of service to His Church. To refuse the operation may only be the unintended neglect of one's Christian responsibility to God and His work.

James wrote that “faith without works is dead.” This applies to all aspects of the Christian life including health maintenance, health care, disease prevention, regular check-ups by a qualified doctor, and healing and/or medical procedures in times of illness or injury. One should always consider the long-range implications for oneself and one's family in these areas by seeking experienced professional counsel and by making wise, sound-minded decisions. Christians should avail themselves of the best health care man can provide and, at the same time, ask God to supernaturally supply what man cannot. This could also include the sick person asking God to bless the skill of the doctor in his diagnosis and treatment (much as God inspired the craftsmen who built the Ark of the Covenant and the Tabernacle, and, later, the Temple; see Ex. 31:3ff; 35:31; 36:1–2; 1 Kings 7:14).

Faith in God for healing and the sensible, sagacious use of the most modern medical/health procedures do not clash. They can, indeed, work together in harmony. The human personality is a unified whole composed of physical, mental and spiritual elements, and each one must be functioning as effectively as possible for the whole person to be completely healthy. In recent years, as a matter of interest, there has been increasing recognition among large segments of the medical profession that they should focus their attention as much on the maintenance of good health and the *prevention* of disease as they have on the treatment of disease. An illustration of this is the increasing use of the term “health sciences” instead of “medical sciences.” Another reflection of this trend is many doctors have come to appreciate certain spiritual factors, especially faith and prayer—and how they can play a significant role in the recovery of patients.

Christians should appreciate *both* the special blessing of healing that God offers to them and the sophisticated techniques man has developed to diagnose and cure illnesses. Healing through faith in God and scientific medicine should never be arti-

ficially opposed to one another but, rather, should symbiotically reinforce one another to bring the greatest benefits to human beings.

11. *Physical procedures cannot be evaluated based on spiritual criteria; all routine health maintenance, as well as special treatment for illness or injury, should be the best available.*

God's miraculous intervention to heal is spiritual; healing is God's prerogative. What we do for ourselves is physical, a means of aiding and complementing the natural bodily processes in healing the body. God does expect us to do what we can for ourselves.

No physical procedure is intrinsically more "righteous" or "spiritual" than any other, though one may well be more effective and have fewer side effects than another. Surgical interventions, pharmacological prescriptions, and other medical procedures (whether diagnostic, preventive, or curative) must be evaluated on their own merits and their own terms.

There should be no hair-splitting between different physical treatments as far as spirituality is concerned. Such would be contrary to the implications of the Bible, the teachings of the Church, logic, and plain common sense. One physical method is not godlier than another; one physical method is not necessarily more in harmony with the Bible than another. Physical healing—of any and every sort—must be distinguished from divine, miraculous, supernatural healing.

Stitching together an open gash in one's arm is just as physical as open-heart surgery—both involve human intervention to aid the body's normal regenerative processes in restoring the cellular tissue. Special diets and supplements to fight cancer are just as physical as surgery, radiation, and chemotherapy. To have a broken bone set is physical; to take a painkiller is physical; to fast for health reasons is physical. Mega-vitamins, rosehip tea, wine, and oil are all just as physical—and just as nonspiritual—as penicillin, vaccinations, cataract removal, and appendectomies. To extract a seriously decayed tooth does not differ in kind from excising a malignant tumor or a diseased appendix—both involve professional competence to remove a damaged part of the body before its continued deterioration causes worse complications, such as the spreading of infection. The efficacy of different physical treatments is evaluated by their results, not

by their degree of spirituality. One may be *physically* preferable—one drug may be more beneficial with fewer side effects than another—but one is surely not spiritually better in God's sight. Therefore, if a person chooses to do something physical about a bodily condition, his concern should not be about which method is more "spiritual." Rather, his sole concern should be to find out what is the best method with the fewest side effects.

In evaluating physical procedures in matters of health, the Christian is encouraged to emphasize proper health *maintenance* and disease *prevention*. There are minimum expenses, little inconvenience, and no side effects to a balanced program of health care. The appropriate use of nutrition, for example, should always be part of a health-maintenance and disease-prevention program. Eating healthful foods in a balanced diet and avoiding excess sugars and starches are both much easier and more enjoyable to do than later being forced to undergo medical treatment.

Proper health care should include periodic physical examinations for all Christians and their families by a qualified medical doctor. Care should be taken to select the most able and proficient doctor available as the family physician. He or she should have a genuine interest and concern about the health of all members of the family. The family doctor should generally recommend eminently qualified specialists for particular problems.

When one seeks professional medical help, one should select the most competent within one's means. There are different specialties and different degrees of competency among individual practitioners just as in any profession.

This will also help people avoid falling prey to quackery and faddism. If a person recognizes the best scientific knowledge should be sought, and this is not associated with lacking of faith, he will naturally want the best he can afford for himself and his family. He will be sound-minded in matters of health, not seeking physically "miraculous" or unorthodox "cures" under the false assumption they are somehow more righteous than the procedures of a knowledgeable specialist; and he will save both his money and his health in the process.

Ministerial Responsibility

What is the minister's role in matters of health

and healing? A minister of God is a professional in spiritual understanding; he should be ready to fully explain the purpose of healing—what it is and what it represents—to all who desire to know. Furthermore, the minister is the expert in counselling and serving the congregation. But he is not necessarily, by virtue of ordination, a medical or nutritional expert. Consequently, he should faithfully teach what the Bible says about health and healing, and should also encourage the congregation to seek the best professional advice available when needed. The minister must remain neutral on medical matters. Subtle differences can be dangerous. He cannot tell one person he “should” take vitamins, get his broken bone set, or have a decayed tooth extracted, and then tell another person “it’s up to you” whether to take antibiotic drugs, get an internal injury repaired or have a diseased appendix removed. The phrase “It is not wrong” can also convey a negative implication, suggesting, in effect, that, “although it is not wrong, it is spiritually not the best.” Such would subtly assign fallacious levels of righteousness to physical procedures when all are in fact the same in God’s sight.

The minister is the spiritual leader of the congregation and must take great care not to abuse this position of spiritual influence, trust, and respect. He must be as aware of his physical limitations as he is of his spiritual responsibilities. The minister must operate on the highest level of integrity; his realm is the spiritual, and this is where he must give counsel and advice. Along these lines, one of his more important duties is to assure that members of the

congregation are not judging each other and not comparing themselves among each other with respect to health procedures and healing. He can accomplish this most effectively by emphasizing God’s positive instructions on these matters and following up His teachings with encouragement and exhortation.

Summary

God can and does heal in ways and manners and at times and for reasons that He determines for Himself—He is God. As such, divine healing is totally beyond the scope of medical science; therefore, doing what we can in seeking and utilizing the most competent professional assistance in times of illness or injury will not inhibit God from healing us, but can contribute to the efficacious restoration of full health. Divine healing is a miraculous intervention by the Creator of the universe in our lives; it is a special blessing from God given according to His mercy and our faith, and represents God’s power through Jesus Christ to forgive our sins, cleanse our minds, and ultimately, establish the Kingdom of God on earth and resurrect our bodies from the dead, transforming the “natural body” into an immortal “spiritual body” (1 Cor. 15:44, 48–50, 53).

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