

THE UPWARD CALL

*Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet;
but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead,
I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God
IN CHRIST JESUS.*

(Philippians 3:13-14 NASB)

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Spiritual Healing of the Body of Christ

The subject of the gifts of healing brings out the extremes of God's people. On one end are the **cessationists** that believe the gift of healing (along with other gifts) no longer exists, having ceased with the early-church apostles of the Lord. Today, God heals only as He chooses to do so; it is entirely up to God and not man nor his faith. On the other end are the **continuationists** that believe all the gifts of the early church, especially as mentioned by Paul in 1 Corinthians 12-14, have continued on and are presently still active to the point that we must demand and expect full healing of all infirmities, based on scripture, faith, sowing seeds, and, in some cases, formulas conjured up by the mind of men. According to some in this camp, the gift of healing has not only continued but is also getting stronger and more frequent. Whether this in fact is happening is left to the reader. Of course, each camp has their pet verses to support their position or build their case. This is not unusual, for every camp of thought does this, and they usually beat up one another with scripture. Personally, I prefer to stay off this ground.

Whether or not the gift of healing is operative today, one thing I know is that **God heals**. My wife and I have personally experienced God's healing power. On one level, we could leave it at this and seek no further explanation other than God loves us and occasionally displays His love through healing. However, on another level, it seems to me the issue is not whether individuals are given the gift of healing, but how we, as the Body of Christ, approach infirmities in one another. Inevitably, the question comes up whenever a group of Christians meet and grow together. Eventually, someone gets sick and someone remains ill or dies, despite all the prayers, laying on of hands, anointing with oil, or prophesying that the Lord is healing. When it is all over, people are left wondering what happened. Not enough faith? Missed the Lord? Misunderstood the Lord? Was a generational curse in play? Was the soul not prospering (3 John 2); that is, did the person harbor unforgiveness, anger, hate, pride, etc. that affected the body? Or, perhaps God healed but in a hidden way. To be sure, many examples and much discussion could be entertained on this subject and the experiences that various groups have had or not had in this arena. BUT, have we overlooked or forgotten something in all this discussion? Perhaps, so!

To begin, let us be reminded that the apostle who wrote about gifts of the Spirit is the very same one who exhorts us to **combine spiritual thoughts with spiritual words** and that **the spiritual is not first, but the natural; then the spiritual** (1 Corinthians 2:13; 15:46). This must be the starting point in a quest for God's truth about healing in His Body, not about the gift of healing but the manner in which we, as individuals, and the Body of Christ, as a whole, must approach healing. In this context, the Body refers to either a local gathering of the Lord's people or the universal Body. As I pursued the question along this line, I began to see that healing on the natural level might relate to healing on the spiritual level, not only in the individual but especially in relation to the Body of Christ. Another way to state this is that an infirmity on the natural level in the individual might relate to an infirmity on the spiritual level in the corporate. Or, yet another way, an individual's infirmity might signify a Body infirmity. So, as Paul reminds us, it goes from the natural to the spiritual, and it moves from the individual member of the Body to the whole of the Body, whether local or universal.

Over the years, I have observed that the Lord's people mostly approach healing on the natural and individual level and seldom on the spiritual and Body level. When an infirmity comes upon a person, appeals go up to the Lord for natural healing of the individual, meaning the focus is on the person. **But, how often is an appeal made to the Lord to know if the infirmity signifies a spiritual condition of the Body of Christ and, if so, what?** I believe we need to ask the Lord how an individual infirmity might relate to His Body. Is there a spiritual infirmity in the Body of Christ? Is the physical infirmity in a person linked to a spiritual infirmity in the Body? Is this not the same principle that Paul gives us in relation to the Lord's Supper. **Judge the body rightly** (1 Corinthians 11:29-32).

We have been treating infirmities as individual cases of the natural realm and not as Body cases of the spiritual realm. Are we not all part of the same universal Body? Then, why not start by asking the Lord for Body discernment rather than going off on a tangent with all sorts of prayers, as if throwing mud on the wall to see what sticks. Don't presume to know. Don't presume that the Body is not sick in some way. Ask: "Lord, what is going on? How do You see this infirmity? Are You after something?" Then, proceed based on His response. This is not to imply that every infirmity relates to the Body-at-large; but why not start here?

Allow me to take some liberty with John's thoughts on good health and prospering: Beloved, I pray (desiring and wishing) that in all respects (natural and spiritual) you (the Body of Christ) may prosper and be in good health (sound in mind, thought, and body; be healthy; good spiritual health of the Body), just as your soul(s) (the experiences of the natural bodies of your individual members) prospers (3 John 2).

We need to guard ourselves from becoming *self*-absorbed with our infirmities and get our eyes on the bigger picture. Without doubt, God uses our individual infirmities to mature and draw us into union with Him. Much good can and often does come out of infirmity, but let us seek for wholeness and good health, especially as it relates to the Body? The Body of Christ is to be built up in love, and this requires that each part contribute.

But we shall lovingly hold to the truth, and shall in all respects grow up into union with Him who is our Head, even Christ. Dependent on Him, the whole body – its various parts closely fitting and firmly adhering to one another – grows by the aid of every contributory link, with power proportioned to the need of each individual part, so as to build itself up in a spirit of love. (Ephesians 4:15-16 WNT)

Here is a suggestion. When we have an infirmity, the first and most obvious thing to do is seek the Lord. Consider Asa who had a severe disease in his feet, **yet even in his disease he did not seek the Lord, but the physicians**, and he died (2 Chronicles 16:12). So, before we even go to our brethren in Christ, we need to seek the Lord. Next, rather than focusing on the condition and crying out for healing of it, let us ask the Lord how this relates to His Body. Is there a greater spiritual issue in play with our infirmity that signifies a spiritual condition (affliction, infirmity, lack, leaven, error, etc.) in the Body of Christ? If the Lord reveals that the infirmity is related to a spiritual condition in the Body, then pray along this line for healing of the Body of Christ. If led to do so, share it with other brethren so they can join in. What a privilege! Please understand that this is not implying we ignore our brethren or doctors, or that this is some sort of formula to success. No; it is not! It is simply a suggestion to progress from the natural to the spiritual, and to get our focus off self-absorption and onto Christ-union.

Each of us can follow this approach, but what if someone comes into our assembly that has not done this and is solely focused on self? Collectively, we follow the same line, and not presume by throwing prayers at the ceiling, hoping something works. We must seek the Lord to know how to pray. What is His insight, His heart, His mind?

What might this look like? If one is naturally blind (or; with vision problems) or deaf (or; with hearing problems), is the Lord saying His Body needs spiritual sight and spiritual hearing, that is, discerning and knowing that which is spiritual, not natural? If one has a disease of the foot, is the Lord saying that the Body has lost sight of its call as a peacemaker? If one has cancer, is the Lord saying that the Body has some unspiritual growth (i.e., carnal flesh) that needs to be cut out? If one has an infirmity of the digestion system, is the Lord saying that the Body is not properly digesting the Word of God and eliminating the waste of error, false teaching, even leaven? If one has a hip out of joint, is the Lord saying that His Body, much like Jacob experienced, needs to know that *God rules*, not man? If one has a back out of alignment and cannot stand, is the Lord saying that the Body is not properly standing and withstanding? And so, individual infirmities might be a sign of something the Lord is bringing to light about His Body, and He is calling for spiritual discerning and healing.

Let us get our spiritual priorities in order. Isn't it time for the true Body of Christ to be spiritually sound and strong and not weighed down with spiritual infirmities that manifest in the physical realm? Let us lay aside our self-absorption. We are all part of the Body, so let us discern what the Lord is saying about His Body in this hour. Let us be a sign. Perhaps, just perhaps, more physical healings of individuals will occur, signifying spiritual healing of the Body of Christ. Let us judge the Body rightly. Let us get back on track – *spiritual to spiritual!*