

*Your message burns in my heart and bones, and I cannot keep silent.* (Jeremiah 20:9)

*The testimony of JESUS is the spirit of the prophecy.* (Revelation 19:10c)

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### ***Spiritual Infirmary in the Body of Christ***

In light of the last insight, there is another matter along the lines of suffering I want to share that has to do with our relationship to the Body of Christ and *infirmary*<sup>1</sup> in the Body.<sup>2</sup>

I begin with two personal experiences.

First, in the night of February 20, 2018, I found myself singing a well-known song in my sleep—*Blessed Assurance, Jesus is Mine*<sup>3</sup>. Instantly, without realizing why, I associated this with Billy Graham. Thirty hours later, on February 21, 2018, Billy Graham died. Doing some research, I discovered that this song was sung at his crusades.

Second, during the early morning hours of February 22, 2012, in my sleep, several things were revealed to me. The most notable was a warning about deception and being on guard against the error of unprincipled men (2 Peter 3:18). During this same time, I also developed a dull shoulder pain that I did not initially connect to anything particular. However, later, I realized that a shoulder bears burdens and this is what was placed upon me—a burden about deception. Initially, there was no context to the burden; this came later that evening.

At the time, we had been meeting with a group that is well known in prophetic circles. They were conducting training sessions on how to prophesy and how to become a prophet. Frankly, I found the training way off the mark. In my book, the only “how to” is to be taught by the Spirit of the Lord and to be called of the Lord. Men don’t make prophets, only the Lord does. (Another topic entirely.)

Well, during the evening of the 22<sup>nd</sup>, with the dull shoulder pain persisting, I attended one of their sessions, during which the leader prophesied that someone in the meeting had a shoulder pain. Obviously, this caught my attention. Strangely, the leader never asked if anyone fit the bill; instead, he closed out the session. This was a teachable moment, for the Lord revealed to me that the shoulder pain (i.e., the burden placed upon me) had to

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<sup>1</sup> The word *infirmary* is used in the broadest sense, to include bodily illnesses, sicknesses, diseases, weaknesses, aches and pains, imperfections, and moral or spiritual weaknesses and defects.

<sup>2</sup> The Body (of Christ) is capitalized to distinguish the corporate, spiritual nature of Christ’s Body (both locally and universally) from that of the individual believer’s physical body.

<sup>3</sup> Singing in my sleep is very unusual for me. Based on past experience, when it occurs, there is a message in it.

do with deception that had taken root in this local Body. In other words, the pain, which went away after the meeting, was not about my body; rather, it was about a condition in the local Body. It was what could be called a *suffering for the Body* to reveal a *spiritual infirmity in the Body*. To be clear, in this case, the level of physical suffering was minimal on my part. The shoulder pain was simply the Lord's way of drawing attention to a deception.

The reason for sharing these two seemingly different experiences is to highlight that there is one Body and we who are in Christ are all connected to one another in the same Spirit<sup>4</sup>. This is why I could find myself connected to the passing of a very famous preacher, whose preaching had no direct impact on me, while also being connected to a local assembly and a deception in its midst. This goes along with Paul's heart for the oneness of the Body of Christ.

And further, whether one member is continuing to experience the effect of something, or constantly undergoes suffering, all the members continually experience the effect or the suffering together with [it]; or if a member is being constantly glorified or progressively receiving a good reputation, all the members are continuously rejoicing together with [it]. (1 Corinthians 12:26 JM-NT)

In Paul's context, he was referring to the Body in Corinth; however, spiritually, this can extend well beyond locality to the more universal Body. For the moment, let's remain with the local Body and physical infirmities.

Paul also exhorted the saints in Corinth to **judge the body rightly** in relation to the Lord's Supper (1 Corinthians 11:29-32).

Years ago, we met with a group that broke bread every Sunday (i.e., Lord's Supper). I recall it being said, based on Paul's exhortation to judge the body, that we needed to examine ourselves to be sure we didn't take the "table" in an unworthy manner. Maybe I missed the message, but, in my recollection, it seemed like we were being exhorted to deal primarily with sin in our lives. I don't recall any exhortation that we, as a company of believers, needed to examine our collective manner as part of the Body of Christ. If we had, we might have avoided some divisive issues, as well as physical infirmities that cropped up as time went on. The heart of the matter is how we treat one another.

The context of Paul's exhortation to the Corinthians dealt with how they were treating one another in approaching the Lord's Supper. Read it and you will see. So when he said to judge the body rightly, he was telling them to assess how they acted as a group toward one

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<sup>4</sup> The word *spirit* is capitalized to emphasize the one *Spirit of God* in the one *Body of Christ*.

another. ***For this reason, many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep*** (1 Corinthians 11:30). To be sure, there was a call to judge one's individual manner, but it was much more than this—it had to do with the life of the local Body as a whole.

This goes to the heart of how a group of Christians that are meeting together should approach serious infirmities in the local Body. It's not unusual when one is sick that the group prays for healing, lays on hands, anoints with oil, even prophesies that the Lord is healing, and yet, the person either remains ill or dies. We have witnessed this on several occasions. In fact, there was a short season where there were over a dozen people who had cancer and many died from it. Regardless of the outcome, when it is all over, people either move on in life, as if not to question it, or they are left wondering what happened. Not enough faith? Missed the Lord? Misunderstood the Lord? Was something else in play—a generational curse; the soul not prospering (3 John 2) due to harboring unforgiveness, anger, hate, pride, etc.? Or, perhaps God healed but in a hidden way. Undoubtedly, many examples and much discussion could be centered on this subject and the experiences that various groups have had or not had in this arena.

Two points: First, I submit that, at its core, prayer about specific matters, whether of a physical or spiritual nature, is about coming into the counsel of the Lord, seeking the mind of Christ in the matter. It is not about throwing a lot of words up in the air, as if slinging mud on the wall to see what sticks. Second, to the point being made, the counsel of the Lord might reveal a spiritual component to a physical infirmity, meaning it might relate to behavior in the local assembly. After all, Paul exhorted the same saints to **combine spiritual (*thoughts, things*) with spiritual (*words*)** and that **the spiritual is not first, but the natural; then the spiritual** (1 Corinthians 2:13; 15:46).

It's important to discern that our connectedness to one another can be both natural and spiritual and that our deportment to one another matters. To some, this might seem so fundamental as to be kindergarten material. But it isn't; it is vital. And, this applies to whether we are or are not regularly gathering with saints in an organized way. This is said for those of us who find ourselves mostly isolated from anything mainstream, finding fellowship where we can through more casual acquaintances or other means. Either way, we are all spiritually joined together in the one Body and the one Spirit. Whether in organized or occasional casual fellowship or in isolation, without recognizing it, we might (but not always) experience infirmities related to the Body.

Mind you; these infirmities don't have to be severe; they can be momentary afflictions like pains, similar to what I experienced with a shoulder pain, signifying a burden placed on me about deception. On the other hand, it is clear that some saints have been called into lifelong infirmities for the Body of Christ, literally as signs.

One of the greatest failures among the Lord's people is not recognizing and holding to our oneness in the Body. Generally speaking, our lack of oneness is probably at the heart of far more infirmities than we realize<sup>5</sup>. For this reason, I believe the anointing that the Lord has put on my heart is essential to the Body of Christ rising up in oneness in these days of darkness. The future of humanity is linked to this anointing and oneness, and this is from the word of the Lord.

Now, let's pivot to healing, specifically the **gift of healing**, a subject that has divided some of God's people into two camps. The **cessationist** camp believes 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 of the spectrum, the **continuationist** camp believes 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.

Regardless of the gift of healing being operative or not today, one thing we know is that **God heals**. My wife and I have personally experienced God's healing power; my wife's healing was truly by the marvelous and miraculous grace and love of God.

As I observed ministries centered on the gift of healing, I began to notice that some of them seemed to focus on one type or another of healings, such as the healing of deafness or blindness. Putting aside a question of legitimacy of these ministries and whether people were actually healed or not, I began to wonder why there seemed to be so many people appearing at these healing sessions with infirmities of one type or another, such as blindness or deafness or structural weaknesses (e.g., of the spine). Were people more desperate to be free from these types, or was there something else in play, perhaps pointing to specific spiritual infirmities in the Body?

For example: If one is naturally blind (or: with vision problems) or deaf (or: with hearing problems), is it an indication that the Body needs spiritual sight and spiritual hearing—that

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<sup>5</sup> Jesus began His ministry proclaiming the good news of the Kingdom of the Heavens, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness among the people (Matthew 4:23). In John 17, Jesus prayed for the oneness of His Body. Based on this, there is an apparent relationship between the Kingdom of God, the oneness of the Body of Christ, and healing of infirmities within the Body.

is, discerning and knowing that which is spiritual, not natural? If one has a disease of the foot, is it an indication that the Body has lost sight of its calling as a peacemaker, readied to announce the good news of peace? If one has cancer, is it an indication 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 it an indication that the Body is not properly digesting scripture and not eliminating the waste of error, false teaching, even leaven? If one has a hip out of joint, is it an indication 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 it an indication 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. Of course, there are many other spiritual infirmities that could be added to this list.

Interestingly, years later, I shared this thought with a small group of brethren. They couldn't grasp the spiritual concept.

To be clear, this does not mean that every infirmity indicates a spiritual infirmity, nor does it mean that we should expect every infirmity to be healed. After all, in our present world, there are many things, especially dangers, that could make us sick or kill us. Case in point is the release of a bioweapon and its aftermath. What this does mean is that we must not assume that all infirmities are strictly natural, having no spiritual meaning. We need to seek spiritual discernment to fully understand what is at stake and how best to proceed.

With this said, given all the illnesses and diseases today, our spiritual perception needs to be heightened to discern what is behind them, whether individually or corporately, whether strictly natural or with a spiritual component.

This leads back to the suggestion that some saints are led to suffer in various degrees for the Body of Christ. Apologies for the repetition but we need spiritual guidance to first discern the infirmity—if and what it means spiritually—and then to act or not act upon it as the Spirit leads. Seek the Lord! Perhaps, it is a call into intercessory prayer, or it is a call to directly exhort the local Body in question, or maybe it is a call to do nothing except suffer—you're simply living as a sign.<sup>6</sup>

A word of caution: We need to guard ourselves from becoming *self*-absorbed with our infirmities, instead setting our minds above, where Christ is. Without doubt, God uses our individual infirmities to mature and draw us into union with Him. Good can come out of

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<sup>6</sup> On several occasions, the Lord has revealed that my wife and I are living signs, meaning we are living out some spiritual matter. We weren't necessarily called to do anything except to live it out.

infirmary, 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.

Consider what John the apostle of love has to say about wholeness. I have taken the liberty of incorporating the Body into John's thought.

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).

Add to this Paul's call to be built up in love.

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)

We are all part of the Body of Christ, whether we regularly meet with a group or not, so let us discern what the Lord is saying about His Body in this hour. Let us rejoice if we are called to 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 stay on track—*spiritual to spiritual!*

Dear saints, isn't it time for the true Body of Christ to be spiritually sound and strong and not weighed down with spiritual infirmities that might be manifesting in the physical realm as a sign? The answer to all infirmities is discovered in the life of our beloved Lord Jesus who is the full embodiment of the Kingdom of God (see footnote 5).

Let us get our spiritual priorities in order and, in life, lay hold of the fact that there is one Body and one Spirit and one Anointing into which we have been called. Let us lay aside our self-absorption. **Let us be Christ-absorbed!**

We are on the cusp of the Presence of our Lord and King and He will have an anointed Body that is His complement—His complete likeness. The good news is that He will not fail to have the desire of His heart.