

# Infirmity, Healing and James 5:14-16

By Gerry Watts

Includes

Appendix: Was Jesus Ever Sick? (Page 14)

"Is anyone **infirm** among you? Let him call to him the elders of the ecclesia, and let them pray over him, rubbing him with olive oil in the name of the Lord. And the vow of faith will be saving the **faltering** one and the Lord will be **rousing** him up, and, if he should have done sins, it will be forgiven him. Then confess sins to one another and pray for one another, so that you may be **healed**."

(James 5:14-16 CV)

This is one of the foremost scriptures that is commonly used to teach that every believer in Christ should be healed of any and every sickness or disease. The line of thought usually goes like this: Jesus healed everyone, the Apostles did the same, and the same Holy Spirit of power has been given to the 'Church' of God, so, therefore, we should be doing the same thing. It is the right of every believer to be healed or better still, to not be afflicted at all. All bad stuff comes from Satan, but Jesus has conquered Satan via His death on the cross, so therefore Satan shouldn't be able to touch us to afflict us.

This all sounds very simple and straightforward, and there are elements of truth here, but there's a little bit more to God's plan and will than this. Firstly, we must remember that Jesus was uniquely commissioned by God, His Father, to be The Anointed One, the Messiah/Christ, and to operate in the power of the Holy Spirit.

"The Spirit of the Lord is on Me, on account of which He **anoints Me** to bring the evangel to the poor. He has **commissioned** Me to heal the crushed heart, to herald a pardon to captives..."

(Luke 4:18)

"...I must bring the evangel of the kingdom of God to other cities also, for I was **commissioned** for this."

(Luke 4:43)

Jesus also commissioned the Twelve Apostles to go out in His name, with the same power and authority, proclaiming that the kingdom of God was near. Paul was also commissioned to herald the kingdom of God with power and signs, but this occurred later when Christ appeared to Him in glory after His resurrection and ascension.

"Now calling together the twelve apostles, He gives them power and authority over all the demons and to be curing diseases. And He commissions them to be heralding the kingdom of God and to be healing the infirm."

(Luke 9:1-2)

The word translated *commission* is the Greek word **apostello**, from which we get the English word *apostle*. This is describing one who is officially sent out with authority. This same Greek word can also be used in a lesser sense of dispatching someone with a message. But we can clearly see that Jesus and the apostles were uniquely commissioned by God to herald the kingdom of God promised to Israel in the prophets. This heralding was accompanied by signs, miracles and powerful deeds, such as healings. Yet notice carefully here that the nearness of the kingdom of God was the reason why the powers of the Spirit were being manifested.

During the period covered by the book of Acts, the evangel of the kingdom continued to be heralded by the Apostles and the 'early Church.' Although this message was initially for the lost sheep of the house of Israel, and it was to be heralded to them first, gradually, through Paul especially, this evangel was heralded to all nations. This resulted in the gathering of local ecclesias or assemblies of believers not only in the land of Israel, but in the cities of the nations as well. All of these were under the authority of the Apostles and their apostolic teams. The power of the Lord was also evident in these ecclesias through various gifts (graces) of the Spirit being given among them.

"...yet to another the graces of healing, by the one Spirit, yet to another workings of powerful deeds...Now all these are the working of one and the same Spirit, apportioning to each one his own gift, according as He is intending...Not all have the graces of healing."

(1 Corinthians 12:9-11, 30 Free Translation based on the CV)

"For I, indeed, being absent in body, yet present in spirit, have already, as if present, thus judged the one effecting this, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ (you being gathered, and my spirit (*that is, Paul*), together with the power of the Lord Jesus)..."

(1 Corinthians 5:3-4)

It is clear from the text from 1 Corinthians 12 that every gift is given of God as He is intending, that is, as He plans it and wills it. And it is also clear that not everyone has the same gifts, whether of healing or some other gift. Paul also states that within the divine ranking of spiritual gifts, **apostles, prophets and teachers** rank the highest, in that order. The other spiritual gifts of powers, healings, helps, guidance, speaking in tongues, etc, are second to these three (1 Corinthians 12:27-28). Therefore, God ranks good, sound teaching as more important than the other gifts! Yet all these gifts are given as He decides!

These powers and signs were given to the apostles and many within the believing community, to confirm that these men were commissioned by God through Christ.

"...obtained a beginning through the speaking of the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who hear Him, God corroborating, both by signs and miracles and

by various powerful deeds and partings of Holy Spirit, **according to His will?**"

(Hebrews 2:3-4)

"Indeed, the signs of an apostle are produced among you in all endurance, besides in signs and miracles and powerful deeds."

(2 Corinthians 12:12)

Yet from a careful reading of Acts, it also becomes clear that the nearness of the kingdom fades away into the background, while Paul's ministry takes precedence. This is very important, so we shall take the time to look at this in more detail later.

When we approach this subject of powers and healing we need to keep in mind that much of what Jesus said, recorded in the 'gospels,' was said to His apostles, in light of the nearness of the kingdom. His every word is not supposed to be applied to anyone at anytime. Even some of the apostles words recorded in their letters were especially applicable to the First Century era, during the transitional time that they were in authority, while they proclaimed the nearness of the kingdom. Now many preachers and teachers today use (or more accurately, misuse) certain texts to make them apply today like some kind of magical formula or spell! The text from James that we started with is a classic example of this.

So let us take a closer look at this passage of scripture.

"Is anyone **infirm** among you? Let him call to him the elders of the ecclesia, and let them pray over him, rubbing him with olive oil in the name of the Lord. And the vow of faith will be saving the **faltering** one and the Lord will be **rousing** him up, and, if he should have done sins, it will be forgiven him. Then confess sins to one another and pray for one another, so that you may be **healed**."

(James 5:14-16 CV)

Firstly, the word translated here as *infirm* is the Greek word **astheneo**. In many versions it is translated as *sick*. Now a careful study of this word, and its variations, throughout the NT will reveal that the word itself does not mean physical sickness. It is true that this word is often used for physical infirmity or weakness caused by an illness of some kind or another, but this is not its basic meaning. Its basic meaning is **weakness or lack of strength**. It is used of the body of flesh in general.

"The spirit is indeed willing (*or eager*), but the flesh is **weak** (*infirm*)."

(Matthew 26:41 Free Translation based on CV)

"It (*the body*) is sown in **infirmity**; it is roused in power."

(1 Corinthians 15:43)

"For Christ, while we are still **infirm**, still in accord with the era, died for the sake of the irreverent."

(Romans 5:6)

It is also used in regard to a person's faith or conscience.

"Now beware lest somehow this right of yours may become a stumbling block to the **weak**...the conscience of him who is **weak**...Now in thus sinning against brethren, and beating their weak conscience, you are sinning against Christ."

(1 Corinthians 8:9-12)

"Now the **infirm in the faith** be taking to yourselves, but not for discrimination of reasonings."

(Romans 14:1)

Bearing this in mind, let us continue with James' words. The primary meaning of infirm is one who is spiritually and physically weak, but not necessarily sick. We can be weak from spiritual attack and affliction, lack of sleep or hunger, etc. It is the same as being exhausted from physically running a race! We may be weak or exhausted, but not necessarily ill.

"Is anyone **infirm** among you? Let him call to him the elders of the ecclesia, and let them pray over him, rubbing him with olive oil in the name of the Lord."

The weak one is to call the elders of the ecclesia to pray over him/her and anoint them with oil. James, the brother of Jesus, had become a prominent leader amongst the believing community of Israel in the land, and this letter was originally sent to the believers of the twelve tribes of Israel in the dispersion. So the ritual of anointing with oil was common practice amongst the Jewish believers. It is a symbol of the anointing of the Holy Spirit. The elders are the spiritual leaders of the local assembly, where ever believers may be gathered. So the weak one is to ask for prayer from spiritually mature believers.

"And the vow of faith will be saving the **faltering** one and the Lord will be **rousing** him up, and, if he should have done sins, it will be forgiven him."

The vow of faith, often translated *prayer of faith*, is referring to the elders' belief in the promise of God. It is this solemn promise of faith that saves the faltering one from their spiritual weakness. In this light, James goes on to say that the fervent prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective, and he gives Elijah as an example (5:16b-18). The Greek word translated *faltering* here is **kamno**. This particular word is used only once more in the NT in Hebrews 12:3.

"...lest you should be **faltering**, fainting in your souls."

The writer of Hebrews is saying that if we don't keep our eyes on Jesus as our Example to encourage us, then we will falter, we will lose courage and strength, fainting in our souls, when persecution and affliction comes. So in James, the use of this word again confirms the main thought of spiritual weakness or loss of strength. So the prayer of the spiritual ones will strengthen the weak and faltering one, and the Lord will rouse them up, like someone rousing from sleep.

Now it also says that if sins have been committed, then they shall be forgiven. It is true that if we are not walking in a right relationship to God or others, because of obvious sin, then this will hinder our spiritual walk. This may lead to weakness or even sickness, but experiencing weakness or sickness in itself doesn't mean that we have sinned. *If* we have sinned, then we are promised the ongoing forgiveness of God in Christ if we confess our sins. This only has reference to our spiritual walk in the Lord, because, as Paul reveals, in our standing with Christ we are fully justified from all sin! (Romans 5:1-2)

James continues,

"Then confess sins to one another and pray for one another, so that you may be **healed**."

The admitting of our mistakes to one another as believers in the Lord Jesus is a good, necessary and humbling experience. It gets things out into the open and it often helps clear things up. It is not saying that we should tell everyone about everything we've done wrong! Some things are best left between God and the individual. Nevertheless, to be open about our mistakes, especially if they are wrongs committed against another, is a good thing, as well as praying for one another. If we are to be restored or healed in our spiritual walk (and this may include physical healing) then we need to follow this path as we learn to grow in the Spirit.

It is this spiritual healing that Peter is primarily referring to when he quotes from Isaiah 53:9 concerning Christ's sufferings and sacrificial death, saying, "By Whose wounds you were healed." (1 Peter 2:24-25). This healing, achieved through Christ's death, does include physical wholeness as well as spiritual wholeness, but we will not experience this complete wholeness until Christ returns and the kingdom has truly arrived in all its fullness. Only then will we be fully delivered from our bodies of sin and death to experience the complete healing of body, soul and spirit in the power of an immortal, spiritual body. In the meantime, any healing, or even being raised from the dead, is a temporary thing. If we could truly claim the fullness of the 'Atonement' now, as many teach, then we would never die, or at the least we would experience great longevity of hundreds of years!

The kingdom that is here at present is a secret, hidden, spiritual kingdom, under the rule of an absent, invisible King. The time is soon coming though when the King shall return, and this spiritual kingdom shall manifest itself in power on the earth. **Then** we shall never die or experience sickness or even need sleep due to the power of an indestructible life!

To summarise the meaning of this passage in James that we have been considering, let me quote Isaiah 40:29-31,

"He gives strength to the **weary** and increases the power of the **weak**. Even youths grow **tired and weary**, and young men **stumble and fall**; but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint." (NIV)

This is what the text in James is primarily referring to: the renewing of spiritual strength. This may include physical weakness due to sickness, but this is not the primary thought behind this passage. It has to do with renewal and restoration from infirmity due to affliction, persecution, human frailty, endurance from trials, and in some cases, infirmity brought on by sin.

It is not supposed to be used as some kind of magical formula or incantation for healing the sick. The same goes for every other scripture that is commonly used to get God to perform a healing or miracle! There are, of course, plenty of incidents where God does heal and work miracles, but these are generally the exception rather than the rule. I want to make it absolutely clear though that I am not trying to undermine or diminish the power of God. Absolutely not! I know that God can, and does, heal people today. A number of years ago, my mother was cured of angina while she was ill in hospital. A friend and brother in the Lord and myself went to visit her and we prayed for her. Some tests were done and they found no trace of the angina, which greatly puzzled the doctors. She immediately recovered.

But what I am saying is that we need to be extremely careful of deception in these days, especially in relation to signs and miracles and healings. For further study, see the article [The Great Deception](#). I believe that a time of true revival is about to be occurring, when genuine signs and miracles and spiritual gifts will be poured out upon the Body of Christ. This will be in accord with the heralding of the evangel of the kingdom, due to the nearness of Christ's return. These gifts are greatly needed as already there is a counterfeit revival sweeping the earth that is primarily focused on false signs, powers and healings. First the soulish, and then the spiritual. First the counterfeit, then the genuine. First the flesh, then the Spirit.

We must be aware of the fact that Satan can transform himself into a messenger of light, and he can work false signs and miracles to deceive people. These signs are spiritual, in the sense that they originate from a spiritual source, even if that source is the dark forces of Satan's army. Nevertheless, these signs are not from God, but they can appear as though they are. In reality, they are rooted in the soulish, carnal nature of man, who is so easily deceived by the Adversary. So let us walk with caution in these days.

Now for us to gain a better understanding in these things and to find out what God's will is for us today in relation to miracles and healings, let us take a closer look at Paul's ministry and the change that was introduced through it.

### **The Transition and Spiritual Gifts**

(This portion can also be found in the article [The Conciliation of the World](#)).

During the Acts period, there was a transition occurring whereby the evangel of grace proclaimed by Paul became increasingly dominant. As you carefully read through the book of Acts, this becomes evident. The preaching of the evangel of the kingdom to Israel in the land (and later outside it) under the authority of the Twelve apostles slowly fades into the background. This was due to the unbelief of the majority of the nation, as their era of gracious probation grew to a close. They had rejected the Son and now they were rejecting the Holy Spirit. This blasphemy of the Spirit was an unpardonable sin for the unbelieving portion of Israel, and as a

result they cannot participate in the blessings of the age to come (Matthew 12:31-32; Mark 3:28-30; Luke 12:9-10).

Even many within the believing messianic part of the nation, those who claimed to belong to the Church, became apostate, which was clearly evidenced in their treatment of Paul in Jerusalem. The crowd wasn't too concerned about him talking about Jesus, but when he mentioned that the gospel was going to the nations, they erupted (Acts 21:17-22:24; see also Hebrews 6:4-8 & 10:26-31 in relation to the blasphemy of the Spirit). Even James, the half-brother of Jesus, had risen up the ranks to be more influential than Christ's original leaders, Peter and John (James, John's brother, having been killed) (Galatians 1:19; 2:7-14).

The latter half of the book of Acts is devoted almost entirely to Paul's ministry amongst the nations, and Peter, James and the Twelve fade away. The focus shifts away from Israel after the flesh and turns to the nations. This was due to the New Covenant superceding the Old Covenant, with the blessings of the original Abrahamic covenant going out to all the families of the earth.

More importantly, this also resulted in the gradual fading away of the miraculous signs and powers of the coming age of the kingdom, and of many of the various gifts of the Spirit, which Jesus and the apostles (including Paul) had evidenced among the people, as a sign of their authority. Miracles and healings are primarily to accompany the heralding of the evangel of the kingdom in power (Hebrews 2:3-5; 2 Corinthians 12:12; Acts 1:6-8). The apostles and prophets of that era were raised up to complete the revelation of God, which is now contained in the writings of the New Testament. This applies especially to Paul's ministry and his writings. The Twelve were commissioned by Jesus Himself while He was on earth, and each of them, including Matthias, who later replaced Judas Iscariot, had to have been with Jesus from the baptism of John through to His return to the heavens (Acts 1:15-26).

But Paul was uniquely chosen later by the glorified Christ for a special ministry, even though he was at that time an enemy of the truth. He became the foremost apostle, and the miracles that he enacted among the nations were probably greater than any other (Acts 19:10-12). The signs of a true apostle and prophet of God are supernatural signs, miracles and powerful deeds (including healings). Many other spiritual gifts were also given to the followers of Christ as a sign to unbelieving Israel and the world that this was truly of God and was the power of the coming kingdom (2 Corinthians 12:12; Mark 16:15-18). But *most* of what passes today as miracles and healings are in fact cheap forgeries by false apostles and fraudulent workers, to deceive the Body of Christ and keep them in immaturity. But they will be judged by their acts towards others, governed by their true motives of the heart.

Jesus revealed that, at the Judgment, many would claim spiritual gifts as their ticket into the kingdom, having shared in the anointing and blessings of the Holy Spirit, but they shall be turned away as imposters!

"Not everyone saying to Me 'Lord! Lord!' will be entering into the kingdom of the heavens, but he who is doing the will of My Father Who is in the heavens. Many will be declaring to Me in that day, 'Lord! Lord! Was it not in Your Name that we prophesy, and in Your Name cast out demons, and in Your Name do

many powerful deeds?' And then shall I be saying to them that '**I never knew you! Depart from Me, workers of lawlessness!**'

(Matthew 7:21-23)

It is not enough to belong to a Christian assembly, coming under the banner of Christ's Name, and to share in the blessings of the Spirit, or even to partake in ministry and teaching! We must do the will of God - to believe in, and to follow, Christ. And Christ says 'Love one another.' Yet it is inevitable, that, in the same way as not all who are Israel are the true Israel, so it is that not all who are the Church are the true Church (Romans 9:6-7). Yet the Lord knows those who are His, and everyone who claims to follow Him must withdraw from injustice and lawlessness as defined by God (2 Timothy 2:19).

Paul also reveals that these last days shall be full of religious apostasy, when there will be false believers, false teachers and prophets, who shall be disqualified as to the Faith. These are those who wish to have their ears tickled and their flesh satisfied, while glorying in themselves, void of the power of God, full of greed and wickedness (1 Timothy 4:1; 2 Timothy 3:1-7, 13; 2 Peter 2:1-3). He reveals something very interesting to Timothy in regard to our present subject, in relation to these imposters.

"...always learning and yet not at any time able to come into a realisation of the truth. Now, by the method by which Jannes and Jambres withstand Moses, thus these also are withstanding the truth, men of a depraved mind, disqualified as to the faith. But they shall not be progressing more, for their folly shall be obvious to all, as that of those also became."

(2 Timothy 3:7-9)

Some will use false miracles and healings, trickery and deceit, to withstand the truth and lead people astray, in the same manner as did the Egyptian magicians, Jannes and Jambres, who sought to copy the signs of God being done through Moses in the court of Pharaoh. But there will always come a time when they shall not continue with their deceit any further, for, in the same way as Moses shamed Jannes and Jambres, these imposters are exposed as the tricksters that they are by the true prophets and followers of God, who perform the real stuff, like Jesus Himself (2 Timothy 3:8-9; 2 Thessalonians 2:9-12).

From my understanding of Biblical types, there shall be two outpourings of the Spirit, symbolised in the early rains and the latter rains. The first occurred in the first century AD and we are entering the second in our day. This shall fully fulfill the prophecy of Joel, which was also fulfilled at Pentecost 33 AD, when the Spirit is being poured out on all flesh before the Day of the Lord (Acts 2:1-21).

## **The Installments**

Paul is describing the transition referred to earlier in a very illuminating passage in 1 Corinthians 13, concerning the spiritual gifts. The whole purpose for the spiritual gifts at that time was '*with a view to expedience*' (12:7), that is, due to the changes taking place at that time, and while the New Testament was being written, various spiritual gifts were necessary for the believers during that era. Paul was still



proclaiming the message of the kingdom to Israel in accordance with the New Covenant wherever he went, and the power and authority of Christ needed to be very evident to those of the nations also, where Paul ministered. In effect, the new ecclesias were being established under the apostles' jurisdiction in preparation for the return of Christ to set up the kingdom.

Due to Israel's unbelief, the return of Christ was to be delayed or suspended indefinitely. God had a new administration planned with a fuller, more glorious message, which was fully revealed by Paul alone.

There is much in his first letter to the assembly at Corinth that has to be understood in the context of this transitional era. One marked example is the fact that Paul's apostolic authority and the power of the Lord were hugely evident in this ecclesia, and this resulted in many being infirm, and many having died, due to selfish, rebellious behaviour concerning the Lord's Supper (1 Corinthians 11:27-32; also 5:1-5). This kind of heavy discipline and judgment from the Lord had been exercised by Peter in the Jerusalem assembly in relation to Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11), and it is very much a part of the righteous rule of the kingdom. Yet it would appear as though this authority is no longer in force now as there wouldn't be many churches left if it was!

There are many passages like this that prove extremely difficult to understand if they are applied to the whole of this Church era. This leads to all sorts of misunderstanding and false reasoning in an attempt to make it apply to today, with many claiming apostolic authority using overbearing tactics. This is one of the reasons why Paul said that teachers should be '*correctly cutting the Word of truth*' (2 Timothy 2:15). So much religious apostasy has come in over the centuries through the Holy Empire of Christendom, Catholic and Protestant, and it still continues, that only a remnant of the Church are the true Overcomers.

The 7 letters to the churches in Revelation chapters 2 and 3 are a complete message for the Church, covering every kind of Christian assembly and individual Christian that exists during this era. Only the Overcomers or Conquerors are the true Body of Christ.

In 1 Corinthians, Paul also introduces the figure of the Body of Christ in relation to the spiritual gifts (12:12-27), although here it is not described as a *joint-body*, as it is in his later letter to the Ephesians (Ephesians 3:6-7). During the transition, there was a distinct order and ranking concerning spiritual gifts and callings, with **apostles**, **prophets** and **teachers** being the top three, in that order (12:27-31). Now that the apostles and prophets are in the foundation, contained in the Scriptures, shepherd/teachers and evangelists are to continue the job of adjusting the Body of Christ to bring it to maturity in the truth, which is based totally on faith, and not by sight (Ephesians 4:11-16; 2 Corinthians 5:7).

So Paul wanted to show them the higher, maturer way, which went beyond the gifts themselves - the way of love. He was showing them a path suited to transcendence, a path that leads to the more excellent way that is above all else - the way of faith, love and expectation. This is a path encompassed by God's glorious grace - a path that was walked to perfection by Jesus Himself (1 Corinthians 12:31).

1 Corinthians 13:8-13 is extremely revealing in this regard, but many translations obscure what is really being said. Here is a more accurate translation from the CV. It reads

'Love is never lapsing: yet, whether prophecies, they will be discarded, or languages, they will cease, or knowledge, it will be discarded. For **out of an instalment** are we knowing, and **out of an instalment** are we prophesying. Now whenever **maturity** may be coming, **that which is out of an instalment shall be discarded**. When I was a minor, I spoke as a minor, I was disposed as a minor, I took account of things as a minor. Yet when I have become a man, I have discarded that which is a minor's. **For at present we are observing by means of a mirror, in an enigma**, yet then, face to face. **At present I know out of an instalment**, yet then I shall recognise according as I am recognised also.

Yet now are remaining faith, expectation, love - these three. Yet the greatest of these is love. Be pursuing love.'

To clarify, it was Paul's intention to reveal the new truths (secrets) in installments. As the signs and miracles pertaining to the earthly manifestation of the kingdom promised to Israel were receding, along with the gradual introduction of new truth, the believers under Paul's ministry needed special divine guidance concerning these things, especially as the Greek Scriptures were only just beginning to be written. This was especially provided for in the gifts of wisdom, knowledge, faith, prophecy and discrimination (or discernment) of spirits (12:8-10).

It was necessary to bring the believers of the Body of Christ ecclesia from immaturity to maturity. For this purpose the apostles and prophets were given to complete the written Word, along with evangelists and shepherd/teachers to adjust the saints and upbuild them in the present truth of the Body of Christ and the new administration of grace (Ephesians 4:1-16). Even though the other apostles wrote most of their letters after Paul, Paul was the one who truly completed the Word of God through the secrets contained in his evangel (Colossians 1:25).

During this transitional era, spiritual gifts were given to the local ecclesias with a view to expedience, that is, it was beneficial and necessary at that time. They were infants who needed these gifts to help bring them on to adulthood in the faith. This is clearly why Paul focuses on these issues in 1 Corinthians 12-14. The young believers were boasting in that which was the equivalent of 'children's play things!' But faith, expectation and love are the signs of maturity (see also Colossians 3:12-14). This walk of faith from immaturity to maturity has to be experienced by every true believer who wishes to be a son of God.

### **The Examples of Paul, Timothy, Trophimus and Epaphroditus**

There was a major adjustment in Paul's ministry at the time of his writing his second letter to the Corinthians, which introduced the message of the Conciliation. A careful reading of this letter will also show that Paul's emphasis begins to change drastically in relation to suffering and affliction for believers. Instead of emphasising healing and powers, he focuses on weakness and suffering a lot more. Our bodies are viewed as vessels of clay that are outwardly decaying so that the power within is clearly of God and not of man (2 Corinthians 4:7-12; 16-18).

He even goes on to reveal that due to the revelations he was receiving from Christ, he was given a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet him, causing him great infirmity (12:7-10). During Christ's visitations, Paul entreated the Lord three times to take it away, but the answer was, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for **My power is being perfected in infirmity.**'

This can't be emphasised enough! The power of God in Christ is being perfected (completed or made mature) in us in infirmity or weakness! This is the secret to why we suffer. Even Christ learned obedience as a Son by what He suffered (Hebrews 5:7-8).

Therefore, Paul's conclusion is 'Wherefore **I delight in infirmities...**for Christ's sake, for, whenever **I may be weak, then I am powerful.**'

In a similar way, Jesus' ministry had a point of change due to the unbelief of Israel, when He began to emphasise the place of suffering and sacrifice instead of power and miracles, which ultimately led Him to the cross (Matthew 16:21-27). This was now occurring in Paul's ministry with equal force. So why didn't Paul heal himself or why couldn't any one else heal him? And why couldn't he rebuke Satan? **Because it was not God's will!** Many today would say that he lacked faith or had a secret sin! But they misunderstand the Scriptures and God's will for us today.

Infirmities and afflictions may not be appealing, compared to great powers of healing and miracles, but these 'weaknesses' can be a sign of God's gracious blessing in this administration of pure grace. And in the same way as many became disillusioned with Christ in his role as the suffering Servant, many also became disillusioned with Paul and his message. Yet having said that, even the letter to the Hebrews shows that, even in the past, servants of God had various ministries and experiences (Hebrews 11). Not all had powers and miracles, not all were materially rich, not all had positions of great authority. Many suffered greatly and were martyred, while others died peacefully at a ripe old age. Yet all is in accordance with God's will as He apportions to each his place.

So Paul had to respond to the growing negativity to his ministry by defending his divine calling and message, so that the truth could remain with us, which he does throughout this second letter to the Corinthians. He also addresses the issue of false apostles and deceitful messengers of Satan appearing as ministers of righteousness, which was evidence that the apostasy had already begun and many 'leaders' could not be trusted even then (11:13-15).

Over the succeeding centuries, the truth of Paul's evangel was virtually lost to the world, especially during the 'dark ages' of the domination of Christendom, when the Apostasy and the man of sin was in full force through the Holy Roman Empire and the rise of Islam. It wasn't until the Reformation that Paul's message began to be recovered with the foundational truth of Justification by Faith alone. The recovery process continues to this day as God raises up His servants to illuminate His truth.

Getting back to Paul's emphasis on weakness and suffering, we have the further testimony of Timothy's frequent infirmities and stomach problems (1 Timothy 5:23). Why didn't Paul heal him? It was not God's will! Instead, Timothy is told to use natural remedies instead of supernatural power. And then there is the case of Epaphroditus from Philippi, who became so sick that he nearly died (Philippians

2:25-30). This was due to the work of the Lord and his sacrificial labour, and yet why wasn't he healed? Well, we are told that God showed him mercy and did cause him to recover sufficiently enough to continue his work. God was also merciful to Paul in sparing him sorrow upon sorrow. But there isn't any evidence that this was due to the gift of healing, through Paul or anyone else. It was a direct touch of God in accordance with His purpose for Epaphroditus.

And finally we have the case of Trophimus, whom Paul had to leave in Miletus because he was infirm (2 Timothy 4:20). If Paul still had the powers that he had previously, why did he have to leave poor sick Trophimus behind? He could have healed him, but he didn't. For those who have ears to hear, this should be enough evidence to show that this administration is focused on the spiritual blessings above, and not on the earthly, soulish things of Israel's Old Covenant kingdom. Our blessings are far greater, but they are presently invisible and do not have anything to do with our present bodies or this world, only in so far as the indwelling Spirit manifests itself through our mortal flesh. We should care for our body as it is a temple of the Holy Spirit, but any divine healing or miracle is left to God's mercy as He deems fit (1 Timothy 4:7-8; 1 Corinthians 6:12-20).

Since that early outpouring of the Spirit, the powers and spiritual gifts of that era faded. God has been moving very differently. **This does not mean that God never heals or never causes miracles or never sends 'angels' - of course He does! These things cannot be ruled out altogether, although it is generally not the norm. God is still active in His people by His Holy Spirit, and He is Sovereign, overseeing all things, operating ALL in accordance with the counsel of His will** (Ephesians 1:11).

But care must be taken in these deceptive days, for most of what passes for miracles and healings today, and through the past centuries, are not the genuine spiritual gifts used by believers in the First Century and by Christ Himself. Most are deceptions of Satan and his messengers, luring people away from the truth, distracting their focus and occupying them with fleshly behaviour and vain imaginations. It was prophesied that during the last days, deception will grow through false miracles, signs and false doctrine, along with the secret power of lawlessness, culminating in a great falling away from the truth, known as the Apostasy (see Matthew 24:4-14, 23-26; 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12; 1 Timothy 4:1-5; 2 Timothy 3:1-9; 2 Peter 2: 1-22). This has occurred through the lawless antichrist kingdom of the Holy Roman Empire of Christendom and some of its Protestant offshoots.

During the Acts period, while the kingdom was still being offered to Israel first, and while the nations were being prepared for the kingdom, there were great signs and miracles being displayed through the apostles as well as other believers. These were the spring rains. These powers faded as the kingdom faded, while the Administration of Grace was being introduced. The time is drawing near, and now is, when these powers will be revived as the kingdom draws near again, and the gospel of the kingdom shall be proclaimed with renewed power. These are the autumn rains. During this era the focus shall partially return to Israel again in the land, just like it was almost 2000 years ago, as we await the soon coming Day of the Lord, the Return of Christ.

Yet even before Paul died, the apostasy from the truth had already begun, as many 'believers' turned away from Paul and His teaching (2 Timothy 1:15). The aged apostle was virtually left alone in his later days, physically restricted by a Roman chain (2 Timothy 1:15; 4:9-18). One of the brothers called Onesiphorus, unlike many others, was not ashamed of Paul's chain, and Paul was so hidden that, when in Rome, he had to search for him diligently to find him! (2 Timothy 1:16-18). Why wasn't Paul released from his chain with mighty power and miraculous signs, like he and Silas had been from the jail at Philippi (Acts 16:25-34). It was not God's will!

This is the astounding truth: the greatest apostle who has ever lived, besides Christ Himself, was given the highest pinnacle of divine revelation ever given to humanity - yet he ended his career rejected and lonely, afflicted and infirm. But this forms the greatest backdrop for God's amazing grace to be manifested through him. Like His Saviour before him, in flesh, on the earth, Paul appears to be nothing - yet in spirit, in the celestials, his blessings are beyond imagination. This truth remains applicable for the whole Body of Christ. God's servants shall soon be rewarded for their affliction and toil on behalf of their Master. Now is not a time to be giving up or slacking in the race of faith.

'My grace is sufficient for you, for **My power is being perfected in infirmity.**'

All Scripture quotations taken from the Concordant Version unless stated otherwise.

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## Appendix: Was Jesus Ever Sick?

We ended the above article with the Divine principle that says "God's power is being perfected or matured in infirmity or weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9-10). If this is the case (and it is), then this principle must have been manifested to its greatest extent in Jesus' life on earth. Of course, many would say this is evident in the things He endured during the final hours of His life, but is there a greater, more deeper fulfillment of this principle in Jesus' life? I believe there is.

It is often true to say that a medical doctor, or a nurse, tends to be less caring and sympathetic to a patient if they themselves have hardly ever been sick in their life, and therefore they don't know what it is like to be a sick patient. I think that you will find that the best doctors and carers are those who have experienced pain and sickness for themselves. This is true of most experiences in life - we don't really know something until we've experienced it. This has to apply to Jesus as well.

The common, traditional belief, widely held today, particularly in the 'prosperity movement,' is that Jesus was never, ever sick in any way whatsoever - not even a cold! I tended to believe this also for many years. But on a closer examination of a few key scriptures, I found this belief to be false. This has given me real comfort, especially as I have often been plagued by various infirmities (and at the time of writing, I have been suffering with M.E./C.F.S. for many years). No wonder Paul could glory in his infirmities because he was following the pattern of Christ! Jesus truly knows our pains and sicknesses, and He can therefore sympathise with us, **because He took them upon Himself and experienced them!** His servants also are to experience these things to some extent, for though He has taken the curse of the Law away in His death on the cross, we nevertheless have not received the full adoption and inheritance as yet - that is, the glorification of our bodies. In the meantime, believers in Christ have a deposit of the Spirit as we walk by faith. This treasure is still hidden in jars of earthen clay. Yet the glory is coming at the coming of Christ, when our bodies shall be transformed at the First Resurrection.

### The Suffering Servant

The following texts from the letter to the Hebrews reveals that Christ is indeed the Physician who has experienced pain, infirmity and sickness, so He can truly sympathise with us. (It is possible, as some have suggested, that when Jesus said that His fellow Nazarenes should say to Him, "Physician, Heal yourself!" this is indicating that Jesus was known to be physically weak and sick and needed healing Himself (Luke 4:23). Others would say that He was referring to those in Nazareth, and not Himself).

"For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses (*'infirmities' CV*), **but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin.** Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need."

(Hebrews 4:15-16 NIV)

"During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. Although he was a son, **he learned obedience from what he suffered** and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him..."

(Hebrews 5:7-9 NIV)

Here we are clearly told that Jesus was tested or tried in every way as we are through the infirmities of the flesh - yet He was without sin. In His heart and mind, in His spirit, He was without sin. He never, ever disobeyed His God and Father, and He fulfilled the Divine Law in every sense. He was perfectly righteous in everything He did and said. But in His fleshly body, He nevertheless suffered the same things that we do as humans. We'll see why He suffered from sickness shortly. Yet we are also told in the second text above that during the days of Jesus' life as a human (the Greek literally reads '*in the days of His flesh*') He learned obedience from what He suffered. The writer of Hebrews is not referring to the final hours of Jesus' life and ministry alone, when Christ's obedience was made perfect or complete when He died on the cross for our salvation, **but he is referring to Jesus' whole life on earth, the days of His flesh during which He suffered.** Even from the beginning of His life on earth, Jesus took up the wreath of thorns that is the curse upon this Old Creation.

The apostle Matthew confirms this fact by quoting from one of the greatest texts of all that describes the character and ministry of the Messiah as the suffering servant of God - Isaiah 53.

"When Jesus came into Peter's house, he saw Peter's mother-in-law lying in bed with a fever. He touched her hand and the fever left her, and she got up and began to wait on him. When evening came, many who were demon-possessed were brought to him, and he drove out the spirits with a word and healed all the sick. **This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah: "He took up our infirmities and carried our diseases."**

(Matthew 8:14-17 NIV)

Matthew is not just telling us that the prophet Isaiah's words were fulfilled because Jesus healed all the sick by the power of the Lord and got rid of all the diseases, he's telling us something deeper. The above quote of Isaiah literally reads in the Greek "He got our infirmities, and He bears the diseases." That is to say, in some measure or other, Jesus got the illnesses and took upon Himself the diseases. This was fulfilled throughout His ministry and not just at the end when He greatly suffered and died. Without sounding mystical, it would appear as though Jesus absorbed in His flesh something of the diseases or illnesses of others so that He could experience them. I know from experience that to work or minister under an infirmity takes greater strength and endurance and pushes our spiritual stamina further than if we were a specimen of health and vitality. Infirmary also keeps us humble.

This theme of transference of sickness through love and sacrifice is often portrayed in many movies, TV shows and books. It usually involves a hero-type figure being willing to lay aside his or her well-being or even their own life to save another from

dying. This is love - and it is this kind of love that Jesus has, and which He showed in His earthly life.

### Isaiah 53

The following portion of Isaiah 53 clearly reveals the nature and experience of the Messiah as the One who suffers on behalf of others, particularly for the sake of His people. The words in italics are a more literal Hebrew rendering.

He was despised and rejected by men,  
a man of sorrows (*pains*), and familiar with suffering (*knowing illness*).  
Like one from whom men hide their faces  
he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

Surely he took up our infirmities (*illnesses*)  
and carried our sorrows (*burdened with our pains*),  
yet we considered him stricken by God,  
smitten by him, and afflicted.

(Isaiah 53:3-4 NIV)

These verses prophesied that the Messiah would be a man of pains, and that He would be knowing illness during His days on earth; He would be burdened with the pains of humanity and He would bear our illnesses; and He would be despised and rejected as though He were judged and afflicted by God Himself. This doesn't sound like the modern Jesus of Christendom who is said to have never caught a cold or had a headache; and it doesn't tie up with the modern version of the 'health and wealth gospel' proclaimed by many today as well as the lives of those who preach it, where emphasis is arrogantly placed on fitness, strength, fleshly ease, worldly wealth, etc. This is not to say that health and well-being should not be important to believers - of course it should, for we are temples of God's Holy Spirit, but this applies more to our character and walk rather than the flesh itself. Jesus said "A man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions" (Luke 12:15) - and this includes our health as well. Paul also said that physical exercise is beneficial for some things, but the most important thing is not our physical health as such but our way of life - our godliness or devoutness. The righteous holy life has promises for this life as well as the one to come (1 Timothy 4:7-8).

This religious picture of Jesus as a kind of Greek super-hero is one of the reasons why many Jewish Rabbi's and scholars have disregarded Him as being the Messiah prophesied by Isaiah. Ernest L. Martin, in his book *Secrets of Golgotha* (Pages 335-341), gives a list of quotes from well known Jewish Rabbi's dating back to before the time of Christ showing that the above depiction of the Messiah being familiar with illness was the common Jewish understanding of Isaiah 53. Here is a quote from page 339:

Rabbi Jacob Ben Reuben (The Rabbanite, 12th Century) is even more specific. He wrote: "The prophet declares that he was 'despised and forlorn of men,' a 'man of pains and known to sickness.' It seems to me [said Jacob Ben Reuben] that no one would be called 'known to sickness' or a 'man of pains' except a man who suffered from severe sickness continually.

Another says (page 341):



"...now there are two species of sickness, one when a man is in pain but is still able to move about, the other when he is attacked by some such disease as consumption of fever, when he is prostrated upon his bed but free from pain; in the latter case he is said to be 'broken by sickness.' The prophet Isaiah says that both descriptions unite against the man spoken of."

Martin also says that Smith's *Dictionary of Christian Antiquities*, among other references, gives historical evidence to show that the early church fathers of the 2nd and 3rd centuries (before the era of Constantine in the 4th century) believed that Jesus was quite frail in His appearance and even quite repulsive to look at. Apart from His teaching and His miracles there wouldn't have been anything about His appearance that would've attracted people to Him. It's only from the 4th century onwards that we get the picture of Jesus as a handsome, strong, fair man, not unlike depictions of the Greek gods.

The New Testament reveals that the real Jesus of Nazareth was one and the same as Yahweh of the Hebrew Scriptures, the very Image and Form of God. Yet He was given a body of flesh that was especially prepared for Him so that He could descend to this earth as a human being, laying aside all of His heavenly glory and majesty and power, and take the form of a Servant. Through a life of love, compassion and mercy, and the ultimate humiliating sacrifice of the cross, He took the punishment and chastening, the sicknesses and the pains that rightly belong to us and bore them Himself. And it is this 'weakness' that is the power and wisdom of God. How can anyone reject such a wonderful Redeemer and Messiah - as Jesus Christ is.

Yet it is interesting to note that in the gospel accounts, after His resurrection, when Jesus appeared to His disciples, none of them recognised Him at first - until their eyes were opened or they saw His five remaining wounds in His hands, feet and side. This would suggest that the resurrected, glorified Jesus looks a little different in appearance now than when He walked this earth as the Suffering Servant. He is the King of kings and Lord of lords, who will return as the victorious King, the Son of David, in power and glory - the Lion who is also the wounded Lamb.