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Frank W. Nelte

PHYSICAL SINS AND SPIRITUAL SINS PART 3

In the first of these three articles I discussed the terms “physical sins” and “spiritual sins”. I also mentioned that in the gospels there are only two occasions when Jesus Christ told someone “**your sins are forgiven**”. And there are also only two other occasions when Jesus Christ told someone “**go and sin no more**”.

In the first article we examined the first of the two occasions when Jesus Christ said “your sins are forgiven”. I mentioned that in the case of the paralyzed man it was his physical sins that were forgiven.

In the second article we examined two more of these four events. First we examined the occasion when the woman who anointed Jesus Christ’s feet had her spiritual sins forgiven. After that we looked at the case of the woman taken in adultery, who was told “go and sin no more”. Her sins were also spiritual sins. But they were not forgiven at that point in time.

In this present article we’ll now examine the remaining one of these four unique occasions. This involved a man who was not fully paralyzed, but who was very infirm for 38 years, to the degree that he could only get around very slowly and with great difficulty. He was healed and told “go and sin no more”.

Now let’s look at this incident.

“SIN NO MORE” AFTER 38 YEARS OF INFIRMITY

This event was only recorded by John, in **John 5:5-15**. This took place on a weekly Sabbath day (John 5:9) at a pool in Jerusalem named Bethesda, which pool had five porches. “Bethesda” means “house of mercy”. Here is the situation:

In these (five porches) lay **a great multitude of impotent folk**, of blind, halt, withered, waiting for the moving of the water. (John 5:3)

There were literally **dozens of people with major health problems** waiting for an angel to stir the water of the pool, because the first one to enter the water after that was going to be divinely healed.

For an angel went down at a certain season into the pool, and troubled the water: whosoever then **first** after the troubling of the water **stepped in was made whole** of whatsoever disease he had. (John 5:4)

The first thing for us to note is that **Jesus Christ did not heal everyone** at that pool who had a major health problem. This account here relates how Jesus Christ healed **one man** out of this “great multitude” of people who were weak, powerless, blind or lame, etc.

The lesson here is that generally **God does not heal people who don’t ask God for healing**. In addition, God generally does not heal people in the world, who have no connection to the Church of God. So when God does heal someone in the world who has not actually asked God for healing, then that is **the exception and not the rule**.

Healing is not just a freebie for all people. There are conditions people have to meet in order to approach God for healing.

For a start James points out one limitation.

Is any sick **among you**? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: (James 5:14)

The words “among you” mean “**amongst the people in the Church of God**”. There is no indication anywhere in the Bible that God promises to heal those who in the Old Testament were not a part of Israel (see Exodus 15:26), and in the New Testament those who are not a part of the Church of God (i.e. those who are not “among you”).

Jesus Christ Himself said very clearly:

I pray for them (His disciples): **I pray not for the world**, but for them which You have given Me; for they are Yours. (John 17:9)

Since **Jesus Christ** Himself did not pray for the world, I take that to mean that **we** in God’s Church in general terms **shouldn’t be praying for the world either**. Sick people in the world are included in the term “the world”. Now that doesn’t mean that we should not pray for **personal relatives** in the world. But when we do so, those cannot be “prayers of faith”, because God has not promised to intervene in the lives of people in the world. So prayers for relatives in the world are only **wishful requests** to God, not prayers of faith.

This limitation is also mentioned by the Apostle John.

And whatsoever we ask, we receive of Him, **because** we keep His commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in His sight. (1 John 3:22)

When we ask God for help and for healing, then there are **two conditions** that God expects us to meet. First, we are required to keep all of God’s laws and commandments. This already excludes the world

from receiving answers from God. But on top of that God also requires that we **actively seek to please God**. That definitely excludes the world.

However, we also need to recognize that many people who today attend one of the Churches of God **fall short** in actively seeking to please God. They are content to restrict their focus on keeping the Sabbath and the Feasts and Holy Days, to tithe and not to eat any unclean foods. I discuss this matter in more detail in my article on the Book of Haggai. If we don't actively examine God's laws for how we can "please God", by searching for ways to **implement the principles** underlying God's laws in our lives, then that may be one reason why many prayers for healing are not answered.

Anyway, coming back to the man who was partially paralyzed, we note that Jesus Christ did not volunteer to heal the dozens of sick people at that pool. God expects us to ask for healing when we are sick. Jesus Christ healed all the people who came to Him in faith and asked Him to heal them. But Jesus Christ didn't go out looking for people to heal, with this one single exception here.

Nobody at the pool named Bethesda made any effort to ask Jesus Christ for healing. But there was one man who had suffered for 38 years, and even though the man did not ask Christ for healing, Jesus Christ really felt sorry for that man.

So let's pick up the account in verse 5.

And a certain man was there, **who had an infirmity thirty and eight years**. (John 5:5)

This man had in fact been afflicted with this infirmity for longer than Jesus Christ had lived as a human being. The man was in a very pitiful state and **Jesus Christ was moved with compassion** for the man.

Note!

This man didn't express any faith and he didn't have a repentant attitude. And he didn't ask Christ for healing. But he was suffering. While there is no direct indication of any kind regarding the man's age, I suspect that this man was already in his late 50's or early 60's, meaning that he had been **in his very late teens or early-to-mid-twenties** when he was struck with this infirmity.

So the next verse says:

When Jesus saw him lie, and knew that he had been now a long time *in that case*, He said unto him, **Do you want to be made whole?** (John 5:6)

Notice that this man didn't actually ask Jesus Christ for healing, or for anything else for that matter. In this case **Jesus Christ volunteered to heal the man**. This is unlike any other healing in the gospel accounts. This fact is significant and we should take note of this. There is no evidence of either faith or

repentance on the part of this man. But **Jesus Christ volunteered to heal him anyway**.

The lesson for us here is as follows:

We in God's Church know what God expects from us. We know that "the prayer of faith shall save the sick" (James 5:15). So God expects us to meet God's conditions when we want God to heal us of some or other affliction. For us it is always a case of doing what we know is right and what is expected of us by God (i.e. the principle of James 4:17).

But there are also **multiple millions of people** out there who don't know what is right. They are like the people of Nineveh of old, who could not spiritually discern "between their right hand and their left" (see Jonah 4:11).

Multiple millions of people **who suffer today are totally clueless** as to what is really going on, and as to why they are suffering. They don't understand that for every effect **there is always a cause**. And even though these people are not repentant and don't have faith, yet God reserves the right to **sometimes** intervene for **some** of these people and to heal them of their sufferings. That's the principle of the angel "troubling the water" to heal someone.

That was also the case with this man in John 5. And that means that God **might** answer some of our wishful prayers for our relatives in the world. It is just that we don't have any promises from God, that we can claim when we ask God to heal relatives who don't keep God's laws, and who certainly don't seek to please God.

Now let's notice the man's reply:

The impotent man answered Him, Sir, I have no man, when the water is troubled, **to put me into the pool**: but while I am coming, another steps down before me. (John 5:7)

The man is **respectful but clueless**. He does not answer Jesus Christ's question with "yes please, I do want to be made whole". He only explains to Jesus Christ why he never gets into the pool first, after an angel had touched the water. And the man is not actually looking to Jesus Christ to heal him.

This is completely at odds with every other healing in the New Testament, that somebody who is not even looking to Jesus Christ for healing is healed. In this case there is no faith and no repentance present. The man has in fact not met any of the requirements for healing that God sets before us in the Church of God.

Yet Jesus Christ healed this man anyway!

Jesus said unto him, **Rise, take up your bed, and walk**. (John 5:8)

As we find out later, **this man had no idea whatsoever who Jesus Christ was**. He was typical of the people in the world today ... clueless about Jesus Christ, the Savior of mankind. And therefore he also had not anticipated that he would be totally healed like that. The healing came totally out of the blue for this particular man.

However, as I mentioned earlier, this incident is the exception and not the rule. In every other healing somebody had to ask Jesus Christ for healing. Most of the time it was asking for healing for self, but sometimes it was also asking for a child or for a personal servant. But somebody had to actually ask. But in this incident in John 5 nobody asked Jesus Christ to heal this man.

In our age today healing is not for adults who have not made a commitment to God. **So we ministers should not anoint uncommitted adults for healing, even when they are close family**!

This is important to understand!

The reason why we should not anoint uncommitted adults is that the anointing represents **an appeal to Jesus Christ's sacrifice for us**! And no part of that sacrifice (i.e. first brutally beaten, and then dying) is available to any unconverted adult.

Every part of Christ's sacrifice only becomes available for us to claim, once we have repented. Anointing unrepentant adults is **a misuse of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ**! Anointing an adult for healing implies that the adult is obeying all of God's laws, and is living the Christian life. In the anointing, the oil represents God's holy spirit. But God's holy spirit is not available for unrepentant people. So **they should not be anointed**.

Now are we supposed to be heartless towards our sick unconverted relatives? No, of course not. So what do we ministers do when such uncommitted adults (both relatives and unrelated adults) approach us for anointing?

We tell these adults:

"**I will certainly pray, asking God to heal you**. I will make this request to God **in private**, when I am alone. But **I cannot anoint you** because God restricts the instruction for anointing to members of God's Church (that's James 5:14 again). Therefore in your circumstances **anointing would not add anything** to the private prayer request that I will make for your healing."

Now we should not explain to such unconverted adults the difference between a prayer in faith, and a wishful prayer that appeals to God's mercy rather than appealing to God's promises to heal us. The fact that we will pray to God for them is sufficient information for them. That's all every other person who knows about the health issue of this person can do, pray for them in private. And **if this offends them**, then we should not pray for them in private either, because their attitude makes clear that **God will not intervene** for them.

You may have noticed that sometimes I refer to “uncommitted adults”, and at other times to “unconverted adults”. I use these two expressions interchangeably. Uncommitted adults are not yet repentant. And “unconverted adults” also refers to people who are not yet repentant.

But there is **one more category** of adults who are not baptized members of God’s Church. That category consists of adults who have started to obey God’s laws and who are attending a Church of God congregation. But they are **not yet baptized**, which means they are not really members of God’s Church.

We sometimes refer to these people as “**prospective** members of the Church”. I will here refer to this group of people as “**not-yet-fully-committed**” adults. As long as they have not taken the step of baptism, they are not yet “fully committed”.

Now in all our dealings with God **the commitment** to live “by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God” (see Matthew 4:4) **is really the key**. When people start to attend God’s Church and **seriously commit** to living by all of God’s laws, then they may not yet be baptized. But they are on the right track, and their minds don’t harbor any resentment or hostility towards the laws of God, and towards God’s whole way of life. **With that attitude such people certainly have access to being anointed for sicknesses**, even though they may not yet be baptized. In contrast, by “unconverted people” I mean **people who make no attempt** to live by all of God’s laws, and who choose to not be a part of God’s Church.

However, people who have started to keep God’s laws and who are attending God’s Church may not yet be baptized. But they are willing to learn and to try to live by all of God’s laws. So **such adults** certainly also have access to the benefit of being anointed for sicknesses.

Another way to state this is:

Anointing is basically restricted to those adults who are eligible to take the Passover, as well as children for whom we are still responsible, and also adults who are in the process of submitting their lives to God. **Adults who are not eligible to eat the broken bread at the Passover** (except for the adults just mentioned), **are also not eligible to be anointed for health problems**.

God has made divine healing available **to His own people** as one of the “benefits” of committing our lives to God (see also Psalm 103:1-3). And for His own people God has instituted **a specific format** we are to follow when we ask God to heal us. That format is spelled out in James 5:14-16. It consists of: calling a minister, praying in faith and being anointed, followed by healing and forgiveness of any physical sins we may be guilty of with the health problem for which we are anointed.

Like Jesus Christ, we too can be moved by feelings of compassion for people who suffer, even if they are unconverted. But in praying in private for unconverted people to be healed by God, we are not to follow the same format that we use in approaching God for converted members of God’s Church. **The requests** we make to God for converted sick people and for unconverted sick people **are the same**: in both cases we ask God to heal the sick people. But **the format** for these two situations **is different**.

For **converted members** of God's Church we call a minister and ask the minister to pray for, and to anoint the sick person. In this process "the prayer of faith" is a key component, meaning faith of the individual being anointed, as well as faith of the minister doing the anointing.

For **unconverted adults** we follow a different format. We don't have a minister do any anointing. In this situation we express in private prayer **a fervent wish for God's mercy** and compassion. This type of prayer is **like Abraham pleading** with God for mercy for Sodom, if only there were a few righteous people in Sodom. See Genesis 18:23-32. Abraham was extremely earnest in his appeals to God, but it wasn't a prayer of faith because Abraham knew that the people in Sodom were very wicked. So Abraham's requests were wishful, because Abraham was really concerned for Lot.

We can learn from Abraham. When we pray wishfully for the healing of an unconverted relative, then we also need to **give God some reasons** for why God should heal our relative. In this situation we pray privately and there is no anointing. Keep in mind that God in fact accepted the reasons which Abraham presented. Had those reasons been met (i.e. if there were at least 10 righteous people in Sodom), then God would not have destroyed Sodom.

So if the reasons we present to God are good, then God may accept our reasoning, and then answer our request.

In the context of anointing someone, the anointing oil represents **God's holy spirit**. God's spirit is available to people who have truly repented and who have submitted their lives to God. But **God's spirit is not available to the unrepentant**. This means that we should not do something (i.e. anointing), that symbolically represents God's spirit being "poured out" on someone, to someone who is unrepentant, because God's spirit is very clearly not available to unrepentant people. Anointing is limited to those people to whom God has given access to His spirit (plus our minor children). **Can we understand why unrepentant adults must not be anointed when they are sick?**

Furthermore, probably the most important factor in such a situation of ill-health is **the mind of the sick person**. If the person has a rebellious attitude towards God, then it is almost guaranteed that God will not heal that person, no matter how much we may pray for that person. God never responds positively to a rebellious spirit.

But now comes the catch for those occasional unconverted people who are healed by God.

Healing is never a freebie! You know that, right?

If God does indeed intervene and heal an unconverted adult, then there is also a very serious consequence, which we see in the incident with this man who had an infirmity for 38 years. If God in our age heals an unconverted person, then in essence God also says these words to that person:

Afterward Jesus finds him in the temple, and said unto him, behold, you are made whole: **sin no more,**

lest a worse thing come unto you. (John 5:14)

Realize that **divine healing brings** a certain amount of **responsibility** with it. This applies to anyone and everyone who is healed by God's intervention, including the thousands who have been healed at one time or another during the past 60 years in our time.

So let's now get back to John chapter 5.

CONTINUING WITH JOHN 5

Let's look at verse 9.

And **immediately the man was made whole**, and took up his bed, and walked: and on the same day was the Sabbath. (John 5:9)

So the man is healed after suffering for 38 years. But he is not even repentant, and neither did he have any faith in Jesus Christ. When he is confronted by people who object to him carrying his bedroll, the man didn't even know who had healed him.

And he that was healed did not know who it was: for Jesus had conveyed Himself away, a multitude being in *that* place. (John 5:13)

So a little later Jesus Christ found this man privately, in order to give him a clear message and warning.

Afterward Jesus **finds him** in the temple, and said unto him, Behold, you are made whole: **sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto you**. (John 5:14)

The Greek verb translated as "finds him" indicates that Jesus Christ made a very specific effort to find the man again. Jesus Christ went looking for the man, to give him a warning.

The threat "lest a worse thing come upon you" is a clear warning. It tells us that the man's infirmity had been caused by sins. The expression "sin no more" means "**don't you ever again do those things that caused your infirmity**".

This form of admonition by Jesus Christ also makes clear that the man was **unrepentant** and **without real faith**! That is not the way Jesus Christ ever spoke to repentant people who had real faith.

The reference to "lest a worse thing come upon you" means that this healing had **increased the man's responsibility** and accountability before God! So **this healing** wasn't a freebie at all; it **had some**

strong strings attached. In this case it was a matter of the man having become more responsible to avoid doing whatever he had done 38 years earlier that led to his infirmity.

We should note that this is the only person who was healed by Jesus Christ and then given such a threatening warning. **No other healed person was ever warned with "lest a worse thing come unto you".** This was an extremely serious warning, precisely because the man was unrepentant and also had no faith at all in Jesus Christ. The only reason Christ healed the man was because Christ knew how long the man had already suffered, and Christ was moved with compassion for the man.

The lesson for us is:

Whenever God does something for us, then that intervention by God in our lives always requires a greater commitment from us. **When God heals us**, then we are expected to take greater care of our health than we had done before we got sick and were then healed. **When God gives us favor** with people, then we are expected to conduct ourselves in a way that doesn't foul things up and destroy relationships. **When God blesses us financially**, then we are expected to use those blessings wisely and not rashly spend it all so that we once again end up in financial difficulties. **When God gives us protection** from dangers, then we are expected to do our part in avoiding foolish and dangerous conduct. Can you see the principle here?

Stated another way: whenever we need to be bailed out by God in any area of life, then God expects us to **in future use more care** to avoid later needing to be bailed out of the same circumstances once again. That is basically what the admonition "**sin no more**" in John 5:14 refers to.

When God forgives us any specific sin, if after that we once again go back to that sin, then "a worse thing" will come upon us. **After forgiveness subsequent penalties for the same transgression will always be greater.** That is what this man needed to grasp.

Now the fact that Jesus Christ healed this unrepentant man shows that **we can certainly pray for unrepentant adults who are sick**, and ask God to heal those people. And God may choose to do so. But we can never pray "a prayer of faith" because God has not promised to heal the unrepentant.

However, it can be a pleading and a reasoning with God, along the lines of how Abraham reasoned with God, regarding Abraham's request to spare Sodom. **God is willing to listen to sound reasoning.** And we need to grasp why such requests cannot include anointing unrepentant people with oil. We cannot give unrepentant people symbolical access to God's spirit.

And above all, we need to understand that if God chooses to intervene and to heal such an unrepentant relative of ours, then that healing places much more responsibility on our unrepentant relative than was the case before the healing took place. When God chooses to heal an unrepentant person, then that is somewhat along the lines of giving that person a witness. And it certainly has consequences. This is something that we seldom seem to understand.

The admonition “sin no more lest a worse thing come unto you” applies to every single individual who is divinely healed by God. I can think back over the past 30-40+ years, where God did heal certain ministers and certain church members, who then subsequently turned away from God, and the latter end was worse for them than things had been before God had healed them. Perhaps some of you also know individuals in that type of situation: people who had been healed by God only to later leave the Church of God. Divine healing always makes us more accountable to God.

That about concludes this specific incident.

Including the previous two articles, we have now covered 4 specific events in Christ’s ministry, which all deal with sins. Here is a brief summary of **these 4 events**.

1) They involve 2 men and 2 women.

2) They involve 2 cases of physical sins, and 2 cases of spiritual sins.

3) They involve 2 instances where people are told “your sins are forgiven”, and 2 instances where people are told “go and sin no more”.

4) The 2 cases of **physical sins** (i.e. healing of some type of paralysis) involve 1 man who is told “your sins are forgiven”, and 1 man who is told “go and sin no more”.

5) The 2 cases of **spiritual sins** (i.e. adultery and immorality) involve 1 woman who is told “your sins are forgiven”, and 1 woman who is told “go and sin no more”.

6) The 2 cases of **sins being forgiven** involve 1 man and 1 woman who both were determined to personally appear before Christ. They both put out effort to get into Christ’s presence.

7) The 2 cases of being told “**go and sin no more**” involve 1 man and 1 woman, neither one of whom made any effort at all to come to Christ. They both didn’t ask Christ for anything, neither verbally, nor something implied in their actions.

8) For the 2 cases of being told “go and sin no more”, both were given **the opportunity to change**. And if they did change away from prior wrong conduct, then their past guilt would be blotted out. In a sense, from then on out **both of them were living their lives on probation**, with the forgiveness of their sins still contingent on them “sinning no more” from then on out.

9) In a sense, the 2 cases of “sin no more” also typify **the people in the second resurrection**, who will all be **living on probation** for a period of 100 years. When they are resurrected to physical life, they will be told by Jesus Christ something like:

“Neither do I condemn you for all your sins in your first life, but **go and sin no more**. You now have **the opportunity** to understand the truth, and to repent and to change, and to become a part of the Family of God. Make good use of this opportunity. Your future is in your own hands.”

And then their actions and their attitudes will be closely evaluated by Jesus Christ. Hopefully they will freely submit their lives to Jesus Christ’s rule, and gladly live by all of God’s laws.

The 2 cases of “your sins are forgiven” give us a lot of information about the forgiveness of both physical sins and spiritual sins, for people who are repentant. And the 2 cases of “go and sin no more” show us that for unrepentant people there will be a time when God intervenes and in effect tells those people: **you have gone far enough** in your sinful ways; **either** from here on out you “go and sin no more”, **or** you will just have to be blotted out in the lake of fire.

For some of those people that moment may come in this life. For most people it will come in the 2nd resurrection. But such a moment will come for every person who does not repent willingly, when given the opportunity to do so.

God’s standard is 100% perfection, and anything less than that is sin in the eyes of God, because it misses the mark that God has set. And for His Family, God will achieve that 100% perfection on both the physical level and on the spiritual level.

Most of the time when we see the word “sin” in the Bible, it is a reference to “spiritual sins”, and only occasionally is it a reference to “physical sins”. And the only reason why we even have to use these expressions “spiritual sins” and “physical sins” is because our English language word “sin” has a more restricted meaning than the Hebrew and Greek words that are translated as “sin”.

There is a lot we can learn from those 4 events in the New Testament.

Frank W Nelte