

Being Healed by the Lord

by the Rev. Eric H. Carswell



Then Jesus went about all the Cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people (Matthew 9:35).

Any of us who has had a cold or the flu recently knows that being sick is a very unpleasant experience. When we're sick, our physical body usually feels somewhat foreign to us and regularly sends messages of discomfort to our mind. Accompanying the physical symptoms there can be the frustration and discouragement of not being able to do as much or work as efficiently as we would like to. In the midst of a period of sickness, many people find themselves wondering if they will ever get well.

The Heavenly Doctrine for the New Church tell us that all diseases correspond to or have a counterpart in a spiritual problem. As we read in *Arcana Coelestia*, "spiritual sicknesses...are evils destructive of the life of a will desiring what is good, and falsities destructive of the love of an understanding to see what is true; in short, things destructive of spiritual life composed of faith and charity" (*Arcana Coelestia* 8364:3).

Many of Jesus' miracles were miracles of healing. His work in the world represents a kind of healing that He wishes to bring to our lives. The question is, "What do we have to do to receive this healing?"

The first step is that we must recognize that a part of our life is in need of healing. With a physical disease, this often isn't very hard for us to recognize. When we have a sense of what it is like to be healthy and then recognize that we have begun to feel poorly, we suspect we are sick. It is trickier when a sickness or a physical problem comes on very slowly and without obvious changes over a long period of time. For example, it is common for a person who needs

glasses to be relatively unaware that he no longer sees as well as he should. There is an assumption that probably everyone sees just as he does. He doesn't even reflect on how fuzzy things are at a distance. Sometimes a person can recognize that he needs to have his vision corrected by noticing that the people around him see things that he doesn't see.

The spiritual ills that interfere with our lives are particularly hard for us to recognize because some of the core ones in our life have always been there. It's as if we have only the vaguest idea of what it means to be healthy. We've always been somewhat spiritually sick in that particular area of life.

For example, a woman can have a pattern of reacting very defensively whenever the slightest indication is given that she has done something wrong in an important area of her life. Her defensiveness makes her lash out at the source of what she perceives to be criticism. It can make her berate herself and can foster feelings of hopelessness and helplessness. It makes a mess of many interactions with friends, with her husband and children, at work. But she doesn't even realize that there is any other way to react to indications that something might be wrong. If this woman is seeking to be led by the Lord and trying to be a good and useful person, He can gradually lead her to see that this pattern of reaction is hurting herself and others. It is keeping her from realistically seeing herself and recognizing what she can do to be more useful.

Another example of a spiritual sickness would be that of a man who rarely reflects on the broad patterns in his life. Each day's events are seen by him as unique and explainable in terms of external circumstances. Since he isn't aware of his own role in reacting to what has happened, he is unaware that if he asked for the Lord's help in changing his reactions, many events would go very differently from their all-too-typical course. The man is hurting himself and others, but he doesn't see it.

Sometimes we can feel discouraged by the frequent reminders of our fallible nature that occur in the Lord's Word. It can seem that every time we turn to it, it says, "You are really sick." This in itself can lead a person to shrug his shoulders and say, "Why even try to get better? There is too much wrong." The first step in being healed by the Lord is that a person recognize that there is a problem that needs to be attended to. This is spoken of in the Beatitudes, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted" and "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled" (Matthew 5:4,6). To the extent that a person shrugs off problems with the reaction "Well, that is just the way things are," there is likely to be little sense of personal responsibility or personal capability to bring about a change. Consequently, the present state of affairs may continue unchanged indefinitely, or it may even get worse.

A wonderful passage in the *Arcana Coelestia* strongly reassures us that we aren't complete and total messes. It starts out: "In some states a person can be called fairly perfect" (*Arcana Coelestia* 894). And then it goes on to say, "but in countless others he cannot." The Lord doesn't expect us to be perfect throughout our lives, but He does want us to recognize that some of our faults and flaws are seriously dangerous to ourselves and others. They are spiritual diseases that will interfere with important uses that we would like to accomplish. They need to be healed.

Usually when we get physically sick, we don't feel guilty because some germ or virus has gained a foothold in our body. Similarly, the Lord encourages us to recognize that all the evil that influences our lives comes from hell. The debilitating guilt that a person feels for faults and flaws likewise has its source in the evil spirits of hell. They love to induce evil loves and false ideas into our consciousness and then condemn us for them. They are the enemies spoken of in Psalm 41 who accuse and condemn with these words: "All who hate me whisper together against me; against me they devise my hurt. 'An evil disease,' they say, 'clings to him. And now that he lies down, he will rise up no more'" (7-8).

In many of the Lord's miracles of healing, the people came to Him for help. They came to be touched by Him and so be healed. In many of these miracles the sick person's faith was an important part of the healing. We, too, need to seek the Lord if we are to be healed. We can recognize that we need His help in some area of life and pray to Him for what we need.

We may sometimes wish that we could be healed of our spiritual ills as instantaneously as the miracles in the New Testament. We rarely are. Sometimes a person feels that he has been working on the same spiritual problem all of his life, and in some states of mind it appears that he has made little or no progress. The reason that we don't experience instantaneous change when we ask for it is that the consequences of such change would actually not be good. A person who gets a pair of glasses for the first time certainly can see better instantly, but for some period of time these glasses will seem foreign to him. He won't really feel like himself. The same would be true if the Lord instantly changed us. Another problem with instantaneous change is that we don't know what the consequences of changing one area of our life will be on many others. Our spiritual state is such a complex interconnection of so many features that even small changes in one area can have surprising results.

Another feature of being spiritually healed is that sometimes progress can look more as if we are going backward. A natural example of this is the renovation of a kitchen. A lot of demolition, dust, and mess are the first steps before a new and much more useful kitchen can begin to take shape. A somewhat similar event occurs in our spiritual development. Consider the following passage from *Arcana Coelestia*: "Before anything is restored to order it is very common for everything to be reduced first of all to a state of confusion resembling chaos so that things that are not compatible may be separated from one another. And once these have been separated the Lord arranges them into order" (842:3).

The Lord wills to heal us of the spiritual diseases that are hurting us and those around us. He will certainly come to us when we call. May we trust in His loving care. May we open our eyes to see the qualities in our life that need His healing touch. And may we seek His healing touch each day.

Amen.

Lessons: Matthew 9:35-38, 10:1-4; Psalm 41; *Arcana Coelestia* 8364

Image: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Eustache_Le_Sueur_003.jpg