

# **DIVINE HEALING OF THE MIND**

## **by R H Johnston**

### **Healing of physical disease**

Jesus and the apostles healed people of physical diseases in various ways by words and actions. The New Testament provides many examples of the healing of different sorts of physical illnesses and disabilities. For this kind of ministry people came and sought healing for themselves, they were also brought by others, and they were directly approached by Jesus and the apostles.

### **Exorcism of evil spirits**

The other kind of direct personal ministry carried out by Jesus and the apostles was the driving out of evil spirits by a word of command (Matthew 8:16). In every case where details are recorded, the evil spirits exhibited clear manifestations such as crying out, (Mark 1:24; Mark 3:11; Mark 5:5; Acts 16:17), self-destruction (Mark 5:5; Mark 9:20-22) or unnatural strength (Mark 5:3-4).

Ordinary people could recognise when someone was possessed and they brought the need to Jesus and the disciples, as at Mark 7:25-30; Mark 9:17. Special spiritual revelation was not needed. Sometimes Jesus or an apostle dealt with the demoniac directly (Mark 5:2; Acts 16:16-18). The most interesting characteristic of the demonised in scripture is that **none** sought help for himself. Indeed the normal reaction of those possessed by evil spirits was to reject help and ask the spiritual person to leave them alone (Mark 1:24; Mark 5:7).

The Bible uses very few adjectives to describe spirits (see a concordance under "spirit"), and in many cases what is described is a condition of the human spirit. This is true even in Luke 13:10-16 where Jesus declares the woman to be freed from her infirmity, lays His hands on her and heals her, because Matthew 8:16 states that Jesus dealt with spirits by expelling them with a word.

Thus the basis and nature of the ministry of those who practice the "exorcism of spirits" from those who seek help for themselves, and who claim to identify hundreds of "named" spirits which they then expel must be seriously questioned. There are no biblical cases of demons being expelled from any Christian. Nor is it scriptural to interrogate a spirit to determine its character before expelling it: the occult teaches that a spirit must be named before it can be expelled. (At Mark 5:9 & Luke 8:30 Jesus had already commanded the spirit to leave.)

## **Psychological disorders**

Neither Jesus nor the apostles undertook any direct ministry for purely psychological problems, nor is there any suggestion that anyone spent time on lengthy personal counselling. Since people with such problems are usually very willing to seek out someone who will listen to them and provide a sympathetic ear, this is remarkable.

Some biblical cases of demon possession would now be regarded (wrongly) as psychiatric problems. An example is the boy with the spirit which threw him into the fire and water (Matthew 17:15), a well-known characteristic of some forms of epilepsy. But it would be a mistake to conclude from this case that the bible regards all psychological illness as the direct result of demonic activity.

Normal psychological problems are widely recognised in scripture. Many Psalms were written as the result of a bout of depression. Job and Lamentations both deal with a very deep level of sorrow: this is also evident at 2 Corinthians 1:8. Ecclesiastes was written by someone disillusioned with life. Fear is mentioned frequently throughout the bible. Anxiety is mentioned (e.g. Matthew 6:25-34, Mark 13:11 and Philippians 4:6), as is delusion, particularly at 2 Thessalonians 2:11.

If there was no direct ministry for these conditions in New Testament times, it can only be because afflictions of the mind, the will and the emotions are healed through a full obedience to the gospel of Christ, and the commands of God (Isaiah 58:6-12).

## **Characteristics of sufferers from mental illness**

Apart from cases with a purely physiological basis, mental sickness is the consequence of wrong attitudes towards God and His creation. The initial underlying cause of mental illness is a refusal to perceive and face the world and reality as it is. This is the wrong type of grieving, which leads to death (2 Corinthians 7:10; contrast Psalm 21:4). The form of the sickness varies according to temperament. As it develops, progressively more extreme manifestations may appear. The initial refusal to face the truth may become obscured. The life denying aspects of the condition can cause metabolic changes in the body which reinforce the condition. In some cases the person becomes prey to invasion by alien spirits. Thus it seems that God "gives people over" to their sins (Romans 1:18-32, especially 1:24,26,28; Deuteronomy 28:15-68, especially 28:20,28-29).

In some cases, the person externalises what is happening, blaming his condition on other people, the environment, or even God Himself. This leads him to believe

that his problem can only be solved by the actions of others. Many who seek help for their problems want a quick and easy way out of what is actually a spiritual problem without any effort on their part. The apostles did not go along with such laziness. In Acts 8:22-24, Peter commands Simon to repent and pray to the Lord. Simon's reply was typical: instead of doing as he was told, he asked Peter to pray instead. It does not appear that Peter did so.

In other cases, people want to keep their problems and to continue to talk about them, because this makes them the centre of attention. They may use a diagnosis of mental illness as an excuse for disobeying direct biblical commands. However, 1 Corinthians 10:13 is applicable to **all** Christians without exception, regardless of how a psychiatrist diagnosed their problem.

### **The Gospel answer to mental illness**

What is the solution to mental illness? Jesus Christ, through his atonement, has dealt with the problem of sin which underlies these problems. The following illustrate the power of obedience to the gospel, through which Isaiah 61:1-3 becomes real.

#### **Answer 1): Real repentance followed by water baptism (Acts 2:38-42)**

Repentance is a "change in attitude", principally towards God (Acts 20:21) and Jesus Christ as Lord. It also involves looking at everything else from a changed standpoint. Since the Fall (Genesis 3) humans have been self-centred. This has to change. Baptism in water is a death to self and the old life, and a raising to new life in Christ (Romans 6; 2 Corinthians 5:17).

Real repentance and obedience expressed in baptism lead to the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38), dealing radically with guilt, and deliver from the power and eternal consequences of sin. Moreover God then supplies the power of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38) which enables a man to live a life that pleases God, and to face and overcome the challenges of life (Psalm 18:29).

What does repentance further involve for the mentally ill who have made an initial repentance expressed in water baptism? Many psychiatric illnesses are the result of a person wanting everything adjusted to suit him. Because things do not suit him, he no longer has a right attitude to what he is and what God has made. God then gives him up to judgement because of his lack of joy and thankfulness (Deuteronomy 28:47f; Romans 1:21). By attempting to save his life he loses it (Mark 8:35).

Repentance in this instance is to see that God is good, what He has created is good, and to see things as He does. The person should see his own place in God's

plan, as dead (Galatians 2:20) but now raised with Christ (Romans 6:4), and that in Christ he has overcome every worldly circumstance (1 John 4:4; 1 John 5:4-5). He should recognise that God has freely accepted us in Christ (Ephesians 1:6 (AV)), believe that for himself, and that he is seated with Christ in the heavenlies (Ephesians 1:17-23; 2:6). Instead of seeing his problems as overwhelming, he should see that he is in a position above these circumstances. This will enable him to overcome, and be thankful in them (Colossians 3:17).

Another cause of psychological problems that needs repentance is covetousness, not only of what belongs to others materially, but also of their gifts and abilities. This leads to a person trying to be what he is not: this destructive attitude needs to be changed.

### **Answer 2): Forgiveness of those who have sinned against us**

God's forgiveness depends on our forgiving others (Matthew 18:23-35). The penalties for unforgiveness are severe: unforgiveness leads to resentment, hatred, bitterness and many other evils including hardness of spirit, depression and anxiety.

### **Answer 3): Rejoicing in the Lord**

God commands us to rejoice in the Lord (Philippians 4:4). God's commands are not burdensome (1 John 5:3), because whatever He commands, He enables. There is always solid ground to stand upon from which to obey any command, including the command to rejoice. Rejoicing in the Lord is not wound up by false optimism or singing choruses, but is an inner response which depends on knowing that "The Lord is at hand" (Philippians 4:4-9). He enables us to rejoice and gives the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness (Isaiah 61:3). Many Psalms are helpful because they show how failures to see things as God sees them can be overcome (e.g. Psalms 42, 43, 77, 143). We can also rejoice because we are seated with Christ in the heavenlies, an assured position with God (Ephesians 2:6).

### **Answer 4): Not being anxious or fearful**

The bible repeated commands men not to fear. There are solid grounds again for not being anxious or fearful, for example at Philippians 4:4-7; Matthew 6:25-34; 2 Timothy 1:7.

### **Answer 5): Loving the truth**

Loving the truth is vital if delusion is to be avoided. It is sobering to recognise that refusal to love the truth and see things as they are may lead to unpleasant and destructive afflictions which will rob a person of the life God intends.

(Matthew 25:14-30). It is essential to choose life (Deuteronomy 30:19; Psalm 21:4).

Those suffering from delusion of any sort should recognise that it overcame them because they failed to love the truth (2 Thessalonians 2:9-12). Not only must the full truth of scripture be faced, but also the reality of his circumstances needs to be seen from God's perspective. A very thorough obedience to every divine command is required of any person recovering from delusion, recognising that, through the Holy Spirit, it is possible to obey (1 Corinthians 10:13).

Repentance should be followed by setting the mind on the things above (Colossians 3:2) and on what good and genuine (Philippians 4:8). All fanciful speculation and fantasy must be avoided (compare 1 Timothy 1:3-7, 2 Timothy 2:14-17, Titus 1:10-16, Jude 1:8). Work or other disciplined activity, particularly work with the hands (compare 1 Thessalonians 4:11), should be undertaken. This should be done alongside others, whose direction will act like the bankers of Matthew 25:27. This will restore a productive attitude (James 1:26-27; 2 Thessalonians 3:6-13; Ecclesiastes 9:10).

### **How to minister to the mentally ill**

People with psychiatric problems should be encouraged to believe that the scriptures are true, applicable to them right where they are, and that they can obey them wholeheartedly in dependence on the Holy Spirit. This will engender faith in liberating Truth (John 8:32).

Where a Christian falls into such problems, he may request the elders to anoint him in accordance with James 5:14-16. The word for "sick" denotes weakness, an appropriate description of many psychological disorders. This passage lays stress on the confession of sins and prayer (James 5:16). Confession of sin is not an end in itself, but is with a view to deliverance from the power of the sins (1 John 1:9). The objective is to bring about repentance, obedience to the Word and renewed life in the Spirit. Ministry should never degenerate into lengthy, repetitious and probing counselling sessions.

### **Conclusion**

Apart from afflictions arising from demon possession, Scripture recognises only two classes of sickness. Sicknesses of the will, heart and mind, which would now be regarded as mental illnesses, are healed through obedience to the gospel, as foretold in Isaiah 61:1-3 for example. Sickness of the physical body (including those that give rise to abnormal brain function) may be healed through direct ministry.

There is no biblical basis for the modern "inner healing" type of ministry, the probing counselling techniques of which owe more to secular psychology than the scripture.

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These notes are not comprehensive but should stimulate personal bible study. Every effort has been made to be accurate, but the reader should test everything in accord with the example of Acts 17:11 and the command of 1 Thessalonians 5:21. Errors, or queries which are unresolved after consulting the LORD, should be referred to the author (email: rhjbibpap@rhj.org.uk) (1st Edn Jan 1983, 2nd Edn 8 March 1994, 3rd edn 27 July 1995, 2.9.2018)

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