Divine Healing

A Position Paper of Legacy Church

Introduction

Question surrounding divine healing have accompanied the church from its earliest days. Christians have always confessed that God is able to heal and that He bears the prosecution of His people, yet they have also wrestled with the persistent reality of sickness, suffering, and death among faithful believers. Throughout history the church has sought to hold these truths together without denying one in order to hold to another or the other. At times this balance has been maintained with pastoral wisdom, while at other times it has been distorted by extremes that either deny God's ongoing work or promise more than Scripture itself does.

This paper seeks to articulate how Legacy Church understands divine healing in light of Scripture, church history, and faithful Christian practice across the centuries. Our goal is neither to diminish God's power nor to elevate human expectations, but to ground our hope in the character and purposes of God as revealed in His Word. By examining the witness of the early church, the Reformers, and contemporary Christianity, we aim to offer a biblically rooted, historically aware, and pastorally careful framework that encourages earnest prayer, humble trust, and endurance in whatever God ordains.

Prescriptive Biblical Passages on Healing

The following passages contain prescriptive commands or instructions regarding healing, distinct from mere descriptions of healings that occurred.

James 5:14–16

> *"Is anyone among you sick? 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. And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up; and if he has committed sins, it will be forgiven. Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working."*

This is the primary prescriptive passage for the church regarding healing. It commands the sick to call for elders, who are to pray and anoint with oil. Note that this does not guarantee immediate physical healing in every case, but promises God will respond to faithful prayer.

1 Corinthians 12:9, 28, 30

> *"To another gifts of healing by the one Spirit… And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing… Are all possess gifts of healing?"*

Paul lists gifts of healing among the spiritual gifts. The rhetorical question "Do all possess gifts of healing?" expects the answer "no," indicating that not all believers have this gift, and by extension, not all will experience healing.

Matthew 10:1, 8 (Apostolic Commission)

> *"Jesus he called to him his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every disease and every affliction… Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons."*

Jesus gave the twelve apostles authority to heal. This was a specific commission to the apostles for their ministry, not a universal command to all believers for all time.

Mark 16:17–18

> *"And these signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up serpents with their hands; and if they drink any deadly poison, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover."*

Note: The longer ending of Mark (16:9–20) is not found in the earliest manuscripts and is disputed by textual scholars. Even if authentic, this passage describes signs that would accompany early believers, not promises for all believers at all times. The abuse of this text (snake handling, poison drinking) demonstrates the danger of making descriptions into universal prescriptions.

Key Observations

Scripture contains surprisingly few prescriptive commands about healing:

- Believers are commanded to pray for the sick (James 5:14–16)
- Gifts of healing are given to some believers, not all (1 Corinthians 12)
- God promises to respond to prayer, but does not promise immediate physical healing in every case
- The apostles were given specific healing authority for their ministry
- Nowhere does Scripture command believers to expect healing or teach that lack of healing indicates lack of faith

Early Church Position and Practice

The early church held a consistent view of divine healing that recognized both God's power to heal and the reality of persistent suffering among believers.

Justin Martyr (mid 2nd century, around AD 150–160)

> "Many of our Christian men have healed and do heal many who were possessed by demons, throughout the whole world and in your city, by exorcising them in the name of Jesus Christ…and they render helpless and drive out the devils."—*Second Apology* 6

Irenaeus (c. 130–200, AD)

> Writes in *Against Heresies* that he saw healings as continuing traditions in the church, but **not possessed by all believers nor guaranteed in every case.**

"Some indeed but the sick by laying their hands upon them, and they are made whole…even the dead have been raised and remained among us for many years."—*Against Heresies 2.32.4*

Tertullian (c. 155–220, AD)

Affirmed healing miracles but warned against those who made healing a central focus or measure of faith. He emphasized that suffering often served God's purposes in sanctification.

Augustine of Hippo (354–430 AD)

Initially expressed skepticism regarding the frequency of miracles in his own day, but later revised his perspective. In *The City of God* and *Retractions*, he documented numerous healings known personally to him, affirming that God continued to heal according to His will. Nevertheless, Augustine maintained that such miracles were extraordinary acts of grace, not promised norms for every believer.

Early Church Practice

The early church practiced:

- Prayer for the sick, often with anointing of oil (following James 5:14–15)
- Laying on of hands for healing
- Recognition that healing was sometimes granted and sometimes withheld according to God's sovereign purposes
- Care for the sick through medical means alongside prayer
- Teaching that suffering could provide spiritual maturity and endurance which is of ultimate value.

Notably, the early church did not teach that lack of healing indicated lack of faith. Many faithful believers suffered prolonged illness, and martyrdom was considered the highest calling, not an indication of faled faith.

Reformers' Position and Practice

The Protestant Reformers generally took a conservative position regarding miraculous gifts while affirming God's ability to heal in response to prayer.

Martin Luther (1483–1546)

Luther believed miraculous gifts had ceased but prayed fervently for healing. His famously prayed for his friend Philip Melanchthon, who was near death and recovered. However, Luther attributed this to God's mercy, not to a normative pattern believers should expect. He emphasized that God's will sometimes includes suffering for our sanctification.

John Calvin (1509–1564)

Calvin taught that the gift of healing was given to the apostolic church to confirm the gospel but had ceased. He wrote in *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (IV.19.18) that God still answers prayer for healing but does not grant healing as a normative gift. Calvin emphasized God's sovereignty in both granting and withholding healing according to His purposes.

Reformed Practice

The Reformers practiced:

- Earnest prayer for the sick
- Use of medical means as gifts from God
- Teaching on the sanctifying purposes of suffering
- Rejection of those who claimed healing as a right or guaranteed outcome of faith
- Emphasis on God's sovereignty in both healing and allowing continued illness

Mainstream Christianity's Position and Practice

Contemporary mainstream Christianity holds diverse views on healing, generally falling into three broad categories:

Cessationist Position

Held by many Reformed, Presbyterian, and some Baptist churches. This view maintains that miraculous gifts of healing ceased with the apostolic age. God does still heal in response to prayer, but healing is not a spiritual gift active in the church today. Suffering is often God's will for sanctification.

Continuationist Position

Held by many Evangelical, Pentecostal, and Charismatic churches. This view affirms that spiritual gifts, including healing, continue today. However, within continuationism there is significant debate about how normative healing should be and whether it always God's will to heal.

Word of Faith / Prosperity Gospel Position

Held by Word of Faith movement and some Charismatic churches. This view teaches that healing is provided in the atonement and is therefore always God's will. Lack of healing is attributed to lack of faith, unrestrained sin, or demonic oppression. This position is rejected by mainstream Christianity as unbiblical and pastorally harmful.

Current Practice

Most mainstream churches practice:

- Prayer for the sick (corporate and individual)
- Anointing with oil in some traditions
- Encouragement to seek medical care
- Teaching that God may heal or may sanctify through suffering
- Rejection of the prosperity gospel's health and wealth teachings

The Position of Legacy Church

Legacy Church affirms God's power and willingness to heal while rejecting the false promises and theological errors of the prosperity gospel and hyper-charismatic movements. We pray boldly for healing while submitting to God's sovereign purposes, whether He chooses to heal or to sanctify through suffering.

We recognize that healing is the sign a partial and temporary. Even those who have been healed from the dead eventually died again. Our ultimate hope is not in physical healing in this life, but in the resurrection of the body and eternal life in the new heaven and new earth, where "He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away" (Revelation 21:4).

Until that day, we will earnestly pray, anoint, endure, and we find God's grace sufficient for every trial.

What We Affirm

1. God Can and Does Heal Today

We affirm that God is sovereign, powerful, and able to heal. He has not ceased, and we believe He continues to heal in response to prayer. Spiritual gifts, including gifts of healing, have not ceased and may be active in the church today.

2. Healing Is Miraculous, Not Normative

A miracle, by definition, an extraordinary intervention by God that breaks the expected pattern. If healing were normative (the standard expectation for all believers at all times), it would cease to be miraculous. We should pray for healing while recognizing that God may choose to heal or to sanctify through suffering according to His sovereign purposes.

3. It Is Not Always God's Will to Heal

While we pray boldly for healing, we recognize that Scripture and church history demonstrate that God does not always choose to heal. Paul was not healed of his thorn in the flesh (2 Corinthians 12:7–9). Timothy had frequent stomach ailments (1 Timothy 5:23). Trophimus was left sick at Miletus (2 Timothy 4:20). God's will sometimes includes suffering for our sanctification and His glory.

4. Suffering and Trial Are Normative

Scripture consistently teaches that suffering is the expected Christian experience:

> *"Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22)*
>
> *"It has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake" (Philippians 1:29)*
>
> *"Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (2 Timothy 3:12)*
>
> *"Consider it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness" (James 1:2–3)*
>
> *"Hit rejoice in our suffering, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope" (Romans 5:3–4)*

If healing were always God's will, these passages would make no sense. Suffering serves God's purposes in producing endurance, character, hope, and Christ-likeness.

5. Lack of Healing Does Not Indicate Lack of Faith

We emphatically reject the teaching that if someone is not healed, it is because they lack faith. This doctrine is:

- Biblically unfounded (Paul, Timothy, Trophimus, and many faithful believers were not healed)
- Pastorally cruel (it adds guilt and condemnation to those already suffering)
- Theologically heretical (it makes healing dependent on human faith rather than God's sovereign will)
- Practically destructive (it devastates believers when healing does not come)

6. We Pray for Healing with Faith and Submission

Following James 5:14–16, we:

- Pray earnestly for the sick
- Anoint with oil where appropriate
- Exercise faith that God can heal
- Submit to God's sovereign will, whether He chooses to heal or to sanctify through suffering
- Confess sins' example of praying, "Not my will, but your be done" (Luke 22:42)

7. We Value Medical Care as God's Common Grace

We believe medical care is a gift from God and do not see it as opposed to faith. Luke was a physician (Colossians 4:14). Paul recommended wine for Timothy's stomach (1 Timothy 5:23). We thank God for medical advances and encourage believers to use medical care while also praying for healing.

What We Reject

Legacy Church explicitly rejects the following teachings as unbiblical and harmful:

1. The Prosperity Gospel View of Healing

We reject the Word of Faith teaching that healing is guaranteed in the atonement and is therefore always God's will. This teaching claims that Christ's physical suffering purchased not only spiritual redemption but also guaranteed physical healing for all believers who have sufficient faith.

Why This Is False:

- Isaiah 53:4 (% in mouth we are healed") is fulfilled in spiritual healing from sin, not guaranteed physical healing (see 1 Peter 2:24 context, below)
- If healing were guaranteed by the atonement, all believers would be healed immediately, or all are immediately justified
- This teaching cannot account for faithful believers who remain sick or die from illness
- It creates false guilt and spiritual abuse when healing does not come

2. Anti-Cessation of "Kingdom Now" Theology

We reject the hyper-charismatic teaching promoted by Bethel Church (Redding) and any others that interprets "Kingdom come, on earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10) to mean that healing should be normative and expected for all believers now.

Why This Is False:

- This prayer is eschatological, looking forward to the full establishment of God's kingdom at Christ's return
- We live in the "already but not yet" of the kingdom. The kingdom has broken into history but will not be fully consummated until the return of Christ and new earth
- In heaven there will be no sickness, death, or suffering (Revelation 21–4). That is our true current reality we crave.
- Jesus Himself prayed this prayer, yet He did not heal everyone, and His own disciples suffered and died
- This theology creates unrealistic expectations and devastating disappointment when healing does not come

3. "Name It and Claim It" Faith Formulas

We reject the teaching that healing can be manipulated or guaranteed through:

- Positive confession repeating healing verses mechanically
- Faith formulas (claiming promises as if they were blank checks)
- Binding and loosing spiritual forces
- Spiritual warfare techniques that promise healing

These practices treat God as a cosmic vending machine who must respond to our faith techniques. They are manipulative, unbiblical, and pastorally harmful.

4. Healing Crusades and Celebrity Healers

We are deeply skeptical of healing crusades and celebrity healers who claim extraordinary healing gifts. While we do not deny that God may give gifts of healing to individuals, we observe that:

- These ministries often lack accountability and verification of claimed healings
- Often frequently exploit the vulnerable and desperate
- They build celebrity platforms rather than local church ministry
- They create false hopes and often financial exploitation
- They cannot produce the kinds of verifiable, organic healings that occurred in Jesus' ministry (limbs growing back, congenital conditions healed, etc.)

5. The Determination of Medicine and Doctors

We reject the teaching that seeking medical care demonstrates a lack of faith or that medicine is opposed to divine healing. God works through both natural (doctors, instrumentation and ordinary means. To refuse medical care in pursuit of faith healing is presumptuous and often tragic.