

Thus the promise that the one who is sick will be restored to health by believing prayer and that the Lord will raise him from his sick bed, is conditioned on whether it is the Lord's will that the sick man recover. Obviously, if it is not God's will that the sick man recover, then he will not be restored to health and raised up!

These five principles appear to be very important to the formulation of a scriptural perspective on deliverance from suffering.

D. The Relationship of Present Deliverance from Suffering to the Revealed Will of God

Those Christians who claim that present healing for all believers is a benefit purchased for us by Christ, and that no believer need continue being diseased or disabled or deformed, run into problems with God's revealed will. Those who claim that every believer has full ability to be healed now through faith in God's almighty power made available to us by Christ, show a lack of understanding of and an impatience with God's Plan.

Not all of the benefits of Christ's atonement were intended to be applied immediately, either to Christians individually or to the Church corporately or to the spirit world or to the physical universe.

Thus in making our character and conduct like that of Christ, God first makes us spiritually alive and gives us new qualities. He then works with us throughout our entire lifetime to make us progressively more Christlike, more holy. And when we go to Him at death, or are caught up to meet Him at His Coming, we are made entirely holy, as Christ is holy. This is not done all at once, but in stages. It is not that Christ's atonement is not great enough or powerful enough to make us entirely like Christ in one moment; it simply is not God's will to do it that way!

The same is true in the case of deliverance from physical death. God first takes away our guilt and our death penalty. He delivers us from the fear of death, through which we were held in bondage to Satan all of our lives. He brings us into a saving relationship with the Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee that we will one day be raised from death. Then at Christ's coming we are either resurrected or transformed, depending on whether we have died in Christ or are still alive in Him. Thus our deliverance is accomplished in stages. Again, it is not that the atonement is too weak to deliver us from death immediately; it is simply not God's Plan to do so!

The same thing is true in the case of Satan's defeat and destruction. Christ certainly crushed the Serpent's head by His atonement, and Satan is a defeated enemy, but the devil is still very much alive and very active on planet earth! Satan's final doom has been guaranteed by Christ's death, but His sentence has not yet been executed. Yet every time a victory is won for Christ, Satan suffers another defeat! The time is coming when Satan will finally be destroyed in the lake of fire, but that has not happened yet. It is clear that Satan's defeat occurs in stages, and that this is God's will.