

The Patio Pulpit For, December 9, 2020 “Studies from the letter to the Hebrews”

I want to give you a heads up before I get started. I am beginning a new Bible study tonight from the book of Hebrews, not a study through Hebrews but a series of studies from the book. And furthermore, I’m going to do some serious rabbit hunting before I get to Hebrews. And my chasing a rabbit begins now. And you will understand why when I finally get to our text. If you don’t know what I’m talking about when I say chasing rabbits, I’ll explain it. It is a term used by hunters who are let’s say ‘coon huntin,’ and one of their dogs picks up a rabbit trail and goes after the rabbit instead of the raccoon. Normally, that’s really bad, especially for the poor dog. But occasionally chasin’ rabbits ain’t so bad.

For my entire ministry as a pastor I have consistently emphasized the essential matter of context. It’s a lesson I took to heart while I was at Columbia Bible College where our hermeneutics professor drove that point home. I got it. And when I got it, I remembered from my past the way my Charismatic and Pentecostal friends were consistently taking Scripture out of context to make the Bible say what they wanted it to say. Most of it was harmless enough but when it wasn’t, it was very harmful to them and the body of Christ.

Let me give you their “taken-out-of-context-go-to-verse” when the Charismatics and Pentecostals want to defend their belief that healing was included in Christ’s work of atonement. That would mean that everyone who comes to faith in Jesus is supposed to be healed, they just don’t know it unless a Charismatic or Pentecostal person tells them. 1 Peter 2:24, ²⁴ *and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; **for by His wounds you were healed.*** (1 Pet. 2:24 NAU) Now just from that verse what would you surmise it is about? Think about it before you answer. Analyze the verse and you will probably come up with the meaning.

You can see immediately that it’s about Jesus dying for our sins. And you can immediately see that the verse is about something far greater than physical healing. But does that verse teach that physical

healing was in the atonement and that everyone is supposed to live in divine health? No, it doesn't. If it did and were that true, then Oral Roberts would not have needed glasses all his life and he would not have died of heart disease. And the late Paul Crouch, one of the leading heretics of our time would not have been senile and crippled when he died. Tammy Faye Bakker would not have died of a horrific case of body-destroying cancer who then posted pics for all the world to see. And the father of Joel Osteen, John Osteen, would not have died of a heart attack at 77 in 1999. And another man who taught divine healing, Charles Capps, died of an "undisclosed" cause in 2014.

Here's the context of 1 Peter 2:24:

²¹ *For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps,*

²² **WHO COMMITTED NO SIN, NOR WAS ANY DECEIT FOUND IN HIS MOUTH;**

²³ *and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously;*

²⁴ *and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed.*

Christ suffered and He was perfect. He was never sick, but He did suffer the rejection of His own and finally the beatings, the scourging and the crucifixion. And the context in our 1 Peter passage is all about Jesus, the Son of God and God the Son. Since His suffering left us an example of what's in store for us, how can it be that His life and atoning death didn't somehow preempt His suffering as the God-Man? I know. Because it was His purpose to live and die on our behalf, including suffering as our example. ¹⁵ *For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, "Abba! Father!"*

¹⁶ *The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God,*

¹⁷ *and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him.*

¹⁸ *For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us. (Rom. 8:15-18 NAU)*

Now back to the context of 1st Peter 2:24.

²⁵ *For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls. (1 Pet. 2:21-25 NAU)* I don't know how it could be any plainer. This is not physical healing but spiritual. The context demands spiritual healing, not physical.

And by the way, the word "you have returned" is one word in the Greek text and it is a verb, a passive verb. This is telling us that our return to the Shepherd and Guardian of our souls was all God's doing. We did not return ourselves. How could we? We were dead. It is quite literally, "*you **have been returned** to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls.*"

Do I believe that God heals? Of course I do, but not because of this passage. I believe that God heals because of many other passages of Scripture like James 5:14, ¹⁴ *Is anyone among you sick? Then he must call for the elders of the church and they are to pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord;*

¹⁵ *and the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him. (Jas. 5:14-15 NAU)* So there is every reason for me to believe in physical healing, just not from the passage in 1st Peter. That passage is not talking about physical healing being included in the atonement. It isn't talking about physical healing...period.

²⁴ *and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed.*

²⁵ *For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls. (1 Pet. 2:21-25*

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NAU) By His stripes or wounds you were healed of your sinfulness and unrighteousness. That's what is actually going on in v.24.

Now lets look elsewhere at two Biblical illustrations of believers who were not healed through faith healing. ²⁵ *But I thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger and minister to my need;*

²⁶ *because he was longing for you all and was distressed because you had heard that he was sick.*

²⁷ *For indeed he was sick to the point of death, but God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me, so that I would not have sorrow upon sorrow. (Phil. 2:25-27 NAU)*

²⁰ *Erastus remained at Corinth, but Trophimus I left sick at Miletus. (2 Tim. 4:20 NAU)*

Do you see why I emphasize over and over the importance of context?

And why am I emphasizing context so strongly here at the beginning of this study in Hebrews? It's because this is one of the most misquoted books in the entirety of the word of God. No book in the Bible has brought so much agony and doubt to the body of Christ as has the letter to the Jews, the Hebrews. And that can be directly attributed to taking almost the entire book out of context. For now, let's go to chapter 1 and v.1. I will address some of the more troubling verses as we go along.

Hebrews 1:1 *God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways,*

² *in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world.*

³ *And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, (Heb. 1:1-3 NAU).*

I'm going to close with this from our study in Hebrews.

First, God spoke in many ways to the fathers long ago.

What does that mean?

First notice that it was spoken “*in the prophets,*” or better, “*through the prophets.*” Did you know that God never did anything in Israel without first letting His prophets in on it? ⁷ *Surely the Lord GOD does nothing Unless He reveals His secret counsel To His servants the prophets. (Amos 3:7 NAU).* And don't forget our lesson on context. This was spoken specifically to the prophet Amos about how God spoke to the Jews/Israel at that time. There is no New Testament equivalent either in the Old Testament kind of prophets speaking in our day or in how God does in fact speak to the church today since He has spoken in a final way through His Son and through the inspired writings of our Scriptures. The voice of God comes to us by two means, the Spirit and the word. ⁶ *Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively applied to myself and Apollos for your sakes, so that in us **you may learn not to exceed what is written**, so that no one of you will become arrogant in behalf of one against the other. (1 Cor. 4:6 NAU)* That is the cardinal rule for listening for the voice of God. We are not to go beyond what is written.

In the Hebrew Scriptures the phrase “Thus says the Lord” occurs 419 times yet doesn't occur even once in the New Testament. In the New Testament there is an equivalent phrase that occurs 60 times, it is “*it is written.*”

It is written is to the New Testament what thus says the Lord is to the Old.

As someone very cleverly said, “If you want to hear the voice of God today, read the Bible out loud.”