

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE HEART (THE INNER MAN) AND THE FLESH

by Samantha Savige

To be physically whole, we must be walking in the truth, and our hearts must be uncompromised by sin.

The presence of sickness and disease in a person's life is linked to a number of factors in their lives. One general reason is because it reflects the general presence of sin in the world, and the cursed conditions sin brings. But often it is deeper than that. Illness is often linked to personal sin. It is the direct result of those who have been engaging in sinful ways, such as, adultery, fornication, drunkenness, gluttony, lying, covetousness, bitterness and many other like examples.

There is a direct relationship between the heart and the flesh. When the Bible uses the word "heart", it generally refers to the inner man — the spiritual component of man — consisting of the spirit and the soul (the mind, will and emotions). The word "flesh" refers to the physical body.

"And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and *I pray God* your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." (1 Thessalonians 5:23).

"For the word of God *is* quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and *is* a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." (Hebrews 4:12).

These Scriptures show that there is a differentiation between the physical body (joints, marrow), and the inner spiritual component of man (the soul and spirit).

The physical condition of the body greatly reflects what a person's spiritual condition is. Plainly speaking, there is a spiritual root cause to every detrimental physical manifestation. Sickness and disease must therefore have a basis in something spiritual and very often something directly in the human soul.

The Bible states: "A sound heart *is* the life of the flesh: but envy the rottenness of the bones." (Proverbs 14:30). This reveals that the flesh (the outward man) and the heart (the inner man) are linked. A sound heart is one which hears and believes the Word of God. "But that on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep *it*, and bring forth fruit with patience." (Luke 8:15). Hearing the Word keeps a person spiritually sound, and kept away from partaking in sin. Sinful behaviour can lead to all types of physical ailments. For example, sin such as fornication can lead to sexually transmitted diseases; alcoholism can lead to liver and brain damage; fear can lead, by way of excessive stress, to gastrointestinal problems and mental breakdown. Even so-called "little" sins lead to big problems.

Sin is rebellion against the Word of God, and partaking in sinful behaviour always carries with it negative consequences. Christians must keep their hearts uncompromised by sin if they are going to maintain a sound heart and healthy body. All of our choices need to be in line with Biblical standards. God instructs us not to "... be partaker of other men's sins: keep thyself pure." (1 Timothy 5:22). The Scriptures shows us the types of things that God hates, and therefore we should have nothing to do with these things. These include behaviours that damage the body — such as the sin of consuming alcohol. Sins like gluttony and other unrestrained behaviours — lasciviousness — are impure, and are a manifestation of a spiritually compromised position. Gluttony and unrestraint, for instance, can lead to obesity, and the multitude of problems

associated with this condition, such as diabetes and heart disease.

Mental illness also has strong and recognisable spiritual links. The devil is the oppressor of people's minds and is the author of tormenting thoughts and dysfunctional thinking. Unless he is resisted with the power of God and God's Word, he will attempt to disrupt people's minds, and manifest real and noticeable problems.

In the area of health, many people place an unequal emphasis on maintaining the physical body, at the expense of a sound inner man, or heart. (Some pretend to address the inner man by following various paths in Eastern religions, but these are often based on physical "key points" in human anatomy, and they are not properly discerning the function of the inner man.)

For a Christian, a whole and healthy body is the consequence of having a sound heart. Alternatively, if the heart is compromised through sin, then an entry point for devilish oppression and sickness has been created. A sound-hearted person will regard the body as the temple of the Holy Ghost, and will therefore take practical steps to maintaining a healthy body, such as partaking of a good diet and regular physical activity. "... know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost *which is* in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's." (1 Corinthians 6:19, 20). 1 Timothy 4:8 shows that whilst exercise does have a beneficial effect on our bodies, "... godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come."

"And a certain man was there, which had an infirmity thirty and eight years. When Jesus saw him lie, and knew that he had been now a long time in that case, he saith unto him, Wilt thou be made whole? The impotent man answered him, Sir, I have no man, when the water is troubled, to put me into the pool: but while I am coming, another steppeth down before me. Jesus saith unto him, Rise, take up thy bed, and walk. And immediately the man was made whole, and took up his bed, and walked: and on the same day was the sabbath." (John 5:5–9). Jesus did not just address the ailment, but He addressed the root of the problem. The entry point for the devilish oppression of infirmity in that man's life was personal sin. "Afterward Jesus findeth him in the temple, and said unto him, Behold, thou art made whole: sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee." (John 5:14).

This man had been healed by Christ, yet he was given a warning to keep himself pure from sin, lest a worse ailment would afflict him. The Scripture shows that the state of our heart affects our health. Sin will bring affliction because it is rebellion against God, and so the devil will take the opportunity to use it as grounds to bring trouble into one's life. "Can a man take fire in his bosom, and his clothes not be burned?" (Proverbs 6:27). God wants total release of physical problems for His people; however, it is up to each individual to personally receive the Word of God. Specifically, believers must actively believe that, "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree" (Galatians 3:13). It is the Christian's responsibility to obey the Word, "Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage." (Galatians 5:1).

It is dangerous not to rely on God to maintain us in a state of good health and it is equally dangerous not to look to Him to provide healing if it is necessary. The Scripture says to acknowledge Him in all our ways (see Proverbs 3:6), so we should acknowledge Him in the area of our health. An important lesson can be learned from the stubborn and hard-hearted way King Asa in the Old Testament approached his own physical condition.

“And Asa in the thirty and ninth year of his reign was diseased in his feet, until his disease *was* exceeding *great*: yet in his disease he sought not to the LORD, but to the physicians. And Asa slept with his fathers, and died in the one and fortieth year of his reign.” (2 Chronicles 16:12, 13). Asa did not seek the Lord and this resulted in an untimely death.

God wants people to have a soft heart toward Him and His Word. A soft heart is ready to believe and receive His promises of wholeness and healing. King Asa left God out of his physical problems, and the physicians were not able to save him. While it is sometimes useful for a person to seek help from a doctor, he is but a man, and should not be relied on above God. “*It is* better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in man.” (Psalm 118:8). God’s Word will never fail if we have our genuine trust put in Him. We must faithfully rely upon His Word, even if a medical prognosis is negative. Hope and restoration are always found in God. “For with God nothing shall be impossible.” (Luke 1:37).

“Wherefore (as the Holy Ghost saith, To day if ye will hear his voice, Harden not your hearts, as in the provocation, in the day of temptation in the wilderness:” (Hebrews 3:7, 8). A hard heart has difficulty believing the Word of God, and will not listen to the Holy Spirit. The person who has a hard heart tends to let negativity and failure dominate in their thinking. Worry and fear are also characteristic in their life. This type of behaviour shuts out God’s power from working in their life. Christians should not display a hard heart because it is God’s will for us to listen to and receive His Word, and to boldly stand on His promises in faith. “For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.” (2 Timothy 1:7). If thoughts of failure come into our minds, they are seeds of unbelief, and they must be cast down with spiritual power. God has given us the weaponry necessary to drive out unbelief and negative thoughts. He has given us a plan of action to walk in belief and to stand strong in faith, even when situations are very difficult.

Belief in God’s power is necessary to see it work in our lives. God backs His Word with His power. Here is an example of the power of God’s Word: “And when Jesus was entered into Capernaum, there came unto him a centurion, beseeching him, And saying, Lord, my servant lieth at home sick of the palsy, grievously tormented. And Jesus saith unto him, I will come and heal him. The centurion answered and said, Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed.” (Matthew 8:5–8). The centurion demonstrated belief in the power of Christ’s Word, and his faith was not in vain. “And Jesus said unto the centurion, Go thy way; and as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee. And his servant was healed in the selfsame hour.” We will not see miracles happen without faith demonstrated in our lives.

Unbelief limits the work of God toward His people. God has provided a free will to people, and He will not work in our lives if we are actively against His ways. The way of faith has been revealed to us in the Bible, but the Lord cannot just force His good will upon everyone, because we must willingly receive the blessings that He has provided for us. If we have no desire or belief to receive, then we are in danger of missing out on the blessings of God. An example can be seen in Matthew chapter 13.

“And when he was come into his own country, he taught them in their synagogue, insomuch that they were astonished, and said, Whence hath this man this wisdom, and these mighty works? Is not this the carpenter’s son? is not his mother called Mary? and his brethren, James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas? And his sisters, are they not all with us? Whence then hath this man all these things? And they were offended in him. But Jesus said unto them, A prophet is not without

honour, save in his own country, and in his own house. And he did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief.” (Matthew. 13:54–58)

Anything which takes the place of God as the first priority in our lives is a false god. This position could be occupied by placing people, possessions or status as the most esteemed thing in our lives. However, we must not have inordinate affection, which is a desire for something which takes the place of our worship for God. If we allow something to shift our focus from God and from upholding His Word, then a person is in sin, and this presents a barrier to having a sound heart. What this means is, if something is preventing you from obediently doing your Christian duty (such as attending Church, reading the Word, prayer, tithing) then it is a major problem, and it needs to be dealt with.

Sin, weights and allowing wrong thoughts all form a barrier to having a sound heart. Lust (desire for sin) is a very big opening for the devil to get a foothold into one’s circumstances. Sin is dangerous because it is a behaviour pattern which draws further and further away from God. As mentioned, sin is rebellion against the Word of God.

As Christians, we need to be sensitive to the prompting of the Holy Ghost, and to the voice of our own conscience. If God is convicting us of sin, then we should promptly listen to Him and correct the situation without delay. We should deal with the situation wholly and utterly. Thankfully, God is merciful and forgiving and ready to help us leave behind wrong, forget it, and lead us on in our victorious walk. The Word of God encourages us to seek and rely upon God’s help. His help can be found in the godly people He has put in our lives, such as the Church Elders. God encourages us to seek prayer if healing is needed.

“Is any sick among you? 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 shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him. Confess *your* faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.” (James 5:14–16).

God’s desires that, if we have sinned, we admit it and seek His forgiveness and cleansing. This is necessary to remove hindrances to healing. When we do this, God helps us to continue on in faith. He doesn’t hold these past sins against us and doesn’t want our thinking to be troubled by them once they have been dealt with by His power and mercy.

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” (1 John 1:9).

To walk in faith with a sound heart it is necessary to give the Word the opportunity to take root in our hearts (the Bible calls the Word of God the seed, see Luke 8:11), so faith can arise and grow. This comes from consistently reading, listening to, thinking about, and speaking the Word of God. “So then faith *cometh* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” (Romans 10:17). Thoughts contrary to God’s Word should be rejected and cast down. This can include fearful thoughts, as fear presents a barrier to our progression in faith.

“For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ;” (2 Corinthians 10:3–5).

As the Scripture commands, cast down oppressive thoughts (believers have the power to do this in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ) and do not be afraid to take a stand of faith. God is faithful and truthful (see John 17:17), and He will not let you down if you are trusting in His promises. It is essential that our words are kept in agreement with God's Word, and that we do not allow ourselves to speak contrary to the Bible.

"And, behold, this day I *am* going the way of all the earth: and ye know in all your hearts and in all your souls, that not one thing hath failed of all the good things which the LORD your God spake concerning you; all are come to pass unto you, *and* not one thing hath failed thereof." (Joshua 23:14).

"Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed *it* by an oath: That by two immutable things, in which *it was* impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us: Which *hope* we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil ..." (Hebrews 6:17–19).

Give God's Word the due attention it deserves, keep it in your heart and allow it to change you from the inside, for the glory of God. Then your heart will be sound, and your flesh whole in God. It's important to examine ourselves spiritually, and to acknowledge if sin is present, and to then confess it and repent of it. God is merciful and will forgive us and help us to go on in faith (see James 5:12 and 1 John 1:9).

"My son, attend to my words; incline thine ear unto my sayings. Let them not depart from thine eyes; keep them in the midst of thine heart. For they *are* life unto those that find them, and health to all their flesh. Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it *are* the issues of life." (Proverbs 4:20–23).