

Chapter 23

SCRIPTURAL BASIS FOR HEALING OF MEMORIES OR INNER HEALING

In one of the Minirth-Meier books a case study is given: a lady named “Sarah” came for counseling. She was caring for her aged mother. She said her mother was a gentle person whom she loved dearly, but that when she spent time with her she would find herself getting very irritable and even feeling rage toward her with absolutely no reason. They prayed about this and asked the Holy Spirit to give Sarah revelation. Into Sarah’s mind came a picture of a coat hanger. She was mystified. They continued to pray. Then Sarah saw a picture of her mother jabbing, jabbing with that coat hanger, and of herself in the womb flailing, screaming silently as she tried to escape the intended abortion. She couldn’t believe it. She said, “My mother has always welcomed me and loved me. That could not have happened!” The counselor encouraged her to talk to her mother about it. With much reluctance she brought the subject up to her mother and told her of the vision. Her mother started weeping. She said, “Your father threatened me, frightened me, forced me to do it. Oh, please forgive me. I love you so much.” And of course Sarah embraced her mother and forgave her – and allowed the Holy Spirit to come in and heal that hidden wound – and she was set free to love her mother.

There is a question, a legitimate question, that many Christians have: “Is inner healing Biblical?” Sarah’s healing experience was real and necessary, but was that God or psychology?

Some years ago I attended a Vineyard seminar led by John Wimber and others, and a pastor named John Smeltzer spoke on this subject. I am using his teaching, along with insights from others, as the basis for this teaching. So let me present five pertinent questions and what I believe to be their Biblical answers:

Question No. 1: “Does the Bible support the idea that the past affects the present?”

Obviously it does in many contexts. Basic orthodox theology, as explained by the Apostle Paul in Romans 5:12 and following, explains that the reason sin exists in the world is because of something that happened in the past: “*Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned. . .*” Not only do we sin because we have inherited the plague of sin in our blood (in our genes), but in some mysterious way we participated in Adam’s sin because we were in his loins when he sinned! Refer to Hebrews 7, which says in Vs. 7: “*Even Levi, who receives tithes, paid tithes through Abraham, so to speak, for he was still in the loins of his father when Melchizedek met him.*”

Also refer to Exodus 20:5 where God says that He “*visits the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me*” by worshipping idols.

Also the Bible states in many places that character, good or bad, is developed in the home. That is a basic theme in the book of Proverbs, as well as in Judges. Ezekiel 16:44 says, “*Like mother, like daughter.*” There is much teaching on this theme in the letters of Paul and Peter and others.

Also remember the Biblical illustration of Joseph’s brothers who were still suffering guilt, fear, remorse, and lack of peace decades after they had sold Joseph into slavery.

Question No. 2: “Do we have to face the past to be healed in the present?”

Many is the time someone has quoted Philippians 3:13 to me to prove that we should not “dig up” the past. It says, in part, “. . . *but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are*

ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.” This verse is used as a proof text by many to prove that the past is truly past and no longer has any control over a Christian’s life.

The problem is that the Apostle Paul is not referring to his wounded past but rather to his accomplishments of the past. He has just listed all of the things in which he might place his confidence “in the flesh.” He lists the fact that he was an Israelite, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Pharisee, zealous, etc., and says that he has counted them as loss, as rubbish (or dung) for Christ’s sake.

According to Dr. Edward Smith (“Theophostic counseling”) people who say, “I need to put my past behind me, the cross was sufficient, I need to lay it all at the feet of Jesus,” etc., are confusing willful sin with woundedness. The only cure for sin is the cross, repentance, grace, forgiveness, release from condemnation and power to break the rule of sin in one’s life, but woundedness comes about as a result of someone else’s sinful actions. These wounds need the touch of a risen Lord. Jesus’ death atoned for our sins, but by His stripes, when He was alive and felt the pain, we were healed. We don’t need to be healed of sin. Sin is atoned for through His death on the cross. We need to be healed by a touch from a wounded Lord who understands our pain. Sarah, in the story above, needed to repent of her sin, which was hidden from her consciousness, of resentment and bitterness toward her mother. She did that when she forgave her mother. But she also needed the risen Lord to touch and heal the festering wound inside, and He graciously came and did that. If the counselor had said to Sarah, “If there was some sort of hidden problem with your mother in the past, you simply need to forget it and put it behind you. After all, Christ’s death on the cross has taken care of all of that!” he would have been encouraging her to repress the pain and perpetuate the problem. Note that it was the Holy Spirit who brought all of that terrible scene of attempted abortion to the surface – so that it could be healed. Satan works in darkness; Christ, the Light of the world, brings the things hidden in darkness to light.

In Deuteronomy 8:2, Moses says to the children of Israel, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, “*And you shall remember that the Lord your God led you for these 40 years in the wilderness....And chastened you (for your sins) ...Beware that you don’t forget....*”

And consider David. For almost a year David lived in denial of his sins of adultery and murder. “Blindness” and “darkness” are the Biblical words for denial. The prophet Nathan came and told David the story of the rich man who stole the pet sheep of the poor family, and then said, “You are the man!” David faced his sin (his past) and recorded his deep repentance in Psalm 51. Remember that in the Law there was no provision, no sacrifice for his sin. His forgiveness was totally by the mercy of God, and David knew it. I believe that God deals with each of us in a similar way. He brings to the surface in His timing our hidden sins of the past as well as our hidden wounds of the past. Someone said that memory is God’s way of allowing us to relive the past and to get it right this time.

Question No. 3: Does Scripture support the idea that there is an unconscious part of our minds from which memories can surface?

I believe it does. Reflect on David who apparently pushed his sin out of his conscious mind.

Consider First Corinthians 4:1. Paul is describing how he wants the church to regard him, and he says, “I am not conscious of anything against myself, but I may still be guilty of some sin of which I am not aware.” (paraphrase) He is saying, I believe, that there might be things inside myself hidden in the darkness that only Christ can bring to the light. What do you call that place of darkness? The unconscious.

And Proverbs 20:5 says: “*Counsel (or purposes) in the heart of man is like water in a deep well, but a man of understanding will draw it out.*”

And in Psalm 139 David prays: “*Search me, O God, and know my heart, try me, and know my anxieties, and see if there is any wicked way (Lit. “way of pain”) in me...*”

A man suffered repeated bouts of pain in his chest and feelings of suffocation all of his life, and the physicians could find no reason. During ministry the Holy Spirit revealed that he was born with the umbilical cord around his neck suffocating him. The nurse pulled him out, he was black and she said, “He’s dead!” but his father breathed into him the breath of life. (Wow!) In the time of ministry Jesus came and touched that deep trauma and removed the pain and set him free. To say to such a man, “Don’t think about the past. The Bible says that we should forget those things that are behind,” would be almost criminal in my opinion.

Question No. 4: Does the Bible support the idea that God Himself can walk into a memory and heal it? Or is that a psychological, Jungian notion?

A reminder about the suffering of Job: Job lost his flocks and herds, his servants, his seven sons and daughters, his health, respect and power and wealth. Note: once a loss is one day old all the pain of that loss is a memory. When God appeared to Job and healed him, everything He “touched” to heal was in his memories except for his physical condition. Job’s lamentation in the midst of all his suffering was that God had withdrawn from him. “Where are you, God?” And then God appeared to Job in a whirlwind. On the day that God met Job did Job have his children back? His wealth? His respect? No. But God healed Job – and it must have been in his memories. Remember that according to Peter Horrobin who ministers in the area of trauma, memory is a function of the spirit, not the mind. (And there are examples of that truth in the teaching on Trauma.) So whether we say that God touches and heals the spirit or the memories it is the same thing. God’s meeting with Job was what healed him. And the same is true with us – when the resurrected Christ comes and touches our spirit (our memories) we are healed of past wounds.

Question No. 5: Is the visualization of Jesus in a memory a Biblical idea?

Not all visualization/visions/mental pictures/dreams are of God, but certainly many are according to the great number of such experiences that are recorded in the Bible. It is certainly wise to “test the spirits,” to test experiences to see if they be of God, but the tendency in the Western world is to elevate science, rationalism and intellectualism and to be very suspicious of the supernatural, including dreams and visions.

John Smeltzer observes: (a) We should not assume that the Jesus I visualize is the real Jesus. We will only see Him as He is on the glorious day when we come into His presence. And we should remember to “test the spirits”. A vision, dream or mental picture of Jesus that is from God (and in my personal experience and in scores of experiences with people during ministry where they have had such experiences only a few were false or counterfeit) is a symbol of reality, not reality itself. (b) We should not assume that when I picture Jesus it unlocks powers in my unconscious – that is Eastern or occultic thinking. (c) We should not try to force a person to visualize who is not a visual person. Some of us are right brain and some left brain. And we must trust God to bring to the individual the right experience. In Theophostic ministry Ed Smith invites the Holy Spirit to come into a painful memory in any way that He chooses, whether with a vision of Jesus, a word from the Lord, or a sense of His presence.

Having said that, I believe it is true that God has made most of us so that it is natural to picture things in our imagination. The New Testament encourages us from beginning to end, in the words of the old song, to “Fix your eyes upon Jesus, look full in His wonderful face....” We are told to consider Him, to see Him, to search for Him, to get to know Him. The implication in many of these passages is to imagine Him with your inner eyes. In Ephesians 1:18 Paul prays “*that the eyes of your understanding may be enlightened...*” (Look up the word “eye” and “eyes” in the concordance.) God tells His people many times through His prophets to “Seek my face!” Psalm 27:8 as an example.

We should be careful about taking people on a guided visual tour. That can be manipulative and even demonic. But we need not be afraid to invite Jesus to come into a person’s imagination or his memory in any way He chooses. Biblical visualization is simply a visual expression of faith, and the Bible is full of examples of that very thing.

In closing, there are a number of Biblical terms that either mean the same thing or are closely connected: sanctification, Christ likeness, perfection, holiness, maturity, walking in love, freedom. In each case, this is a goal toward which we are exhorted to strive, and it involves a process of denying self, of following Christ, of obedience and submission. In my understanding, inner healing is central to this process for everyone. I don’t mean that everyone has to accept the premise of “inner healing,” but the truth and reality of that expression is in my opinion everywhere in the ministry and teaching of Christ and of the Bible as a whole.

I want to make it clear that those who minister inner healing are not encouraging people in a victim mentality, or in perennial navel gazing, or incessant digging up and focusing on past wounds. The only reason for dealing with past issues is that in many lives they are like hidden chains that prevent a person from moving with freedom into the future. Remember that Jesus stated His reason for coming in His prophetic proclamation: “...*He has anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed...*” (Luke 4:18) Christ is still actively engaged in that ministry through His body.