



The Hermeneutics of *Θεραπεία* (Healing) in John 9:1-12 and Its Application in the Christ Apostolic Church, Ibadan, Nigeria

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Abstract. This study explores the physical, spiritual, and symbolic dimensions of healing performed by Jesus Christ as recorded in the Gospel of John. Healing occupies a central place in Jesus' earthly ministry. In obedience to Christ's directive to his followers to preach the gospel and heal the sick, the Christ Apostolic Church (C.A.C.) has made healing one of its core practices. The various healing methods employed by Jesus—through touch, faith, prayer, anointing with oil, distance healing, and the use of water—form the foundational principles upon which the healing ministry of the C.A.C. is built. The healing narrative in John 9 was chosen for analysis because it features the use of natural elements such as water, clay, and saliva—methods that resonate with the healing practices found within the C.A.C. However, the study observes that the healing practices of some ministers within the Church fall short of the biblical model exemplified by Jesus. The questionable character of certain healers often casts doubt on the authenticity of their ministry, leading some believers to question whether such individuals are truly called by God. Reports of immoral behavior, such as adultery, fornication, or involvement with familiar spirits, undermine the credibility of divine healing. *θεραπεύω* means “to heal,” “to cure,” or “to restore to health.” This study is motivated by the need to undertake an exegesis of *θεραπεύω* to extract healing principles from the ministry of Jesus and its application in the Christ Apostolic Church. Employing the historical-exegetical method of biblical research, the text of John 9:1–12 was examined alongside qualitative data collected through structured interviews analyzed descriptively. Findings reveal that Christ Apostolic Church upholds, to a significant extent, the principles of healing reflected in the Gospel of John. Nonetheless, the

study recommends continuous improvement in aligning healing practices with biblical standards.

Keywords: *θεραπεύω* (*therapeuo*), Health, Miracle, Salvation, Christ Apostolic Church (C.A.C.)

1. Introduction

As Jesus was passing by, he encountered a man who had been blind from birth (v.1). This situation prompted a theological question from his disciples, who asked, “Rabbi, who sinned—this man or his parents—that he was born blind?” (v.2). Their inquiry reflects the prevailing Jewish belief that physical afflictions were often divine punishments for sin, whether personal or ancestral. In response, Jesus refuted this assumption, declaring that neither the man nor his parents had sinned to cause his blindness. Rather, the man's condition served as a means for God's works to be revealed in him (v.3). This statement shifts the focus from human culpability to divine purpose, emphasizing that suffering can become a platform for the manifestation of God's power and glory.

Jesus continued, “We must work the works of Him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work” (v.4). Here, “day” symbolizes the time allotted for Jesus' earthly ministry, while “night” represents the impending period of his suffering and death when his redemptive work on earth would cease. The statement underscores Jesus' awareness of his divine mission and the urgency of fulfilling it within the time appointed by God.

In verse 5, Jesus proclaims, “As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” This self-revelation identifies him as both the spiritual and

physical source of illumination, contrasting the man's physical blindness with humanity's spiritual blindness. His forthcoming miracle would serve as a visible sign of his identity as the Light who dispels both physical and spiritual darkness. Jesus then performed an unusual act: he spat on the ground, made clay with the saliva, and applied it to the man's eyes (v.6). This use of natural elements such as clay and saliva is symbolic of God's creative power, reminiscent of the creation of man from dust in Genesis 2:7. By employing physical means, Jesus demonstrates that divine healing can operate through both natural and supernatural channels. After anointing the man's eyes, Jesus instructed him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means "Sent") (v.7). The command required faith and obedience. The man went, washed, and miraculously received his sight. His healing thus became both a physical restoration and a testimony to the effectiveness of faith in Christ's word (Tasker, 2017:122-123).

This narrative encapsulates key theological themes: the relationship between sin and suffering, the revelation of God's glory through human affliction, and the necessity of faith and obedience in divine healing. Jesus' role as the Light of the world signifies not only the illumination of human blindness but also the invitation to spiritual renewal through faith in Him. John's use of the term *μαθητής* ("disciple") for a broader group allows him to extend Jesus' invitation to the general crowd as a call to discipleship. This portrays Jesus addressing large gatherings (*ὄχλοι πολλοί*) to explain what it truly means to be his disciple. John's narrative emphasizes that the disciples were not a small, exclusive circle but a larger community meant to serve as models for all believers. His intention was for readers to identify with these disciples and see them as examples of faith and commitment (Heising, 1968: 80).

Beyond expanding the scope of discipleship, John assigns theological significance and a specific mission to the term. The disciples' identity is primarily defined through their relationship with Jesus. In both his person and message, the eschatological reality—the fulfillment of God's final purpose—is anticipated. Those who are in fellowship with Christ and have accepted his word are depicted as participants in the present realization of the end-time salvation. They are the ones whom Jesus, as the divine agent of the *eschaton*, has sought out and redeemed. His

unique role in salvation history is therefore expressed through his divine calling (Alana, 2002).

2. The Healing of the Man Born Blind (John 9:1–7)

The question posed by Jesus' disciples introduces the classic problem of *theodicy*—the relationship between sin and suffering. In verse 2, they ask, "Who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Their inquiry reflects the prevailing Jewish assumption that all suffering is a direct consequence of sin. They reasoned that either the man had sinned (*ἥμαρτεν*) or his parents had, yet they struggled to understand how one could sin before birth. According to Hunter (2017), three possibilities were debated in Jewish thought: sin committed in the womb, sin from a preexistent state of the soul, or inherited sin from one's parents. Tasker (2016) suggests that it is uncertain whether the disciples actually believed the man himself could have sinned prenatally. However, Farmer (2019) argues that their question presupposes the possibility of prenatal sin, an idea influenced by the ancient belief in the preexistence of souls—an idea found in Plato's philosophy and later adopted by Philo and rabbinic teachers.

Howard (2016) observes that certain sayings in the *Targums* and *Talmud* imply that some rabbis entertained the notion that a child could sin while still in the womb, though the historical accuracy of this view remains uncertain. The rabbis (2019) also referred to Old Testament teachings suggesting that God could punish children for their parents' sins up to the third and fourth generation. Yet, the prophet Ezekiel later clarified that each person is accountable for their own sins (Ezek. 18:20). Hale and Thorson (2021) add a modern perspective, noting that many hereditary diseases are now known to pass from parents to children, offering a biological basis for understanding how parental sin or behavior might affect offspring. Thus, the disciples likely assumed that the man's blindness was the result of his parents' sin.

In verse 3, Jesus corrects this misconception, teaching that sin is not always the direct cause of suffering. Although sin and suffering are interconnected (cf. Luke 13:1–5; Acts 28:4), not all suffering is a punishment for sin. Instead, suffering can serve a divine purpose—"that the works of God might be made manifest." Tasker (2022) explains that the man's condition existed

so that it might become a lasting revelation of God's power and glory. The physical healing of the man was meant to signify the spiritual enlightenment that comes when God opens the eyes of those who are spiritually blind. Hunter (2017) agrees, cautioning believers not to waste energy speculating about the mystery of evil, but rather to focus on alleviating human suffering through God's help.

In verses 4–5, Jesus declares, "*We must work the works of Him who sent me while it is day; night comes when no one can work.*" Here, *day* symbolizes the period of active ministry and opportunity, while *night* signifies the end of one's earthly mission. Dodd (2018) interprets "day" as representing the span of human activity and "night" its cessation. Jesus' statement emphasizes the urgency of fulfilling God's work during one's lifetime.

If the pronoun "we" in verse 4 is original, it implies that Jesus included his disciples in his divine mission, aligning with Matthew 5:14, where believers are called "the light of the world." Scribes might later have changed "we" to "I" to highlight Jesus' unique role. Conversely, if "I" was original, the later change to "we" could have been intended to generalize the statement for the Church. Regardless, the message remains that one must serve God faithfully in the present, for service to God is inseparable from service to humanity (Matt. 25:40, 45).

3. Christ's Varied Methods of Healing (John 9:6–7)

In verses 6–7, Jesus uses a symbolic method to heal the blind man. He spat on the ground, mixed the saliva with dust to form clay, and applied it to the man's eyes. This recalls the account in Mark 8:22–25, where Jesus healed another blind man using a similar method. In the ancient world, saliva was widely believed to possess healing properties. However, Jewish Sabbath laws forbade both making clay and applying ointment to the eyes (Clay, 2008, p. 25).

By forming clay from dust and saliva, Jesus symbolically reenacted the creative act of God in Genesis 2:7, where man was formed from the dust of the earth. Through this act, Jesus demonstrated that, like the Father, he continuously gives life (cf. John 5:17). After applying the clay, Jesus instructed the man, "*Go, wash in the pool of Siloam*"—a name meaning "Sent."

Archaeological evidence indicates that Siloam was a large reservoir supplied by a channel from the Gihon Spring (Culion, 2011, p. 80). John draws a symbolic connection between the pool's name and Jesus himself, the One "sent" by God. Just as the water of Siloam cleansed the man's eyes, Jesus, the divine "Sent One," cleanses and restores spiritual sight.

The man's obedience was crucial to his healing. Dodd (1962) notes that his willingness to follow Jesus' command reflected his faith and was an essential part of the healing process. Unlike Naaman, who initially doubted Elisha's instruction to wash in the Jordan, this man obeyed without hesitation. His faith-driven response, independent of Jesus' physical presence, highlights the active role of personal trust in divine healing.

He further interprets this event as symbolic of spiritual rebirth. Just as the blind man gained physical sight through washing, all believers must experience cleansing through the blood of Christ, made effective by his atoning death. Thus, the man's washing in Siloam prefigures Christian baptism, which enlightens the believer and grants spiritual sight.

4. Effect of the Healing on the Neighbours (John 9:8–12)

The first outcome that John highlights following the healing miracle is the astonishment and confusion it produced among the man's neighbours. Those who had previously known him as a blind beggar were deeply perplexed by his transformation. Some could not believe that he was the same person they had seen sitting and begging daily. As John 9:8–9 records, the neighbours and others who had seen him before asked, "Isn't this the same man who used to sit and beg?" While some affirmed that it was indeed him, others denied it, insisting that it was merely someone who resembled him. However, the healed man himself settled the dispute, declaring emphatically, "I am the man." McDonald (1986) notes that the reaction of the neighbours reveals their struggle to reconcile the miraculous event with ordinary human experience. Their astonishment was so great that some refused to accept what their own eyes witnessed. The reference to "neighbours" suggests that the man had returned to his home after being healed. Although the Greek text in verse 7 simply says "he came seeing," rather than "came home," it is likely that he went back to his community, where

those who knew him best could confirm his identity.

Two groups are mentioned in this narrative: the man's immediate neighbours and those who had often encountered him as a beggar. This is the first explicit mention of his role as a beggar, though his blindness already implied dependence on begging for survival, as was typical for the disabled in the ancient world. These two groups—those who lived near him and those familiar with him from his begging—represent the people most capable of recognizing him.

Their question, "Isn't this the same man?" assumes an affirmative answer, yet its very phrasing betrays their doubt. Some accepted the evidence before them, but others could not, though they admitted a strong resemblance. Their hesitation underscores the extraordinary nature of the miracle, which defied rational explanation.

When the man himself affirmed his identity, their curiosity deepened. They asked him, "How then were your eyes opened?" (v. 10). The Greek text implies a simple conversational tone—"they said to him"—showing that their inquiry stemmed more from wonder than from hostility. In response, the healed man recounted the event briefly and faithfully: "The man they call Jesus made some mud, placed it on my eyes, and told me to go and wash in the pool of Siloam. So I went, washed, and now I can see" (v. 11). His testimony is concise and factual. He knows little about Jesus and expects that his listeners are equally uninformed. Referring to him as "the man they call Jesus" indicates that, at this stage, his understanding of Christ's identity is limited—he recognizes him only as a man, not yet as a divine healer or the Messiah.

The neighbours, still puzzled, ask the obvious follow-up question: "Where is this man?" (v. 12). The healed man's reply, "I do not know," highlights both his physical separation from Jesus, who had already moved on, and his spiritual journey that was only beginning. This episode, therefore, illustrates a crucial transition in John's Gospel—from physical restoration to spiritual revelation. The neighbours' bewilderment and the man's simple faith lay the foundation for the subsequent narrative, in which his understanding of Jesus deepens through conflict and testimony. As Heising (1968, p. 80) observes, the miracle not only demonstrates Jesus' divine authority but also exposes human

reluctance to accept the evidence of God's power. The neighbours' divided opinions mirror the broader human tendency to question what cannot be explained by natural reason.

5. Healing of the Man Born Blind in John 9:1–12 in the Christ Apostolic Church

The healing of the man born blind in *John 9:1–12* presents several theological and practical themes that resonate deeply with the healing tradition of the Christ Apostolic Church (CAC). One of these is the persistent belief in the relationship between sin and suffering. Similar to Jewish thought, the CAC maintains that sin often brings about sickness and affliction. As Akintunde (2004) observes, sin is a reality that never goes unpunished — aligning with biblical declarations such as "the soul that sins shall die" and "the wages of sin is death." In some instances, the sinner personally bears the consequences of their wrongdoing (Bultmann 2016).

In the narrative, Jesus anointed the blind man's eyes with a mixture of saliva and clay, then instructed him to wash in the Pool of Siloam. This act recalls Naaman's healing in *2 Kings 5*, where Elisha directed him to bathe in the Jordan River. Beyond the physical cleansing function of water, such ritual washing symbolized purification from sin. Moreover, water itself is recognized for its healing potential. Consequently, hydrotherapy — the therapeutic use of water — is a common healing practice within the CAC. This involves applying hot or cold water to specific parts of the body to relieve ailments or promote recovery (Akintunde, 2004, p. 71).

Another significant dimension of this miracle is *faith healing*. When instructed to wash in the Pool of Siloam, the blind man obeyed in faith, which, according to Dodd, represented his personal contribution to his healing. Faith is consistently central to Jesus' miracles; He often inquired, "Do you believe?" or declared, "Your faith has made you whole." In CAC healing practices, faith is likewise considered indispensable to divine healing and restoration.

Touch is also an essential aspect of healing within the CAC. The hand, regarded as an instrument of God's power, is used in the laying on of hands — either upon the head or directly on the afflicted area. At times, worshippers are encouraged to touch the part of their body where pain is felt, or a minister may perform the touch as a symbolic

act of transmission of divine power. This practice has reportedly resulted in numerous healings among CAC members (Alana, 2002, p. 77).

6. Abuse of Healing in the Christ Apostolic Church

Despite the positive aspects of the healing ministry, misuse and excesses have also emerged within the CAC. One major issue is the overemphasis on *anointing* and the glorification of *anointed men*. This has led to several theological misconceptions. First is the mistaken belief that *character equals anointing* — the idea that moral conduct automatically produces spiritual gifts, or that the possession of gifts validates one's character. This misconception encourages pretense among some ministers who feel pressured to display spiritual power (Woods, 1963, p. 25).

Second is the false assumption that *anointing equals divine approval of ministry style*. Some ministers, claiming divine empowerment, adopt unorthodox and sometimes questionable methods. Yet, methodology does not determine anointing. Third is the idea that *anointing equals doctrinal infallibility*. Church history shows that even highly anointed individuals have embraced heretical teachings. A case in point is William Branham, a 20th-century evangelist whose powerful healing ministry drew thousands but whose teachings eventually deviated into doctrinal error (William, 2011, p. 113; Liardon, 1998, pp. 56–59). Such examples warn against equating miraculous power with theological accuracy.

Moreover, some healers lead morally questionable lives, undermining the credibility of their ministries. Reports of immorality, pride, or involvement with familiar spirits have caused skepticism among believers. Furthermore, the pursuit of personal gain has corrupted the healing ministry in some circles, turning it into a commercial enterprise. Ministers gifted in healing sometimes exploit the desperate, seek financial reward, or cause schisms by leaving to establish independent churches. Pride and rivalry among healing ministers further threaten the unity of the church (Ashby, 2017: pp. 78-82).

7. Conclusion

The healing of the man born blind in *John 9:1–12* ultimately reveals Jesus as the *Light of the World*, who opens not only physical eyes but also

spiritual understanding. While sin may have consequences, it is not always the direct cause of human suffering. Instead of focusing on the cause of affliction, believers should seek divine intervention through faith and obedience. Jesus' healing ministry was marked by compassion, flexibility, and a commitment to fulfilling the Father's will. Healing miracles, described in *Hebrews 6:5* as "powers of the age to come," serve as signs of the in-breaking Kingdom of God. As the world anticipates the final manifestation of this Kingdom, believers may expect a greater outpouring of genuine miraculous works that testify to God's power and glory. Thus, healing within the CAC should reflect Christ's humility, compassion, and truth, avoiding the errors of pride, exploitation, and doctrinal distortion.

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