

A Sure Foundation

Constructing a New Paradigm for Modern Medicine



*Behold I lay in Zion a stone for a foundation,
A tried stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation;
The one who trusts will never be dismayed.*

2000 Summer Medical Institute Health Care Bible Study

A Sure Foundation: Constructing a New Paradigm for Modern Medicine.

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1 Introduction: Why study Biblical healthcare?

See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ. Colossians 2:8 (Phillips)

*“But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall.”
Matt. 7:26-27*

Children love stories; at least mine do. Young children like to hear the same story, over and over, and over, again (often to the exasperation of their parents!). They do this because young children form their understanding of reality, of the nature of the world and of everything in it, through stories. Stories remain a powerful way of reaching inside of us throughout our lives. Jesus often told stories in order to convey a profound spiritual message. A particular favorite in my household lately has been the story of the two houses and their builders. One built his house on the sand, and when the storms came, it washed away. The other man built his house on the solid rock, and it survived the storms. Jesus used the story as a metaphor about life.

Most Christians take this story to heart and attempt to live as the wise master builder. When it comes to issues of money, dating, marriage, parenting, ministry, career, personal pain and suffering or loss, etc. most of us look to God’s Word for His perspective, His direction and guidance, His wisdom and comfort. We realize that God has a lot to say about everything in life. Faith and our relationship with Christ are not just for Sundays. This theme is repeated over and over again throughout Scripture.

But what about health care, about modern biomedicine? Isn’t that just scientific facts about the human body? Does modern medicine need anything else beyond scientific facts? Yes it does, for two reasons. The first is that science and medicine do not operate the way that the scientific worldview says it does. As we will see, science is not a matter of only completely objective facts. But even if the scientific viewpoint were true, health care is not just a matter of science; it is not only concerned with treating disease. Healthcare is about people. This fundamental distinction is something we will explore in depth as we go through this study.

The truth is that God’s Word has much to say about medicine and health care, both from the “fact/science” end, about the nature of health and healing, disease and death, and from the “patient” end, about treating people, not just disease. We must look to God’s Word for our understanding of health care as we do for everything else. This is the first and primary reason for our need to understand Biblical healthcare.

1. God commands us to think and to act Biblically about everything in life, including healthcare.

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. Romans 12:1-2

◇ What should form the basis for our thinking about healthcare?

Does it matter?

See the following verses:

Romans 12:1-2

1 Corinthians 3:18-19

Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you seems to be wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, "He catches the wise in their own craftiness"

Colossians 2:8

Isaiah 55:8-9

2 Timothy 3:16-17

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Proverbs 9:10

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, And the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.

The main reason we need to understand Biblical healthcare is because God commands us to think and to act Biblically about everything in our lives. God's Word is to be the source, the foundation, of all our thinking.

2. The health care crisis

A second very important reason to understand Biblical healthcare is the state of our healthcare system today. Just about everyone acknowledges that today's health care system is in a state of crisis. A recently published book describes it well:

Health care consumes 13.6 percent of our economy – compared with 9.7 percent for Canada, 10.2 percent for the nations of Western Europe, and 8.3 percent for Japan. Despite our appetite for leading edge drugs like t-PA, the additional \$333 billion per year in economic share that we spend on health care in comparison to

our trading partners buys the United States the highest infant mortality rate and lowest life expectancy in the industrialized world. Meanwhile, half of the typical U.S. hospital sits empty, while the other half cannot push patients out the door fast enough. Many argue that the nation has twice as many physicians as necessary, even though the average office-based physician attempts to diagnose and treat 19 patients in an average working day. And 41 million people live under the menace of no health insurance coverage. (Kleinke)

Despite the best healthcare science and technology ever developed, **health** remains elusive for the United States and other countries as well. While there is no question that a crisis exists, there are many questions about the causes of the crisis and the solutions to the crisis.

Central to the health care crisis is the failure of the doctor-patient relationship.
C. Everett Koop, M.D.

What is the root cause of the crisis? What are the fundamental issues involved? Societal and cultural issues are surely involved, as are financial and political ones. But are these the root of the crisis? Consider the following two excerpts from medical journals:

Something has gone wrong in the practice of medicine, and we all know it. It is ironic that in this era, dominated by technical prowess and rapid biomedical advances, patient and physician each feels increasingly rejected by the other. Clearly, one root of the problem lies in the patient-doctor relationship. High technology tends to dehumanize care, and third-party regulations, paperwork, and malpractice threats distract the doctor. Nevertheless, the responsibility for dissatisfaction with modern medical care lies not only with the patient and the system but also with the physician. (Gorlin)

*The bed is too short to stretch out on,
The blanket too narrow to wrap around you.*
Isaiah 28:20

Belief in progress defines modern medicine. With each year we understand more, can treat and prevent and cure more. The unspoken and unexamined promise of modern medicine, in popular consciousness if not in the medical community itself, is that some day all disease will be conquered. With no more diseases, perhaps we will never die. While the modernist concept of progress is not an unreasonable world view in which to practice science, it creates a lot of problems for those who practice medicine. ...

Walker Percy, the physician turned novelist, was acutely aware of the havoc that the modernist worship of science has wrought upon Western popular consciousness. In his philosophical essays, Percy repeatedly returns to the simple point that science can tell us nothing about an individual. Science speaks in terms of probabilities, of means and standard deviations, the behavior of groups of electrons or proteins or people, not of individual entities. Everything that makes an individual an individual, everything that importantly defines an individual's life, is outside the realm of science. The practice of medicine involves only individuals.

*Is there no balm in Gilead,
Is there no physician there?
Why then is there no recovery
For the health of the daughter
of my people?*
Jeremiah 8:22

One common but not inevitable by-product of modernism is the concept that the ends justify the means.... In modern medicine we have made a related error; the means have *become* the ends. Our traditional goal is to help, to heal, to cure. Diagnosing and understanding the disease are one means to that need. But in modern medicine there is a disconnect: diagnosis and understanding have acquired value independent of their possible usefulness in helping the patient. (Goodwin)

There are certain fundamental flaws in the biomedical system. The framework of biomedicine, the paradigms and presuppositions that underlie the system, are in part to blame. This is the conclusion of secular theorists; a Christian viewpoint has even more to say! If

biomedicine is flawed at a fundamental level, then a Biblical framework will have much to say about biomedicine and the current state of healthcare, and about solutions to the crisis.

3. Reform or transform?

“No one puts a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment; for the patch pulls away from the garment, and the tear is made worse. Nor do they put new wine into old wineskins, or else the wineskins break, the wine is spilled, and the wineskins are ruined. But they put new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved.”
Matthew 9:16-17

Unfortunately, many Christian and secular attempts at dealing with the healthcare crisis or the flaws in modern biomedicine do so on a superficial level. This amounts to little more than treating a symptom of a much deeper disease. What happens is that the system is built on an unbiblical foundation, and then attempts are made to add Christ to the system, to “make medicine a ministry.” Certainly the desire for ministry is not wrong, but this way of thinking reveals a fundamental dichotomy that should not exist – the dichotomy between medicine and ministry. The two should be one. But this unification cannot happen unless the medicine is built upon a Biblical foundation. It is a system that is unbiblical, and most attempts at making medicine a ministry try to add Christ into the current biomedical paradigm, rather than using biomedicine as a part of a larger Biblical framework. See figure 1.

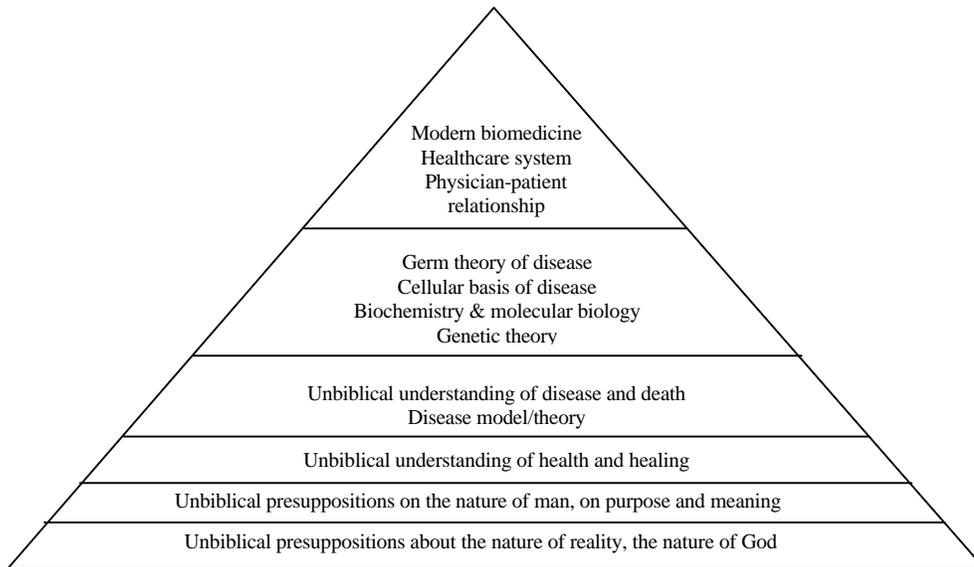


Figure 1: Current biomedical framework

❖ What did Jesus say about this approach? See Matthew 9:16-17

Healthcare does not need to be reformed; we do not need to try to add Christ into a system that is diseased. It needs transformation. Healthcare needs to be built on a Biblical foundation if Christ is to be Lord of it.

4. Abide in me, and I in you...

“Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. ⁵“I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.” John 15:4-5

There is a common theme in the applications every year for the Summer Medical Institute which can be summarized as, “I want to be a Christian who is physician (or nurse or therapist or dentist, etc.), not a physician who happens to be a Christian.” Students sense the tension between these two perspectives. The tension is due to the dichotomy illustrated above. A Biblical framework allows you to be Biblically integrated in all that you do, with Christ and the gospel at the center of all that you are and do. Medicine becomes just a part of Christ’s work in you and through you.

Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ’s behalf, be reconciled to God. 2 Cor. 5:18-20

5. This ministry of reconciliation

With medicine centered around the gospel, then patient care becomes ministry. A Biblical framework lived out also demonstrates the gospel and the character of God to those around us, to our colleagues and co-workers. Moreover, we have a relevant gospel to share. Christ is relevant to the practice of medicine; we demonstrate Christ’s reality and relevance to the very thing that our colleagues have given their lives to. We don’t have to look far for opportunities for spiritual conversation because we are demonstrating that He is vitally relevant, that He has something to say, about health and healing and about caring for patients.

6. The Kingdom of God

...to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places, according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord... Eph. 3:10-11

Jesus came not only to redeem mankind; He ushered in the Kingdom of God. We are in the era of the church, the body of Christ, the Kingdom of God, the two cities as Augustine called it. Part of the role of this kingdom is to demonstrate to the world and to the powers and principalities in the heavenly places the wisdom and the righteousness and the glory of God. We are all called to do this in whatever arena we touch by the calling of God; we do this individually (salt and light) and in community. We must understand Biblical healthcare so that we can live it out and thus manifest God

and His glory to all around us. We must live out the Kingdom of God in healthcare.

7. Good medicine

A cheerful heart is good medicine... Prov. 17:22

Biblical medicine is the best medicine there is; how can it be any thing else? Practicing medicine according to God’s truth, according to the true nature of reality, the universe, the patient, disease, health, and healing, would be the best healthcare possible.

8. Understanding your patient’s health

Do not be wise in your own eyes; Fear the LORD and depart from evil. It will be health to your flesh, And strength to your bones. Prov. 3:7-8

Most of the leading causes of death in Western society – heart disease, HIV – are preventable diseases, and are directly related to lifestyle and choices made by the patient. Many more diseases are effectively treated if patients are compliant with the therapy, but many are not. Motivating patients to change behavior is most effective when it comes from the inside-out, from a change in belief or worldview. Therefore it is a spiritual issue.

9. Understanding public health issues

Most public health problems are rooted in societal problems – poverty, hopelessness, crime, homelessness, drug abuse – and many of the issues of patient noncompliance and lifestyle issues are rooted in these issues as well. Attempts to solve these societal issues must come from a Biblical perspective.

10. Bioethics

Dealing with deep and complex issues requires a profound understanding of the fundamental issues involved. It is not enough to say that physician-assisted suicide is wrong; we have to understand why it is wrong in order to really change hearts, or to understand why someone is in favor of it, or what their fears are so that the real issues can be addressed.

11. Jesus our mentor

A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone who is perfectly trained will be like his teacher. Luke 6:40

What does the word “Christian” or disciple mean? It means a follower of Christ.

◇ Look at Luke 6:40. What does mean for a healthcare provider? What does it mean for you? _____

We are to be like Christ in all that we do. Does this have particular meaning and significance when looking at certain tasks or roles or callings in life? Being Christ-like certainly applies to all Christians

in all things. But it has greater import in certain areas, doesn't it? Think about being a pastor, a shepherd of God's flock. God's Word even says that Christ is a particular model for a pastor. Or what about a teacher of God's Word, of God's people? Scripture also speaks of the particular model Christ is for this role (James 3:1) It is interesting that the New Testament speaks over and over again about preaching and teaching. These are obviously two of the main activities of Christ's church. Indeed, that was the primary part of Christ's ministry.

And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease among the people.
Matthew 4:23

◇ What was Christ's ministry? What did He do in His earthly ministry? Look at Matthew 4:23. _____

Teaching and preaching ... and healing!

And when the Pharisees saw it, they said to His disciples, "Why does your Teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" When Jesus heard that, He said to them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice.' For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance."
Matthew 9:11-13

◇ What does this mean in context of Luke 6:40? See also Matt 9:12, where Jesus refers to Himself as a physician. This is where we get the term Great Physician. _____

Why did Jesus heal? Why was healing a part of His ministry? This is a profound and critical question, one that we will answer during this study. It is a question worthy of pondering, one that you and I can explore for the rest of our lives.

12. The truth about medical education

We have looked briefly at the fact that the current biomedical paradigm and healthcare system is unbiblical in some of its actions and its underlying beliefs and presuppositions. How does this effect the medical education process? Is the medical education process just about learning medical facts and skills, or does it pass on the unbiblical beliefs and presuppositions? The following excerpt from a landmark article on medical education provides the answer:

We argue that although matters of technical information and the transmission of technical skills traditionally have been thought to lie at the heart of the medical educational system, medical training at root is a process of moral enculturation, and that in transmitting normative rules regarding behavior and emotions to its trainees, the medical school functions as a moral community....

Most of what the initiates will internalize in terms of the values, attitudes, beliefs, and related behaviors deemed important within medicine takes place not

within the formal curriculum but via a more latent one, a “hidden curriculum,” with the latter being more concerned with replicating the culture of medicine than with the teaching of knowledge and techniques. In fact, what is “taught” in this hidden curriculum often can be antithetical to the goals and content of those courses that are formally offered. The result can be a progressive decline of moral reasoning during undergraduate medical school training....

By definition, socialization is the “processes by which people acquire the values and attitudes, the interests, skills, and knowledge, – in short, the culture – current in the groups of which they are or seek to become a member.” Sociologically, medical training is the pathway by which lay persons are transformed into something other than lay persons – in this case, physicians. Neophyte students are taught what is valued by this new culture, along with strategies and techniques to organize these values. They are also provided the opportunity to internalize these values....

In sum, (1) students encounter an endless barrage of often conflicting messages about the nature of medical work and their place in it; (2) students internalize an appreciable number of clinically relevant values well before they formally embark on their clinical training; and (3) the overall process of medical training helps establish and reinforce a value climate that explicitly identifies matters of rightness and wrongness within the overall culture of medicine. From these perspectives, a significant component of medical training involves the development of a medical morality and supporting rationales within its initiates....

Medical training is not just about the acquisition of new knowledge and skills, it is about the acquisition of a physician identity and character.
(Hafferty, emphasis added).

So medical education actually is more about acquiring a certain belief structure, certain values and presuppositions, than it is about medical skills and knowledge. This fact is acknowledged in the secular medical education community.

Furthermore, the effects of this belief system, this culture, the “hidden curriculum” on trainees is directly contrary to the desired effects of medical schools, as we will see. It also happens to be even more contrary to Godly character. The system knows this but does not know what to do about it. A Biblical framework for medicine solves most of these issues, and allows trainees to stand firm against these effects.

The truth about health care

Lastly, there is the truth about healthcare. This can be seen as a reason for developing a Biblical framework for medicine only as the framework is being developed. As a Biblical understanding of health and disease, of healing and death, is revealed through God’s Word, an amazing thing is discovered. Healthcare is far more glorious, far more a ministry, far more Christ’s work, than we could have ever dreamed, imagined, or hoped for. The truth about healthcare is that it is a parable of the Gospel! Through disease, death, healing, and health, God is speaking, demonstrating the gospel to people, not in

words, but in the very fabric of their lives. God has designed it to reveal Himself and His gospel to people; that is why healing was Jesus' ministry along with teaching and preaching. It is profoundly spiritual. We will discover this truth as we go through this study. In order to develop a Biblical framework for medicine, we must first investigate how frameworks are constructed, developed and used.

Summary

Jesus said that the wise man builds his life on the Word of God. This applies to medicine and healthcare as well as every other area of life. We discussed several reasons and benefits to developing a Biblical understanding of medicine; we will discuss all of these issues in depth as we go through the study. We looked at the following reasons:

1. We are to think and to act Biblically about everything, and to obey God in every area of our lives.
2. Healthcare is in crisis. The root of the crisis is at a fundamental level, at issues addressed by God's Word.
3. Biblical medicine must address the fundamental flaws and the unbiblical framework of modern medicine.
4. We want to be Biblically integrated in all that we do. Everything in our lives should be centered around the gospel.
5. It provides a way to reach others in medicine with the gospel, show that Christ is relevant.
6. It is a demonstration of the Kingdom of God to the principalities and powers.
7. It is the best medicine; the best patient care is according to God's principles.
8. It provides a basis for understanding health on a population level.
9. It provides a basis for understanding health on an individual level.
10. It provides a basis for understanding bioethical issues.
11. We are followers of Jesus, and He is our model. Healing was part of His ministry, and He called Himself a physician. This must say something extremely profound and important about healing and our role as healers.
12. The goal/effect of the medical education process is to indoctrinate you in the unbiblical system and framework, with very harmful effects.
13. Health care is a parable of the gospel, a glorious opportunity to participate with Christ in His redemptive work.

In order to think Biblically about medicine, in order to develop a Biblical framework, we must first look at the nature of knowledge and how we use frameworks to interpret reality.

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