

FAITH AND HEALING

By

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Many Christians are being disturbed by the popular teaching that anyone can be healed of any sickness providing he has enough faith. Ergo: If you are a Christian without perfect health it means you do not have the proper faith! Instead of growing in the faith and knowledge of Christ and rejoicing in the “salvation ready to be revealed in the last time” (I Peter 1:5–6), faithful Christians are depressed because they haven’t faith enough to be healed.

Claims for wholesale healing are based on several false assumptions. Wide spread is the claim that Jesus expects us to perform miracles. “Greater works that these shall you do because I go unto my Father” (John 14:12). Jesus did not imply by this that we should do greater work of the same nature as that which He did. Can anyone multiply loaves and fishes? Calm the stormy sea? Call the dead forth from the tomb? What greater work is there than the atonement in which Christ took our sins and met their penalty on the cross? Certainly Jesus did not mean that we can either duplicate or improve on His work. What he did mean was that at His ascension He would send the Holy Spirit to inspire the apostles, to convict men of sin, righteousness and judgment and thus bring about their salvation. Preaching of the Gospel with power to redeem and save both body and spirit for eternity is a much greater work than the mere healing for a brief time of the dying body.

The miracles which were wrought by the apostles were for the specific purpose of confirming “the things that were heard” concerning salvation, “God also bearing witness with them both by signs and wonders and by manifold powers and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will” (Heb. 2:1–4). Paul wrote to the Corinthians that “the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience by signs and wonders and mighty works” (II Cor. 12:12). If everyone worked miracles, there could be no such thing as “signs of an apostle” through miracles.

Many claim that healing of the body is guaranteed by the suffering and death of our Lord, and quote Matt. 8:16–17 to prove it. This simply states that Jesus cast out demons and healed all that were sick; “that it might be fulfilled which was spoken through Isaiah the prophet, saying “Himself took our infirmities and bore our diseases.” This prophecy (Isa. 53:5) was fulfilled in the fact that Jesus, in His earthly ministry sympathetically bore the diseases and took them away by healing the sick. It certainly does not mean that Christ’s death on the cross was for the purpose of giving us physical health in this life. His atoning death was to meet the ultimate penalty for our sins, which is the final and ultimate death at judgment. Nowhere in the New Testament is there any suggestion that His death was for the purpose of healing our sicknesses. Rather it was substitutionary and vicarious (Rom. 4:25, II Co. 5:21, I Peter 2:24). He died “for the remission of sin.” The penalty for sin is not sickness, but death in the final judgment, a death that is eternal. It was to meet this penalty on our behalf that Jesus died.

Sufferers are often told that they are sick because they are in the grip of Satan and need deliverance from Satan to be well. Job was afflicted with sickness so severe that his

wife suggested that he simply curse God and die. But the account of Job's sickness reveals that he was under God's constant protection, that he was afflicted for God's Glory, to prove his faith in God. From beginning to end Job was accounted as righteous before God. His sickness was due to his righteousness, not his sinfulness. Job did get well, but only after the purpose of God had been served.

The disciples called attention to a blind man asking Jesus, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man, or his parents, that he should be born blind? Jesus answered, Neither did this man sin, nor his parents; but that the works of God should be made manifest in him" (John 9:2-3). The blind man was NOT blind because of Satan nor because of sin, and he was not healed because of any particular faith in Christ. What a far cry from the kind of claims and conditions made today by healers.

Some make the presumptuous claim that "God wants you well." Therefore if you are sick or crippled, it must be because you have little faith and certainly it is in opposition to God's will. But there are several reasons why this claim must be false. God did not always heal through the apostles. Paul prayed for healing, but God did not heal him, saying instead, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (II Cor. 12:9). Rather than view physical impairment as a calamity or lack of faith, Paul "took pleasure in infirmities" (II Cor. 12:10) and said he would "glory in my weaknesses" (Vs. 9). In fact he wrote that it was because of his infirmities that the Galatians had heard the Gospel (Gal. 4:13-14). Therefore Paul was able to "Glory in the things that concerned his infirmities" (II Cor. 11:30).

Apparently Paul was unable to heal Timothy, whom he told to "take a little wine for your stomach's sake and your often infirmities" (I Tim. 4:20). Not a word about Timothy exercising more faith in order to be healed! In II Tim. 4:20 Paul wrote that Trophimus was sick, so he had left him at Miletus. We could hardly accuse Paul of having little faith, yet he was not able to heal these men or himself. In all the letters of Paul, we find no guarantee of healing.

If God want you well, as so many claim, then you will get well. God is able to heal, and does heal. We have seen His healing in numerous instances, some of them quite dramatic. But far more important than our physical health is our relationship to God and our attitude under stress. Peter writes that we have "an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fades now away, reserved in heaven for you...Wherein you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be; you have been put to grief in manifold trials" (I Peter 1:4-6). These trials, he adds are to prove our faith and refine it. Our rejoicing is in the salvation wrought in the atonement of Christ, and in the inheritance reserved for us. It does not depend upon our being in perfect health. Some of the greatest contributions to Christian understanding have been made by those who labored under severe physical handicaps.

The curse which God placed upon the entire race at Adam's fall was that "in dying you shall surely die." Death is decreed by God and obviously He does not intend for anyone to remain in imperfect health in this present evil world. People grow to an age when their work is done, then they die. Sometimes that illness serves a good purpose which no one discovers, but which only God knows. It is faith which enables one to accept such infirmities without complaint or question, so that rather than the sickness proving that one does not have faith, as so-called faith healers claim, the sickness proves the faith.

God still heals. He could heal everyone if He wanted to. He could feed everyone, as Jesus fed multitudes on two occasions, if He wanted to. We do not always know the mind of God in every instance, so we cannot always pray with faith that God will heal. Never the less, we are taught to pray for that which we need. Two of the conditions of prayer are given in John 15:7 “If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatsoever you will, and it shall be done unto you.” Abiding in Him refers to abiding faithful. Certainly He knows whether or not you will remain faithful. The “if” also includes “and my words abide in you;” that is, our hearing and reading what He teaches, and making His teaching the rule of our lives. “He that turns away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayers shall be an abomination” (Prov. 28:9). Many people desire healing, but care nothing at all for Christ’s commandments.

Another requirement of God is that we pray for one another. “Confess therefore your sins one to another and pray one for another, that you may be healed” (James 5:16). Those who spend their time and money going from one healing meeting to another may have little concern for confessing their sins and praying for other people. This kind of prayer refers not to praying for another person to be used for our own benefit, but rather that we be concerned enough for other people and their afflictions that we pray for them instead of praying for ourselves. We are to forgive the other person and pray that he may be blessed. God desire that we turn our minds to Him and to others, rather than always concentrating on our own desires.

James gives specific instructions to the sick. “Is any among you sick? 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” (James 5:14). Note that this is to be done by the elders of the church and not by professional healing hucksters. Instead of obeying the Lord’s instructions, millions of people flock to “crusades,” traveling half-way around the world to sensational “healers.” This is not faith, but a lack of faith, for faith is to believe God will do what He say he will do under His own terms. Faith is to believe that God is present throughout His world; He is no more in Tulsa than He is in Gallup. He can heal as well in your own town as He can in Lourdes, or manila or wherever the latest popular miracle-worker is hooding his or her crusade. It is significant that the apostles never needed to “screen” the audience to find the neurotics (easy marks) and those with functional problems, a large percentage of which are psychosomatic. They never required the warm-up session of emotion-packed songs and they never took up huge collections in connection with healing.

Healing is no proof of a “healer’s” hot-line to God. Satan has great power, and is able to perform mighty “signs and lying wonders” (II Thess. 2:9) Through his ministers who “fashion themselves as minister of righteousness” (II Cor. 11:15). Multitudes are deceived by his work which is so marvelous that he might “lead astray, if possible, even the elect” (Matt. 24:24).

God can heal and does heal. “The supplication of a righteous man avails much in its working” (James 5:16). But He makes no blanket promise to heal everyone that desires it or believes it. God is not our servant and is not subject to our desires. It is God “Who works all things after the counsel of His will” (Eph. 1:11) and not ours. What He desire is that we seek Him, not His healing. “Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness” (Matt. 5:6). What he demands is that we have faith to accept whatever He gives or does, that we deny ourselves to follow Christ, and that in all things we give Him praise and honor.

The purpose of God is to conform us to His own image. Such transformation is going on continually for those who are called according to His purpose but it will not be complete until Christ comes and we “put on immortality” (II Cor. 3:18, Phil. 2:13, I Cor. 15:53). Then every Christian will be PERMANENTLY HEALED, with glorious and immortal bodies. There will be no more sickness, and no more death (Rev. 21:4). But that inheritance is now “reserved “f or you, “to be revealed in the last time” (I Peter 1:4–5). It is ours now by faith and in hope, but then it will be ours in sight and by actual personal possession.

The work which Christ came to do was to “seek and to save the lost” and to “give His life a ransom for many.” The greatest proof of the work of the Holy Spirit is found in redeemed lives, not restored livers. The Bible reveals that Satan has power to produce miracles, but only God can reconcile, forgive and redeem for eternity.

For those who “walk by faith and not by sight” and who are not seeking after a sign like the Pharisees, this is enough. “For our light affliction, which is for the moment, works for us more and more exceedingly an eternal weight of glory” (II Cor. 4:17).

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