

HEALING

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Almighty God made man and, obviously, understands how the body and mind work. It is God that has made us and not we ourselves (Psalm 100.3). God made man. God made woman. He knoweth our frame; He remembers that we are dust (Psalm 103. 14). And the Lord God formed man out of the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and man became a living soul (Genesis 2. 22).

God has not lost any of His Power. Power belongs to God (Psalm 62. 11). Therefore He can heal and restore the body and the mind according to His Sovereign Will. All things are possible unto God (Matthew 18. 26) except sin, of course. God can heal today if that is His Will.

Divine healing is defined in various ways by many people but I take it that it is when God heals miraculously without any other agent.

It is sometimes forgotten that it is God who had revealed to man remedies for some illnesses and diseases. Sadly, some give the credit to men and to science and God is ignored. Yet I have heard Pentecostals and charismatics claim that healing mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12 is the sole prerogative of Christians who have the gift of healing. They believe that as the Lord said, ‘ Ask and it shall be given you, seek and you will find and knock and it shall be opened unto you, ‘ Then, if you believe that. God can cure you from anything from a cold to cancer and you claim and receive this healing and you will certainly be healed.

Before any doubt what I say, this is written in their doctrinal statements and on websites of charismatic groups. I have just read it on the doctrinal statement of the Full Gospel Men’s Business Association, another charismatic organisation.

Doctors can heal in many cases. We must agree that doctors and medicine are in God’s plan for the benefit of mankind and the suggestion implied by some Pentecostals and charismatics that doctors are no longer required because they are superseded by faith or some alleged superior brand of Christianity is going against the Word of God and common sense.

In passing I should mention that there are fringe medicines such as hypnotism and acupuncture but this constitutes another subject although I may comment on this later.

I will quote the basic Pentecostal, neo-Pentecostal, Full Gospel and other charismatic organisations whose doctrine states:

Healing for all sickness and illness is included in the atonement and that every believer can claim and receive healing.

But the atonement is the means of our being reconciled to God through the sacrificial death of Christ upon the Cross. The idea that healing is included in the atonement presumably comes from Isaiah 53 verses 4 and 5 compared with Matthew 8 verses 16 and 17. This gospel, in fact, quotes the passage in Isaiah in the context that the Lord Jesus healed sickness in fulfilment of that prophecy. Fulfilment refers to something that has been done and we often read of the activities of the Lord in fulfilment of Scripture. All the prophecies about the Lord’s life on earth have been fulfilled. For example, in His 33 years here, all the prophecies of Isaiah 53 have been fulfilled. The Jews expected the Messiah to come and fulfil Scriptures including healing. Had He not done so, the Jews would have labelled Jesus a fraud. The Lord healed all that came to Him and some that did not appear in person.

However, the passage in Matthew also deals with those who are demon possessed who need healing.

Demons are of the Devil who is the author of sin. Demon possession was rife in the time of the Lord since it was Satan's plan to thwart the work of Christ. The end of Matthew 8 gives an example of a tortured soul possessed of demons. Notice how often the demons recognised the Lord Jesus.

Demon-possession is Satan's work. And the Devil knows who Christ is.

Although all sickness may be the result of the Fall, we cannot say that every illness is the work of the Devil; sometimes God allows it for specific purposes which may only be known to Him.

It has been said that such healing is a combination of faith but subject to God's Sovereign Will.

There are those who quote these passages as if the Lord on the Cross bore our sicknesses and therefore the believer ought never to be ill. Indeed, if healing is included in the atonement, the no Christina would ever endure any illness or disease. For them there would be no heart failure, cancer, arthritis, headaches or colds. Christians would be immune and that would be either a great witness or a source of jealousy.

Faith healing, or healing by faith, presents a problem. If my faith is the reason for healing, then my faith is superior to God and His Will. Healing would be dependent on me and not on God. But you will say that the Lord Jesus said to some that He had healed, 'Thy faith hath made thee whole.' It was faith in God's Will and Power as seen in Christ. You would not have faith in Him if you did not believe that He had the power. It is the faith as expressed by the leper, 'Lord, if Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean.' God's Will is the vital matter.

In many parts of the world today, healing meetings are held and not just meetings but lavish crusades. Is this in accordance with the example of Christ? While it is true that there may have been occasions when crowds thronged Him for healing, it may be true to say that their interest in Him was for what they could get of Him for bodily comforts rather than spiritual blessings.

Yet we read that when the Lord was to about to perform a healing, he was not waiting for a crowd to appear or to hire a hall and put around a lot of advertising leaflets. For most of the time, His healings were more of a private matter. The Lord was concerned with the sick and not with an audience. The raising of Jairus's daughter in Mark 5 was after He had put on would-be spectators. If I may say this reverently, the Lord was not a show-off or a showman; He was not demonstrative or dramatic, nor did He work in environments of emotionalism.

It has been said that James 5.14 states the New Testament way of dealing with the sick. Notice the sick person invited the elders of the local assembly of believers to visit him. He was not taken to the church building or any other venue or the next healing crusade. The elders came to him and, remember, the elders were spiritual men. An elder had to be the husband of one wife and so a woman cannot be an elder. The elders prayed over the patient who was anointed with oil by the laying on of hands. Oil here is not symbolic or ritualistic, but a soothing application. For example, the Good Samaritan in Luke 10 dealt with the victim's wounds by applying oil and wine. Paul tells Timothy to use wine not only for his stomach's sake but also for his other infirmities (1 Timothy 5. 23). Oil and wine were first aid. The application of the oil, or medical balm, was called anointing. Oil is referred to as balm in Jeremiah 8.22. Note that oil and prayer were used together.

However, I believe the passage in James 5 has to be read in context and the whole chapter deals with sin and forgiveness. Verse 15 begins, 'Is there any sick among you?' The word sick here means weak and feeble. Sin can produce these debilitating effects and one can say that some conditions of illness is because of sin. The same verse ends, 'If he hath committed sins they shall be forgiven him.' The next verse tells us to confess our faults one to another. One to another, not to everybody.

The word fault here is a false step, a trespass, a sin. Indeed the whole of this chapter deals with sin and forgiveness. That is what is meant by spiritual healing, healing from sin and its consequences. Verse 19 and 20 continue with the problem of sin and its healing with particular reference to backsliding. How gracious God is to be, and remain, willing to forgive sinners and heal them from the hurt of sin. God forgives upon true confession (1 John 1. 9).

It is only in the eternal state that physical sickness and disease for all believers is abolished (Revelation 21. 4). If we took the Pentecostal and charismatic doctrine, no Christian would die from illness or disease.

Let me put this simply. If I am ill who do I consult? Surely, a doctor. When I sin against another, I confess my fault to him (not to all and sundry) and repent and make restitution. I also confess this to the Lord and seek His forgiveness also. When I see another believer in sin do I criticise him and gossip about him, as most do, or do I privately pray for him and his recovery? And it must be remembered that God must forgive sin and its implications.

In all of this, it must again be remembered that suffering is often a feature of a believer's experience. Job was a godly man and yet he suffered. God allowed this and in all his distress, Job sinned not nor blamed God.

The Lord sometimes chastens those whom He loves. He sometimes tests us to make us strong but that does not necessarily mean He is punishing us. Perhaps He is teaching us sympathy since sometimes we can be hard and ungracious. We may need help to be humble. Remember too, that the Lord is touched with the feelings of our infirmities (Hebrews 4.15). He is a loving, sympathetic Lord. Paul had a 'thorn in his flesh' and asked the Lord three times to remove it (2 Corinthians 12. 7 - 9). The Lord did not and that in itself scuttles the Pentecostal and charismatic teaching that healing for all sickness is included in the atonement and that every believer should claim and receive healing. Timothy knew recurring illness. In 2 Timothy 4. 20, Trophimus was ill and Epaphroditus, in Philippians 2, nearly died through overwork. Paul was subject to illness and travelled with Luke who was a doctor.

Healing ultimately depends on the Sovereign Will of God. God could have healed Paul, Timothy, Trophimus and Epaphroditus but chose not to. Are we to assert that they were not healed because they did not understand the atonement and that they were lacking in faith?

Paul was present at the healing of many, yet, in his own suffering, he learned that God's grace was sufficient for him (2 Corinthians 12.9). Had he received instant healing would he have fully known God's grace?

The question often arises today as to whether the gift of healing is available today as in the days of the Lord and the apostles. Do some Christians have the gift of healing nowadays?

The apostles had this gift but some had known the Lord personally. The gift is referred to in 1 Corinthians 12.9 According to Mark 16, they had the gifts of healing and casting out devils; they could speak in foreign tongues which they had not learnt; they could handle serpents and drink deadly things and not be hurt although I am not saying that they did this deliberately; they laid hands on the sick and they recovered. Peter and Paul raised the dead. Do we see this today? Would a Pentecostal healer come with me to the hospital and heal the sick and dying for me?

The gifts of Mark 16 were temporary gifts as we have shown elsewhere.

If healing is in the atonement, then why has it not been effective through centuries to combat the plagues which killed Christians as well as others or are we to assert that only non-Christians perished?

If healing is always available why did New Testament worthies suffer? Why, in our time did the charismatic leader David Watson die so young?

Claims are made by some Pentecostals and charismatics who believe in healing was included in the atonement have died, gone to Heaven and been told by the Lord only to preach charismatic doctrine and been resurrected and come back to earth to preach this! This contradicts the Biblical precedent of Luke 16. 19-31.

Some have quoted the charismatic Eddie Gibbs in his book, *I Believe in Church Growth*, where he says, 'Healing may be instantaneous, gradual, complete or partial with or without the aid of medication or surgery'.

The healings by Christ and the apostles were never partial or gradual or involved pills or surgery.

I realise that in Mark 8, the blind man was touched twice by the Lord but that did not take minutes, hours or months. In Luke 17, there were ten lepers healed and told to go to the priest and, as they went, they were healed. That took little time and was not a gradual healing but their putting their faith in action and knowing that what the Lord said was absolutely true.

The Lord did not have any failures in His healing ministry. The Pentecostals and charismatics certainly do and pass the blame on to the patient for not having enough faith. Divine healing is dependent on God's Sovereign Will.

It should be realised that in New Testament times, the causes and remedies for sickness and illness did not have the benefit of advanced medicine as we have today. This is why there is great emphasis in the Gospels and the Epistles on healing and why some many flocked to the Lord Jesus for instant healing!

But what do we say to those who assert that they have the gift of healing and want to demonstrate this by the laying on of hands?

As we have said, their doctrine, teaching and practices are wrong and if the healing does not work it is the fault of the patient for not having faith!

Some of these healers apply auto-suggestion by planting thoughts in the mind by persuasive and emotional means to engender a feeling of well-being. It is also true that some patients recover because all they need is a 'good talking to.'

Others apply forms of hypnosis and many still use a planted person in the audience who claims to have been ill and miraculously cured previously. This is what is done in spiritualist and physic meetings.

This is deception and must be condemned. There are Pentecostals who use psychological procedures. Christian Science states that pain, sickness an illness are unreal, mere illusions.

One of the most appalling and notorious Elim leaders was the American Aimee Semple MacPherson who had a temple in Los Angeles. She employed the 'slain in the Spirit' doctrine when those receiving healing were pushed backwards and often to the ground if they were not caught by the stewards and the result was that the illness was cured. It is emotionally charged and somewhat dramatic and draws attention to the healer and the Pentecostal position.

Even the sceptics find this highly entertaining. The healers rant, 'I can heal you!' and while they may continue, 'In the Name of Jesus I command this illness to go!'

Who do they think they are? They assert themselves to be more important than God! God is relegated to a lower division and the healer gets the glory!

Such faith meetings are emotionally charged, as we have said.

Psychiatrists and psychologists agree that it is usual for people to show some immediate effect and striking improvement but, invariably, a relapse, follows shortly afterwards. When the remission is longer, it is often shown that the illness is generally hysterical in origin and will show itself in another form.

The comparison between Pentecostal/charismatic healings and those of the spiritualists/physics shows their obvious common ground. Spiritualists and psychics claim that healing is not the result of faith but due to the intervention of other agencies such as the spirits of deceased doctors on 'the other side.' Pentecostals advocate the other agency is a person with the charismatic gift of healing who effects the cure.

Living doctors admit that healing meetings may have a temporary psychological benefit for a short while, but also refer to the serious dangers of patients not going to a doctor but preferring to go to a Pentecostal healing crusade.

Independent statistics show that the healing success rate is so very small that it is negligible.

If someone is so healed, does this not dispute our argument? No, because God is Sovereign and if His will is to heal someone, He will.

The healing has been wrought by Him not by some person who wants to take the credit.

In 1 Corinthians 15.3 we read that Christ died for our sins. His death was to provide spiritual healing, the removal of our sins. Christ died for our sins not for our sicknesses and illness. He died to put away for sin not provide cures for the common cold and cancer!

When will people learn that false teaching is apostasy and comes under the severity and judgment of God?

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