

QUESTIONS WE WANT ANSWERED

85.3 What Is the Christian View of Sickness and Healing?

Part III

Scripture: James 5:13-16

INTRODUCTION

We have reduced the issue of healing to three basic considerations. First, that the atonement of Christ does or does not assure the believer of a deliverance from illness once certain conditions have been met. Second, that it is or is not God's will to heal all believers. Lastly, that the gift of healing is or is not possessed by people today.

In answer to the first possibility I have taken the position that it is most important for us to understand the implication of healing in the atonement. Inasmuch as all blessings to the Christian's life are redemptive and come by way of Jesus' cross, healing is in the atonement. The Scriptures are silent as to just how this is so. I do not understand this to be healing by right or possession but rather as a privilege experienced in an act of God sovereignly bestowed. Concerning the matter of God's will, everything will bow to it but we must distinguish between what is positive and permissive. God has chosen to allow evil means to produce redemptive results in the believer's life. For the Christian the conclusion of every one of life's experiences is triumphant though the process may have the appearance of tragedy. Hence, there will be those times in which God does not choose to heal for it is not His will to do so. Our study today has to do with the gift of healing mentioned among the other spiritual abilities which were given to believers as a means of revealing Christ and for the purposes of edification.

I. HEALING BY JESUS AND THE APOSTLES CONFIRMED AN IDENTITY AND A MESSAGE:

We spent considerable time in our first study establishing the fact that the sick were healed by Jesus and the apostles and that the ministry was continued by the ascended Lord through His church. There was a very important reason for what they did quite apart from the relief of sickness. It is the Apostle Peter who makes this very clear in his sermon to the people of Israel at the time of Pentecost.

He said, *“Ye men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know.”* (Acts 2:22) The purpose of Jesus' miracles was to ratify and confirm His identity.

It is perhaps a little difficult for us to understand the situation. The New Testament world was a much different one from that of the last writing prophet, Malachi. Four hundred long years have passed. The gap has brought many changes. No more Philistines, Assyrians, and Babylonians. The people of God are now Jews rather than Hebrews or Israelites, and they are scattered far and wide. The golden age of Greece has come. The Jews reacted to this culture by withdrawing at with the Essenes, and by adopting Greek ways as did the Hellenists. There were so many changes that the ordinary Jew of Palestine beset with religious and political confusion must have had serious misgivings about a Messiah ever coming.

You see, the Old Testament had made a promise. It promised a prophet even as Moses himself had said, *“He will raise up for you a Prophet like me, an Israeli, a man to whom you must listen and whom you must obey.”* (Deuteronomy 18:5) There was also the promise of a priest who would establish a new covenant, one written upon the heart in the expression of worship, according to Jeremiah. (Jeremiah 24:7) There was the ancient promise of a king and of one who would come with healing. (Isaiah 10:6-7; Malachi 4:2) The Old Testament never fulfilled its promise of a prophet, priest, king and healer. These were promises made to a chosen earthly people although it hardly occurred to them, it appears, that they all would be realized in a single person.

When Jesus came His ministry was well defined. He said, *“I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”* (Matthew 15:24) It is recorded in Matthew 10 as Jesus instructed His men, *“Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not. But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And as ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand.”* (Mathew 10:5-7) He also instructed, *“Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils.”* (10:8) According to Jesus the gospel had to be preached to Israel first. It was not the gospel of grace we preach, it was the gospel of the kingdom.

It was a gospel which said that the promises of the Old Testament had at last been kept. When John the Baptist came preaching the imminent arrival of the Kingdom of God, he pointed to the one who embodied that kingdom,

he pointed to Jesus. It is interesting to note that Jesus said about John, *“Among them that are born of women there hath not risen greater than John the Baptist.”* (Matthew 11:11) Yet this unique man did not perform a miracle, not a single one. (John 10:41) Had he performed miracles he undoubtedly would have been mistaken for the Messiah for such were the credentials of the one who had been promised. Jesus first preaching was that the kingdom was at hand. (Luke 17:21; Mark 1:15) Do you think you would have believed Jesus had you been there? How could you be sure He was telling the truth? There were many Messianic pretenders being heard. The point was that Jesus could be trusted. He came with the signs just as the prophets said He would. As Peter was later to say, *“a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs.”* (Acts 2:22) He vindicated His claims openly, the king had come. Plainly, Jesus offered Himself to Israel as King. (Luke 19:35-40)

Kingdom blessings were associated with attainment. They were known in terms of health, wealth and prosperity. (II Samuel 7:11; Isaiah 2:4; 11:6-9; Jeremiah 33:14-17, 55:5; Hosea 2:18; Daniel 7:13-14; Zechariah 14:9; Micah 4:1-3, 5; Psalm 72: 1-11; Deuteronomy 30:1-10) Little wonder Jesus came healing the brokenhearted, recovering sight to the blind. (Luke 4:18) But an amazing thing happened. The more signs given, the more demanded. (John 4:48, 6:30; I Corinthians 1:22)

Allow me to conclude this point by saying that the miracles of Scripture were never performed as mere displays of power. They were never meant to be spectacular in themselves, they were meant to draw attention to the miracle worker, to authenticate the message which accompanied them. The four great periods of miracle manifestation were during the days of Moses, Elijah, Jesus and the apostles. The miracles were signs to Pharaoh, the Egyptians, the nation of Israel and the world. The purpose of Jesus in healing was not primarily to relieve suffering.

Signs and wonders also certified certain people as apostles. When Paul's apostleship was questioned, he said, *“Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you all in patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds.”* (II Corinthians 12:12) God was to eventually inscripturate His truth through these men who had been so endowed. See also Hebrews 2:3-4.

II. HEALING WAS A GIFT TO THE CHURCH:

The doctrinal basis for the distribution of gifts to the church is found in

Ephesians 4:7-16. A reading of this passage quickly reminds us of the humiliating death, resurrection, ascension and exaltation of our Lord. Verse eight is a quotation from Psalm 68:18 where the thought is of a king returning home from battle and receiving gifts for victories won. Paul had in mind the victory of Christ over demonic powers through His work on the cross and the giving of gifts in celebration of that victory. I Corinthians 2:14 speaks of the way believers are involved in that triumph. Thus, the victory won by Christ is shared with the Church through gifts which are given. One such gift was that of healing.

The word for **healing** is **iama**. It appears in I Corinthians 12:9, 28, and 30. It is found only in these places in the New Testament. Of the 16 or more gifts listed in Romans 12:6-8, I Corinthians 12:4-11, 28-31 and Ephesians 4:7-12 it seems clear that at least one classification which can be made is that of the miraculous and the non-miraculous. Miraculous gifts would appear to be healing, miracles, tongues and interpretation of tongues. Some include prophecy and discerning of spirits in this category. Apostles might also be included in this group.

It must be noted that at least one of these gifts was a temporary one exercised during experience of the primitive church. This was the gift of the "apostle." An apostle was one of the original twelve followers of the Lord. When Judas took his life the remaining men decided to replace him. They agreed on certain qualifications. *"One who had been with the eleven all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning with the baptism of John, unto the same day that He was taken up from us"* and one who *"must be ordained to be a witness with us, of His resurrection."* (Acts 1:21-22) When Paul became one born out of due time his apostleship was certified by virtue of the fact that he had seen the risen Lord on the road to Damascus. (I Corinthians 9:1) It is reasonable to assume that if the qualifications of an apostle necessitated being a contemporary of Christ, it is a gift that was temporal and given to meet a particular need at a particular time. If this is so, could there be other temporary gifts?

Of course there were many people who were contemporaries of Christ and even witnesses to his resurrection who were not apostles. I Corinthians 15:6 speaks of 500 people who may have been in such a category. There must have been some other distinguishing characteristic of an apostle which set him apart from the ever increasing number of believers. Paul makes it very clear what this quality was. Apostles had signs of their own. They were signs, wonders and mighty deeds. (II Corinthians 12:12) The word for signs is **semeion**. It means to

mark or to signal. The apostles were marked men by virtue of their deeds. If the office of the apostle was a temporary one serving a unique purpose, then the signs and wonders and mighty deeds which certified an apostle could also be temporary. This would also apply to gifts which could only be bestowed by an apostle. (II Timothy 1:6; Romans 1:11)

Hebrews 2:3-4 is interesting. *“How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord and was confirmed unto us by them that heard Him. God also bearing them witness with signs and wonders, with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to His own will?”* The author of the book of Hebrews ascribes these miraculous happenings to those first generation believers who heard Jesus. There is no hint here that the writer or his contemporaries (second generation Christians) possessed these same gifts.

III. CAUTION SHOULD BE EXERCISED IN REACHING A CONCLUSION:

In drawing the pieces together concerning healing as a spiritual gift in the church today I am able to make the following observations.

1. There Is No Command for Christians to Heal:

Miraculous gifts are also referred to as sign gifts. The special classification arises because there is no command to perform them. Other gifts are akin to exercises which are to mark the spiritual Christian even without the special charismatic endowment. As an example, all Christians are to speak and serve.

2. There Is Little Attention Given to Healing in the Epistles:

There is a law of occurrence in the Scripture. The word sign is used 61 times in Acts and the Gospels, 16 times in the rest of the New Testament. The word **heal** is used 45 times in the Acts and Gospels, 3 times otherwise, i.e. **therapeuo**. Another word for heal, **iaomai**, 25 times in the Acts and Gospels, 3 times in the remaining New Testament. The word **wonder, (teras)**, is used 16 times in Acts and the Gospels, 1 time otherwise. Jesus did not develop a systematic theology during His life on earth. Having earned the right He gave the task to His interpreters in their letters. Had healing been important they would have emphasized it as giving us the mind of Christ. They did emphasize the Christian life as one of faith. The word is used 40 times in the

Gospels and Acts, it is used 204 times in the rest of the New Testament.

3. Our Relationship to Christ Is a Unique One:

Jesus came proving His identity by miraculous demonstration. He healed. The Jews related to an earthly Jesus who would be their king. We do not know, nor follow, nor seek to emulate Him in that way. Paul speaks of this to the Corinthians in II Corinthians 5:14-17. We have the living Christ within us. We do not require a sign, ours is a walk of faith. No promise of prosperity or health is held out to us. It is however interesting to note that the epistles do have a great deal to say about suffering.

4. Healing Is Only a Part of the Gospel Message:

Love is more important than any of the other gifts. Any gifts we have must be exercised in love or they are meaningless. Jesus also made it very clear that a body healing is second to a soul restored to health where sins have been removed. (Mark 2:5)

5. The Gift Did Not Heal Every Disease:

Paul was unable to heal himself. In Acts 19:11 he did extraordinary miracles. Even his handkerchiefs healed. Epaphroditus, nearly died. Timothy used other medical means. Trophimus he left ill. (II Timothy 4:20; Philippians 2:25-27; Galatians 4:13; I Corinthians 2:3; II Corinthians 11:30) What happened? These were all men important to Paul in later years, the church having been firmly established on the apostles. Did their office cease along with the mighty signs and wonders?

6. We Have to Take No Man's Word as Final:

If it is possible that the sign gifts were temporary we must be cautious about manifestations today. We must test the spirits to be sure they are of God. (I John 4:1) We must be convinced by the Holy Spirit and Scripture. We may back away and say we don't know. We can't spend a lifetime checking out this or that claim. We are told not to allow anyone to deceive us in any way. (II Thessalonians 2:3)

7. Only Christ Has the Authority to Heal and He Will Bestow the Gift:

If God is sovereignly bestowing these gifts today we should allow God to be God. Does anyone in the world have the gift of healing today? We can only

prayerfully seek the answer from Scripture and be careful not to bias ourselves so as to limit God. This too would be bad theology.

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