

QUESTIONS WE WANT ANSWERED

31.2 What Is the Gift of Healing?

Part II

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 one of the humiliating death, resurrection, ascension, and exaltation of our Lord. It is well to note that verse eight is a quotation from Psalm 68:18 and the change from *"thou hast received gifts among men"* to *"gave gifts unto men"* is worthy of attention. The thought in Psalm 68:18 is that of a warring king returning home from battle and receiving gifts for victories won. Paul has in mind the victory of Christ over demonic powers through His work on the cross and the giving of gifts to His people in celebration of that victory. There is a great verse found in I Corinthians (2:14) which emphasizes this truth. *"Now thanks be unto God who always leads us in the triumph of Christ and maketh manifest the savior of his knowledge in every place."* Thus the victory accomplished by Christ is shared with the Church through God's gifts to believers. One such gift is the gift of healing. This gift has caused a great deal of dismay among believers for we all have longed to see healing take place when a loved one is struck with illness. The gift of healing is the supernatural intervention of God through a human instrument, to restore health to the body. Several more truths are found in Scripture which will help us to better understand the gift of healing.

I. THERE IS NO PROMISE THAT EVERY SICKNESS WILL BE HEALED:

Evidently, the gift of healing was not effective in every instance. We can only conclude that it is not God's will to heal everyone. I think it is contrary to the Word of God for anyone to say to you or to me, "It is not God's will for you to be sick." When we turn to the Bible, we find Paul's inability to heal Timothy compelled the latter to remain behind on a missionary journey. Paul wrote to him and instructed. *"Drink no longer water, but use a little wine for your stomach's sake and thine often infirmities."* (I Timothy 5:23) Paul tells the Philippians that Epaphroditus had been ill night unto death he certainly would have healed him if it had been God's will. An error commonly propagated by divine healers is that it is God's will for every person who is sick to be healed. This, in my opinion, is contradictory to the Word of God. Paul also left

Trophimus ill at Miletum. (II Timothy 4:20) Epaphroditus, Trophimus and Timothy all would not have remained ill if Paul's gift of healing was available at the time. Another interesting fact is that Paul's constant companion was Luke, a physician. Certainly, God could have sent someone with the gift of healing to minister to Paul's need, for he was not in good health a great deal of the time. (I Corinthians 2:3; II Corinthians 11:30, 12:5, 7-10; Galatians 4:12-13) It was God's will for Paul to bear his affliction. One last thought here is that we have come to accept the final illness that will ultimately bring death. If the gift of healing could be exercised to cure every illness of a particular individual, that person would never pass through the valley of the shadow. Such a person would be confirmed in physical life forever. Interesting how we have come to accept the fact that at sometime in the future there will be the gradual decline in strength, perhaps by illness, without giving any thought to being miraculously restored to health. There is no promise that every sickness will be healed.

II. THERE IS NO COMMAND FOR CHRISTIANS TO HEAL:

The gifts of the Spirit are often classified as speaking gifts, serving gifts, and sign gifts. The reason for the special classification of sign gifts is that there is no command to perform them. Whereas, the gifts falling into the speaking (prophecy, evangelism, teaching, exhorting, Word of Wisdom, Word of knowledge, missionary) category, and those in the ministering category (helps, hospitality, giving, ruling, faith, discernment) are to be engaged in even without the special charismatic endowment.

III. THERE ARE CERTAIN MISINTERPRETATIONS TO AVOID:

One such misunderstanding having to do with bodily healing is that the believer has the right to claim deliverance from sickness just as he claims the forgiveness of sins. This is the common belief that physical healing has been provided for believers through Christ's atonement. The favorite Scripture for believing this is found in Isaiah 53:5, *"he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed."* The word for *"stripes"* here may be rendered "bruises." The interpretation here is that "healing" refers to bodily healing. The truth is understood by reading the context. Even in the verse itself, the prophet is clearly referring to spiritual disease, rather than physical. Why was he wounded and bruised? He was bruised for our iniquities. The Apostle Peter uses Isaiah's words as if to clarify for us, *"Who his own self bore our sins in his own body on the*

tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness; by whose stripes we are healed." Peter plainly associates the cross work of Christ, not with bodily healing, but with the healing of the soul. Again, healing is not in the atonement because Christians die from sickness. If healing were part of the experience of salvation through the cross, there would be no such thing as death from disease for the true believer.

MATTHEW 8:17:

Another text often misunderstood is this one from Matthew. *"That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah, the prophet, saying, he himself took our infirmities, and bore our sickness."* It is a fulfillment of Isaiah 53:4. Faith healers believe that the word "grief's" is really "diseases" and the word "sorrow" is actually "pains," This translation seems to be acceptable. "Sure he hath borne our diseases and carried our pains." We believe that Matthew 8 is a fulfillment of Isaiah 53:4. But when did the events of Matthew 8 take place? Not at Calvary. What took place in Matthew took place during the earthly ministry of Jesus. When did Jesus fulfill Isaiah's prophecy? *"When the evening was come, they brought unto him many that were possessed with demons; and he cast out the spirits with his word, and healed all that were sick."* (Matthew 8:16) The prophecy of Isaiah 53:4 was fulfilled three years before Jesus died upon the cross. The Greek word "borne" means to sympathize with. On these occasions Christ wept and had continual sorrow for those in need.

EXODUS 15:26:

Another verse often quoted is *"If thou wilt hearken to the voice of the Lord thy God, and wilt do that which is right in his sight, and wilt give ear to his commandments, and keep all his statutes, I will put none of these diseases upon thee, which I have brought against the Egyptians; for I am the Lord that healeth thee."* These words were addressed to the nation Israel, God's chosen people. This was a nationalistic covenant. Very often it took strong external characteristics such as temporal blessings. The blessings which are for the church have not taken the physical emphasis, the blessings promised to the church are spiritual. Old Israel could claim this covenant of healing, no such promise has been made to the church.

IV. THERE IS LITTLE ATTENTION GIVEN TO HEALING IN THE EPISTLES:

The power of healing was given to the apostles, but evidently it was not a lasting power. In Matthew 17:16 the disciples were confronted with a person in need. They were not able to heal him. The power given in Matthew 10 was not permanent. Further, the interpreters of Jesus would have emphasized this gift in their writings if it were important to us today.

V. THE DAY OF MIRACLES:

The day of miracles is not past. God is still working miracles today. We believe in miracles. A very great miracle that is being performed every day somewhere in the world is the miracle of a second birth and the regeneration of human nature. However, there is a difference between the working of miracles and the gift of miracles. The gift of healing and miracles recorded in I Corinthians 12:28 was employed at will when the need presented itself. God does not work that way today. We must say that healings which are wrought today are medical, psychological, satanical, or spiritual. Cures received at the hands of a divine healer may be psychological. Any doctor knows that sickness may be psychosomatic, produced by the mind. Removal of the mental cause can cause the sickness to go away and no miracle has taken place. Other cures may be the result of Satan's work. He is the great deceiver and if he can rally people to his cause through a cure to their physical beings, he has won a victory. (Exodus 7:11-12, 22, 8:7; II Timothy 3:8.) You may remember that Jesus was accused of casting out demons by diabolical power. (Matthew 12:24) The world of His day was flooded with demon energized healers and workers of magic. (Acts 8:9-11, 13:8-10) Of course God cures. He may intervene in a miracle way and restore health. We have said before that such healings are immediate, total and permanent.

VI. WE ARE TO GLADLY BEAR OUR INFIRMITY WHEN GOD DOES NOT HEAL US:

This is to be our attitude when healing does not come. We have to recall again that important word of Paul found in I Corinthians 12:9, *"Most gladly therefore, will I rather glory in my infirmity that the power of Christ may rest upon me."* We have all sung Fanny Crosby's hymns. She was a woman of deep faith in Jesus Christ. Blinded in infancy, she came to write when she was eight years old, "O, what a happy soul am I, although I cannot see I am resolved that in this

world contented I will be. How many blessings I enjoy that other people don't. To weep and sigh because I am blind I cannot and I won't."

VII. HEALING IS ONLY A PART OF THE GOSPEL MESSAGE:

Healing is only a half truth. God does heal the body, but of what profit is that if the soul remains diseased? Mark 2:5 reads, *"When Jesus saw their faith, He said unto the sick of the palsy, Son, thy sins be forgiven thee."* He did not simply heal the body. He related the physical healing to the totality of the gospel. Very often healing is divorced from the rest of the gospel message. When this happens it becomes a cult, it becomes an end in itself, rather than being a means to an end. Worse than body sickness is soul sickness. A body restored to health is wonderful, but even better than that, is a soul where sins have been removed as far as the east is from the west.

VIII. WE MUST BEWARE OF FALSE HEALING:

I want to conclude our study with this sober warning without being unkind. Matthew records the words of Christ in this way (7:21) *"Not everyone that saith unto me, 'Lord, Lord', shall enter into the kingdom of God (heaven), but he that doeth the will of my Father, which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name and in thy name cast out devils, and in thy name done may wonderful works'? And then I will confess unto thee, I never knew you."* In I John 4:1 we are warned that not all spirits come from God and that we ought to try the spirits before we follow them. Let me say that I don't mean this as an indictment against the ministry of so-called "divine healing." There are many documented cases of healing. We must try the spirits to see whether they be of God.

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