

The Blessed Person and Work of God the Holy Spirit



Lesson 15--The Gift of Healing

Does God Give the Gift of Healing to His Church Today?

1. Is it God's will for every sick person to be healed?

Consider four New Testament examples of people who were sick:

1) 2 Corinthians 12:7-10

Paul was afflicted with a painful ("thorn") bodily ("in the flesh") ailment. Paul prayed _____ times that God would remove this thorn in the flesh from him, but God did not do this. God did something better. He taught Paul the sufficiency of His G_____, that God's grace was enough even to enable him to endure such a physical affliction. Sometimes God allows sickness or pain in order to teach us of His all-sufficient grace.

2) Philippians 2:25-30

Epaphroditus was seriously sick, to the point where he was near D_____. It is interesting to note that Paul did not heal this faithful brother. God had mercy on him and raised him up.

3) 1 Timothy 5:23

"Drink no longer water, but use a little wine for thy stomach's sake and thine often infirmities." Timothy had a stomach problem and he was often sick and ailing and infirmed. Paul did not tell him to see a healer, nor did Paul tell him that his physical problems were due to sin or a lack of faith. Paul merely gave Timothy a common sense prescription.

[It is possible that Paul was recommending unfermented wine to Timothy rather than alcoholic wine. Athenaeus, the Grammarian (280 A.D.) wrote the following: "Let him take sweet wine, either mixed with water or warmed, especially that kind called *protropos*, the sweet Lesbian *glukus*, as being good **for the stomach**; for sweet wine (*oinos*) does not make the head heavy" (Athenaeus, *Banquet* 2,24). This is an example from ancient literature showing that unfermented wine was recommended as a remedy for stomach problems.]

4) 2 Timothy 4:20

"Erastus abode at Corinth: but Trophimus have I left at Miletum S_____." There is no indication that Trophimus had a spiritual problem (sin, lack of faith), but he did have a physical problem and Paul did not heal him. It is sometimes the will of God for His children to be sick in this life, but never in the next life (Rev. 22:4).

Consider godly people of the past who were sick or who suffered with serious bodily ailments. For example: John Calvin was afflicted with rheumatism, intense headaches and a weak body. Fanny Crosby was blind. Robert McCheyne was very sickly and died at age 30. George Mueller certainly did not have a lack of faith, but had a lifelong struggle against bodily infirmity and ills including head troubles and an operation at the hands of a skillful surgeon. Read almost any biographies of godly saints of the past and you will in most cases read of certain physical afflictions which God allowed them to endure. [For an excellent discussion on the subject of sickness, see *Practical Religion* by J. C. Ryle, his chapter on "Sickness." It is well done and would be a great encouragement to any saint suffering through a time of sickness.]

There are some Charismatic people who think that if you are sick you are out of the will of God. For example, Kenneth Hagan Jr. wrote: "My belief is that it is indeed God's will that His children walk in complete health....It is always God's will to heal His children." [Personal letter from Kenneth Hagan Jr. to me dated 7/16/87.] To such people we must ask these questions: Do any of you wear glasses? (Kenneth Hagan Jr. does.) Do any of you ever catch the common cold or the flu? Do any of you ever take aspirin or other pain medicines? And most significantly, do any of you ever die?

Take for example the case of faith-healer Oral Roberts. He once bypassed his own multi-million-dollar City of Faith medical complex to have eye surgery in California. But why didn't he go to a faith-healer or why didn't he heal himself? Also if faith healing is really effective, why do you need a multi-million dollar medical complex? The Lord Jesus and the apostles healed hundreds of people without any such facilities. Indeed, if there had been a hospital back then, Christ could have emptied the place!

2. Does the New Testament teach a "Prosperity Gospel"?

This is the very popular and very appealing message often heard today that if you trust Christ you will have HEALTH and WEALTH. That is, you will have physical health and material prosperity. Your body will be free from sickness and your bank account will be loaded. The ones who really prosper financially from this kind of teaching are the false teachers themselves, the prosperity gospel preachers.

THE HEALTH AND WEALTH GOSPEL

| | |
|--|---|
| <p>"It doesn't matter how many times we've heard it—we need to be continually reminded that it is God's will for us to be well and healthy and to have good things in this life" (Kenneth Hagin)</p> | <p>"That's ridiculous," says Kenneth Copeland about the belief that Jesus' ministry was poor. "It would have been impossible for Jesus to have been poor! All the way through the Old Testament God promised material blessing to anyone who would walk perfectly and uprightly with Him. If God had failed to bless Jesus financially, He would have been breaking His own Word" (Charisma, 9/90).</p> |
|--|---|

It is true that those who trust in Christ will prosper spiritually. They are able to prosper and have good health in their S_____ (3 John 2). They are able to enjoy every spiritual _____ that is found in Christ (Eph. 1:3). They are able to be R_____ in Him (2 Cor. 8:9). But God never promised robust physical health and material, financial prosperity in this life for His children.

Indeed, the message of the entire New Testament is that God's people will be a suffering and afflicted people, even as sheep led to the slaughter (Romans 8:18,35-36). They will be hated and persecuted by the world (John 15:18-20). In the world they will have T_____ and affliction and pressure (John 16:33). All who live godly in Christ will _____ persecution (2 Tim. 3:12) and every Christian is to suffer hardship as a good soldier of Christ (2 Tim. 2:3). Paul's answer to the prosperity gospel is perhaps best summed up in 1 Thessalonians 3:3-4, "That no man should be moved by these _____: for yourselves know that we are _____ thereunto. For verily, when we were with you, we told you before that we should suffer _____; even as it came to pass, and ye know."

Apparently the Apostle Peter was unaware of the prosperity gospel when he said, "Silver and gold have I none" (Acts 3:6)! The Apostle Paul was also unaware of this teaching. He characterized believers as being poor, having nothing (2 Cor. 6:10)!

3. Is it unspiritual to go to a doctor? Does this show a person's lack of faith?

An extreme Charismatic group in Indiana ("the Glory Barn") taught that believers should never go to a doctor but that they should trust God for healing instead. Certain expectant mothers had difficulties in childbirth because of the lack of medical attention and their babies died. To make matters worse, the members of this community prayed over these dead babies hoping that God would raise them from the dead. The local media got hold of these stories and it was a great shame to the name of Christ. It was wrong practice due to wrong teaching.

"But when Jesus heard that, He said unto them, They that be whole [healthy] need not a _____, but they that are _____" (Matthew 9:12). Those who are whole and healthy do not need a doctor or physician. This implies that those who are sick do need a doctor. Indeed, one of Paul's companions who was also one of the gospel writers was a medical doctor: "Luke, the beloved _____, and Demas, greet you" (Colossians 4:14).

4. Were Christ and the apostles able to heal?

The Lord Jesus Christ healed all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people: "And his fame went throughout all Syria: and they brought unto him _____ sick people that were taken with divers diseases and torments, and those which were possessed with devils, and those which were lunatic, and those that had the palsy; and He _____ them" (Matthew 4:23-24).

The disciples (apostles) were given authority "to heal _____ manner of sickness and all manner of _____" (Matthew 10:1).

The Apostle Paul was able to heal in a remarkable way: "And God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul: So that from his body were brought unto the sick handkerchiefs or aprons, and the _____ departed from them, and the evil spirits went out of them" (Acts 19:11-12).

5. Are modern "faith healers" able to heal?

A noted doctor, William A. Nolen, objectively examined a famous faith healer, Kathryn Kuhlman. At first he was skeptical but willing to believe. Here are some of his comments:

Occasionally Miss Kuhlman would turn to the audience and say, "Someone with a brace—a brace on your leg—you don't need that brace any more. Take it off. Come and claim your cure." The first time she called for a brace, no one came forth. Finally a very pretty young girl came up on the stage. She was waving her leg brace and standing, with her pelvis tilted badly, on one good leg and one short, withered leg.

Kathryn Kuhlman questioned her. "How long have you worn this brace?" "Thirteen years. Since I had polio at seven." "And now you're cured. You don't need it any more. You've taken it off." "Yes," she said. "I believe in the Lord. I've prayed, and He's curing me." Everyone applauded. The girl cried.

This scene, to my mind, was utterly revolting. The girl's leg was just as withered as it had been ten minutes earlier. Now she stood in front of 10,000 people, giving praise to the Lord—and indirectly to Kathryn Kuhlman—for a cure that hadn't occurred and wasn't going to occur. I could imagine how she would feel when the hysteria of the moment had left her and she again had to put on the brace she had worn for 13 years—and would wear for the rest of her life.

Finally with a hymn and a final blessing, the show ended. All the desperately ill who had been in wheelchairs were still in wheelchairs. As I watched them leave, seeing the tears of the parents as they pushed their crippled children to the elevators, I wished Miss Kuhlman were with me. I wondered if she really knew how much sadness those disappointed patients and parents suffered. I couldn't believe that she did.

During the service, as those who had "claimed a cure" came down off the stage, two legal secretaries I had enlisted to help me wrote down the names, addresses, phone numbers and diagnoses of everyone who was willing to cooperate in a follow-up study. We got 82 names. A few weeks after the service, letters were sent to the names on the list, inviting them to come to Minneapolis on Sunday, July 14, and tell us about their experiences. Twenty-three people showed up, and I made arrangements to interview them individually over the next few months.

In talking to these people, I tried to be as honest, understanding and objective as possible, but I couldn't dispense with my medical knowledge and my common sense. I listened carefully to everything they told me and followed up every lead that might have led to a confirmation of a miracle. I was led to an inescapable conclusion: Of the patients who had returned to Minneapolis to reaffirm the cures claimed at the miracle service, not one had, in fact, been miraculously cured of anything. [William A. Nolen, M.D., "In Search of a Miracle," *McCall's Magazine*, September 1974. Dr. Nolen has published his findings in a book as well, which is also called *In Search of a Miracle*.]

Richard Quebedeaux, a friend of the Charismatic movement, writes the following about Kathryn Kuhlman, who for many years was considered one of the foremost faith healers in the world:

She cites the ailment—everything from terminal cancer to allergies (though amputated limbs never reappear; teeth are not miraculously filled with gold)—and asks those who feel they are healed to come forward to the platform to testify about what has happened. (Trained ushers try to screen cases and verify healings as much as possible beforehand.) Quite often, there are physicians on the platform who themselves may be asked for confirmation; and everyone is urged to confirm an apparent cure with his or her own doctor. Some individuals, of course, testify, but are not healed; others seem to get better, but later regress; probably most in attendance are not cured at all. [Richard Quebedeaux, *The New Charismatics*, page 86.]

6. How do modern "faith-healers" explain their failures?

"It's not our lack of power as a healer; the sick person simply did not have enough faith!" When all else fails, blame the sick person!

7. Did Christ and the apostles only heal those who had enough faith?

In Matthew 12:15 great multitudes followed the Lord Jesus and "He healed them _____" whether they had faith or not. In Acts 5:16 a multitude of sick folk were brought to the apostles, "and they were healed _____." The healing was for all without any faith requirement. Not one sick person went away disappointed.

In Acts 3:1-8 we have the healing of the man who was born lame. This beggar was hoping to receive some money from the hand of Peter. Being healed was the last thing this man expected. He certainly did not have faith that he would be healed. He might have believed Peter would give him some money (v. 5) but he did not believe Peter would heal him. The reason God performed this healing miracle had nothing to do with this man's faith or lack of faith. [The faith mentioned in Acts 3:16, in connection with this same miracle, must be a reference to Peter's faith in Christ, not to the lame man's faith.]

In Acts 20:9-12 we find Paul healing a man from the most serious ailment of all, death itself. Here was a young man who actually had died. Certainly a dead man cannot exercise faith! How silly it would be for a modern day faith healer to say, "I was not able to raise that man from the dead because he did not have enough faith!" This raises an interesting question: If modern day faith healers have the same healing powers as Christ and the apostles, then why do they not raise the dead?

8. How can we describe the healing miracles of Christ and the apostles?

1) INSTANTANEOUS

The Lord Jesus touched a leper and I _____ his leprosy was cleansed (Matthew 8:3). Jesus touched the eyes of two blind men and I _____ their eyes received sight (Matthew 20:34). Peter took a lame man by his right hand and lifted him up and I _____ his feet and ankle bones received strength and he started leaping around (Acts 3:7). Such healings were done instantly. There was no need for any prolonged period of recuperation or therapy.

2) PERFECT AND COMPLETE

"And when the men of that place had knowledge of Him, they sent out into all that country round about, and brought unto Him all that were diseased; And besought Him that they might only touch the hem of His garment: and as many as touched were made _____ whole" (Matthew 14:35-36). "And His Name through faith in His Name hath made this man strong, whom ye see and know: yea, the faith which is by Him hath given him this _____ soundness in the presence of you all" (Acts 3:16). Contrast this with Dr. Nolen's observation of a girl claiming to be healed at a Kathryn Kuhlman service, standing on one good leg and on one short, withered leg with her pelvis tilted badly. Hardly a whole and complete and perfect cure!

3) EVERYONE HEALED

"But when Jesus knew it, He withdrew himself from thence: and great multitudes followed Him, and He _____ them _____" (Matthew 12:15). "There came also a multitude out of the cities round about unto Jerusalem, bringing sick folks, and them which were vexed with unclean spirits: and they were healed _____" (Acts 5:16).

4) UNDENIABLE

"Then was brought unto him one possessed with a devil, blind, and dumb: and He healed him, insomuch that the blind and dumb both spake and saw. And all the people were _____, and said, Is not this the son of David? But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, This fellow doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub the prince of the devils" (Matthew 12:22-24). The Lord's enemies could not deny the miracle. Instead they accused Him of doing this great miracle, not by the power of God, but by the power of Satan.

"And beholding the man which was healed standing with them, they could say _____ against it....Saying, What shall we do to these men? for that indeed a notable miracle hath been done by them is manifest to all them that dwell in Jerusalem; and we _____ it" (Acts 4:14,16). These men hated the apostles and their message but they could not deny the remarkable miracle which had been done.

5) SPECTACULAR

The lame leaping, the blind seeing, lepers cleansed, demon possessed men delivered, a cut-off ear instantly restored and even the dead raised back to life! According to Matthew 11:5, such spectacular miracles proved that Jesus was indeed the Messiah: "The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them" (Matthew 11:5; read the context and compare Isaiah 35:5-6).

9. How can we describe the so-called "miraculous" cures of modern faith healers?

1) DOUBTFUL

We have already referred to Dr. Nolen's article in which he investigated a healing service of a prominent and nationally known faith healer (see #27). Suppose a medical doctor were to examine those who had been cured by Christ and the apostles. Suppose a doctor were to examine Lazarus after he had been dead for four days! Suppose an eye specialist were to examine Bartimaeus after he received his sight! Suppose an orthopedic surgeon were to witness the man born lame leaping about (Acts 3)! Suppose an ear doctor were to examine Malchus after his sliced-off ear had been healed (Luke 22:50-51). Would there be any doubt as to the genuineness of these miracles?

2) DONE IN A CONTROLLED ENVIRONMENT

"But strangely enough, the people who claim to have the gift of healing never seem to get out of their tents, their tabernacles, or their TV studios. They always seem to have to exercise their gift in a controlled environment, staged their way, run according to their schedule. Why don't we hear more of the gift of healing being used right in the hospital hallways? Why aren't healers using their gift in places like India and Bangladesh? Why aren't they right out in the street where masses of people are racked by disease?" [John MacArthur, Jr., *The Charismatics*, p. 134.]

3) DISAPPOINTING

No one that came to Christ or the apostles for healing went away disappointed. In contrast to that we share again the comment of Dr. Nolen: "All the desperately ill who had been in wheelchairs were still in wheelchairs. As I watched them leave, seeing the tears of the parents as they pushed their crippled children to the elevators, I wished Miss Kuhlman were with me. I wondered if she really knew how much sadness those **disappointed** patients and parents suffered. I couldn't believe that she did." [William A. Nolen, M.D., "In Search of a Miracle," *McCall's Magazine*, September 1974, emphasis mine.]

Richard Quebedeaux, a friend of the Charismatic movement, in evaluating the ministry of a prominent faith healer concludes that "probably most in attendance are **not healed at all**." [Richard Quebedeaux, *The New Charismatics*, p. 86, emphasis mine.] This is certainly not a very encouraging evaluation for those who are hoping for a miracle of healing.

THE TOUCH OF GOD

