

Divine Healing

Growing up in an evangelical conservative church, I rarely heard the subject of 'divine healing' addressed. This was probably not intentional, it simply reflected the church culture at the time. Many believed the gifts of the Spirit ceased with the Early Church including myself at one stage. However I remain deeply grateful for the emphasis in my upbringing on evangelism and bringing people to Christ. I still believe the greatest miracle anyone can witness today is seeing a person come to know Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour.

Having a strong emphasis on evangelism and teaching is only part of the gospel message and I have since come to the conviction that the 'Father heart of God' has compassion for the suffering multitudes and desires to release people into wholeness.

'The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour' Luke 4:18,19.

Jesus fulfilled these words through His teachings and actions. A similar command comes to His followers.

'And these signs will accompany those who believe ... they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well' Mark 16:15-18.

The early church took these words of Jesus seriously. Jesus also says:

'I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these' John 14:12.

The 'greater things' must surely refer to a wider geographical extension of His working outside of Palestine as no one can perform (with God's help) any greater miracles than what Jesus did.

Cautions

1. *Ignorance.* The New Testament teaching is given not for philosophical and theological debate, but to know how to lead believers into understanding and practicing the 'ways of God.' As Paul says,

'For the Kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power' 1 Corinthians 4:20.

2. *Excesses.* Some healing meetings are like a side show where a magician does his latest trick. This is terribly wrong. Jesus makes it clear that only an evil and adulterous generation seeks signs (Matthew 12:40). It is wrong also to avoid following the commands of Jesus because of excesses. For example, we would never dream of not eating because some people have a problem with gluttony.

3. *Risk.* Moving in the realm of faith is always a risky thing to do. Hebrews 11 is full of examples of people who ventured forth. Fears that may come to us as leaders could include things like:

We may fear that praying for the sick and seeing no immediate result could discourage or embarrass both the person receiving prayer and ourselves. We may also wonder whether encouraging divine healing could cause things to get out of control, draw people to the spectacular, or shift their focus away from Jesus.

In every situation, we must learn to trust the Lord to build His church as He leads. Charles Kraft (1928–2021) was a missiologist and former professor at Fuller Seminary. He wrote that healing and deliverance ministries are important components of Christian mission, particularly in cultures with a strong awareness of the spiritual realm.

How leadership can administer healing

Although there are many means whereby healing may occur, James 5:13-16 gives the procedure for those in eldership:

- a. *Elders.* Notice that the word 'Elders' is in the plural. Deuteronomy 32:30 makes it clear that with God's help one person can put one thousand to flight, while two people may put not two thousand to flight, but ten thousand to flight. Therefore, two or more elders united in prayer in a spirit of unity have great power in praying for the sick, if they are walking with the Lord.
- b. *Anointing oil.* In New Testament times people thought oil had medicinal powers. For example, Herod the Great before his death was bathed in oil. Even Jesus in telling the story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37), talked about that man anointing the battered person's wounds with oil.

However, the oil was probably used more for symbolic purposes than for any other reason. It may have been a visual way of encouraging faith in the believers as the power of the Spirit came upon them.

I do not always use oil when praying for the sick, as in the book of James this is the only time the anointing oil is mentioned in the Epistles.

- c. *Faith.* In praying for the sick, it is important that faith is released whatever the procedure. An honest appraisal of James clearly indicates that the '*prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well*' James 5:15.

Discernment and wisdom are essential when praying for the sick. We desire God's will to be done, but His will must be discerned and prayed for in faith, not treated as passive acceptance that whatever happens happens. Suffering may carry a powerful redemptive witness to those around them. Prayer may be answered differently to what we expect.

When we sense in our spirit that God desires healing, Elders can pray with greater confidence and authority.

Sometimes this faith necessary to save the sick comes from us and sometimes the sick person.

'He said to her, 'Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering' Mark 5:34.

Sometimes it is a faith released from God Himself.

'Have faith in God,' Jesus answered. 'Truly I tell you, if anyone says to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and does not doubt in their heart but believes that what they say will happen, it will be done for them' Mark 11:22.

The word faith here is in the genitive form and refers to God's faith.

I find it interesting to observe that even some 'faith healers' have physical infirmities that are like a thorn in their side. This no doubt keeps them humble and dependent upon God for His divine grace. I recommend that people seek the gift of healing as by it people are deeply blessed.

4. *Sin.* Confession of sin is often connected with healing. Wrong attitudes can hinder the flow of God's power.

However, not all sickness is caused through sin. In Mark 2:5, it appears that sin was the problem.

'When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralysed man, 'Son, your sins are forgiven', but not in John 9:2,3. 'His disciples asked him, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?' 'Neither this man nor his parents sinned,' said Jesus, 'but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him.' Only God knows the reason.

When healing doesn't occur

Sometimes, after experiencing a healing the sickness appears to return. In these cases, continue to encourage faith through claiming appropriate promises of Scripture in the realm of healing. Sometimes the battle for health must be won through praise and worship.

If a believer is not healed from a terminal illness never give the impression that approaching death is a dreaded enemy, as after all, this gives direct entrance into God's everlasting presence, a place of joy and eternal security.