

Place: Lurgan Baptist 26:2:2002

Reading: 1 Cor 12:1-9

THE HOLY SPIRIT AND US

17. DOES GOD STILL HEAL ?

Feeling like a prisoner in her own body, Rita longed to be free from the iron chains of her cerebral palsy. One night, her Christian friends gathered around her saying, " If you juts have faith, Rita, God will enable you to walk." " If you juts have faith," the words echoed in her mind. If I just have faith. She shut her eyes tightly, and the small group prayed with all their might. When the praying ceased, all eyes focused on Rita. She grasped the armchairs of the wheelchair, and slowly lifted herself up. Her heart bursting with hope, she took one step, then two, three, four twenty steps before stumbling. The group cheered and promised her that if she continued to believe God, her healing would be soon complete. She did believe God in the days that followed. But her healing never came. Desperately, she tried and tried, but she couldn't even repeat her triumphant steps from that first hopeful night. Had God forsaken her ? Did He want her to remain chained to her wheelchair ? Was her disease a result of some sin in her life ? Was her faith just not strong enough ?

Larry and Alice Parker wanted God's best for their family of six. But their oldest son suffered from diabetes and regularly received insulin injections. When Daniel Badilla held special services in their Barstow, California, church, the Parkers " walked the aisle," with eleven year old Wesley. They sincerely sought a healing miracle. The preacher pronounced Wesley healed. Larry joyfully entered, " Praise God our son is healed," into Wesley's insulin log. But Wesley's next insulin test indicated differently. Yet by faith the Parkers claimed the healing and blamed the unexpected insulin results on Satan. Shortly afterward, Wesley began to suffer the nausea and severe stomach cramps that predictably indicate low insulin. Larry and Alice postponed medical treatment and sought God's continued healing power through prayer. In spite of their sincere faith, Wesley fell into a coma and died three days later. Newsweek, magazine in the USA reported the tragedy nationally.

A south-western city in the USA advertised a healing campaign. Among those who applied for healing was an elderly Christian gentleman who lived out on the prairie. His vision was becoming dim, and he most likely was developing cataracts. The only lighting in the little cabin where he lived was a kerosene lamp, He was a devout Christian, read his Bible daily, or tried to and had all the faith necessary for healing, if faith indeed does secure healing. His major complaint was that his sight had deteriorated to the point where he could not longer read his Bible. On the night of his appearance before the healer, the old man was brought up in the atmosphere of a side-show. The faith healer said, " Well, Pop, you can't see anymore. You've gotten old, you can't see with your glasses. Your vision is failing." Then he reached over and took off the old man's spectacles, threw them on the platform, stamped on them, and broke them.

He then handed the elderly gentleman a large print Bible, which under the lights necessary for television in those days, enabled the man to read (Jn 3:16) out loud to the astonishment and applause of the audience. The

elderly gentleman praised God, the healer praised God, the audience praised God, and the old man went back to his dimly lit cabin and could not find his Bible, because his glasses were destroyed. This old saint went back to the healer but was told the most discouraging thing a godly man like that could possibly hear, " You didn't have enough faith, or the healing would have stuck."

Today, thousands travel around the world seeking those who claim to have the gift of healing. Testimonies of people declaring they have been healed abound. Special

" anointed," cloths are even sold that are said to have healing powers. My are these things real ? Does Christ heal today as He did on the pages of the

Gospels ? Are we showing a lack of faith when we visit the doctor for help with an illness ? If we are sick, does it mean that we are out of God's will ? If we had enough faith would we be healed ? How is God healing today ? Is it always God's will to heal ? Will God heal me ? Or a friend ? Or a family member ? Now there are three verse's in (1 Cor Ch 12) that mention the gift of healing. In (12:9) we have these words, " to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit." In (12:28) we have these words, " then gifts of healings," and finally in (12:30) " have all the gifts of healing ?" Now we have noticed that the NT seems to classify the gifts. There are Speaking Gifts, there are Serving Gifts, and there are temporary Sign Gifts, which were given to certain believers for the purpose of authenticating and confirming the Word when it was still being proclaimed in the early church, before the Scriptures were completed.

Now I believe that " the gift of healing," that is restoring health to the body, was a temporary sign gift that ceased as a gift with the passing of the apostles. But while the gift of healing is no longer bestowed, God is able to heal in answer to prayer. My wouldn't it be wonderful if this " gift of healing," still existed ! I have stood by a dear friend and watched while leukaemia was destroying his body. I have wept as I have walked up hospital corridors, after leaving a dear colleague of mine struggling with a tumour. I have stood by husbands and fathers as they have looked on a wife and daughter fighting for life after a car accident. Think how thrilling it would be to have " the gift of healing." Think of what it would be like to go into a hospital, to all the sick and dying, and just touch them and heal them. Think of the efforts and years that doctors go through in medicine. Think of the millions of pounds spent on technology when all we need is the gift of healing.

Imagine that all of the people who had the gift of healing got together, got on an airplane, flew to the great pockets of disease in the world, and went through the crowds healing everyone. It would be fantastic. it has been said that in three years Christ banished disease from Palestine. Why don't we do it ? Why is that people who claim to have the gift of healing don't leave their tents ? Why do they perform their gifts in a controlled environment ? Why aren't they out in the hospitals ?

Why aren't they out in area's of the world where people are really hurting ? It just doesn't happen ? Why ? For they don't have the gift of healing, because it was a temporary sign gift for the authenticating of the Scripture's as the Word of God. Once the Word of God was authenticated, the gift ceased. But while " the gift of healing," has

ceased the healing by God continues. Now in order to put a handle on our study this I want us to consider three things.

(1) THERE ARE PRINCIPLES WE NEED TO REMEMBER

To help us construct God's perspective on healing, lets first of all nail down a few points of basic theology.

(a) There are two categories of sin original and actual:

Original sin refers to the nature we inherited from Adam, (Rom 5:12) while personal sin is the daily disobedience that is spawned by our Adamic nature.

Original sin is the root, personal sin is the fruit. Do you want an example ? Well, think of children. As beautiful and innocent as they are, children never need to be taught to do wrong, do they ? They and we have a propensity in our nature to do wrong, which reflects our legacy from Adam, and our personal sins come from choosing to spend and invest this inheritance.

(b) Original sin introduced sickness and death:

Do you recall Paul's words ? " Wherefore as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin, and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned."

(Rom 5:12) Because, Adam and Eve, disobeyed God, sickness and death spread to every living thing. So, in the broadest sense, all sickness and death are the result of original sin.

(c) Sometimes there is a direct relationship between personal sin and sickness:

Do you remember the story of David and Bathsheba ?

(2 Sam 11:1) David committed adultery with Bathsheba, arranged for her husband to be killed, then refused to acknowledge his sin. Finally, after a rebuke from the prophet Nathan, David confessed and repented. Psalm 32 is David's journal of this period. It reveals the physical sufferings he experienced while denying his sin. In that psalm David says, " When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long. For day and night Thy hand was heavy upon me, my moisture (vitality) is turned into the drought of summer." (32:3-4) So (c)

(d) Othertimes there is no relationship between sin and sickness:

Once when the disciples and the Lord Jesus passed by a blind man they asked, " Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind. Jesus answered, Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents, but that the works of God should be manifest in him." (Jn 9:2)

(e) It is not God's will that everyone be healed:

Do you ever people talking like this ? Because God wills that Christians enjoy His blessing, sickness shows that you are out of His will. Usually, those who claim that it is God's will for everyone to be healed base their belief on the last phrase of (Is 53:5) " And with His stripes we are healed." Surely, there is healing in the atonement ? Well, Peter did not think so, for he speaks of this as spiritual healing not physical ! " Who His own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree, that we,

being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness, by whose stripes ye were healed." (1 Pet 2:24) Its worth noting that Matthew applied (Is 53:4) to our Lord's ministry on earth (Matt 8:14-17) Christ had not yet died on the cross, yet Matthew applied (Is 53:4) to His earthly ministry. My what about Paul ? Did Paul not ask the Lord three times to remove his own " thorn in the flesh," (2 Cor 12:7-8) What did the Lord say ?

" My grace is sufficient for thee." In other words,
" Paul it is not my will that you be healed." (1)

(2) THERE IS A PATTERN WE NEED TO EXAMINE

Do the methods used by modern faith healers coincide with those used in the New Testament ? How did the Lord Jesus heal people ? Did He book appearances on popular television shows ? Did He appear with his subjects on a talk show ? Well, lets look at the pattern of healing:

(a) IN THE MINISTRY OF THE LORD:

1. Christ healed with a WORD or TOUCH:

Do you recall when Jesus was entering Capernaum, a centurion came to Him and asked him to help his servant who was lying paralysed at his home and suffering great pain ? (Matt 8:6-7) Jesus told the centurion that He would come and heal the servant.

But do you recall the centurion's response ? " Speak the word only and my servant shall be healed." Jesus said,

" Go thy way and his servant was healed in the self same hour."

Christ healed with a touch ! For the woman with chronic bleeding was healed simply by touching the Saviour's robe. (Mk 5:25)

2. Christ healed INSTANTANEOUSLY:

The centurions servant was " healed in the self same hour," (Matt 8:13)

" And straightway the fountain of her blood was dried up." (Mk 5:29)

When ? Immediately ! People often say, " I've been healed, and now I'm getting better." Well, the Lord Jesus never did progressive healing. If Christ had not healed instantly, there would have been no miraculous element sufficient to demonstrate His deity.

3. Christ healed TOTALLY:

Do you remember Simon Peter's mother in law ? She was very ill. In fact, the implication is that she was dying. Do you know what Dr. Luke says, " And He stood over her, rebuked the fever, and it left her and immediately she arose and ministered unto them."

(Lk 4:39) The Lord Jesus didn't say, " Well, now you have been healed take a cup of hot tea and some toast, stay around the house and take it easy for a week or two." No, He healed her totally of deathly disease, and she got up and made dinner. That is total healing.

4. Christ healed EVERYBODY:

Unlike the healers today, Christ did not leave long lines of disappointed people who had to return home in their wheelchairs. Luke says, " Now when the sun was setting, all they that had any sick with divers diseases

brought them unto Him, and He laid His hands on every one of them and healed them." (Lk 4:40)

5. Christ healed ORGANIC DISEASE:

He did not go up and down Palestine healing lower back pain, heart palpitations, headaches and other invisible ailments. No ! Christ healed obvious kinds of organic disease. People who were crippled from birth, people who were blind could see, people who were deaf and dumb could speak and hear.

6. Christ RAISED THE DEAD:

Do you what modern faith healers say ? " If you have enough faith, you will be healed." Well, Lazarus (Jn 11:1) Jairus's daughter (Matt 9) and the widows son (Lk 7) were all dead. My they were incapable of displaying faith. Yet they arose from the dead, by the power of Christ ! I wish the people who claim to have the gift of healing would spend a little time in funeral parlours. They could sure make some exciting things happen. I mean wouldn't it be wonderful if the next time you went to a funeral someone with the gift of healing came in and said, " I feel bad about this situation. Would you please get up." Now why did Christ heal the way He did ? Did He do it to infatuate or play games with the people. Why ? Well, look at (Jn 20:30-31)

My the gift of healing authenticated who Jesus Christ was, God, the true Messiah. You say, " Well, what about the apostles, they healed didn't they ?" Well, look at the pattern of healing:

(b) IN THE MINISTRY OF THE APOSTLES:

For Christ gave this gift of healing to the twelve apostles. Look at (Lk 9:1) Christ extended this ability to another group. Look at (Lk 10:1, 9) Moreover, a few of the associates of the apostles like Stephen (Acts 6:8) Philip, (Acts 8:7) and Barnabas (Acts 14:3) were given this gift. Now some might argue that healers today operate at a different level of power. After all, they are not God. Well, how then did the apostles heal ?

1. They healed with a WORD or TOUCH:

Do you know how Peter healed Aeneas ? He had been bedridden eight years because he was paralysed. All Peter said was " Aeneas, Jesus Christ maketh thee whole, arise, and make thy bed. And he arose immediately." (Acts 9:34) In (Acts Ch 28) we see Paul on the island of Malta and he healed with a touch.

2. They healed INSTANTANEOUSLY:

Do you remember what happened when Peter and John was going up to the temple at the hour of prayer ? Look at (Acts 3:4-8) My there was no rehabilitation. This man had never walked in his entire life. There was no therapy, just instantaneous wholeness.

3. They healed TOTALLY:

Like Christ, the apostles healed totally. (Acts 9:34) There is nothing like, " I've been healed and I am steadily getting better. No, this was instantaneous, total healing !

4. They healed EVERYBODY:

" And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people insomuch that they brought the sick into the streets, and laid on them beds and couches, that at the least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them " (Acts 5:12-16) My noone was left out.

5. They healed ORGANIC DISEASE:

The man spoken of in (Acts 3) had been crippled for forty years. They didn't heal low back pain, migraine headaches, or anything else that was not visible and not organic. They dealt with actual organic diseases !

6. They raised the DEAD:

Do you remember how Peter brought Dorcas back to life ? (Acts 9:36) In (Acts 20:9) a young man named Eutychus died in a fall, and Paul brought him back to life.

Now let me ask you, do you know any healer who is exhibiting these six traits today ? Where are the healers in Ulster who can raise the dead ? You say, " Well, why did God gave this gift to the apostles ?" To authenticate their ministry ! The purpose of the gift was not to keep Christians healthy, it was given as a sign to unbelievers. In (2 Cor 12:12) Paul says, " Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs and wonders and mighty deeds." The theologian, B.B. Warfield said this, " The miraculous gifts were not for the possession of the primitive Christian as such, nor for that matter of the Apostolic Church or the Apostolic Age, they were distinctly the authentication of the Apostles. They were part of the credentials of the apostles as the authoritative agents of God in founding the church. Their function thus confined them to distinctly the Apostolic Church, and they necessarily passed away with it."

Now perhaps you're saying, " Well, how do you explain what goes on today ?" All right let me ask you a question. Since none of the healers today can heal with a word or touch, instantly, totally, everybody, organic diseases, and raise the dead. How do you explain it ? Since none of them have received the " gift of healing," from Christ or the apostles, since the Bible is complete, since revelation has ceased, how do you explain it ?

Since so many tricks, gimmicks, and special effects are often used, since the evidence is weak and unsupported, how did you explain it ? You say, " Are you saying, God does not heal." No ! You see, while the gift of healing is gone, the Lord continues to heal. For notice in the final place:

(3) THE PROCEDURE WE NEED TO ADOPT:

Does God heal people ? Absolutely ! But the biblical gift of healing is not present. God heals whom He wills when He wills. Like any pastor I have seen the most tragic, unexplainable, and seemingly needless cases of

suffering involving committed Christians. I have prayed earnestly with families for the recovery of loved ones only to see the answer come back no. Charismatics if they are honest will admit they have the same experience. But what is the typical explanation charismatic teachers, healers, and leaders give for multitudes who are not healed. " They didn't have enough faith." That kind of reasoning is neither kind nor accurate. My it is wrong to say that God wants everyone well. The Bible does not teach that, yet you have the right to look to the Lord in every illness. Indeed in sickness there is:

(a) SUPERNATURAL HELP:

1. There is God's PERSON:

In (Exod 15:26) God says, " For I am the Lord that healeth thee." (Jehovah Ropheca) God is a healer. You have a right to look to the Lord in every illness !

2. There is God's PROMISE:

The Lord says, " Call unto Me, and I will answer thee, and show thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not." (Jer 33:3) The promise of God is, that if it is His will, He will heal. (1 Jn 5:14)

3. There is God's PATTERN:

God's pattern was established in Christ. My if you want to know how God feels about disease, look at the Lord Jesus. Christ went everywhere healing. Did He not give us a pattern of God's attitude ? (Matt 8:16-17) (a)

(b) ECCLESIASTICAL HELP:

Come to (James 5:13-16) Now this difficult passage is describing a local church ministry at a member's bedside. Now there are several things that I want you to notice here: Notice here:

1. THE PROBLEM:

" Is any sick among you ?" (5:14) Now the Greek word translated " sick," has a variety of meanings including " without strength," " not functioning properly." It can mean weakness in body, weakness in soul and weakness in spirit." (astheneo Acts 20:35 Rom 14:1-2)

Physically, it would describe a serious condition. In the context of James it may be describing believers who because of pressure and persecution were tempted to give out, to give in or to give up.

2. THE PROPOSAL:

" Let him call church." (5:14) The Greek word for " call," means " to call alongside, to summon." Now will you please notice that the elders or pastors don't have any mysterious powers for knowing that any member of the flock is ill, when no one not even the sick one tells them. Now who is the sick one to call for ? Healers ? No ! Elders ! Yes ! Now the thing that James is stressing here is that the initiative comes from the patient. There is no warrant for people running around

with bottles of oil in their pockets anointing anyone and everyone. The onus rests with the sick person. (1) (2)

(3) THE PROCEDURE:

" Pray over him anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord " (5:14) Now the Greek word translated " anointing," is a medicinal term, it could be translated " massaging." (aleipho) But look at that phrase, " the name of the Lord." Its used in (5:10) to refer to prophets who spoke under a divine mandate. The ministries of these men were in God's name, according to God's will and on God's authority. (Acts 3:16) Now James is not saying that when a Christian falls ill he must immediately send for the elders to anoint him with oil. The calling of the elders and their response, are not automatic press button procedures for healing. If they were no Christian would die. No, rather these actions will only be effective when carried out " in the name of the Lord." That is according to God's will and on God's authority ! Do you know what that means ? It means that there must be a conviction of the Holy Spirit that it is right to call the elders and as " God is not the author of confusion," (1 Cor 14:33) we may expect that when there is, the elders will have a similar witness that the course of action is right, and God will beget in the elders:

4. THE PRAYER:

Not just any prayer, but " the prayer of faith." But what is " the prayer of faith," that heals the sick ? I believe the answer is in (1 Jn 5:14-15) " And this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He heareth us, and if we know that He hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of Him." My the " prayer of faith," is a prayer offered when you know the will of God. The elders would seek the mind of God in the matter, and then pray according to His will. Did you notice:

5. THE PANACEA:

" And the Lord shall raise him up " (5:15) I wonder did James have far more in mind than the physical dimension when he penned this passage ? Was he thinking about a believer who has wandered into sin and remained in sin.

God has chastised him by bringing sickness into his life to bring him back to Himself. When that believer recognises that God has brought a severe illness to incapacitate him, he is to call for the elders of the church. The elders are then to come. He is to confess his sin, and they are to anoint him with oil and pray over him. If sin is the cause of the sickness, then God will raise him up. My whatever view we take of (James 5) its encouraging to know that the Lord is aware of, and concerned about, and involved in, sickness among His people. Indeed, how thankful we should be that there is:

(c) MEDICAL HELP:

Should Christians go to doctors ? Certainly, the Lord Jesus assumed that sick people need a doctor for did He not say, " they that be whole need not a physician but they are sick." (Matt 9:12) Do you recall how Hezekiah's healing took place ? He besought the Lord in prayer for healing

and " Isaiah said, let them take a lump of figs, and lay it for a plaister upon the boil, and he shall recover." (Is 38:22) God was lying down a principle here. When you get sick, do two things, pray and go to a doctor !

DOES GOD STILL HEAL ? Yes ! For while the gift of healing is gone the Lord continues to heal whom He wills, when He wills for His glory ! But to those countless Ritas who are confined to braces, wheelchairs or hospital beds as well as all of us who live in this sin-sick world there is hope. But its not found in the presumptuous promises made by faith healers. It is found in the compelling promise made by the Healer of souls.

" And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes, and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain, for the former things are passed away." (Rev 21:3-4) Until then, we trust in a God who " will perfect that which concerneth us."