

Faith Healing

by Daniel Steele

The sermon explores the complexities of faith healing, emphasizing the distinction between the grace of faith and the gift of faith while advocating for a submission to God's will in healing prayers.

Scripture: Isaiah 53:4, Matthew 7:22, Matthew 8:17, Acts 28:5, 1 Corinthians 12:4, 1 Corinthians 13:2, Galatians 4:13, Colossians 4:14, 2 Timothy 4:20, James 5:15

Topics: "Faith Healing", "Holy Spirit"

Description

Daniel Steele preaches about the earnest effort to restore the lost extraordinary gifts of the Spirit in modern Christianity, focusing on healing by faith and the distinction between the grace of faith and the gift of faith. He emphasizes the importance of understanding that the gift of faith for healing is sovereignly bestowed by the Holy Spirit and is not morally obligatory like the grace of faith. Steele highlights the need for unwavering faith in God's will for healing, cautioning against the dangers of expecting unconditional healing through the exercise of faith. He concludes by advocating for a prayer of submission to God's will in times of sickness, rather than insisting on healing through faith alone.

Transcript

Of late there has been earnest effort to restore to modern Christianity the lost charisms or extraordinary gifts of the Spirit described in 1 Cor. 12:4-11. The Irvingites, recently organized under the name of the Catholic Apostolic Church, profess to have recovered these gifts by restoring the various orders of a complex ecclesiasticism -- apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastors. There is good evidence that several persons, mostly women, were endowed with the gift of tongues, and some remarkable cases of instantaneous healing were attested in the early stages of the movement, between 1828 and 1848. More recently there has been a very widespread inquiry about healing by faith. It is taught by some in various evangelical churches that the atonement covers sickness as well as sin, and that any invalid may as confidently trust for healing as the penitent trusts for the pardon of sin; in other words, the grace of faith attainable by all is the only requisite to healing every disease. Hence, we infer that every sick person is, to a certain extent, an unbeliever and responsible for his own continued sickness. "The sick man is a rascal," was the vigorous Saxon in which Dr. Samuel Johnson expressed the *reductio ad absurdum* to which he brought the advocates of this doctrine in his day.

Let us now examine the texts alleged to prove that the atonement conditionally removes all sickness as well as all sin.

Isa. 53:4, the R. V., margin, "Surely he hath borne our sickness." This is one of the items of the sufferings of the coming Messiah. It is correctly translated in Matt. 8:17 -- and bare our sicknesses. The best scholarship rejects the idea of atonement here. "The idea is poetical," says Meyer, who adds, "When their ailments are taken away from the diseased, the marvelously compassionate One who does this stands forth as he who bears the burden lifted from the shoulders of others." This is the figurative way of saying he healed them under circumstances which awakened a painful sympathy. We are to think of a pure and sensitive soul brought into contact with forms of suffering, and beholding them as a specimen of a millionfold more misery in a groaning world. To the heart of Jesus all our woes and pains were present, and they pierced him through with many sorrows. Read carefully the account of a single day's work of Christ in Luke 4:33-41, the healing of the demoniac in the synagogue, of Peter's wife's mother in Peter's house; and at eventide let your imagination individualize the vast number sick with divers diseases crowding the house and yard and street, "on every one" of whom Jesus laid his healing hands. With patient love the Good Physician takes up each new case, and bears away the burden of manifold diseases by his mighty power. Yet as a man he must have felt the nervous strain of such a draft upon his sympathies. This explains why Isaiah enumerated healing among the sufferings of the Man of Sorrows, and in close relation to his being bruised for our iniquities, prefiguring the atonement, while healing is not included therein, but is rather an evidence of his Messianic character and of his sonship to God.

The difficulties besetting the subject of healing by faith disappear when the distinction between the grace of faith and the gift of faith is clearly understood and acknowledged. All Christians believe in praying for the sick, and in praying with faith in humble submission to the divine will. This is the only petition which the true child of God can present, unless he is supernaturally endowed with the assurance that the healing in answer to prayer is his will, or, in other words, unless the Holy Spirit inspires in him the gift of mountain-moving faith, defined by Wesley as the inwrought assurance that God in answer to prayer will grant this or that petition.

The following are some points of difference between these two kinds of faith.

This faith is something very different from the grace of faith. We note the following points --

1. The grace of faith is morally obligatory upon every soul having a knowledge of Christ, and the absence of such faith is the ground of condemnation. 2 Thess. 2:12.
2. The gift of faith is not required of any one, but is sovereignly bestowed by the Holy Spirit, "severally as he will." 1 Cor. 12:11. This is called by the theologians *fides miraculosa* (Matt. 17:20), or miracle-working faith, in distinction from saving faith. Meyer styles it "a heroism of faith."
3. There is no more culpability for the absence of the gift of faith than there is for that of the gift of tongues or of miracles.
4. The grace of faith is grounded on the Bible, while the gift of faith does not rest on the written word of God, but upon the revelation of the Holy Spirit made immediately to the human spirit.
5. This testimony may relate to future events, when it is called prophecy: "Let us prophesy according to the measure of faith"; or it may be an inwrought conviction that in answer to prayer a certain sick person will be healed. "Faith" and "the gifts of healing" are in juxtaposition in St. Paul's catalogue of charisms. (1 Cor. 12:9.) Wesley's note is very judicious, showing entire freedom from fanaticism. We call the attention of all who abjure physicians and medicines. "Faith may here mean an extraordinary trust in God under the most

difficult or dangerous circumstances. The gift of healing need not be wholly confined to healing with a word or a touch. It may exert itself also, though in a lower degree, where natural remedies are applied. And it may often be this faith, not superior skill, which makes some physicians more successful than others." "The prayer of [charismatic] faith shall save the sick," says St. James.

James 5:15. We deny that this is the grace of faith, (1) because it is illustrated by an instance of Elijah's faith (in verse 17), in which he prayed for distress to come upon the land through the divine judgment. The grace of faith is exercised for blessings only. "Vengeance is mine," saith the Lord. (2) The 16th verse literally translated shows that it is a prayer specially inspired by the Holy Spirit, "The inwrought prayer of a righteous man availeth much." Thus Michaelis, Huther, and Ecumenius.

Of course no healing follows the prayer not prompted by this extraordinary faith. The grace of faith is not sufficient.

6. The grace of faith, when exercised in prayer, is always accompanied by the condition, "if it be thy will." The gift of faith is the assurance beforehand that it is God's will to bestow the thing desired. Hence, those who have experience in the charism of faith for healing -- the speaker has no such experience -- say that there is no if in this kind of prayer. It is an unconditional grasping, not of the written promise, but of God himself.

7. The grace of faith is a permanent habit, as indispensable to spiritual, as breathing is to natural life. Faith as a charism is occasional, and not permanent. St. Paul sometimes had it, and could heal (Acts 28: 8), and sometimes he had it not, and could not heal, as we infer from 2 Tim. 4:20. The charism of faith is not requisite to the highest spiritual life, nor to even the lowest stage, any more than speaking with tongues or miracles.

8. The grace of faith is saving; the charism is not saving. Says Wesley, "Even the working of miracles is no proof that a man has saving faith" (Matt. 7:22). Again, "Though I have the highest degree of miracleworking faith, and have not love, I am nothing." Judas Iscariot once wrought miracles (Matt. 10:1-4), but is now in hell (John 17:12). The grace of faith works by love and purifies the heart. The gift of faith may exist without effecting any moral transfiguration of character. In support of this startling assertion, we quote 1 Cor. 13:2, to the Greek scholar, calling his special attention to the fact that the form of this conditional sentence (ean with the subjunctive) assumes the condition (charismatic faith without love) as possible, with some present expectation that it may be realized. (See the Greek grammars.) Jesus Christ strongly hints at the same possibility in Matt. 7:22, 23. Balaam (Num. 24:4-13) and Saul (1 Sam. 10: 10-12) may be quoted as instances of unregenerate men receiving the divine afflatus of prophecy without moral transformation.

When Paul was on the island called Melita, and the serpent fastened itself upon his hand, no harm came to him. "And in the same quarters were possessions of the chief man of the island, whose name was Publius," who received them and lodged them three days. And the father of Publius was sick of a fever. Paul entered in and prayed, and laid his hands upon him, and healed him. "So when this was done, others also, which had diseases in the island, came, and were healed." -- Acts 28:5, 9.

So Paul healed the sick.

That sometimes he could not heal those who were sick, we infer from another passage in the epistles, which reads as follows: "Erastus abode at Corinth: but Trophimus have I left at Miletum sick." -- 2 Tim.

4:20. Why didn't he heal him and bring him along? Because he was not conscious of the inwrought conviction that it was God's will to heal him. It was withheld by the Holy Spirit. The gift of faith for his healing was not then bestowed. St. Paul had not any "supernumerary preachers." He needed every one in the ever-widening harvest-field of the gospel, and he certainly would have healed this disabled laborer if he had been able.

The gift of faith may sometimes be bestowed without any corresponding growth in grace, or without effecting any moral renovation of character. Jesus Christ strongly suggests the same possibility in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 7:22, 23), "Many will say unto me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity."

Balaam and Saul may be quoted as instances illustrating the fact that men may receive the gift of prophecy without moral transformation. The preaching of bad men has been the instrument in the regeneration of men, because God puts honor upon his own truth. So cures were wrought by Judas, not on the ground of his moral worthiness, but because of the name of Jesus Christ, the omnipotent Son of God. See Matt. 10: 1, 4.

St. Paul did not heal every sick person, as we have seen in the case of Trophimus. St. Paul speaks of "gifts of healing," "the plural pointing;" says Meyer, "to the different kinds of sickness, for the healing of which different gifts were needful." As there are men endowed by nature with the ability to treat special diseases successfully, so there may be specialties in supernatural healing.

In conclusion, let me say that the need of a special gift of faith for healing is evident when we consider two facts --

1. That every exercise of faith must be under the primal curse, pronounced outside the gates of a lost Eden, "Dust thou art, and unto dust thou shalt return." Hence, there must be a special revelation that the sickness is not unto death, and that it is the will of God to heal, before there can be unwavering faith in behalf of any given case.
2. Every exercise of faith for healing is for a person in probation, in whom it may be the divine purpose to bring forth for the beautifying of the moral character, the grace of submission to the divine will. No one but God knows how hot or how long the furnace is to be heated. None but He knows the hour of deliverance. When the sufferer, or any other person, has a divinely inspired intimation that that hour has come, he can exercise unwavering faith for his cure.

We can but regard the modern eager desire for the gifts of the Spirit instead of the graces of the Spirit comprised in that charity (1 Cor. 13), which has been aptly styled, "the greatest thing in the world," as a sign not of real spiritual progress, but rather of decline in the divine life. St. Paul, after a full description of these extraordinary gifts in 1 Cor. 12, gives this command, "But desire earnestly the greater gifts. And a still more excellent way I show unto you." He then proceeds to give a panegyric of charity, or love, as that eternal principle without which all gifts are worthless: a principle superior in quality and dignity to all other cardinal Christian graces, and therefore infinitely superior to those miraculous gifts which may exist in the absence of love (Matt. 7:22, 23).

Says John Wesley, "Many have had the gift of faith who thereby cast out devils, and yet will at last have their portion with them."

To prefer gifts to that fullness of love which St. Paul eulogizes is to recede from the highest spirituality, if not to fall from grace. These gifts were attended by various extravagances, excesses, and fanaticisms, which gave St. Paul much solicitude. I have been pastor of fifteen churches, and I thank God that none of them was so disorderly and so trying to my patience as the church of Corinth, where the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit were fully bestowed, must have been to St. Paul -- "Wrangling over Paul, Apollos, and Cephas, running after false teachers, full of envying, strife, and divisions, carnal, walking as men, harboring an incestuous person, without discipline, degrading the Lord's Supper into a feast of appetite and drunkenness, giving to pastor Paul constant sorrow and anxiety -- the Corinthians needed miracles to give them a respectable name; and they so abused miraculous gifts by jealousy and contention that they turned their Sabbath assemblies into cabals of men and women singing, praying, shouting, prophesying, pell-mell, without order or decency.

Hence I have never offered a prayer for the restoration of the charisms, or extraordinary gifts. Following the apostle to the Gentiles as a guide, I have found the more excellent way, the way of love, and I am supremely blest.

Though the apostle to the Gentiles, on rare occasions, exercised the gift of healing, he never gave it any prominence in his practice, and never mentioned it in his recorded sermons. His only mention of it in his epistles is to relegate it to [the] rear of the beautiful procession of the Christian graces, the fruit of the Spirit. As for himself, he had a physician as his traveling companion, who doubtless applied appropriate remedies to him in sickness. Why do I think so? It is an inference from the Holy Scripture, "Ye know that because of an infirmity of the flesh I preached the gospel unto you the first time (Gal. 4:13, R. V.). Some physical disability, it may be lameness, hindered his journey through Galatia toward Europe, but did not prevent his preaching while unable to travel. From a study of the Acts, chap. 16:7-10, we ascertain from the change in the pronouns from "they" to "we," that Dr. Luke had overtaken St. Paul at Troas. We infer that in his detention in Galatia, near by, he sent for Luke because he was in need of his professional services. Our inference is confirmed by a study of Col. 4:14, "Luke, my beloved physician, and Demas, salute you." Why do I say "my" instead of "the"? Because it is grammatical to express an unemphatic possessive pronoun by the article in Greek as it is in English, "the doctor" meaning "my doctor." See Hadley's Greek Grammar, § 527d, and Kuhner, § 244,4. The Greek scholar will find seven instances of this kind in this epistle to the Colossians. I quote only one found in the first verse, "Our brother" for "the brother," as in the R. V., margin. See Bishop Lightfoot on Colossians.

There are grave perils attending the doctrine that the atonement conditionally covers all sicknesses as it does all sins. It is perilous to read more into the divine promises than the Spirit of inspiration intended. I heard William Miller read into prophecy the second advent in 1843; and in 1844 I heard him express his regret for his mistake, and the wish that he could "get a peep at God's clock, and set his watch by it." His misinterpretation of the Bible may not have subverted his own faith in God, but it utterly destroyed the faith of many of his weaker disciples. In like manner, many have been assured that the exercise of the grace of faith would heal their sickness, to be bitterly disappointed in the dying hour. This is, to my mind, the worst feature of the delusion of divine healing as it is taught in our day. The sick are often trusting for a cure while steadily approaching the gates of death. They are taught to insist that they are healed, and to regard all the symptoms of sickness as the devil's counterfeits to shake their faith. Thus they do till some kind friend informs them that they will die in a few hours. Then they exclaim, as did one of my neighbors, "Whom can I trust now?" That must be a dangerous delusion, which is liable to bring the supreme test of faith in the hour of supreme weakness. I never before fully appreciated the propriety of the following

petition in the prayer-book committal service at the grave: "Thou most worthy Judge eternal, suffer us not, at our last hour, for any pains of death, to fall from thee!"

The only safe instruction is to teach the sick to pray with an if -- "if it be thy will, O God, restore my health; if it be not thy will, give me grace to endure my sickness and victory over the fear of death through Jesus Christ!"

I cannot state in a better manner the whole subject of healing in answer to prayer than to relate this overheard dialogue between two little girls while President Garfield was lying mortally wounded: "I believe the President will get well, so many people are praying for him," said one of the girls. "I doubt it," said girl No.2. "Then," replied No.1, "you don't believe God answers prayer, do you?" No. 2, "Oh, yes, I do; but sometimes he answers 'Yes' and sometimes 'No.'"

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