

Faith Healing - Part 1

Is physical salvation purchased the same way as spiritual salvation?

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Satan, the great imitator, has a counterfeit message (Gal. 1:6-9), counterfeit ministers (II Cor. 11:13-15), and counterfeit assemblies (Rev. 2:9). There are magicians with their enchantments (Ex. 7-8), false Christs and prophets (Mark 13:22), sorcerers (Acts 8; 13:8-12), workings by evil spirits (Acts 8:5-11), beasts (Rev. 13:13, 14), and demonic spirits (Rev. 16:14).

All false teachers are guilty of flagrant perversions, obvious distortions, and inexcusable unscriptural statements concerning God's word. So-called faith healers are demonically led to claim that sickness passed from the individual to Calvary, and salvation passed from Calvary to the individual. They assume that since the cause was removed, the effect ceased. Their opinion is that our attitude toward sickness should be the same as our attitude toward sin. They question God's justifying a person and requiring him to remain under the curse from which he is delivered. One of their arguments is that since Christ who knew no sin was made sin for us, He who knew no sickness was also made sick for us. They believe we receive the firstfruits of our physical salvation the same way we receive the firstfruits of our spiritual salvation. They say that the command of James 5:14 is a positive ordinance of healing that is as sacred and binding on every assembly today as the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper.

Job 2:4 is the key to understanding the modern "faith healers." "And Satan answered the LORD and said, Skin for skin! Yes, all that a man has he will he give for his life" (NASB). Although these words were spoken by the father of lies (John 8:44), the truth is that man is ever searching for the cure of disease and the suffering entailed by it. Between the medicine man

and the highly educated physician with his science of therapeutics, there are all kinds of practitioners.

1. Informed Christians agree that nature is the chief restorer to health. The best any doctor can do, whether by surgery, setting broken bones, or administering medication, is to assist the recuperative power of nature. It has been said that eighty percent of all sick people get well normally.

2. In the middle of the fifth century before Christ, Hippocrates is said to have introduced medicine into the healing of disease. However, Isaiah directed Hezekiah to a remedial agency for his healing before the time of Hippocrates (Is. 38:21). (Study Luke 10:30-37; I Tim. 5:23.) Paul's advice to Timothy to use a little wine for his stomach's sake was a medicinal treatment.

3. Psychotherapy is recognized in all medical practice. Mental therapy plays a large and legitimate part in the ministry of healing. The power of the mind over physiological conditions is an undeniable fact. The interference with the unconscious process of life by the entrance of disturbing elements into the mind is profound. Here, we encounter a mental force known as suggestion, which is either internal or external. The former is known as autosuggestion; the latter is called heterosuggestion. The latter represents the process by which an idea or impression is given to one by another. The idea becomes deeply impressed so that it dominates the person's thinking and produces a reaction in habit or action, sometimes both. Hypnotic suggestion is only another phase of heterosuggestion, which finds its sphere of operation in the subconscious mind.

Religious psychology is sometimes called faith healing or divine healing. Many make this the major part of their religious program. Their cause is promoted by such religious institutions as Spiritualism, Unity, Christian Science, Charismatics, Four Square Gospel, Christian Missionary Alliance, Transcendental Meditation, etc.

A correct understanding of miracles will enable Christians not to be led astray by false teaching on the subject. A miracle is not against nature, but it is above and beyond nature. Both "healing the sick" and "raising the dead" are called nature by men, because they think sickness and death are natural. However, sickness and death are discords brought by sin and depravity into a world of original harmony. On the other hand, every miracle by our Lord and His disciples was as a flower picked from the paradise when all things are made new. Bible miracles teach us that we cannot be satisfied with this world as it is under the curse.

Sign-miracles (a sign taking place to prove that what is taking place is miraculous) are connected with either the beginning of a new dispensation, such as Pentecost (the foretaste of the kingdom) or the establishment of the kingdom. After Pentecost, Peter continued preaching to the Jews (Acts 3). He began with the public miracle of healing the lame beggar at the gate of the temple: "Now Peter and John were going up [imperfect active indicative of anabaino] to the temple at the ninth hour, the hour of prayer. And a certain man who had been lame from his mother's womb was being carried along [imperfect passive indicative of bastadzo], whom they used to set down [imperfect active indicative of tithemi] every day at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to order to beg alms of those who were entering the temple. And when he saw Peter and John about to go into the temple, he began asking to receive alms. And Peter, along with John, fixed his gaze upon him and said, Look at us! And he began to give them his attention, expecting to receive something from them. But Peter said, I do not possess silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you: In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene—walk! And seizing him by the right hand, he raised him up; and immediately his feet and his ankles were strengthened. And with a leap he stood upright and began to walk [imperfect active indicative of peripateo]; and he entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God. And all the people saw him walking and praising God; and they were taking note [imperfect active indicative of epiginosko] of him, as being [imperfect active indicative of eimi] the one who used to sit at

the Beautiful Gate of the temple to beg alms, and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened [perfect active participle of *sumbaino*] to him" (Acts 3:1-10 NASB).

The Jews admitted that a notable miracle had been done. Like the gift of languages at Pentecost (Acts 2), this miracle prepared the audience for a Divine proclamation to the people of Israel. As before, Peter delivered the address. His message began with Acts 3:12 and extended to the end of the chapter. Peter ascribed the power of the miracle to the God of Israel who glorified His Son, Jesus Christ. Peter's reference to Moses in the latter part of Acts 3 confirms the meaning and reality of the kingdom. Christ was set forth as the antitypical realization of Moses' well-known prediction of the Messianic Prophet—"like me" (vv. 22, 23). Moses was the first mediatorial ruler in the historical rule of God on earth. Peter concluded his address with reminding the Jews that by descent they are the primary objects of the prophetic utterances.

Two disciples, Peter and John, went to the temple. Two is the number of testimony's confirmation (Luke 10:1; I Tim. 5:19). Someone may question their going to the temple, since Christ had died and all the things typified in the temple had been fulfilled. This is Jewish territory, the transitional period between the Gospels and the assembly Epistles. The message had not yet extended to the Gentiles. Peter and John selected this place at the time of prayer when the Jews were assembled. The Lord Jesus spoke from the same place to the rebellious Jews. After declaring Himself the good Shepherd who gave His life for the sheep, there was a division among the Jews (John 10:19-23). Peter delivered his second message to apostate Jews at the same place (Acts 3:11). They had already rejected Jesus Christ and ridiculed what took place at Pentecost.

The disciples wrought many signs and wonders among the people during the transitional period: "And at the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were taking place among the people; and they were all with one accord in Solomon's portico" (Acts 5:12 NASB). The portico was the only

remnant of the original temple. It was destroyed in 70 A.D. by Titus. By Peter's speaking from Solomon's portico, the Jews would recall what happened during the time of Solomon. 4

The character of the lame man is described in Acts 3:2-5. Character and money are not interchangeable terms. Christ does not promise His people material gain but His own richness in faith and heirship that will be experienced only in the earthly rule. The healing of the lame man is described in Acts 3:6-8. The beggar was near and yet far from the holy place. This is a picturesque description of Israel, to whom Peter was speaking (Matt. 23:38). Acts 3:9-10 tells what the people saw as a confirmation of Peter's message.

Many describe miracles as public vindications of God. They assume that the Bible is full of sign-miracles. However, sign-miracles are not continuous throughout human history. Biblical history reveals that sign-miracles have been few and far between:

1. Within the 1,656 years from creation to the flood, the only sign-miracle was Enoch's translation in 987 B.C. after Adam's creation (Gen. 5:24).

2. Abraham was born 2,008 years after Adam was created. From the flood to Abraham, the only sign-miracle was God's judgment at the tower of Babel when one language was changed to many languages. This miracle took place about two years after the flood about 1658 B.C. It was the beginning of the various nations of the world (Gen. 11:1-9).

3. From Abraham in 2008 B.C. to Moses in 2433 B.C., sign-miracles were uncommon. During the 400 years of Israel's bondage in Egypt, not one, single sign-miracle is recorded.

4. There was a great outburst of miracles during the times of Moses and Joshua. Between the years 2433 B.C. and about 2553 B.C., a period

of about 120 years, there were such sign-miracles as the plagues, the Passover, the Red Sea, the smitten rock, the manna from heaven, the red heifer, the serpent of brass, and Korah being swallowed up.

5. Miracles were spasmodic during the time of the judges, which covered the period between the conquest of Canaan and Joshua's death to Samuel's judgeship and the introduction of the monarchy in Israel. This was between the years 2553 B.C. and 3051 B.C. after the creation of Adam. The outstanding miracles during this time were manifested in the lives of two men—Gideon (Judges 7) and Samson (Judges 16).

6. From the time of King Saul, who was the people's choice, to the division of the kingdom, sign-miracles were rare. This was between the years 3051 B.C. and 3143 B.C. There were no sign-miracles during the time of Solomon.

7. From the division of the historical kingdom to the Babylonian captivity, the two sign-miracles were Elijah on mount Carmel (I Kings 18) and the shadow going back ten degrees (II Kings 20:9, 10). These miracles were between the years 3743 B.C. and 3521 B.C.

8. From the captivity to the close of Old Testament history between the years 3521 B.C. to about 3600 B.C., the three miracles were the furnace of fire, the den of lions, and the whale swallowing Jonah.

9. There was a period of 400 years between the Old and New Testaments, known as the time of God's silence, of which there is no record.

10. John the Baptist did not perform one sign-miracle (John 10:41).

11. Jesus Christ did not perform a sign-miracle during the first thirty years of His life on earth. His first sign-miracle was turning water into wine (John 2:1-11). His sign-miracles were not to make sick people feel better, crippled people whole, blind people see, or make physically dead

people alive. They confirmed His power and authority to deal with the sins of those the Father gave to Him in the covenant of grace.

12. Sign-miracles accompanied revelation (Mark 16:20). (1) A sign-miracle proved Peter's message to be true (Acts 3:1-11). Peter was preaching to the Jews, most of whom were apostates. The miracle symbolized Israel's impotence. God's message was first to the Jews who looked for signs. (2) The healing of the impotent man at Lystra confirmed Paul and Barnabas as ministers to the Gentiles (Acts 14:8-10). (3) Sign-miracles were credentials of God's extraordinary messengers. These messengers were known by their words and works.

13. From the time of Stephen's death, Christ prescribed a course of silence respecting His miracles. Immediately after Stephen's death (Acts 7), the apostle to the Gentiles, Paul, received his commission. This was a crisis akin to that which marked the ministry of Christ when the council at Jerusalem decreed His destruction (Matt. 12:14).

Christ's teaching became veiled with parables. This continued in the record of Acts. The apostle to the circumcision, Peter, gave place to the apostle to the Gentiles, Paul. The key is that God's great power was exercised not only to accredit the testimony of the apostles, but also to deliver them from outrage and to rescue them from prison (Mark 16:20; Acts 4; 5; 12). Paul was not behind the twelve apostles in this respect; however, do not fail to compare the record of Pentecostal days and Paul's imprisonment in Rome. When carried to jail at Philippi, God delivered the apostle (Acts 16). This was a sign-miracle confirming his work. Conversely, God did not deliver him from the Roman prison (II Tim. 4:6-8). Both Peter and John the Baptist were God's servants. Peter was rescued from prison (Acts 12), but John was killed by Herod (Matt. 14:10).

Silence is neither weakness nor indifference by God. In character, Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. However, He changes His methods of operation. It is not so much what God has done in the past or

what He will do in the future, but what He is doing through His Divinely chosen servants now that His word is complete. Since God's word is complete, we are to speak His words, not perform miracles (Is. 8:20; I Pet. 4:11; Jude 3).

God never performed miracles to gratify curiosity, but to satisfy the reasonable demand for evidence that His power is Divine. The miracles of the Bible bear no resemblance to the lying wonders of today that are often grotesque displays of magical tricks, liquefying blood, nodding and weeping madonnas, uncontrolled laughter, so-called healing of all kinds of diseases, and other such follies. The uncertain, indefinite, and unreliable cures of neurotic cases so much in evidence bear no resemblance to the miracles recorded in God's word.

Bible miracles have the following characteristics: (1) The cures were instantaneous, perfect, and permanent. (2) Miracles consisted of both signs and wonders. (3) They were signs of attestation. (4) They were examples in the physical realm of what the Lord came to do in the spiritual realm. The few He raised from the dead signifies that the born-again ones have been raised from death in trespasses and sin and have been made to sit together in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus. The few healed from blindness points to our being given eyesight that we may see and understand the spiritual things of God.

The signs of an apostle must be distinguished from the signs of discipleship. Paul proved his claim of apostleship (I Cor. 9:1; II Cor. 12:12). There were apostolic signs (Gal. 1:15-24; Acts 26:16-24), which lasted as long as the apostles. The signs of discipleship do not include signs and wonders. Men are now measured by the complete revelation of God's mind.

Those in whose midst most of the sign-miracles were performed crucified Christ as an imposter. At Pentecost, Peter reminded them of this sin: "Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God

performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know—this Man, delivered up by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death” (Acts 2:22, 23 NASB). When Christ was challenged to perform miracles to support His claim, He refused (Matt. 12:38, 39; 16:1-4).

No Christian denies that God heals, but there are two kinds of healing: (1) Sign-miracle healings are recorded in Scripture to confirm the authenticity of God’s message (Mark 16:16-20). These were spectacular and undeniable because they were instant, complete, and permanent. (2) Other healings have nothing to do with the confirmation of God’s message. They are associated with a believer’s confession of sin for which God chastened him with illness (James 5:13-18). God’s gifts have changed. They are no longer revelatory and confirmatory. No sign or miracle has ever brought faith to any individual. Faith is the gift of God. It is the fruit of regeneration. Miracles were never meant to create faith, be the origin of faith, or sustain faith.

The Hebrew root word *rapha* means healing of all kinds, particularly of wounds by outward application. It means to cure, heal, or make whole. At the beginning, the word meant binding and sewing. “Son of man, I have broken the arm of Pharaoh king of Egypt; and, behold, it has not been bound up for healing or wrapped with a bandage, that it may be strong to hold the sword” (Ezek. 30:21 NASB). The word also means to heal a distressed nation. In a moral sense, it means to cure the mind or pardon the soul. Metaphorically, it refers to healing a person, healing people, or healing a land (II Chr. 7:14). Between Genesis 20:17, the first Biblical reference to healing, and Exodus 15:26, there is only one reference to *rapha*. There, it is translated physicians (Gen. 50:2). It also refers to physicians in II Chronicles 16:12. Metaphorically, the word refers to a person, a people, or a land being healed, or to restore to pristine felicity (II Chr. 7:14; Hos. 7:1; 11:3). The word *rapha* is used for comfort (Ps. 147:3; Jer. 6:14; 8:11).

Many Scriptures are quoted by so-called faith healers to affirm that they have the oracles of God on their side. Exodus 15:26 in connection with Psalm 103:3 is one of their favorite texts. However, this verse does not substantiate their view. God's covenant of healing is not for the assembly of Christ. It was for Israel who enjoyed temporal blessings. The assembly enjoys mainly spiritual blessings. Therefore, the Lord said to Israel, after her national deliverance by blood and by power, "...I, the LORD, am your healer" (Ex. 15:26 NASB).

[From a message preached By W. E. Best May 16, 2004]