

MIRACLES

“signs and wonders and miracles”

Key question

What is a miracle and how are we to understand the Biblical teaching on supernatural healing for the church in our day?

Key text

II Corinthians 12:12

“The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with all perseverance, by signs and wonders and miracles.”

Key Definition

Miracle

A miracle is an act of God’s special blessing or judgment that represents a dramatic departure from the normal way in which God governs His creation.

Introduction:

Miracles are a part of God’s providence.

1. We understand that God in Christ sustains all of nature (Col.1:15-17). This means that there is no ultimate conflict between what we call “natural” (God’s normal, indirect, operation through “secondary” powers of nature) and “supernatural” (God’s unusual or direct and dramatic way of operating outside of nature).
 - a. Some miracles may be the manifestation of little-known or unknown natural laws. i.e. the catch of fish in Luke 5.
 - b. Some miracles seem to counter natural forces by supernatural forces. i.e. the resurrection of the dead.
2. Supernatural acts vary in their degree of improbability:
 - Class “A” Miracles** - Virtually unheard of in the natural world - i.e. the Resurrection.
 - Class “B” Miracles** - Highly improbable events in the natural world - i.e. Physical healing through prayer.
 - Class “C” Miracles** - Natural events that are dramatic because of their timing - i.e. Calming the storm.

3. Miracles are often dismissed as superstitions from outdated religious traditions. The Enlightenment has conclusively delivered us from such notions leading us to realize that all phenomena is contingent on “natural” forces.
 - a. It is commonly thought that modern science has or eventually will have a conclusive natural explanation for everything.
 - b. It is clear that much of what we see in this world is contingent on some (other) natural force or power. As scientific understanding increases, we expect that more explanations will be forthcoming and that until such time the unexplained will be labeled as “mysteries” rather than “miracles.”
 - c. What is not clear is that science will ultimately be able to explain everything as contingent upon natural laws of chemistry and physics. There are some things that seem beyond the purview of scientific examination – origin of the Cosmos, Life, etc.
 - d. It is one thing to say that science is only equipped to test for natural causes and cannot speak to any others. It is quite another to insist that science proves that no other causes could possibly exist. As the philosopher Alvin Plantinga notes, *“This is like the drunk who insisted on looking for his lost car keys only under the streetlight on the grounds that the light was better there. In fact, it would go the drunk one better: it would insist that because the keys would be hard to find in the dark, they must be under the light.”*
 - e. While it is wise to be skeptical of miraculous claims, it is irrational to dogmatically insist that miracles have not, do not, and will not occur. After all, miracles are miracles because they are rare and defy known, natural, explanations.
 - f. When we seek a rational explanation for unusual events or experiences we should access a wider palate of tools than just modern science with its presupposition (faith) that only natural causes are permitted. We generally make the most important decisions in life by listening not only to science, but also to the artistic and spiritual sources of truth.
4. The importance and uniqueness of “signs and wonders” in the Early Church is indicated in the following texts:

Heb.2:3-4 “how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard, God also bearing witness with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will.”

II Cor.12:12 “The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with all perseverance, by signs and wonders and miracles.”

John 10:25 “the works that I do in My Father’s name, these testify of Me.”

John 6:26-29 “²⁶ Jesus answered them and said, “Truly, truly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate of the loaves, and were filled. ²⁷ Do not work for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man shall give to you, for on Him the Father, even God, has set His seal.” ²⁸ They said therefore to Him, “What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?” ²⁹ Jesus answered and said to them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent.””

Note that this passage suggests that the primary purpose of miracles is not pastoral but prophetic. They are signs of Jesus’ authority and identity as Messiah.

HEALING

- A. **Before we talk about healing we need to talk about dying. Our theology of suffering, death, and dying is basic to our theology of healing because -**

WE MAY NEVER FULLY ESCAPE DEATH IN THIS FALLEN WORLD.

1. **Physical death is God's visual aid to the most basic issue of life - Our relationship with God.**

Gen.3 tells the story of how physical death is a sign of our separation from God.

Rom.6:23 "For the wages of sin is death,"

1. **Our hope is not in this body, this life, or this world.**

2 Cor.4:7-5:10 "7 But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the surpassing greatness of the power may be of God and not from ourselves; 8 we are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; 9 persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; 10 always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. 11 For we who live are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus' sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. 12 So death works in us, but life in you. 13 But having the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, "I believed, therefore I spoke," we also believe, therefore also we speak; 14 knowing that He who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and will present us with you. . . . 16 Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. 17 For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, 18 while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal. 1 For we know that if the earthly tent which is our house is torn down, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. 2 For indeed in this house we groan, longing to be clothed with our dwelling from heaven; 3 inasmuch as we, having put it on, shall not be found naked. 4 For indeed while we are in this tent, we groan, being burdened, because we do not want to be unclothed, but to be clothed, in order that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. 5 Now He who prepared us for this very purpose is God, who gave to us the Spirit as a pledge. 6 Therefore, being always of good courage, and knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord - 7 for we walk by faith, not by sight - 8 we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord. 9 Therefore also we have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him. 10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad."

2. **The answer to the issue of death is not preservation of this mortal body but resurrection from the dead.**

- a. Because this mortal body cannot inherit eternal life, we must all die.

I Cor.15:50 "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable."

- b. Death has lost its ability to intimidate.

I Cor.15:55 "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?"

- c. Our hope extends beyond this life.

I Cor.15:19 "If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied."

- d. Paul's attitude toward death was ambivalent.

II Cor.5:8 "I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord."

- e. We are called to be living sacrifices while in this body.

Rom.12:1-2 "I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice,"

- f. At our baptism we died with Christ.

Rom. 6:1-5 "Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death?"

3. **Illness is a form of death that comes to us all as a result of Adam's sin. Therefore we will fully escape illness only as we escape death.**

Rom. 5:12-14 "death spread to all men because all sinned"

I Cor.15:42-44 "It is sown a perishable body"

4. **The effects of the fall are not limited to the physical we should therefore seek more than physical wholeness**

- a. It can be physical (**Ex.15:26** Egyptian plagues),
 b. It can be emotional (**Ps.147:3** "He heals the broken-hearted").
 c. It can be spiritual (**Jer.3:22** "will heal your faithlessness").

5. **Illness can come from God. Therefore be careful not to ascribe all sickness to sin or Satan.**

- a. **SIN: I Cor.11:30** "For this reason many among you are weak and sick", **Deut.28:15,22**
 b. **SATAN: Acts 10:38** "all who were oppressed by the devil," **II Cor.12:7** "a messenger of Satan"
 c. **GOD: Jn.9:1-3** "it was in order that the works of God might be displayed in him." **Ex. 15:26** "I will put none of the diseases on you which I have put on the Egyptians." **Acts 13:11**, "the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you will be blind," **Acts 12:23**, "an angel of the Lord struck him ... and he was eaten by worms and died." **Deut.32:39** "It is I who put to death and give life. I have wounded, and it is I who heal," **Isa.30:26** "the Lord binds up the fracture of His people and heals the bruise He has inflicted."

6. **We expect to mature through suffering because suffering can have a redemptive purpose.**

- a. **Suffering can teach us obedience.**

I Cor.5:5 "I have decided to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus."

Hebrews 5:8 "although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered"

- b. **Suffering can equip us to minister to others.**

II Corinthians 1:3-10 "3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort; 4 who comforts us in all our affliction so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God."

- c. **Suffering can be an occasion to rejoice.**

I Peter 4:12-16 "12 Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; 13 but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing; so that also at the revelation of His glory, you may rejoice with exultation. 14 If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you."

- d. **Suffering reminds us that life is unmanageable and that we need God's grace.**

Romans 8:18-23 "18 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us. 19 For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. 20 For the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will, but because of Him who subjected it in hope 23 And not only this but also we ourselves having the first fruits of the

Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for {our} adoption as sons, the redemption of our body."

7. Some questions to ponder.

- a. We all will die. Will we do it as Christians who have a theology of death that gives hope?
- b. How does being a living sacrifice prepare us to be a dying sacrifice?
- c. Are we more interested in being comfortable or being a comfort to others?
- d. To what extent is our passion to control life a hindrance to dying?
- e. Are we as gracious with the process of death as the prospect of being dead (with Christ)?

B. While it is God's plan to give His people a resurrection body it is also His pleasure to reveal Himself in this life as a healing God because -

HEALING IS AN IMPORTANT PART OF GOD'S KINGDOM.

1. God has revealed Himself through His names, - JEHOVAH-RAPHA.

Ex.15:26 "I am the Lord that heals you"

2. The redemptive sacrifice of God's Son includes provision for physical healing. (Isa. 53:4)

Matt. 8:17 *"He Himself took our infirmities, and carried away our diseases."* In the Hebrew text the verbs "took" and "carried away" are used in Isa. 53:11-12 in a vicarious sense.

1. A.B. Simpson (the founder of the Christian and Missionary Alliance denomination) made a connection between sin and sickness. If the cross of Christ delivered us from sin then it should be expected that it also delivered us from all sickness.
2. This view is based upon one central text - **Matt.8:17** (Isa.53:11) "in order that what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled, saying, 'He Himself took our infirmities, and carried away our diseases.'" and is supported by a number of other texts - Jn.9:2-3; 10:11; Matt.26:28; Rom.5:8-10; II Cor.5:21; I Pet.1:18-19; 2:24.
3. Three interpretations of Matt.8:17
 - a. The reference in Isaiah is to a vicarious bearing of our sicknesses. Matthew interprets Isaiah's statement literally and sees its fulfillment in Christ's work on the cross.
 - b. The reference in Isaiah is to a vicarious bearing of figurative sicknesses (our sins). Matthew interprets literally what was intended to be figurative by Isaiah. What Matthew has done is to apply to Jesus' healing ministry an Old Testament passage concerning his bearing our sins.
 - c. Both Isaiah and Matthew are thinking of actual physical illnesses. In this respect both references are to be understood literally. In each case, however, what is in view is not a vicarious bearing of our sicknesses, a taking away of disease. Rather, what is in view is an empathy with our illnesses, a sharing in our hardships. There is a figurative element - but it has to do with Christ's bearing of our diseases, not the diseases themselves. This is the view that seems to have the most Biblical support.

3. God's people are commissioned to heal.

- a. Christ was so commissioned.

Lk.4:18 *"He has sent me to proclaim . . . recovery of sight to the blind."*

- b. Christ commissioned the 12 and the 70 to heal.

Matt.10:1 "He gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every kind of disease and every kind of sickness"

- c. Those who follow Christ are to heal.

Mk.16:17-18 "And these signs will accompany those who have believed: . . . they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover."

If you will look in the notes or margins of your Bible you will read that Mark 16:9-20 does not appear in the best manuscripts of the Greek text and in the minds of many is doubtful in its authenticity. For this reason most interpreters have been reluctant to base any "questionable doctrine" on these verses.

Lets just for the sake of argument assume that they are authentic. If this is true then are we to conclude that all "Christians" who don't drink poisons and handle snakes without harming themselves are not really in the faith? How many does that leave - a few cult groups in the mountains of West Virginia perhaps.

On the other hand we could observe that Jesus does not say that every person will do these things but that these things will take place in the history of the church, which is no doubt true.

We cannot say that no Christians speak in tongues, cast out demons, or even escape the natural consequences of dangerous activity. The problem comes when these things become the main issue in the faith, which is often what happens in groups that insist on them.

- d. The church is to have a healing ministry.

I Cor.12:9 "gifts of healing"

4. Prayer promises that apply to physical healing.

- **Matt.7:7-11** "ask, seek, knock"
- **Matt.21:22** "all things - ask in prayer - believing"
- **I Jn.5:14-15** the only limitations are "faith" and "God's will"
- **Mk.11:24** "what things so ever you desire"
- **Jn.14:13-14** "Whatever you ask in My name"
- **Phil.4:6** "let all your requests be made known to God"

5. The healing miracles of Jesus appear throughout the gospels.

- a. Healing was a major part of His ministry.
- b. There were some situations where Jesus' healing was conditioned upon human faith but others where faith was not mentioned.
- c. Jesus had the power to rid the world of all sickness but He did not.
- d. Jesus' use of miracles tells us a lot about their purpose.
 - To authenticate a message: **Jn. 5:36; 20:30-31**
 - To symbolize His spiritual work:

Lk.5:24 "But in order that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins, - He said to the paralytic - 'I say to you, rise, and take up your stretcher and go home.'"
 - To attract an audience:

Jn.12:9 "they came, not for Jesus' sake only, but that they might also see Lazarus,"
 - To show compassion:

Mk.1:41 "And moved with compassion,"

Miracle	Method	Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
Healing an official's son	Word, father's faith				4:46-54
Delivering a demoniac in the synagogue	Exorcism, word		1:21-28	4:33-37	
Multitudes	Teaching, preaching, healing	4:23		6:17	
A leper	Word, touch, leper's faith	8:2	1:40	5:12	
Healing Peter's wife's mother	Touch, word, prayer of friends	8:14-15	1:29-31	4:38-39	
Multitudes	Touch, word, faith of friends	8:16	1:32	4:40	
Many demons	Preaching, exorcism		1:39		
Multitudes				5:15	
Healing a paralytic	Word, faith of friends	9:1-8	2:1-12	5:17-26	
Healing a man at the Pool of Bethesda	Word, man's faith				5:1-15
Healing a withered hand	Word, obedient faith	12:9-13	3:1-5	6:6-11	
Multitudes	Exorcism, response to faith	12:15	3:10		
Healing a centurion's servant	Master's prayer, faith	8:5-13		7:1-10	
Raising a widow's son	Word, compassion			7:11-17	
Casting out a blind and dumb spirit	Exorcism	12:22-32		11:14-23	
Delivering a demoniac of Gadara	Word, exorcism	8:28-34	5:1-20	8:26-39	
Healing a woman with a hemorrhage	Touching garment in faith	9:20-22	5:25-34	8:43-48	
Raising Jairus' daughter	Word, touch, faith of father	9:18-26	5:22-43	8:41-56	
Healing two blind men	Word, touch, men's faith	9:27-31			
Casting out a dumb spirit	Exorcism	9:32-34			
Multitudes	Teaching, preaching, healing	9:35			
Multitudes	Proof to John Bapt. in prison	11:4		7:21	
Multitudes	Compassion, response to need	14:14		9:11	6:2
Multitudes	Touch of garment, friends' faith	14:34	6:55		
Exorcising a Syrophenician's daughter	Mother's prayer, faith	15:21-28	7:24-30		
Great Multitudes	Faith of friends	15:30			
Healing a deaf and dumb person	Word, touch, friend's prayer		7:31-37		
Mary Magdalene and others	Exorcism		8:2		
Healing a blind man of Bethsaida	Word, touch, friend's prayer		8:22-26		
Casting out a demon from a lunatic boy	Word, touch, father's faith	17:14-21	9:14-29	9:37-42	
Healing a man born blind	Word, touch				9:1-7
Healing a woman infirm for 18 years	Word, touch			13:10-17	
Various persons	Exorcism			13:32	
Healing a man with dropsy	Touch			14:1-6	
Raising Lazarus	Word			11:1-44	
Cleansing 10 lepers	Word, faith of the men			17:11-19	
Great multitudes		19:2			

Healing blind Bartimaeus	Word, touch compassion, faith	20:29-34	10:46-52	18:35-43
Healing Malchus' ear	Touch			22:49-51

C. We should not always expect to have the same dramatic healing ministry today that we see in the book of Acts because -

SIGNS AND WONDERS IN THE BOOK OF ACTS WERE THE WORK OF APOSTLES.

1. We understand that God in Christ sustains all of nature. This means that there is no ultimate conflict between what we call “natural” (God's normal operation) and “supernatural” (God's unusual way of operating).
2. The importance and uniqueness of “signs and wonders” in the Early Church is indicated in the following texts:
 - Heb.2:3-4** *“how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard, God also bearing witness with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will.”*
 - II Cor.12:12** *“The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with all perseverance, by signs and wonders and miracles.”*
3. A list of the miracles in Acts indicates that they were the work of the Apostles and their associates, not every believer. Acts 2:43 *“And everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles.”* (Also 5:12)

TEXT	TYPE OF	PERFORMED BY
2:43	Sign	The twelve
3:67	Healing	Peter & John
5:12	Sign	The twelve
5:15-16	Healing	Peter
5:19	Release from prison	Angel
6:8	Sign	Stephen
8:6	Sign	Philip
9:40-41	Resurrection	Peter
12:7	Release from prison	Angel
13:11	Blinded	Jesus
14:3	Sign	Paul & Barnabas
14:9-10	Healing	Paul
16:18	Exorcism	Paul
19:11-12	Healing & exorcism	Paul
20:9-10	Resurrection	Paul
23:11	Appearance of Christ	God
27:23	Appearance of angel	God
28:5	Immune to poison	God
28:8	Healing	Paul
28:9	Healing	Paul

D. We must be careful to seek God and not just to seek healing because -

TEMPORAL HEALING IS NOT ALWAYS DIRECTED OF GOD.

1. Healings can be divided into many categories.

a. NATURAL HEALINGS

1. Through body processes.
2. Through medical science **II Kings 20:1-7, I Tim.5:23.**
3. Through faith (psycho-somatic) See Larry Dossey, *Healing Words -The power of prayer and the practice of medicine*, Harper Collins.

b. SUPERNATURAL HEALINGS

1. Demonic

- a. Overt - in the name of Satan or false gods.
- b. Covert - through special psychic powers.

2. Divine

- a. Through the prayer of believers **Lk.11:9-10, Mk.8:22-26**
- b. Through spiritual gifts of healing.
- c. Through special grace from God (independent of man).

c. NOTE: Miraculous healings have long been a part of human social and religious tradition.

- Psychics like Harry Edwards.
- Mediums like Thomas Johanson.
- Roman Catholic saints.
- Pentecostals like Oral Roberts and A. A. Allen.
- Mind “Scientists” like L. Ron Hubbard.

2. The Scriptural conditions for healing:

a. Faith

Heb.11:6 “without faith it is impossible to please God”.

Jas.1:5-7 We are to come to God without doubt.

b. God's will

“You may have the most incredible, powerful, mature faith in the world, but if God has a different plan, you will not be healed.” Toxic Faith p57.

- **Matt.8:1-5** “if you will, you can make me whole”.
- **Job** - God had a purpose for Job's sickness.
- **II Cor.12:8-9** “My grace is sufficient”.
- **II Kings 13:14** Elisha (upon whom a double portion of God's Spirit rested) was taken home through sickness.
- **II Tim.4:20** “Throphimus I left sick at Miletus”.
- **I Tim.5:23** “use a little wine for your stomach's sake”.

3. Some questions to ponder.

- a. How do you go about finding God's will in healing?
- b. Is psychosomatic faith healing common?
- c. Why are some physical conditions more often healed than others?

d. How can I have perfect faith when I do not always know God's will?

E. **While Christians differ as to how important faith is in the healing process, they are forced to agree that not everyone who believes is healed because -**

GOD HEALS IN HIS TIME AND WAY, NOT OURS.

1. Much of our healing is reserved for Christ's return.
 - a. We have yet to experience the fullness of God's glory and our salvation which will be revealed at Christ's coming - **II Thess.1:6-7** "*It is only just for God . . . to give relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire.*" **I Cor.15:19** "*If we have only hoped in Christ in this life, we of all men are most to be pitied.*" **I Cor.15:50-58** "*this perishable must put on the imperishable,*" Rev. 21:4 "*And He shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there shall no longer be any death; there shall no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away.*"
 - b. While in this world and this body we carry with us a kind of death (**I Cor.15:19,50-58, II Cor.5:1-6**). This is seen most dramatically in our physical bodies which are passing away (**Rom.5:12-14**). Very few people die a "natural death" - as our bodies become older they become less resistant to disease and are eventually overcome unto death. We ultimately may never be able to escape the consequences of death in this mortal body.
2. God's timing in healing is governed by His sovereign plan and will not our faith or desire.
 - a. Like other tragic consequences of living in a fallen world with a mortal body we face sickness and disease not always to be delivered "from" but often "through" - **I Cor.10:13** "*No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, that you may be able to endure it,*"
 - b. Note the following examples where healing did not take place on man's timetable.
 1. **II Cor.12:7-10** Paul's thorn in the flesh.
 - a. Compare **Gal.4:13-15** "*13 but you know that it was because of a **bodily illness** that I preached the gospel to you the first time; 14 and that which was a trial to you in **my bodily condition** you did not despise or loathe, but you received me as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus Himself. 15 Where then is that sense of blessing you had? For I bear you witness, that if possible, you would have **plucked out your eyes and given them to me.***"
 - b. Its purpose:
 1. vs. 7 to cause humility.
 2. vs. 8 to caution against presumption in prayer.
 3. vs. 9 to exhibit the self sufficiency of God's grace.
 2. **Job** (Job never knew why he suffered).
 3. **I Cor.11:30** (Divine discipline includes physical weaknesses).
 4. **II Tim.4:20** "*Trophimus I left sick at Miletus.*"
 5. The many cases in church history of sicknesses that were not removed though prayer were offered in faith.

F. Anointing the sick with oil is widely practiced but it is not prescribed in Scripture.

JAMES 5:13-18 IS MISUNDERSTOOD.

*“Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, **anointing** him with oil in the name of the Lord; and the prayer offered in faith will **restore** the one who is sick, and the Lord will **raise** him up, and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him. Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be **healed**. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much. Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain; and it did not rain on the earth for three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the sky poured rain, and the earth produced its fruit.”*

1. **The context** causes me to wonder if it is physical healing that James has in mind here.
 - a. The elders praying for physical healing is not mentioned in the Apostle's instruction to the church. This makes me wonder if we are not dealing with a different issue in this text.
 - b. Although the gift of healing was no doubt operative in the church, it is not here mentioned. Why not?
 - c. James 5:7-11 speaks of patience under trial and vs. 19-20 speaks of victory over sin. Physical healing doesn't seem to fit.
2. The meaning of **“sick”** in vs. 14-15:
 - a. The first word used in vs. 14 is ἀσθενέω (ASTHENEIO) and means *“to be weak.”* In the gospels it refers to physical weakness while in the epistles it more often refers to spiritual weakness - **Rom.14:1** *“the one who is weak in faith.”* **Rom.14:2** *“but he who is weak eats vegetables only,”* **I Cor.8:11** *“For through your knowledge he who is weak is ruined,”* **I Cor.8:12** *“and wounding their conscience when it is weak.”*
 - b. The second word used in vs. 15 is κάμνω (KAMNO) and means *“to grow weary or become fatigued.”* The only other occurrence of this word in the New Testament is in **Heb.12:3-4** *“For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you may not grow weary and lose heart. You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin..”*
3. The meaning of **“restore”** in vs. 15:

This is the very common word σώζω (SOZO) meaning *“to save.”* It is used in a wide variety of ways including deliverance from temporal affliction in a believer's life - **Matt.8:25, Mk. 13:20, Lk.23:35, Jn.12:27, Tim.2:15, II Tim.4:18, Jude 5.**
4. The meaning of **“raise up”** in vs. 15:

This is a common term, ἐγείρω (EGEIRO) meaning *“to raise up.”* It is used in so many ways that we learn little from its use here.
5. The meaning of **“healed”** in vs. 16:

The word is ἰαομαι (IAOMAI) can be used of physical healing or of spiritual strengthening as in **Heb. 12:12-13** *“Therefore, strengthen the hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble, and make straight paths for your feet, so that the limb which is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed.”* (vs. 3-4 indicate that the context here is *“striving against sin.”*)
6. The meaning of **“anointing with oil”** vs. 14:

- a. The word is ἀλειφω (ALEIPHO) which usually means “grooming” as in **Matt.6:17**, “But you when you fast, **anoint** your head, and wash your face.” It may have the same sense in **Mk.6:13** “And they were casting out many demons and were **anointing** with oil many sick people and healing them.”
- b. The word χριω (XPIO) is the term for ceremonial anointing and it is not used here.

7. The example of **Elijah** in vs. 17-18:

- a. Elijah was a man who knew what it was to be spiritually weary like us - I Kings 19:1-5.
- b. James does not refer to Elijah's prayer for the healing of the widow's son in I Kings 17:17-24 but rather to his dealing with Ahab over Israel's sin.

8. **Paraphrase:**

If anyone is spiritually weary (burned out so as not to be able to pray in faith) let him call the elders (who are spiritually strong) and let them pray in faith and groom the weak one. (Don't let him stay down, depressed and unkempt.).

9. **Implications**

- a. Spiritual depression and immaturity can be serious problems that need healing.
- b. While this text does not seem to prescribe the anointing with oil for healing it does not proscribe it. There is a precedent in the Old Covenant for such symbolism and Mk.6:13 indicates that it was done by the disciples.
- c. This text does suggest that unconfessed sin can have an adverse effect upon a person's spiritual energy and general health.
- d. It may be appropriate to prescribe a change in outward behavior (i.e.. grooming) as a part of healing.
- e. It is important that those who pray do so with wisdom and faith. It is assumed that elders in a community will be the best candidates for such ministry.

10. **Some questions to ponder.**

- a. What is the relationship between a person's sin and their illness?
- b. What does this text suggest about the importance of confessing sin and praying in faith?
- c. What kind of prayer ministry should the elders in a church have?

G. **There is a lot of hype, misinformation, fear, and embarrassment associated with supernatural healing because -**

WE TOO OFTEN IGNORE SCRIPTURE AND SPIRITUAL COMMON SENSE

1. **Make it a priority to know and serve God rather than receive a physical blessing.**

- a. When we are challenged to not be conformed to this world (Rom.12:1-2) we must resist the temptation to focus on temporal wholeness, creature comforts, and the blessings of this life.
- b. We must ask ourselves, why do we seek healing? Are we God-centered or self-centered?
- c. To be whole in our spirit is worth far more than to be whole in our bodies.

2. **Don't believe all that you hear.**

- a. Those who promote an experience are seldom objectively critical of what is happening. Often they feel that any critical thought or word will be blasphemous to the Spirit. They

- feel that the fruit is all the proof that is needed and if something is of God then it is pure and holy, not open to critique.
- b. Those who are afraid of the experience are equally subjective in their evaluation. Too often it is not until they personally experience God's touch that they soften their views. Many reject any experience that is not a part of their religious tradition even when there is Biblical warrant for the experience. The Spiritual Counterfeit's Project has printed several scathing reviews of the Toronto Blessing. Much of this reporting seems reactionary.
3. **A person's theology does not have to be perfect for God to work.**
 - a. There will probably be many points of legitimate criticism of those who are involved in dramatic manifestations of spiritual power.
 - b. God has always been limited to imperfect vessels in His work.
 - c. Those who seek the healing power of God are not to look at the human instrument but to Christ who works through the instrument.
 - d. Sometimes we have to shut our ears to those who are manipulative or espousing poor theology and just seek God.
 - e. A lot of the circus that seems to follow any dramatic outpouring of God's power is going to be manipulative, immature, and even abusive. Don't let this drive you away from God's presence and touch.
 4. **Don't be afraid to ask honest, critical questions.**
 - a. "Be wise as serpents and innocent as doves."
 - b. Come, seeking Jesus' healing hands, without fear of spoiling His manifestation of power through your questions.
 - c. Recognize that there are issues in our lives that are more important to God than our temporal comfort. God may have plans for us that include our temporal discomfort.
 - d. True faith need not be void of critical discernment. A lot of skeptics have been touched by God.
 - e. Healing power is not unique to Christianity. Whenever it takes place and the credit is given to another we best stay clear. But if God is given the glory and the work is blessed to Him, why should any believer withdraw?
 5. **Expect God to work but don't demand that He follow your plan or timetable.**
 - a. Faith is an important part of our relationship with God. His blessings are often (but not always) received in proportion to our faith.
 - b. We must not forget also that faith, in and of itself, has a positive effect on our health. This is not to take away from God's word but to honor the way He has created His universe.
 - c. There is nothing wrong in confessing that we do not know God's plan or timing and asking that God's will be done. Demanding that He heal is not necessarily a show of faith; it may instead be a show of presumption.
 6. **The physical techniques and manifestations associated with a work of the Spirit may seem strange.**
 - a. The form is not the criteria by which you evaluate the spirit. It is the source with which it is identified and the results in a person's character.
 - b. Look for Biblical fruit not just fireworks.

7. **Recognize that some sickness may have a higher purpose.**
 - a. Paul's "thorn in the flesh" is an example.
 - b. Redemptive sickness is more the exception than the rule.
 - c. There is a time for a person to die.
 - d. While it can be said that sickness is an evil it does not follow that no good can come from it.
8. **Healing ministries should normally take place in the context of the local church.**
 - a. Healing often requires a process involving relationships that are most often found in the context of Christian community.
 - b. Responsible and balanced teaching is most often found in the context of a community where many gifts and elders are ministering.
 - c. Knowledge of a person's true spiritual and physical condition is more often found in the ongoing context of the local church.

H. **Many people have been wounded by healing ministries because they have failed to see that -**

DISCERNING THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE SPIRIT AND THE FLESH IS VITAL.

1. In **I Corinthians 12:1-7** Paul gives some basic guidelines.

*"1 Now concerning spiritual {gifts,} brethren, I do not want you to be unaware. 2 You know that when you were pagans, {you were} led astray to the dumb idols, however you were led. 3 Therefore I make known to you, that **no one speaking by the Spirit of God says, 'Jesus is accursed'; and no one can say, 'Jesus is Lord,' except by the Holy Spirit.** 4 Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. 5 And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. 6 And there are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all {persons.} 7 But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good."*

 - a. Paul recognizes that it is possible for Christians to be "led astray" just like non-believers.
 - b. Paul indicates that the test of the Spirit is not in form (emotional, physical fire works) but in content.
 - c. The glorification of Jesus' life and death as Lord and Savior is the mark of the Spirit.
 - d. Paul wants us to know that the message of Jesus' Lordship can be expressed through many diverse ministry forms.
 - e. The Spirit will respect diversity of ministry forms and will not be exclusive or proud (I Cor. 12:12-31).
2. Luke describes some of the hazards that can accompany a genuine move of the Spirit in **Acts 8** where Simon the Sorcerer is attracted to the signs and wonders and power of the Spirit.
 - a. We know that in the latter days God will allow Satan and false prophets to show great "signs and wonders." Matt.24:24; Mark 13:22; II Thess.2:9
 - b. "Signs and wonders" are the badge of a true apostle (II Cor.12:12) but were not to be expected from every believer.
3. **The works of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit are a good witness to the Spirit's presence or absence. Galatians 5:19-24**

*"19 Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: **immorality, impurity, sensuality, 20 idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions,***

factions, 21 envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you just as I have forewarned you that those who practice such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. 22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. 24 Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.”

4. **The Biblical emphasis is a good plumb line to use in evaluating contemporary spiritual encounters.**
 - a. Everything that happens today in the name of Christ does not have to have a Scriptural precedent to be authentic.
 - b. Ministries and movements that stray from the major themes of Scripture need to be critically watched.
 - c. Some issues that do not seem to follow important Biblical themes:
 1. Exorcism is not a major theme in the Apostles teaching. Spiritual warfare is most often described in terms of our identity in Christ and our will to follow Him, not in terms of a demon’s control.
 2. In Scripture, exorcism from demonic power is never linked with moral conflict (i.e. a demon of lust, or pride, or anger). It is treated more like a disease.
 3. While dramatic emotional expressions have often accompanied spiritual revival, they are not emphasized in Scripture as normative.
 4. The notion that there are demonic spirits that have control of cities and should be confronted by believers is not characteristic of the Apostles teaching.
 - d. Spiritual revival will produce spiritual maturity not just spiritual energy.
 1. The fruits of the Spirit mentioned in Galatians 5 will be evident.
 2. Humility will replace pride.
 3. Love of one’s critics will be evident.
 4. Freedom from the power of sin will be seen in a broad spectrum of life’s activities not just in one or two areas.
 5. People will be drawn to faith in Christ not just to a spiritual experience.
 6. In a genuine move of the Spirit, change will not be short-lived but long-standing. People will stay healed.
 7. There will be a deep conviction of sin in a true revival.
5. **The gift of discerning spirits can play an important role.**
 - a. Spiritual common sense and sound Biblical teaching should provide the backbone of godly wisdom.
 - b. There are some areas of discernment that require a giftedness that is subjective and unique to certain people.
 - c. Gifts of discernment should always be open to question and should never be seen as infallible but they should be given special consideration.
 - d. People with this gift will know it and those around them will confirm it. If such a gift is not confirmed by the church it loses its credibility.
 - e. It should be noted that there are certain temperament types that possess a clairvoyant sixth sense. This is not necessarily a gift of discerning spirits.

I. The testimonies of special spiritual manifestations concerning the working of God's Spirit should be received with thankfulness and caution because -

SPECIAL SPIRITUAL MANIFESTATIONS MAY BE A MIXED BLESSING.

1. One example: **The Toronto Airport Vineyard Church** in Toronto Canada is the site of what has come to be known as the Toronto Blessing - holy laughter, shaking, animal noises, being slain in the Spirit, and healing.
 - Rodney Howard-Browne, a South African revival leader and self-described “Holy Ghost bartender” is the catalyst for the Toronto Blessing.
 - Thousands of pastors from around the world have made pilgrimages to Toronto to receive and take back with them the spirit of revival that seems to have been present there.
 - 500-1000 people from all parts of the globe gather at the 4-5 hour meetings every night.
 - Toronto Life magazine billed the Toronto Blessing as the top tourist attraction of 1994.
2. **What should be affirmed.**
 - It has provided spiritual renewal for many thousands of Christians.
 - There is a social and evangelistic impulse at work in the Toronto Blessing.
 - It results in joyful worship of Christ.
 - It is taking place in the context of a basically evangelical theology.
 - Some of the excesses that were a part of the movement are being corrected. Many leaders are warning people to beware that not all that takes place in a power meeting is of the Spirit of Christ.
3. **What is disturbing.**
 - Critical review of the Toronto Blessing is met with prophetic warnings of God's judgment on the critics.
 - Many claims of dramatic healing are often exaggerated and do not stand up under close medical examination.
 - The preaching surrounding the experience is shallow and superficial.
 - There is a tendency to let the dramatic manifestations (holy laughter, shaking, animal noises, being slain in the Spirit) to take center stage.
 - It has divided the Charismatic movement, not to mention the church at large.
 - Some people have actually been injured as they have been “slain in the Spirit” causing others to wonder if this is really of the Spirit.
 - There is a tendency to limit theology to practice. The only thing that matters is what actually “happens.” The only part of theology that counts is what results in moving my spirit or changing my heart.

J. Demonic activity is real and should be understood because -

DELIVERANCE MINISTRY HAS A ROLE IN HEALING

1. "Deliverance ministry" (praying for deliverance from demonic powers) while a long standing practice in Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox circles has become a growing emphasis in many Protestant Charismatic circles.
 - a. There are **five basic models** used to diagnose and treat human problems.
 1. The **MARXIST MODEL** sees everything in terms of class struggle requiring political revolution as a solution.
 2. The **MEDICAL MODEL** sees everything as a chemical problem that needs a scientific medical solution.
 3. The **MORAL MODEL** sees everything as a volitional problem that calls for repentance.
 4. The **THERAPEUTIC MODEL** defines problems in terms of emotional disease requiring psychotherapy.
 5. The **DEMONIC MODEL** relates most problems to demonic oppression calling for "deliverance ministry."
 - b. It must be noted that there is valid support for each model.
 1. The problem is one of reducing everything to one particular model or letting one model dominate the picture.
 2. Each model must be respected **IN ITS PLACE**.
2. **Deliverance ministry should not be ignored.**
 - a. There is a tendency among many evangelicals to ignore the existence of demonic activity.
 - b. There is a tendency for some to never entertain the need for exorcism.
 - c. There is a tendency for some to use natural causes to explain away testimonies of deliverance.
 - d. There are seven specific accounts of Jesus casting evil spirits out of individuals.

Miracle	Matthew	Mark	Luke
Delivering a demoniac in the synagogue		1:21-28	4:33-37
Casting out a blind and dumb spirit	12:22-32		11:14-23
Delivering a demoniac of Gadara	8:28-34	5:1-20	8:26-39
Exorcising a Syrophoenician's daughter	15:21-28	7:24-30	
Casting out a demon from a lunatic boy	17:14-21	9:14-29	9:37-42
Healing a woman infirm for 18 years			13:10-17
Casting out a dumb spirit	9:32-34		

3. **Deliverance ministry is often accompanied by an unscriptural emphasis on demonism.**
 - a. There is a tendency for some ministries **to blame too much on demonic activity.**
 1. Derek Prince (a deliverance minister) notes that the following signs usually call for deliverance ministry. *Blessing or Curse: You Can Choose*, Chosen Books pp. 45-58
 - Mental or emotional breakdown
 - Repeated or chronic sickness
 - Barrenness and a tendency to miscarry
 - Breakdown in marriage and family
 - Continuing financial insufficiency
 - Being accident-prone

- Family history of unnatural deaths
- 2. One cannot help but ask what else is there that could go wrong? Demons and curses seem to be blamed for everything.
- b. If there is a demonic origin of a problem, **it suggests that we are victims** and cannot be held responsible until we are delivered.
 1. It is important to note that exorcism in the New Testament record is never seen as the cure for moral failure or character immaturity.
 2. Demonism in the Bible is treated more like a “disease” where the person afflicted is helpless until ministered to through deliverance.
- c. While we see many descriptive accounts of deliverance in the Gospels and Acts, **we find little of its emphasis in the Epistles.**
 1. In areas like Corinth where you would expect Paul to prescribe deliverance in the face of the congregation’s flirting with demonic worship you find exhortation to repentance instead.
 2. When Paul speaks of spiritual warfare in Ephesians 6 there is no mention of deliverance ministry.
 3. The Epistles constitute the teaching of the Apostles to the church. If deliverance ministry were to be a front line tactic in spiritual warfare, why is there no instruction to that end?
- 4. **Pastoral advice in approaching deliverance ministry.**
 - a. **Seek out people who have had experience** in deliverance ministry if you sense that it may be called for.
 - b. **Do not be afraid** of deliverance ministry. It will not hurt you.
 - c. **Be careful** to not let the dramatic nature of deliverance ministry to eclipse or take the place of other less spectacular ministries.
 - We are to give special honor to the less powerful ministries. I Cor.12:23-24
 - We are not to go beyond that which is written in judging the spirituality of others. I Cor.1:12; 4:6
 - We are to cultivate unity and diversity in the body of Christ.
 - d. Be aware of **Satan’s lies.**
 - “I am a victim and not responsible for my condition.”
 - “It is my fault that I am not delivered because my faith was not strong enough.”
 - “All my moral, maturity problems are demonic.”
 - “Deliverance ministry is the only “true” spiritual warfare.”
- 5. **How to tell when a person may need deliverance** (see notes on spiritual warfare.)

K. **Ten half-truths on healing.**

1. Because God wills that every Christian be healthy at all times, sickness reveals that you are out of his will.
2. Sin is the root cause of sickness; therefore you must resist sickness as you would sin.
3. Since Christ died for your sickness as well as your sin, you can be freed from both.
4. If you just had enough faith, you would be healed.

5. What you confess is what you possess, so talk sickness and you will get sick; talk health and you will get well.
6. All adversity comes from Satan, so it should be rebuked and overcome.
7. If you only knew the secret truth of God's healing, you would be healed.
8. Through Christ we receive the blessing of Abraham which guarantees God's protection from sickness.
9. Since Christ and the apostles healed in their day, others can be channels of miraculous healing in our day.
10. Miraculous healing through the laying on of hands and the prayer of faith passed away with the apostles.

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