

No.23. Myths about Physical Healing

I pointed out last week that, along with the tongue-speaking phenomenon, the other great emphasis in Pentecostal/Charismatic circles is that of physical healing, with it being taught that it is always God's will to heal the sick and it is never His will for the believer to suffer illness. Let us note some of the main tenets of the teaching of the Charismatic/Pentecostal movement on the subject of healing. Specifically I wish to deal with some of the myths promoted about physical healing.

GOD PROMISES HEALTH TO HIS PEOPLE

For example, Charismatic preachers will teach that "*God promises health...*" and will point to Exodus 15: 26. However, they are very selective in quoting from this verse, concentrating on the words – "*I will put none of these diseases upon thee...for I am the LORD that healeth thee.*" On the basis of these words it is taught that since it was God's will to give good health to Israel then it is His will to do so today. However, such teaching is a violation of this verse in that it conveniently leaves out the opening words. Note them – "*If thou wilt diligently hearken to the voice of the LORD thy God, and wilt do that which is right in His sight, and wilt give ear to His commandments and keep all His statutes.*" Note that God speaks here to Israel as a nation and commands them to keep His commandments -- (moral, ceremonial and civil) – and on this basis He promises that He will protect them from the virulent diseases that the heathen suffered. In other words, this promise of health was made only to Israel as a nation for that time and was conditioned on their obedience.

The same is true with respect to other promises made to Israel only. For example, that they would be led to their own special country and if obedient would be protected from all earthly enemies. But such promises do not mean that believers today are promised some particular land as their very own and that they will be kept from the calamities of life. Rather, the opposite is true for the N.T. Christian. We are to see ourselves as strangers & pilgrims on the earth, the object of Satan's constant attack, and subject to various afflictions and illnesses too. What there is for the Christian today in these O.T. promises to Israel is the teaching that the Lord will heal our *spiritual wounds*, defend us from our *spiritual enemies*, and lead us to our *spiritual home*.

SICKNESS IS ALWAYS BECAUSE OF SIN

Of course Charismatic/Pentecostal teachers have to recognise that sickness did come upon God's Old Testament people. But to try to defend their erroneous notion that it was always the will of God for His O.T. people to be healthy, the Charismatic accounts for the sicknesses of the O.T. saints as being *always* due to sin. In other words, they teach that sickness was an immediate punishment for some personal sin.

Now it is true that sickness did come upon them at times due to disobedience and sin. Exodus 15: 26 implies such a fact. Moreover, there are examples of disease coming upon various individuals due to sin – Miriam for her murmuring against Moses, Nu 12: 10; Uzziah for his intrusion into the priest's office, 2 Chr 26: 21. The same is seen in the N.T. – John 5: 14, 1 Cor 11: 30.

However, it is not true to teach that sickness was *always* due to sin. Consider Job's sufferings. One charismatic leader, John Wimber, in a vain attempt to support the error that sickness is always due to sin, is on record as having stated concerning Job – "*Job is the one exception...*" i.e. to the Charismatic notion that sickness is always due to sin. The Charismatic would not dare to teach that Job's affliction was due to sin, since it came for the very opposite reason – his godliness. But then Wimber tries to dismiss Job's case by saying – "*most of his suffering was not sickness.*" This is an incredible statement, for while Job's sufferings were various, it is a gross misrepresentation of his case to teach that most of his suffering was not sickness. Job suffered terribly in body with a grievous disease, as even a cursory reading of the Scripture will show. Therefore, Job actually provides the classic case that sickness is not always due to sin.

The fact is that there are many O.T. saints, seen to be walking with God, yet suffering physically. Jacob's mortal sickness, Gen 48: 1; Elisha's "*sickness whereof he died...*" 2 Kings 13: 14; the godly king Hezekiah, 2 Kings 20: 1-3 – note how Hezekiah could actually plead that he had been walking with God as he prayed for divine intervention. Note a classic example of the fact that sickness was not always due to sin – 1 Kings 14: 1, 12, 13: this child Abijah died of some sickness, but not because he had sinned. Remember also the lads who fell sick and died and were raised up by Elijah and Elisha – 1 Kings 17 & 2 Kings 4.

In the N.T. there is ample evidence that sickness among believers was not a always sign of divine displeasure. See John 11: 3, 36 – the language here underlines the Lord's love for Lazarus not displeasure, yet Lazarus became ill and died. Remember also Paul's own physical suffering, his thorn in the flesh, 2 Cor 12: 7 – it was given to him by the Lord, not because he had sinned, but to prevent him from sinning!

IT IS ALWAYS GOD'S WILL TO HEAL

One Pentecostal preacher said – "*Healing is what God wants done in the world and it is our responsibility to see that it is carried out.*" But is it always the Lord's will for healing to take place? Most certainly it is not. Paul was not healed of his thorn in the flesh, though he sought the Lord for it. Timothy had many infirmities along with a stomach problem, 1 Tim 5: 23. Why did Paul not heal Timothy if healing is always the will of God? Why did he rather advise him to employ wine as a medical remedy? For the simple reason that it is not always the will of God to heal. Note the words of 2 Tim 4: 20 – "*Trophimus have I left at Miletum sick.*" What a callous man was Paul if it is always God's will to heal and he as an apostle had the gift of healing!

Note John 5: 3 – vast numbers of sick people were lying helpless by the pool of Bethesda. Christ came by that way, but He healed only one of that vast throng, v.v. 5, 6, & 8. What is being taught here? Plainly, that it is not always the will of the Lord to heal. Here is the great Healer Himself, but He passed on and left all but one in their helpless state.