

An Essay On Faith Healing

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Were it not for the fact that many Christians in our times are disturbed and confused in their minds on the subject of "Faith Healing," an essay of this nature would be a waste of time and energy. As pastors we should like to feel that in an age of scientific and doctrinal enlightenment our people could no longer be misled by the ancient practice sometimes miscalled "divine healing." Years ago these practitioners operated in a secret sort of way. When I was a little boy (too many years ago), I recall my father telling us of a certain John Huebner who was said to have the power to heal. Incidentally, this John Huebner was a member on the church council of one of the congregations which my father served as pastor. The problem was how to deal with old John Huebner, especially in view of the fact that this juicy bit of information came to my father via the usual route: other members who did not want their names to be mentioned had volunteered it. The story went that this man had received his power because he was the seventh son of a seventh son and that the power to heal could only be passed on to the next generation through another seventh son. This, possibly, explains why John had so many children; 13, I believe it was. He also was to have been in possession of the secret "formula" which was performed by *blasen*, or blowing. Whatever became of this power, I never heard. All I know is that the percentage of sick calls and funerals in that congregation was as high as it was anywhere else.

A number of years later, when I was pastor at Bonduel, Wisconsin, several of my members called my attention to practitioners of this type, to whom many were going who hoped to be cured of some disease. There was a certain Walter Hawkins who called himself "the Good Brother," who extended invitations to any and all for the help that he could give them. He called himself a "metaphysical divine healer, lecturer and teacher of the great science of health." He hung out his shingle at 219 N. Monroe Avenue in Green Bay, Wisconsin, in those years. His "invitation" (a copy of which also came into my possession) assured wonderful benefits through his "marvelous health treatments" even at a great distance without coming to see him at all. Another one, an Antone L. Fay of 314 S. Jefferson Street in Green Bay, advertised that he was able to treat and cure cancer. You can well imagine how popular he was. I noted that on the back side of his card he used the name of one of my Bonduel members as a references. She had gone to him for cancer treatments. My successor, Pastor John Wendland, buried her. She died of cancer. Then, through some one else, I obtained a card advertising the office hours of a Rev. E. H. Feavel, Spiritualists-Divine Healer, at 208 Irene Street in Neenah, Wisconsin. (Professor Malchow, a native of this fair city, tells me that Rev. Feavel later was assassinated in his home by a disgruntled former "customer.") Of more recent date, the public has been lured via television to a certain Oral Roberts of Tulsa, Oklahoma. Some years ago I delegated one of the boys in my instruction class at Collins, Wisconsin, to write in for the free pamphlets advertised on TV by Oral Roberts. In addition to the pamphlets, he also received a sample copy of Oral Robert's monthly publication, "America's Healing Magazine." I have read and reread them all. There is nothing particularly new in any of them. They all seem to follow the same pattern. Later, however, I had the opportunity to discuss the practice of this Oral Roberts with a Rueben Stebane of Forest Junction, Wisconsin. Four Stebane brothers at that time owned and operated the Nash Garage. All of them were very strict Methodists. Each one happened to have married a Catholic whom they had instructed and confirmed in their own church. Now it happened that a

little 2½-year-old child of this Rueben was discovered to be deaf and an epileptic. After having traveled the country from doctor to doctor and having spent over two thousand dollars in the process, the child still did not improve. Then one day the parents learned that Oral Roberts was conducting a meeting in the Milwaukee Auditorium. Lured by the “ads” over television, Rueben decided he had nothing to lose if he would take his youngster to Oral Roberts. About six weeks after they had returned from their “visit” with Oral Roberts, I happened to see Rueben again and asked about this little boy. He said, “O, there seems to be some improvement.” And when I inquired as to the nature and extent of the improvement, he said, “It seems as though he doesn’t get quite as many fits as he used to.” That was all I needed to know. Presently there are several other TV exhibitionists of this type with whom many of you are acquainted.

But now, our topic is “Faith Healing,” and it is not our intention to dismiss the topic by not having said much on it. Of one thing we should be certain, and that is that we cannot cure people of their desire to go to these practitioners until certain fundamental truths have been made clear to them. It cannot be done by merely forbidding them to go. Forbidden fruit has an allurements all of its own. Nor can we cure them by just laughing at them or at the so-called powers to heal. Some one is sure to say, “O, these preachers are only jealous. They are afraid that some one else might steal the show from them or get in on their racket.” The sad part, however, is that most people do not care to be bothered with having to examine all things in the light of Scriptures. All that matters to them is, “Can we get what we want?” In order to be truthful and effective in dealing with this situation there are several important things that must be taken into account. We shall, therefore, briefly discuss the topic of Faith Healing according to the following outline: *First*, We must distinguish between the different kinds of healing. *Secondly*, We must give all supposed faith healers the Scripture Test. *Thirdly*, We must note that certain kinds of healing can be accomplished without medicine or surgery; and, *Fourthly*, We must take note of the methods used to accomplish this kind of healing. The conclusion of all of this should be obvious and self-evident to every Christian.

The very first thing we must do is distinguish between the different kinds of healing involved in this topic. First and foremost is the miraculous healing of diseases as performed by our Savior, Jesus Christ, and by His apostles—over against the healing which our Lord graciously performs from time to time in answer to Christian prayer. In order to save time, let us briefly look at a few examples of each of these kinds of healing. Jesus cured by saying, “Receive thy sight!” “Stretch forth thy hand!” “Arise, take up thy bed and walk!” Likewise, Peter and John cured the cripple at the temple gate by commanding him in the name of Jesus to stand up and walk. Paul and Peter and other disciples as well as some Christians in the early church had received power from the Lord that “they shall lay hands on the sick and they shall recover.” These are but a few examples of true miracle-working power.

From this power of miraculously curing diseases we must now distinguish the miracles of healing which God graciously performs in answer to Christian prayer. We do have the Lord’s invitation and command to come to Him in prayer in all our needs. Of this the Apostle John writes, “This is the confidence we have in Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He heareth us.” (I John 5, 14). Note: “*According to his will.*” Here we could cite example after example of miracles performed by the Lord in answer to Christian prayer—not only from the Scriptures, but from our own personal experience in the Ministry. Yet, who of us would ever claim that since in certain cases the Lord has answered our prayer exactly as it was prayed, that there is a power inherent in *our* person? On the other hand, we do not quarrel with any one who believes that such persons may be found today upon whom the special gift of healing has been

conferred by the Holy Ghost. The Bible does not, per se, limit the promises of these special gifts to the age of the Apostles. Those who insist that the gift of healing miraculously is still extant, should, however, also believe in the continuation of the *other* gifts which the Lord promised to confer: Mark 16, 17-18, the casting out of devils, the speaking in new tongues, the taking up of serpents and drinking of poison without harm; and, Matthew 10, 8, the raising of the dead. These were the credentials of Jesus and of His immediate followers among the Jews who refused to accept Jesus as the Messiah unless they saw signs and wonders performed by Him. And having performed them, Jesus publicly established His divinity. The question is: Do *we* believe in the continuation of these powers? I am sure that most of us agree that these powers of the Lord surely would continue wherever the conditions are as they were in the age in which they were exercised according to the testimony of the Scriptures, that where it is necessary to vindicate His Truth, God today will also grant the same power which He gave to His first disciples. We however, realize that in our proclaiming of the Gospel message today we do not need such external credentials as were needed in the early church. Among the heathen, particularly in non-Christianized countries, it is different. There we do find truthful testimonials of such powers granted by the Lord to His servants in order that they might accredit themselves as messengers of the only true God. Farther than that we cannot go. In spite of the much-ado-about nothing as is made by some of the modern faith healing, we do not believe that the miracles claimed by these so-called healers are what they claim, namely, *divinely* wrought miracles. This brings us to the second point under discussion.

How, in a given case, shall a Christian decide whether a cure worked by a professional “healer” or through a “ministry of healing” is a true case of *divine* healing? What test shall he apply? By what standard shall he judge? To a Christian, there is but one test, one standard that is valid: *Every doctrine and practice made in the name of religion must agree with the Word of God.* The Lord certainly does not endorse a false prophet by granting him special gifts of the Spirit, the Spirit of Truth. Mark 16,20 and Hebrews 2, 3.4 plainly teach that the gifts of the Spirit are given *to confirm the Word of God.* Consequently, if some one teaches contrary to the Word of God, he surely cannot possess the gift of healing or any other gift of the Spirit of God. However, we also know that “signs and wonders” may be worked by those who reject the revelation of God. References to such are made in Deuteronomy 13, 1-5, II Thessalonians 2, 10, and in Revelation 16, 13.14. What our Lord says of all such can be found in Matthew 7, 23. When Christians, nevertheless, accept the claims of such, they merely prove the truth of our Lord’s statement in Matthew 24, 24. The mere fact that certain people are cured by such practitioners does not prove that they have the gift from the Holy Ghost. It may only prove that these people have come under the judgment of God concerning the lying wonders of latter-day false prophets.

Just who are some of these who claim the gift of healing today? Foremost among all the church bodies is the Roman Catholic Church which, in addition to its many false doctrines is “loaded” with superstitions. Then there is the Christian Science Church which makes faith-cure its specialty. Its founder, Mary Baker Eddy, denied the personality of God, the existence of the devil and of sin, the creation of man, the Trinity, the power of prayer, the atonement. Should she and her followers be regarded as the heirs of a promise once given to “them that believe”? We could enumerate many others who claim to have the power to heal from God, but who have dethroned God and His Word as the only norm of doctrine and practice. This applies to the numerous professional “healers” of today and any other time when we note how they interpret the word, “faith,” and what they teach concerning sickness and disease.

As for “faith,” first of all, we hear no mention among these faith healers of an *objective* faith. They stress the faith of the one *being* or *wanting to be* healed and claim that it was in view of the faith of the sick persons that Jesus and His apostles accomplished their cures. With this interpretation of the word “faith” they conveniently are able to explain away their frequent failures. The Gospel record, however, tells an altogether different story. Examples are, the Centurion, Matthew 8, whose servant was healed. Though the Centurion believed, the Scriptures say nothing concerning the faith of the servant before he was healed. In Mark 9 we are told that the father believed, but, again, nothing is said about the son who was healed. John 9 clearly tells us that the blind man did not even know who Christ was, and yet he was healed. What about Malchus, whose ear Peter had cut off and which Jesus restored? Did Malchus believe in Jesus? Hardly. When the disciples complained to Jesus that they were not able to heal at certain times, did Jesus blame this on the unbelief of the people? A glance at Matthew 17, 14-21 shows that Jesus blamed His disciples for *their* lack of faith. Miracles of healing as well as other miracles done by our Lord and His disciples were performed as a sign, “Not to them that believe, but to them that believe not.” I Corinthians 14, 22. God never was limited to confirm the Word by the attitude of those on whom He would work His wonders. If the healers of our day are so limited, as they freely admit and urge it strenuously to explain their failures, then their power cannot be of God. Furthermore, if we pay close attention to their use of the word “faith,” we soon perceive that “faith” amounts simply in the belief that God is able to perform a miraculous cure through this particular healer, thus hoping for a mental attitude of trust in the healer’s power. This, surely, is not the substance of faith as it is revealed to us in the Scriptures. O, yes, these people, at least many of them preach *about* Christ’s atonement, etc. Such preaching of theirs is, however, immediately linked up with their teaching that as Christ died to save us from sin, so He also died to save us from sickness and that, unless we believe in His power to heal *physical* sickness, we do not accept Him as our personal Savior. The phrase used is: “A double cure for a double curse.” Let us now examine this type of faith. The Apostle Paul carried the affliction of a “thorn in the flesh” to the Lord in prayer. Thrice he prayed that the Lord would remove it. The Lord simply, answered, “My grace is sufficient for thee; my strength is made perfect in weakness.” II Corinthians 12, 9. Did that mean that the Apostle did not have a genuine saving faith? Or, what about Luther, who suffered from frequent gall stone attacks and migraine headaches? Was his faith insincere and not unto salvation?

Now, in regard to their teaching concerning sickness. They do not believe that sickness could be a visitation or that by means of it God may wish to discipline His children to the end that they glorify Him whose strength is made perfect in weakness. To this these so-called faith healers will not assent. They teach that sickness is contrary to God’s will; that God in His love actually does not want people to suffer but that it is the devil and sin which cause sickness; and that when Satan has been cast out of a person and sin has left him, then there is no reason, *if he has the right faith*, that he should not be healed. If our salvation depended on that type of faith, who could, who would ever be saved? Not even the faith healers themselves could hope to be saved; since they, too, must some day have a fatal, final illness. Must man then despair of his salvation if he does not get well again? No, we believe, as the Scriptures teach, that sin has also brought every imaginable misery upon the human race, including that of diseases; but we also believe, as the Scriptures teach, that sickness or physical infirmities are *not* the result of a specific sin, as John 9 clearly teaches in regard to the man who had been born blind. Consequently, the above-mentioned teachings of faith and of diseases as taught by the self-proclaimed divine healers are anti-Scriptural, leading to despair, and a doctrine of Satan. If such

men and women who teach and profess such false doctrines appear to have the power over diseases, we may correctly assume that their power is not of God. This brings us to the third point.

Is there, then, such a thing as faith-cure? Why not? But we shall not and dare not call it *divine* healing in the sense as it is used by the so-called healers. If these people should happen to perform what might properly be called a miracle, the power that works them is not from *above*, but from *below*. But even the devil does not seem to cooperate with them any too well, because, in most instances one cannot find the miraculous element present. Have you ever heard of these people restoring a missing limb or giving eyesight to one who had been born blind or raising some one from death back to life? In the majority of cases there is an absence of the truly supernatural element. Then, just what kind of cures do they effect, if any? We all know of the interaction of the soul and the body, both in sickness as in health. These interactions are some of the greatest mysteries of human philosophy whose reality, however, no one can deny. In this connection we need only remind ourselves of the effect which joy, hatred, worry, jealousy, and the like emotions have upon the body and mind. Likewise, we also know that there is a subconscious working of the mind and the nervous system which effects a healing. Call it “mind over matter” if you wish. There are any number of ailments which respond to this type of healing process. Physicians tell us that somehow the mind pours the lymph around a broken bone, draws off poison into canals, seals up abscesses with a firm wall, marshals blood cells to attack invading germs. Doctors claim that rheumatism often disappears by self-elimination and that tuberculosis often heals itself. A sudden scare may be just the touch-off necessary to send a bedridden patient back to his feet. People who had lost their hearing or their sight by an accident often regain these senses after or during an exciting experience. Aware of this, the healers often resort to artificial excitement in order to obtain results; and then they claim that it is a special power of God vested in them. And then, there is the power of suggestion, which is the secret to nearly 90% of the successful cures of the healers. All of this applies with double force when the disease was caused by the mind or in the nervous system. This is called a form of hysteria (not to be confused with hysterics). Hysteria, it is claimed, can stimulate every known complaint so that the symptoms of the disease appear while the disease itself is not present. In other words, it is possible for people to experience paralysis, heart disease, the worst forms of fevers and the like; but, a complete physical check by a reputable physician will reveal no disease present. Surely, when such are cured, we cannot think that a miracle, in the generally accepted sense of the word, has taken place. In many cases a patient of this type is helped the moment he is given a medicine or an injection which in itself contained no curative drug whatsoever. Placed in a hopeful state of mind, having implicit confidence in either the doctor, the medicine, or the “healer,” such a person soon is on the way to recovery. The point is, no *miracle* has taken place. Often it merely is a matter of asserting willpower and overcoming fears. When fear is removed, the nervous system begins to relax and again has a chance at trying to restore what had been lost. Faith healers resort to every known trick of the trade to effect their cures, especially on the power of suggestion. We also must keep in mind that the faith healers who claim success, nevertheless, do not attempt to cure *any and every* kind of ailment. For example, have you ever heard of their restoring amputated limbs, or of raising the dead to life, or proving their immunity to snake-bite—all of which are among the signs following them that believe as credentials of the truth of God’s Word. Occasional attempts at some of these signs on the part of would-be healers invariably end up in failures.

Finally, let us now take a brief look at the methods and manner employed by the “healer.” From the first-hand reports of those who watch the TV showing of the rituals and services of these “faith healers” one can draw some worthwhile conclusions. The preliminaries to their healing services are not a mere side show. They are a necessary element. These include: the singing in unison of swing-style sentimental religious songs, the coming to the forefront of people who claim to have been healed and now give public testimony of their cure, the prayers hallelujahs, praise the Lord, the clapping of hands and shouting, still more singing, a sermon on faith (by the healer himself or herself); and, not to be forgotten, the special emphasis on the necessity of the *right* faith, the faith that believes that God will help them only if they trust in the power invested in the healer; and then, the warning that unless they believe this, they might be damned and not even able to get forgiveness of sins. *All of this is a highly essential part of the healing program.* It puts the people in the proper mood; for, whoever *can* be helped *by the power of suggestion*, might be helped. Yet, even in this area the records of such cures are very thin. Some time ago a careful investigation brought to light that 90% of the patients could report no change different from the ordinary course of the disease. What about the 10% which claimed to have been healed? If you have taken note how the “healers” have gone about their work, you will have become aware of the many psychological preparations without which they could not have accomplished a thing. Nowhere in Scriptures do we find Jesus or His disciples resorting to a technique whereby their hearers would or could become emotionally “wound up” to the extent that they became more receptive to a miraculous cure. In other words, the so-called healers could have accomplished the game without resorting to religion (were it not for the fact that they knew that their audiences expect “religion” to do the trick, and, to salve their conscience). As far as such diseases are concerned where tissues and organs of the body have broken down, there are no reliable records of success. If they really could cure *any* sickness or human ailment and truly had the well-being of mankind in mind (as they claim), why would they not do as Jesus did: enter the hospitals and cure the hopeless cases; or, go to a leper colony and heal the lepers, as Jesus did?

What about the numerous, voluminous testimonials which claim success even in cases of hopeless victims of diseases? Investigations have proved them to be as false as the healers themselves are dishonest and false. It has been discovered that a number of such false claims of these healers turned out to be cripples who were lifted on their feet and urged and helped to stagger a few steps while people cheered, only to be carried out as they came in—no, not even as they came in: with hope and “faith;” now they left in despair. Since they had not been cured, their faith was at fault and they were in danger of eternal damnation.

To what conclusion must a Christian come as he stares these facts in the face? Is it not this that this entire healing craze is a trick of the devil to draw people away from God’s revealed plan for our Salvation? It surely is obvious that God never has and never will confirm His Word by having false prophets perform signs and wonders from heaven. As has already been stated, the false doctrine of these practitioners consists in their unbiblical teaching concerning faith and concerning human sickness; and, their false practice is that of resorting to “quack” methods, to the power of suggestion with the claim that it is by the power of God. In short, theirs is the false practice of dishonesty and deception.

It is the Church of Rome which revels in and seems to play on the superstitious “nerve” of its peoples. Let no true Bible-believing Christian be deceived by the claims of such who do not have their redemption and salvation at heart. Whatever is not in full harmony with His Word

and does not redound to His Glory is not of God and therefore must be avoided. God still heals, but not through such who misuse and falsify His Word.