

# TOO HOT TO HANDLE

## 28 Gifts Of Healings

### Scripture Reading

Matthew 8:16 – 17, James 5:13 – 18

### Craving Miracles?

In 1 Corinthians 12:9 Paul lists “gifts of healings” among the gifts of the Spirit available to the church. Some say we should expect healing, and other miracles, to be a regular occurrence; that we should expect them to happen on a grand scale and that we should use their drawing power, to bring people into our gatherings.

Certainly, when miracles did happen, Jesus and the apostles used the occasion to present the gospel but they never laid on miracles as a pre-evangelism effort to arouse interest. Jesus never organised healing crusades or invited people to come and see His miracles. If anything he was shy of the kind of attention they drew (Mark 3:7 – 12, 5:43). He made the point very well with the story of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19 – 31), that those who will not hear the word of God will not be brought to faith by the miraculous. ‘If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead.’

### The Purpose Of Jesus’ Miracles

Jesus’ miracles were first of all works of compassion performed in response to the plight of those He encountered. They were also evidence of His right to make the claims He did about Himself (Matthew 11:2 – 5, John 20:30 – 31) and a foretaste of the glory to come when His kingdom is established.

### Miracles Are Not Proof

To keep perspective we should also add, that remarkable healings and other miracles can take place where there is no commitment to the Lord at all. Demonic activity can mimic divine activity, as the magicians of Egypt in the days of Moses demonstrated and Jesus warned us of the possibility of deception.

“For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect.”

Matthew 24:24

“Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me.’”

Matthew 7:22

### Discernment Is Needed

So, where claims are made regarding healings and other miracles we need to exercise discernment. We also need to take account of the possibilities of false diagnosis, psychosomatic factors and the fact that there is a lot about disease recovery and the world around us that we do not understand.

**Question:** When we hear reports and claims about miraculous occurrences how can we determine if they are truly the work of the Holy Spirit?

### Miracles Do Happen

However it is not my purpose to explain away the possibility of miraculous healing altogether. The Old Testament does not give many examples of miraculous healing. Of the fifty miracles recorded in the Old Testament only three, apart from the one associated with the brazen serpent which had important symbolic significance, had to do with healing of the body.

The New Testament describes many instances of healing but certain things about those instances stand out in contrast to what is often presented as miraculous healing today. When people were healed in New Testament times there was no feverish excitement — no stirring up of emotion. There were no half healings: no apparent recoveries that led to speedy relapse, no healing that required excuses and no tentative claims or pronouncements of possible healing or hoped for healing. Healing, when it did occur, was immediate and total.

It is also noteworthy that there were occasions in the New Testament when illnesses were not healed. Jesus passed by crowds at the pool of Bethesda to seek out the crippled man whose ability to walk was restored (John 5:1 – 16). Paul did not heal Timothy (1 Timothy 5:23) and he left Trophimus sick at Miletus (2 Timothy 4:20).

**Question:** What are the dangers that can arise when people are taught to have a high expectation of miracles of healing?

### Healing And Atonement

Two passages are important to our understanding of the phenomenon of miraculous healing. The first is Matthew 8:16 – 17 in which Jesus quotes Isaiah 53:4.

"He Himself took our infirmities and bore our sicknesses."

It is often claimed on the basis of this passage that there is healing in the atonement and that healing therefore is to be claimed with faith by all God's children just as forgiveness is.

Substitutionary atonement is indeed the theme of Isaiah chapter 53 and it is true that Jesus did not draw a sharp distinction between forgiveness and healing (Matthew 9:6). He did indeed bear our guilt and our sicknesses, which are the outward evidence of our fallen state. Jesus dealt with all the consequences of Adam's sin but that does not necessarily mean that we can claim healing in the way we claim forgiveness. Jesus bore our sins but that does not mean sinless perfection is possible here and now: that belongs to heaven. Similarly, His bearing of our sicknesses points to the day when in heaven:

"God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away."

Revelation 21:4

But that does not mean that we can expect no relief from our present suffering.

### How It Should Be Done

The second passage we ought to consider is James 5:13 – 18 which is the only teaching passage that tells us what to do when people are sick.

First note that the initiative is to come from the one who is sick. He, or she, is to approach the elders: not one elder, the team. They are to pray and anoint the sick person with oil in the Lord's name.

**Question:** What do you think is the significance of anointing the one who is sick with oil?

We are told that, "the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven." The passage states firmly that in response to the prayer of faith healing will be granted.

**Question:** What do you think is meant by "the prayer of faith?"

Verses 15 and 16 are not necessarily linking sickness with personal sin. They are acknowledging that personal sin may lie behind sickness and saying what must be done when it does. Forgiveness must be sought and confession made when it is appropriate.

### Gifts Of Healings?

James 5:13 – 18 appears to be the definitive passage describing how sickness was handled in the church once it was established and settled. It therefore describes how it should be handled in the church today. There are those who would argue that the gifts of healings spoken of in 1 Corinthians 12:9 are therefore no longer appropriate or necessary. We are not told how those gifts operated within the church, merely that they existed.

**Question:** What do you think is the significance of Paul speaking of "gifts of healings" rather than a gift of healing?