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WHAT IS THE GIFT OF HEALING AND HOW IS IT TO BE USED?

Matthew 8:1-4 and John 5:1-8

THE SOVEREIGN GOD OF THE BIBLE

Sovereignty Over All Things

The Bible clearly teaches God is sovereign and He has control over all things, even sin and sickness. God did not create sin but He does have control over it. God is sovereign over nations. **“All the peoples of the earth are regarded as nothing. He does as He pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth.”**(Dan. 4:35); He is sovereign over kings. **“The king’s heart is in the hand of the LORD; he directs it like a watercourse wherever he pleases”** (Prov. 21:1). He is sovereign over salvation. **“For he chose us in him before the creation of the world . . . in accordance with his pleasure and will”** (Eph. 1:4). He is sovereign over disaster. **“I am the LORD, and there is no other; apart from me there is no God . . . I am the LORD, and there is no other. I form the light and create darkness, I bring prosperity and create disaster; I, the LORD, do all these things”** (Isa. 45:5-7). He is sovereign over circumstances. **“When times are good, be happy: but when times are bad consider: God has made the one as well as the other”** (Eccl. 7:14). He is sovereign over the destinies of the non-elect. **“The LORD works out everything for his own ends—even the wicked for a day of disaster”** (Prov. 16:4.).

Whatever else the Bible may teach about God, it definitely teaches His sovereignty. There is no law of any kind or description anywhere in the universe that can coerce or force God to do anything which He does not please to do. **“Remember the former things, those of long ago; I am God, and there is no other. I am God, and there is none like me. I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say: My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please”** (Isa. 46:9-10). God always does what pleases Him **“Our God is in heaven; he does whatever pleases him”** (Psa. 115:3).

Sovereignty Over Sickness and Death.

Since God is sovereign, He has control over sickness. Whether that sickness is brought directly from God or allowed in His permissive will, He still has control over it and can remove it if He chooses to do so. God is sovereign over sickness. **“The Lord said to him, ‘Who gave man his mouth? Who makes him deaf or dumb? Who give him sight or makes him blind? Is it not I, the LORD?’** (Exodus 4:11). He is sovereign over death. **“The LORD brings death and makes alive; he brings down to the grave and raises up. The LORD sends poverty and wealth; he humbles and he exalts”** (I Sam. 2:6-7).

Even if some see Satan behind much of the sickness, we know from the life of Job that Satan must work under the limitations of a sovereign God. God allowed Satan to touch the body of Job with horrible boils but he could not take his life. **“Skin for Skin!” Satan replied. ‘A man will give all he has for his own life. But stretch out your hand and strike his flesh and bones, and he will surely curse you to your face.’ The LORD said to Satan, ‘Very well, then, he is in your hands; but you must spare his life’” (Job 2:4-5).** Whether God brings sickness in His directive will or allows for it in his permissive will, He always has control over it. Somehow, sickness is working for God’s glory and the good of God’s elect. Just exactly how we will not know completely until we get into eternity. Yet, because He is sovereign over sickness, God can remove it if He chooses to do so.

THE SOVEREIGN GOD HEALS IN THE BIBLE

The Old Testament

One of God’s names in the Old Testament is Jehovah-Rapha which means, “I am the Lord who heals you”, and it is used in relation to Israel’s captivity in Egypt (Exo. 15:26). Jehovah was the physician for His covenant people Israel. One of the great healings in the Old Testament was that of the Gentile Naaman, commander of the army of the King of Aram (2 Kings 5:1-15). Naaman sought out Elisha the prophet for healing for leprosy. Naaman’s first mistake was to try to buy healing from Elisha. Obviously, the prophet refused any money to heal.

The principle is one can’t buy healing and those who heal should never accept money for their practice. Just as tragic in today’s world is the opulent lifestyles of men and women who are getting rich by healing people in the name of Jesus.

Naaman made a second mistake by assuming Elisha should pray for him a certain way. **“But Naaman went away angry and said, ‘I thought that he would surely come out to me and stand and call on the name of the LORD his God, wave his hand over the spot and cure me of my leprosy.’” (15:11).** Elisha told him to go wash himself seven times in the Jordan. Naaman was offended and thought the rivers Abana and Pharpar in Damascus were better than any waters of Israel.

The issue was not the water but God. Would Naaman swallow his pride and obey Elisha who represented God? Finally, Naaman humbled himself and washed himself in the Jordan seven times. He was miraculously healed of leprosy “So he went down and dipped himself in the Jordan seven times as the man of God had told him, and his flesh was restored and became clean like that of a young boy.” (15:14). What Naaman had to learn was it was not the prophet or the water which healed him but it was God, and it was to this God Naaman gave all the glory “Naaman said, ‘Now I know that there is no God in all the world except in Israel’” (15:15).

New Testament

The New Testament is filled with supernatural healings of the sick by Christ, the Apostles and the Elders. One particular healing to show the sovereignty of Christ is the healing of the invalid who had been in that condition for 38 years at the Pool of Bethesda

(John 5:1-8). Those with all kinds of sickness would come to this pool for supposed healing - the blind, the lame, the paralyzed. There were surely hundreds that day around the pool seeking healing but this one man who had been an invalid for 38 years could not get to the water. Then Jesus said to this man, "Get up! Pick up your mat and walk." At once, this man was cured. A supernatural work was done.

Christ healed only one person out of the hundreds who were around the pool. The invalid was chosen out of many as needy as he was to be healed. Why God chose one and passed by others is a mystery, which must be placed in the sovereign purposes of God. God did not choose this man because of his faith because Jesus had to ask him, "Do you want to get well?" The invalid was healed that day because Jesus chose to heal him, and that was pure grace.

THE SOVEREIGN GOD CHALLENGED BY FAULTY MODERN THEOLOGY

There are a lot of things being said and done in the modern day healing movements that need to be examined closely. What is being said is (and this may be an over simplification): "God loves everyone and desires to heal everyone. Sickness is sin and an enemy to the Christian. It is really God's desire to heal all who come to Him by faith because Christ died for all sickness. If we come and are not healed, then the fault is not with God but the person who did not exercise enough faith or the right kind of faith."

Behind this kind of thinking is a theology - a well thought out theology - which has some truth but just enough error to make it very dangerous. At the bottom of this theology is a misunderstanding of God, namely His sovereignty. It is freewill oriented and man centered which always plays down God and exalts.

Because most of us are not theologically oriented, we never challenge the presuppositions (assumptions) of the many faith healers of our day. Yet, we need to do this if we are going to have a sane and biblical approach to divine healing.

God Can Be Coaxed To Change His Plan by Man's Freewill

Problem

The modern healing movement says God has given man a freewill and by this freewill can exercise faith in such a way that God must give us our desires: "If I just have enough faith, I will be healed. I must believe I'm healed even though I see no signs that I am."

This movement says we must not only believe God is able to heal us but that He can, wants to and will. Some say He must heal to be faithful to His promises to heal. Anyone who wishes to be healed must have absolute certainty that he will be healed and it is God's purpose to do so. Therefore, one must rid his or her mind of all doubt and apprehension concerning God's desire to restore health. If God does not heal, it is not because He is not willing but due to some failure in one's faith.

Answer

True faith is faith in God, who does all things right and well, not faith in ourselves, faith in our hopes or faith in our faith. Merely because we believe or are convinced in ourselves that God wants to heal does not mean He will. He may heal but not because we coaxed Him into it by our faith. God is sovereign and free to do what He pleases and is not dependent on the moods, whims and demands of His creatures.

We must never wield our faith as if it were a whip by which we compel God to respond. We do not force His will into submission to our wills simply by banishing doubt from our hearts.

What about those who have faithfully believed and were not healed? Often these people get great guilt, wonder what is wrong with their faith and then get angry with God. Many abandon the faith because they feel God didn't keep His promise.

How do these healers explain to Joni Eareckson Tada? Who is crippled for life, that she does not have enough faith? Joni sought healing for a long time. Did not get it and became very guilty and angry with God until she finally submitted to God's will for her.

We never know the sovereign will of God for us until it happens. It may be that we are sick and this is God's will for us, but it also may be His will to heal us through supernatural means or through medical means. We should fight sickness as long as we can but when healing does not occur, then we must submit to the sovereign God who has higher purposes for us.

God is in No Way Connected with Sickness

Problem

Sickness is not in the will of God for man because pain, suffering and death are all the works of Satan. Peter Wagner says, "If sickness is not God's will, but many people are in fact sick, what is the cause? The answer is clearly Satan" (How To Have A Healing Ministry). Those in the healing movement try to disconnect God from pain, suffering and sickness because these are equated with sin and Satanically inspired.

Answer

In the Old Testament, God is presented as the one who has ultimate control over sickness. **"Who gave man his mouth? Who makes him deaf or dumb? Who gives him sight or makes him blind? Is it not I, the LORD?" (Exo. 4:11).** This is clearly illustrated in Job's illness, which was allowed by God for Satan to inflict but always with limits.

How God has control over sickness is somewhat of a mystery but He does. What is the alternative? The alternative is a God who does not have control over sickness, and we are the creatures of chance and a cosmic joke. What we must do is let God be God even though we don't understand everything.

God Wants Everybody to be Healthy and Happy

Problem

Those in the modern healing movement say, “God wants everybody to be healed because God wants everybody to be happy.” They claim God is good and loves us; therefore He will alleviate whatever diminishes our joy. We are the “King’s Kids” and He wants what is best for us and sickness is never His best for us under any circumstances.

Answer

This kind of reasoning says we have to be healed to be happy, but the Bible teaches we must learn contentment in whatever state we find ourselves. Joy does not necessarily mean the absence of physical pain and adversity. Joy is inner contentment, which is unaffected and not disturbed by worldly turmoil or bodily pain.

If a person cannot be happy until he is healthy, there is something woefully deficient in his or her understanding of God and His grace. The Apostle Paul prayed three times for God to remove his thorn in the flesh (probably an eye disease) and God refused. He said to Paul “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Cor. 12:9). The Apostle Paul had to learn joy in the midst of sickness. Surely, we cannot say Paul had a defective, weak and misguided faith and this is the reason he didn’t get healed.

The Christian will probably never be happy about being sick but he can have the joy of Christ in that sickness. We should seek divine healing and healing from medical doctors to alleviate our sickness. But if in the providence of God we are not healed, then we must submit to our God in our circumstances, looking forward to our future, new, resurrected bodies.

God Desires To Heal Everybody

Problem

Those in the healing movement say “God desires all men to be saved” and He is not willing that any should perish,” indicating God desires to save everybody but can’t because of their unbelief.

So also God desires all men to be healed and if they are not it is because they do not believe.

Answer

If we are talking about some kind of an emotional will of God based on His compassion which is separate from His sovereign will which includes all things. I can accept that. However, it is not God’s sovereign will to save all men and it is not God’s sovereign will to heal all men. But it is God’s sovereign will to save some and to physically heal some. On that basis, we seek to offer healing to whomever wants it, trusting God to do His will whatever it may be.

Matthew 8:1-4. **“When he came down from the mountainside large crowds followed him. A man with leprosy came and knelt before him and said, ‘Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean.’ Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. ‘I am willing,’ he said. ‘Be clean!’ Immediately he was cured of his leprosy.”** When the leper came and knelt before Jesus, he rightly evaluated Jesus’ power. The leper knew Christ was able to heal and wanted to know whether He was willing. He said, **“Lord if you are willing, you can make me clean.”** Jesus touched the man and said, **“I am willing. Be clean.”** In this particular case, Christ was willing. The leper was appealing to Christ’s compassion, mercy and grace to heal from this horrible disease. He did not demand healing but asked for a healing and Christ gave it, not because He had to but because He wanted to do it.

Christ Will Heal Everybody Because of the Atonement

Problem

Most people in the modern healing movement believe healing has been provided for in the atonement (death of Christ). Their primary text is Isaiah 53:4-5. **“Surely he took up our infirmities and carried out sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.”** They claim Christ bore our “infirmities” (sicknesses) and “sorrows” (pains).

These folks believe that since Christ bore our sicknesses, then no one who comes to Christ by faith will be refused.

The modern healing movement also appeals to Matthew to show healing is in the atonement. “When evening came, many who were demon-possessed were brought to him, and he drove out the spirits with a word and healed all the sick. This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah: ‘He took up our infirmities and carried our diseases.’” (Matt. 8:16-17). Isaiah 53 is obviously quoted to show that the casting out of demons and the healing of the sick was definitely related to Christ’s work on the cross, concluding Christ died in a substitutionary sense for sickness in the same way He died for sin.

Answer

Those in the healing movement must equate sin and sickness. It is true that sickness is the result of sin in the same way that pain, accidents, tornadoes and weeds are the result of sin, but sickness is not sin in itself. There is no guilt in sickness. The Bible tells us to pray for forgiveness for our sins and to confess our sins, but it does not say. “Forgive my arthritis” or “I confess I have the flu.” We do not repent of having kidney stones, nor do we come under conviction for having a cold. Jesus was punished for our sins not our sicknesses. He bore the wrath of our sins not our diseases.

When reading the context of Isaiah 53, it is obvious this passage is filled with figurative language to express the point that Christ died for our sins, and this has an impact on those things which sin effects such as sickness and disease. Through His death

for sin, Christ laid down the foundation for the overthrow and ultimate annihilation of all physical disease, which will occur at the second coming of Christ. While healing is not in the atonement per se, any blessing we receive in life now, comes as a result of Christ having died for sins which affects matters such as sickness, disease, suffering tragedy and so forth. Is healing in the atonement? No! Is healing related to blessing which flow from the atonement? Yes! All blessings to both the saved and unsaved come through the death of Christ. While healing is not in the atonement, healing does come to us through or on the basis of the atonement.

I believe that when it says “by his wounds we are healed,” it is referring to the spiritual healing of the soul, or the blessings of healing which come to us through or on the basis of the atonement.

In Matthew 8:16,17, when it says Christ “healed all the sick” and then quotes Isaiah 53:4: “He took our infirmities and carried our diseases.” Obviously when this was quoted, the death of Christ had not occurred yet so it is referring to His earthly ministry. Furthermore, any blessing including healing comes to man on the basis of the atonement and healing is just one of the blessings both saved and unsaved receive on the basis or through the atonement.

If healing is in the atonement, then all should be immediately healed who come to Christ for healing because all who trust Christ for sin are immediately saved.

If healing is in the atonement, then no Christian should ever be sick. For if Christ forgives sin completely, then He must be able to heal completely or His death would be ineffective.

THE SOVEREIGN GOD HEALS TODAY

God Heals Sovereignly.

Does God have the power to heal? Yes! Does God desire to heal? Yes! Does God actually heal today? Yes! Does God desire to heal you? I don't know but He may. It is your responsibility to seek divine healing by faith. It is God's prerogative to give healing to whom He pleases.

We who believe so strongly in the sovereignty of God, ought to be seeking God for healing and directing others to God for healing. Yet, when healing does not take place, we know it is not a mistake, a lack of faith or an inscrutable mystery. We know it was not God's will. With that Divine decision, we can live, knowing that in our suffering there is genuine redemptive value which can bring glory to God.

God Is To Be Approached As A Sovereign.

When we go to God for a healing, we approach Him as a Sovereign, a king who has the power to heal or not to heal. We approach Him with awe and respect. We do not tell Him He has to heal: we do not demand He heals; we do not command Him to heal. We humbly throw ourselves on Him, who is a loving, compassionate God, asking Him to

be merciful and heal for His own glory. God, the Sovereign, may or may not decide to heal, depending upon His infinite wisdom as to whether this healing would be best for His glory and for the good of His child. But, you know what? You will never know if God wants to heal you until you go to Him by faith, asking Him to do so. **“You have not because you ask not.”**