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THE NEW TESTAMENT TEACHING  
ON DIVINE HEALING

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
INTRODUCTION . . . . .	i
A. The Problem Stated . . . . .	ii
B. Definition of Terms . . . . .	iii
C. The Problem Delimited . . . . .	v
1. Not an examination of the evidence for specific miracles . . . . .	v
2. Not a philosophical defence of the idea of miracle . . . . .	v
3. Not a study of the miracles of Jesus . . . . .	vi
D. The Problem Justified . . . . .	vii
1. General confusion on the question . . . . .	vii
2. Rapid growth of healing cults . . . . .	viii
E. Presuppositions of the Treatment . . . . .	ix
1. The essential accuracy of the New Testament . . . . .	ix
2. The doctrinal unity of the New Testament . . . . .	x
F. Method of Treatment . . . . .	xi
G. Sources . . . . .	xi
 I. THE NEW TESTAMENT DATA . . . . .	1
A. Introduction . . . . .	2
B. The Data from the Gospels and Acts . . . . .	3
1. Christ commissioned His disciples to heal . . . . .	3
a. The Twelve . . . . .	3
b. The seventy . . . . .	4
c. All believers . . . . .	5
d. John 14:12 . . . . .	7
2. The disciples performed miracles of healing . . . . .	8
a. General statements . . . . .	8
1) Before the Ascension . . . . .	8
2) After the Ascension . . . . .	9
b. Detailed narratives . . . . .	11
C. The Data from the Epistles . . . . .	14
1. Spiritual gifts . . . . .	15
2. The health of Paul and his associates . . . . .	16
3. James 5:13-15 . . . . .	20
D. Summary . . . . .	23
 II. THE TWO TRADITIONAL INTERPRETATIONS OF DIVINE HEALING . . . . .	25
A. Introduction . . . . .	26
B. The View that Miracles Have Ceased . . . . .	28

27820

May, 1950

Chapter	Page
1. The view stated . . . . .	28
a. The view as stated by three of its leading representatives . . . . .	28
1) R. C. Trench . . . . .	28
2) J. B. Mozley . . . . .	33
3) B. B. Warfield . . . . .	35
b. The characteristic features of the view . . . . .	37
2. The view evaluated . . . . .	38
3. The validation of the view from Scripture and history . . . . .	46
a. The testimony of Scripture . . . . .	46
b. The testimony of history . . . . .	48
C. The View that All Christians May be Healed . . . . .	51
1. The view stated . . . . .	51
a. The view as stated by two of its leading representatives . . . . .	51
1) A. J. Gordon . . . . .	51
2) A. B. Simpson . . . . .	54
b. The characteristic features of the view . . . . .	59
2. The view evaluated . . . . .	61
D. Summary . . . . .	74
III. A PROPOSED DOCTRINE OF DIVINE HEALING . . . . .	78
A. Introduction . . . . .	79
B. Basic Principles . . . . .	80
1. Christ's redemption the ultimate ground of healing . . . . .	81
2. The difference between the miracles recorded of Christ and those recorded of His disciples . . . . .	85
3. The importance of faith . . . . .	88
4. The sovereignty of God . . . . .	92
C. The Proposed Doctrine of Divine Healing Stated . . . . .	97
D. Summary . . . . .	100
IV. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION . . . . .	102
A. The Problem Restated . . . . .	103
B. Summary . . . . .	103
C. Conclusion . . . . .	108
V. BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . .	110
A. Primary Sources . . . . .	111
B. Secondary Sources . . . . .	111
C. Miscellaneous Sources . . . . .	114

## INTRODUCTION

## THE NEW TESTAMENT TEACHING

### ON DIVINE HEALING

#### INTRODUCTION

##### A. The Problem Stated

It is characteristic of healthy Protestantism to demand from the advocates of any special theological emphasis the justification of their viewpoint from the Scriptures. Evangelical Protestants unite in affirming with the Brief Statement of the Reformed Faith:

We gratefully receive the Holy Scriptures, given by inspiration, to be the faithful record of God's gracious revelations and the sure witness to Christ, as the Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and life.<sup>1</sup>

This implies that every proposed doctrine must wait for acceptance until the Scriptures have been searched to see whether these things are so.

It is the purpose of this study thus to search the Scriptures of the New Testament with respect to the much controverted doctrine of divine healing. The problem, then, this thesis is intended to investigate is: to discover what the New Testament teaches concerning divine healing, with a view to establishing upon that discovery a

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<sup>1</sup> The Hymnal, Published by the authority of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, Presbyterian Board of Christian Education, Philadelphia, 1945, p. xliii.

sound doctrine of divine healing. Anyone with the most superficial acquaintance with the New Testament knows that it records numerous instances of miraculous healing. But the question remains unanswered in many minds as to whether modern Christians have a right to pray for and expect divine healing today. This thesis is intended to answer that question.

### B. Definition of Terms

By the term divine healing is meant miraculous healing. A. H. Strong offers a good working definition of miracle:

A miracle is an event palpable to the senses, produced for a religious purpose by the immediate agency of God; an event therefore which, though not contravening any law of nature, the laws of nature, if fully known, would not be competent to explain.<sup>2</sup>

Miraculous healing, then, is healing that could not be explained apart from God, even if absolutely all the facts were known. This is not to return to the old conception of a miracle as a violation of natural law, but is simply to say that divine healing, as the term is used here, denotes that sort of healing that cannot be accounted for apart from God.

It is necessary to make this clear because the term divine healing is sometimes used as a synonym for faith-cure in the sense of a healing effected by the influence of mind over body in a manner and degree that may be explained by the operation of natural laws. For

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<sup>2</sup> A. H. Strong, Systematic Theology, American Baptist Publication Society, Philadelphia, 1907, Vol. 1, p. 117.

example, J. C. Lambert says with reference to 1 Cor. 12:9 that "the gifts of healing to which Paul alludes were not miraculous endowments, but natural therapeutic faculties raised to their highest power by Christian faith."<sup>3</sup> It can hardly be doubted that some of the healings depicted in the New Testament belong in this category. But it is equally certain that they cannot all be thus explained, e.g. Peter's raising of Tabitha,<sup>4</sup> and Paul's healing of the congenital cripple at Lystra.<sup>5</sup>

It is evident that in many--perhaps in most--cases there is not sufficient information to determine in which of these categories a given instance of divine healing should be placed. And this problem is complicated by the fact that the entire modern distinction between natural law and direct divine action is utterly foreign to the thought of the Biblical writers. They were accustomed in their thinking to pass over secondary causes and to refer all events directly to the hand of God. Fortunately, however, it is as unnecessary as impossible to distinguish in these pages between the healings that might be explicable in terms of natural law and those that require direct divine action. Such knowledge is necessary neither for Christian faith nor for Christian practice. The Biblical instinct not to differentiate sharply between second causes and the

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<sup>3</sup> J. C. Lambert, "Gifts of Healing", International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Howard-Severance Co., Chicago, Vol. II, p. 1349.

<sup>4</sup> Acts 9:36-41.

<sup>5</sup> Acts 14:8-11.



primary cause is a sound one. After all, if God "worketh all things after the counsel of his own will," the sharp distinction between secondary and primary causation, while useful in ordering thought, is ultimately a false distinction.

### C. The Problem Delimited

#### 1. Not an examination of the evidence for specific miracles.

It should be made clear at the outset of this investigation that this is not an examination of the evidence for any specific miracle or miracles, whether Biblical, historical or contemporary. In some cases this has been done already by competent historians. In most cases it would be impossible to acquire all the facts that would be necessary before final judgment could be pronounced. In the words of C. S. Lewis:

I am not a trained historian and I shall not examine the evidence for the Christian miracles. My effort is to put my readers in a position to do so. It is no use going to the texts until we have some idea about the possibility or the probability of the miraculous. Those who assume that miracles cannot happen are merely wasting their time by looking into the texts: we know in advance what results they will find for they have begun by begging the question.<sup>6</sup>

#### 2. Not a philosophical defence of the idea of miracle.

This study does not propose to present a philosophical defence of the possibility of miracles. It is noteworthy that the older notion of natural laws as operating with mechanically rigid necessity has largely given way among modern scientists to a more elastic and

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<sup>6</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Miracles*, The Macmillan Co., New York, 1947, p. 13.

vital conception of the universe in which natural laws are statements of statistical averages with considerable room for freedom and variation.<sup>7</sup> It is evident that this newer conception makes the idea of miracles in general and miraculous healing in particular easier to defend philosophically, but to do so is not the purpose of this study. This has already been done brilliantly and persuasively in such works as The Faith that Rebels by D. S. Cairns<sup>8</sup> and Miracles by C. S. Lewis.<sup>9</sup>

### 3. Not a study of the miracles of Jesus.

This is not a study of the healing miracles of Jesus. It is obvious that the New Testament teaches that Jesus did perform numerous miracles, and all but the more radical critics accept the essential historicity of the majority of the miracles ascribed to Christ in the Gospels. These miracles of Jesus have been adequately dealt with in such classic works as Notes on the Miracles of Our Lord by R. C. Trench<sup>10</sup> and Characteristics of the Gospel Miracles by B. F. Westcott,<sup>11</sup> and in such recent treatments as The Miracle-Stories

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<sup>7</sup> See further, Sir Arthur Eddington, The Nature of the Physical World, The Macmillan Co., New York, 1937.

<sup>8</sup> D. S. Cairns, The Faith that Rebels, Richard R. Smith, Inc., New York, 1930.

<sup>9</sup> C. S. Lewis, op. cit.

<sup>10</sup> R. C. Trench, Notes on the Miracles of Our Lord, Fleming H. Revell Co., New York, n.d.

<sup>11</sup> B. F. Westcott, Characteristics of the Gospel Miracles, Macmillan and Co., London, 1859.

of the Gospels by Alan Richardson.<sup>12</sup> In any case, the detailed discussion of the miracles of Jesus would not be strictly germane to the main purpose of this study because His miracles include the perfectly unique factor of His own Person. Yellowlees writes:

Jesus was a perfectly unique personality, and he had a perfectly unique mission to fulfil. That mission will never need to be carried out again; there never was, and there never will be another Jesus. That being so, it is not unreasonable for anyone, who believes in God at all, to expect that things would happen in relation to Jesus, which could never happen to any other person, before or since, not even to his own immediate disciples.<sup>13</sup>

Thus, the question at hand is not whether Jesus healed, but whether His disciples could heal. And further, if the disciples did perform actual healings, what were the conditions of their working them? And finally the question must be answered: Were those conditions such that modern disciples can meet them and perhaps themselves be enabled to heal miraculously?

#### D. The Problem Justified

##### 1. General confusion on the question.

The need for such a study as this is evident, in the first place, in the fact that there is widespread confusion concerning the doctrine of divine healing in many modern evangelical circles. The advocates of divine healing have preached and written extensively,

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<sup>12</sup> Alan Richardson, *The Miracle-Stories of the Gospels*, Student Christian Movement Press, London, 1941.

<sup>13</sup> Yellowlees, *Psychology's Defence of the Faith*, cited by G. G. Dawson, *Healing: Pagan and Christian*, Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, London, 1935.

and their views have often attracted considerable attention. Some have opposed their view, maintaining that all miraculous healing ceased with the apostolic or sub-apostolic age, and they have sometimes endeavored to stamp out what they have regarded as heresy. For example, A. J. Gordon wrote The Ministry of Divine Healing<sup>14</sup> and then B. B. Warfield countered with a book whose title clearly suggests his viewpoint, viz. Counterfeit Miracles.<sup>15</sup> Almost every writer on this subject has entered the lists with his lance of argument set to unhorse all opponents. There has been hardly any dispassionate, exegetical and expository presentation in concrete detail of the actual New Testament teaching on this difficult subject. It is with a view to helping meet this need that this study is being undertaken.

## 2. Rapid growth of healing cults.

The importance of such a project further appears in the undisputed fact that various cults are growing rapidly, while the Protestant church barely holds its own, or at best merely inches along. Marcus Bach speaks of his investigation of American religious cults in these terms:

For fifteen years I had followed men and women in odyssey of faith off the beaten Protestant track. Now I was reporting to the churches of my own faith. Reporting to pulpit and pew: Protestantism is being challenged from the right and from the left! Reporting: Many Americans are seeking God outside the

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<sup>14</sup> A. J. Gordon, The Ministry of Healing, Howard Gannett, Boston, 1883.

<sup>15</sup> B. B. Warfield, Counterfeit Miracles, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1918.

historic churches! Reporting: Many Protestants are seeking the self-enfoldment of their spiritual lives outside Protestantism!<sup>16</sup>

Prominent among these cults that are drawing people from the church are the healing cults, whose promise of healing naturally attracts those with bodily needs. If the New Testament promises the Christian church the gift of healing, it is vitally important that the church be made aware of the fact in order to proclaim a full gospel and to minister to men's bodies in the name of Christ. If the New Testament does not teach the possibility of modern divine healing, the church should fully and frankly declare the fact, so that earnest seekers may not be deceived, disappointed and perhaps turned away from religion altogether.

#### E. Presuppositions of the Treatment

In every investigation of this sort the investigator works on the basis of certain presuppositions, whether they are explicitly stated or merely implicit. Two statements may make the presuppositions that underlie this study sufficiently clear to help the reader in its evaluation.

##### 1. The essential accuracy of the New Testament.

The first of these is: it is assumed that the New Testament writings are essentially accurate, so that the incidents they describe actually occurred essentially as described and the sayings reported

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<sup>16</sup> Marcus Bach, Report to Protestants, Bobbs-Merrill Co., New York, 1948, p. 261.

are substantially what was really said. In other words, this thesis will not enter into questions of historical and literary criticism. The New Testament writings will be accepted as they stand. This study only seeks to discover what is taught concerning divine healing in the New Testament as we have it now.

## 2. The doctrinal unity of the New Testament.

The second presupposition underlying this treatment is: there is essential doctrinal unity in the New Testament. After spending years mired down in the slough of sterile divisive analysis, modern criticism has seen the need for synthesis and is finally making the full circle to come around again to an acceptance of the doctrinal unity of the New Testament. For example, Hunter says at the conclusion of his investigation along this line, "There is, therefore, a deep unity in the New Testament, which dominates and transcends all the diversities."<sup>17</sup> And C. H. Dodd says of the New Testament that it has "a marked unity and concentration, overriding all the diversities of its writings."<sup>18</sup> The practical significance of this presupposition for this investigation is that if the possibility of modern divine healing is clearly taught only in a relatively small number of passages, it will be assumed that this accurately represents the apostolic preaching and teaching, even if other writers

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<sup>17</sup> Archibald M. Hunter, *The Message of the New Testament*, Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 1944, p. 121.

<sup>18</sup> C. H. Dodd, *The Bible Today*, The Macmillan Co., New York, 1947, p. 73.

did not have occasion to make explicit statements on the subject.

#### F. Method of Treatment

The steps in the treatment are as follows: (1) a survey of the New Testament data with respect to divine healing; (2) an examination and evaluation of the two traditional interpretations of the New Testament data, and (3) a proposed doctrine of divine healing, intended to do justice to the New Testament data and designed to retain the values of the traditional interpretations while avoiding their deficiencies.

#### G. Sources

The primary source is, of course, the New Testament. For the Greek New Testament, Nestle's eighteenth edition was used.<sup>19</sup> Quotations of the English text are from the American Revised Version<sup>20</sup> unless otherwise noted. The secondary sources are books, articles and pamphlets on the subject of divine healing. Various standard exegetical commentaries have been consulted for suggestions of the interpretation of relevant Biblical passages.

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<sup>19</sup> D. Erwin Nestle, editor, *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 18th edition, Stuttgart, 1948.

<sup>20</sup> The Holy Bible, Edited by the American Revision Committee, 1901, Thomas Nelson and Sons, New York, 1901.

CHAPTER I

THE NEW TESTAMENT DATA



## CHAPTER I

### THE NEW TESTAMENT DATA

#### A. Introduction

The obvious place to begin the search for the New Testament teaching on divine healing is the New Testament itself. The first task will be the gathering and classifying of the relevant data. Scattered through the New Testament writings there are commands, instructions, exhortations, narratives and promises which teach, directly or by implication, a doctrine of divine healing. It is the purpose of this chapter to gather and classify this New Testament data. Some observations will be made on the basis of these facts that will prove useful in the formulation of a doctrine of divine healing. But the full significance of many of these facts will appear only in subsequent chapters.

This survey will begin with an examination of the materials in the Gospels and Acts. Here the facts fall into two main categories: (1) Christ commissioned the disciples to heal, and (2) the disciples fulfilled that commission by actually performing healings. A second division presents the material drawn from the epistles. This includes: (1) the data with regard to gifts of healing; (2) the data with regard to the health of Paul and his associates, and (3) the passage in James concerning anointing with oil and prayer for the sick by the elders of the church.

## B. The Data from the Gospels and Acts

The first five books of the New Testament, which are primarily historical in character, furnish many facts that are significant in relation to the question of divine healing. There are specific instructions to the disciples by Christ. There are general summarizing statements of the activities of the disciples that give information concerning their performance of miracles of healing. There are passages that narrate particular instances of divine healing wrought through one and another of the disciples. The consideration of this material is the first step in this survey of the New Testament data.

### 1. Christ commissioned His disciples to heal.

a. Christ sent out the Twelve with specific authority to heal the sick and to exorcize demons. "And he called the twelve together, and gave them power and authority over all demons, and to cure diseases. And he sent them forth to preach the kingdom of God, and to heal the sick."<sup>1</sup> The setting emphasizes the significance of this commission. In the eighth chapter of Luke several of Jesus' outstanding miraculous cures were described, and now in the verses quoted, the apostles are endowed by Christ with the ability to do the same things He has been doing.

The version of this commission as given in Matt. 10:1 ff. is even more remarkable. For there the apostles are commanded (ver. 8) to "raise the dead." These are startling words, but Plummer, having

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<sup>1</sup> Luke 9:1-2.

weighed the evidence, says that "the words are so strongly attested by the best witnesses that they cannot be rejected."<sup>2</sup> The command, striking as it is, was literally obeyed by at least one of the apostles; for Peter raised Tabitha from the dead.<sup>3</sup>

It should be observed that this commission is restricted to the Twelve, but otherwise it is almost without limits. Their power and authority were sufficient to give them victory over all diseases and over all demons. There is no indication of a definite time limit.

b. This power and authority to heal was soon extended by Christ to another and larger group. "Now after these things the Lord appointed seventy others, and sent them two and two before his face into every city and place, whither he himself was about to come."<sup>4</sup> And among the instructions Christ gave this group was the command to "heal the sick . . . and say unto them, The kingdom of God is come nigh unto you."<sup>5</sup>

In this passage the healing commission is extended beyond the limits of the apostolate. Thirty-five pairs of disciples were given power and authority to heal the sick, and Luke 10:17 states that they were also able to exorcize demons. In other words, the seventy

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<sup>2</sup> Alfred Plummer, *An Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to St. Matthew*, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1909, p. 119.

<sup>3</sup> Acts 9:36 ff.

<sup>4</sup> Luke 10:1.

<sup>5</sup> Luke 10:9.

seem to have been denied none of the healing powers given to the apostles.<sup>6</sup>

c. After His Resurrection and before His Ascension Christ apparently extended this healing commission to all believers. In a final charge to the eleven, after they had been commanded to preach the gospel to the whole creation, Jesus promised, "And these signs shall accompany them that believe: in my name they shall cast out demons; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents, and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall in no wise hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick and they shall recover."<sup>7</sup>

This is a passage fraught with many difficulties. In the first place, the preponderance of evidence both internal and external is generally felt to be decidedly against the Markan authorship of Mark 16:9-20.<sup>8</sup> However, the question of authorship is basically a literary and textual problem. Whether written by Mark or not, the passage merits close attention. As Alford says:

The inference seems to me to be, that it is an authentic fragment, placed as a completion of the Gospel in very early times: by whom written, must of course remain wholly uncertain; but coming to us with very weighty sanction, and having the

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<sup>6</sup> Luke 10:1 seems to suggest a temporary mission, preparing the way for Jesus. But the perfect tense of "I have given" in 10:19 indicates that this healing commission given in the past still continues in force. (See Dana and Mantey, A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament, Macmillan Co., New York, 1946, pp. 200-205, for the significance of the perfect tense in Greek.)

<sup>7</sup> Mark 16:17-18.

<sup>8</sup> But see James Morison, A Practical Commentary on the Gospel according to St. Mark, Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1889, pp. 446-470.

strongest claims on our reception and reverence.<sup>9</sup>

The very least that can be said is that the passage is a valuable witness to the faith and practice of the early church, and therefore is not without doctrinal significance. J. C. Lambert points out its value:

The unauthentic conclusion of Mark's Gospel, if it does not preserve words actually used by Christ Himself, bears witness at all events to the traditional belief in the early church that after His departure from the world His disciples would still possess the gift of healing.<sup>10</sup>

It is true that the rather bizarre promises concerning speaking in new tongues, taking up serpents and protection from poison sound strange in modern ears. But the idea of speaking in tongues is found elsewhere in the New Testament,<sup>11</sup> and Paul's experience at Melita<sup>12</sup> may have some relation to this promise about serpents. And the fact remains that even if these verses cannot be explained to our full satisfaction on every point, yet the parts relating to the question of divine healing are quite clear. Christ here extends the commission to cast out demons and heal diseases to a wider circle than any yet noted. Only two conditions seem to limit the promises at all. Faith is necessary, for these signs are to accompany "them that believe" (ver. 17). And the signs are to be wrought "in my

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<sup>9</sup> Henry Alford, *The Greek New Testament*, Deighton, Bell and Co., Cambridge, 1868, Vol. I, p. 437. (*Italics his.*)

<sup>10</sup> J. C. Lambert, "Spiritual Gifts", *International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, Ed. James Orr, Howard-Severance Co., Chicago, Vol. V, p. 1349.

<sup>11</sup> See esp. 1 Cor. 12-14.

<sup>12</sup> Acts 28:1 f.

name" (ver. 17).

d. There is one other passage that is understood by some interpreters to involve a commission to heal given by Christ. In the midst of His last discourse to His disciples, Jesus said, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto the Father."<sup>13</sup> The difficulty of interpretation arises from the question: In what sense can the works of any of the disciples be said to be "greater" than those of Christ? The traditional interpretation is that given by Plummer:

These "greater works" refer rather to the results of Pentecost; the victory over Judaism and Paganism, two powers which for the moment were victorious over Christ. Christ's work was confined to Palestine and had but small success; the Apostles went everywhere and converted thousands.<sup>14</sup>

Swete points out that "the works of Christ are not to be limited to the miracles, nor were these in His own judgment the greatest;"<sup>15</sup> and he suggests that the conversions through Peter at Pentecost and through the missionary Paul constitute greater works than those accomplished by Christ. There is much to be said for this viewpoint. But the study of the use of the word "works" in the Gospel according to John in such passages as 3:19-21, 7:3, 10:35 ff. clearly indicates that outward deeds, and not mental or spiritual accomplishments are in view; and 5:17, 7:21 and 9:4 in particular certainly

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<sup>13</sup> John 14:12.

<sup>14</sup> Alfred Plummer, *The Gospel according to St. John*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1881, p. 278.

<sup>15</sup> H. B. Swete, *The Last Discourse and Prayer of Our Lord*, Macmillan and Company, Ltd., London, 1914, p. 30.

use the word to refer to miraculous healings. It therefore seems impossible to exclude altogether the idea of miraculous works of healing from this promise in John 14:12, though it may be conceded that the superiority of the disciples' works lies in their number and extent. In any case, it is made clear that it is still Christ's power at work through the disciples from His place with the Father (ver. 13). It should be observed that the sole condition limiting this commission is faith. The commission is offered to him that believeth (ver. 12a).

2. The Gospels and Acts record more than the disciples' commissioning by Christ to perform miracles of healing; they also report that the disciples obeyed their commission and actually did perform healing miracles. These facts are recorded in several general statements that merely name the persons through whom the healing is wrought, and in several narratives reporting more fully the essential facts of certain particular healings.

a. The survey of the New Testament data proceeds to the general statements which merely note in summary fashion the fact that healings were performed by the disciples.

1) Some of these refer to healings accomplished during the earthly ministry of Christ, although He was not physically present with them when the miracles are performed. "And they cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many what were sick, and healed them."<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Mark 6:13.

Following close upon the first commission to the Twelve, this indicates that the power and authority the apostles received from Christ they put to immediate practical use. The notice of the use of oil is interesting inasmuch as it is not mentioned among Christ's instructions. Alford thinks: "This oil was not used medicinally, but as a vehicle of the healing power committed to them;--a symbol of a deeper thing than the oil itself could accomplish."<sup>17</sup> This detail need not be dealt with here, however.<sup>18</sup> The main fact is the definite statement that the apostles actually did perform numerous works of healing.

The seventy likewise made practical use of the powers they had received by virtue of their commission from Christ. "And the seventy returned with joy, saying, Lord, even the demons are subject unto us in thy name."<sup>19</sup> The use of *καί*, even, indicates that the seventy healed those who were sick as well as exorcizing demons. Thus, the fact is established that the seventy, like the apostles, actually did perform the healings they had been commissioned to do.

2) The Gospels and Acts further indicate that Christ's disciples also performed healings after His Ascension.

a) "And they went forth and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word by the signs that followed."<sup>20</sup> The primary reference may be to the apostles, but in view

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<sup>17</sup> Alford, op. cit., p. 348. (Italics his.)

<sup>18</sup> See below p. 21.

<sup>19</sup> Luke 10:17.

<sup>20</sup> Mark 16:20.



of the fact that the promise had been made "to them that believe," there is no reason to assume that none besides the Twelve are here described. And it can hardly be doubted that among the "signs" at least some were miracles of healing.

Acts 2:43 and 5:12 state that the apostles wrought many signs and wonders, and the prayer of the infant church in Acts 4 included the petition (ver. 30) that the Lord might stretch forth His hand to heal. In these general statements of healings performed after the Ascension of Christ it is clear that miracles of healing were performed by the apostles, by the seventy, and by those who must be simply designated "believers."

b) The Book of Acts also records the fact that certain individuals were used of God to perform healing miracles. Peter is pictured as being so endued with power from on high that even his shadow brought healing.<sup>21</sup> Hostile critics have usually regarded this as superstition and discredit the story, but Lumby well says:

These men who gave such an exhibition of faith have been described (ver. 14) as believers in the Lord. There can therefore be no question as to what they regarded as the power which was to heal their sick. They did not believe on Peter, though they magnified him as the Lord's instrument; they did not ascribe healing power to Peter's shadow, though it might please God to make that a sacrament of healing, as to Israel in old times He made the brazen serpent. They had seen health bestowed through the Apostle by the name of Christ, and to demonstrate their faith in that name, they bring their afflicted friends into the way of salvation.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Acts 5:15.

<sup>22</sup> J. Rawson Lumby, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1937, p. 140.

Soon miracles began to be wrought by those outside the apostolic circle. "And Stephen, full of grace and power, wrought great signs and wonders among the people."<sup>23</sup> And Philip wrought such signs that "from many that had unclean spirits, they came out, crying with a loud voice: and many that were palsied, and that were lame, were healed."<sup>24</sup> Healing miracles, then, were wrought by those upon whom the apostles had laid their hands in ordaining them as deacons. And soon after, to Paul and Barnabas it was granted that "signs and wonders be done by their hands."<sup>25</sup> And God wrought such unusual miracles through Paul that "unto the sick were carried away from his body handkerchiefs or aprons, and the diseases departed from them, and the evil spirits went out."<sup>26</sup> Thus the gift of healing was being distributed by the Holy Spirit in an ever widening circle--first the original Twelve, then the seventy, then the deacons, then the designated missionaries of the church at Antioch, Paul and Barnabas.

b. Acts also includes several narratives describing a little more fully certain healing miracles performed by disciples. 3:1-10 tells the story of the healing of the beggar at the Beautiful Gate of the temple through Peter and John. The narrative suggests the man's faith, for, as Lumby remarks, in his "leaping up" (ver. 8) he manifests "his faith by his instant obedience, though his limbs must have been

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<sup>23</sup> Acts 6:8.

<sup>24</sup> Acts 8:6-7.

<sup>25</sup> Acts 14:3.

<sup>26</sup> Acts 19:11 f.

shrivelled with forty years' want of use."<sup>27</sup> But even more emphatic in the incident is the stress upon the fact that the healing was performed in and through the name of Christ. It was in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth that Peter bade the man walk, and in his sermon he underlined that fact that "by faith in his name hath his name made this man strong."<sup>28</sup>

In the healing of Aeneas through Peter the power of his healing gift is emphasized in the fact that the man had been bed-ridden for eight years.<sup>29</sup> And this point receives further stress in the next paragraph where Peter is able simply by prayer to raise Tabitha from the dead.<sup>30</sup> The communities recognized, however, that Peter's healing power was a gift, and not his own achievement, for the result of both incidents is described as a general turning to the Lord.<sup>31</sup>

Paul's healing of the congenital cripple at Lystra emphasized the importance of faith on the part of the potential recipient of healing grace.<sup>32</sup> For the thing that moved Paul to command the man to rise to his feet was his perception that the man "had faith to be made whole." (Verse 9.) This obviously miraculous healing of a man suffering from a congenital malformation is followed by a victory

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<sup>27</sup> Lumby, op. cit., p. 111.

<sup>28</sup> Acts 3:16.

<sup>29</sup> Acts 9:33 f.

<sup>30</sup> Acts 9:36 f.

<sup>31</sup> Acts 9:35, 42.

<sup>32</sup> Acts 14:8.

over an unclean spirit. For in Philippi Paul drove a spirit of divination from an unfortunate maid who was being victimized by her harsh masters.<sup>33</sup> The deed was done, it is explicitly said, "in the name of Jesus Christ."

The healing miracles of Paul come to a climax in the raising of Eutychus.<sup>34</sup> The language cannot fairly be interpreted to mean anything less than that the lad was dead, for Knowling points out: "The word *νεκρός*, the action of Paul, the word *ἐκείνου* all point to an actual death, whilst the vivid details in the narrative also indicate the presence of an eyewitness as an informant."<sup>35</sup>

And one of the last pictures of Paul describes him as healing the father of Publius of Melita by prayer and the laying on of hands.<sup>36</sup> And when this fact became known, "the rest also that had diseases in the island came, and were cured." (Ver. 9.)

On the basis of this record from the Gospels and Acts demonstrating that the disciples of Christ actually fulfilled their healing commission several observations may be made. In the first place, though apparently the apostles were the first to exercise these healing gifts, this power was by no means restricted to them. The seventy performed healings, some of the deacons wrought great signs, Paul

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<sup>33</sup> Acts 16:16 f.

<sup>34</sup> Acts 20:9 f.

<sup>35</sup> R. J. Knowling, "The Acts of the Apostles", Expositors Greek New Testament, W. R. Nicoll, editor, Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., Grand Rapids, n.d., Vol. II, p. 36.

<sup>36</sup> Acts 28:8 f.

and Barnabas were able to heal, and there is no reason to doubt that many obscure disciples whose names are unknown to history were enabled by God to be instrumental in the healing of the sick.

Rackham says, "Later on, like the 'speaking with tongues,' the 'working of miracles' took its place among the customary spiritual gifts (*Χαρίσματα*) of the church."<sup>37</sup>

In the second place, thus far in the survey of the New Testament data there has been no suggestion that the healing powers of the disciples are waning.

Further, two qualifying conditions appear again and again. The necessity of faith is emphasized, and the fact that healings were accomplished through the name of Christ is stressed. Throughout the source of the miraculous healing power is declared to be God, whether Father, Son or Holy Spirit.

### C. The Data from the Epistles

The historical books of the New Testament have yielded many facts concerning the faith and practice of the early church with respect to divine healing. The remaining area of search lies in the region of the epistles. If the first disciples received a commission from Christ to heal, and if they wrought miracles of healing, what did they teach their converts on this vital subject? Paul healed and even raised from the dead. What did that great missionary teach

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<sup>37</sup> R. B. Rackham, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Methuen and Co., London, 1901, p. 41.

the infant churches he had fathered in the Lord with respect to divine healing?

1. In the first place, Paul taught that God the Holy Spirit conferred various spiritual gifts upon different members of a given congregation, and he said that among those gifts to some were given "gifts of healings, in the one Spirit; and to another workings of miracles."<sup>38</sup>

The word for gifts here is charismata. Lambert says:

. . . [charismata] in the plural form is employed in a technical sense to denote extraordinary gifts of the Spirit bestowed upon Christians to equip them for the service of the church. . . . Paul in this passage speaks of "gifts of healings" (the plural "healings" apparently refers to the variety of ailments that were cured) as being distributed along with other spiritual gifts among the ordinary members of the church. There were men, it would seem, who occupied no official position in the community, and who might not otherwise be distinguished among their fellow-members, on whom this special charisma of healing had been bestowed.<sup>39</sup>

The impression of this Corinthian passage is strengthened when the evidence of Galatians 3:5 is added. Paul writes there, "He therefore that supplieth to you the Spirit and worketh miracles among you, doeth he it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?" Beet comments on this verse, "This question implies that miracles were indisputably wrought in the apostolic churches."<sup>40</sup> Lightfoot says, "It is important to notice how here, as in the Epistle to the Corinthians, St. Paul assumes the possession of these extra-

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<sup>38</sup> I Corinthians 12:9.

<sup>39</sup> J. C. Lambert, loc. cit.

<sup>40</sup> J. A. Beet, Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians, Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1904, p. 171.

ordinary powers by his converts as an acknowledged fact."<sup>41</sup>

It is altogether likely that Paul reached his conclusions regarding gifts of healing partly on the basis of his own experience. At least it is clear that in II Cor. 12:12 and Romans 15:19 he is claiming to have had such gifts himself. Plummer says:

. . . Paul assumes that the Galatians, Corinthians and Romans know quite well that miracles do happen, and that he has worked many in their presence. It is incredible that he should have said this, if neither he nor <sup>42</sup>any other Apostle had ever done anything of the kind . . . .

2. A second line of investigation in the epistles reveal further facts significant in relation to the question of divine healing. The autobiographical allusions to Paul's personal history contain several interesting details about his own health and that of his associates.

In this connection one of the most difficult passages to interpret is II Cor. 1:8-9:

For we would not have you ignorant, brethren, concerning our affliction which befell us in Asia, that we were weighed down exceedingly, beyond our power, insomuch that we despaired even of life: yea, we ourselves have had the sentence of death within ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God who raiseth the dead.

Commentators are sharply divided as to what sort of experience this describes. Plummer thinks that "we may fall back upon the hypothesis of persecution, not by officials, but by furious mobs,

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<sup>41</sup> J. B. Lightfoot, St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians, Macmillan and Co., Ltd., London, 1921.

<sup>42</sup> Alfred Plummer, The Second Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1915, p. 359.

consisting of, or hounded on by, exasperated Jews, so that he was nearly torn in pieces by them."<sup>43</sup>

Alford, on the other hand, thinks the reference must be to a "deadly sickness." He says of the phrase "insomuch that we despaired even of life":

. . . [these words] surely would not be used of a tumult, where life would have been the first thing in danger, if Paul had been at all mixed up in it---but of some wearing and tedious suffering, inducing despondency in minor matters, which even reached the hope of life itself.<sup>44</sup>

It must be owned that the use of the first person plural suggests that Paul is describing some experience shared with others, presumably Timothy (ver. 1). But Paul often used the editorial "we", and to speak of having the "sentence of death within ourselves" suggests intimate personal experience.

The interpretation of this passage, it is evident, must remain an open question. But the verses indicate at least the possibility that the Apostle Paul, for all his miraculous healing power, was himself on occasion near death's door with some serious sickness.

Whatever difficulties may attend the ascertaining of the exact ailment, Galatians 4:12-15 offers almost positive proof that Paul at least during one period of his life suffered from painful disease. The phrase "infirmity of the flesh", especially lying in this context, must refer to some disease. "The language," says Burton, "can refer only to some physical ailment hard to bear, and calculated to

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 16.

<sup>44</sup> Alford, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 630. (*Italics his.*)



keep him humble and, in some measure, to repel those to whom he preached."<sup>45</sup> The conjecture on the basis of the phrase "ye would have plucked out your eyes and given them to me," that the disease is some severe ophthalmia is precarious because of the unemphatic position of the word for your in the Greek text. Alford calls attention to this:

Had the Apostle's eyes been affected, and had he wished to express, "You would, if possible, have pulled out your own eyes and have given them to me," he would certainly have written ὧμῶν τοὺς ὀφθαλμούς, not τοὺς ὀφθαλμούς ὧμῶν.<sup>46</sup>

Whatever the specific nature of the disease afflicting Paul at this time, the fact most significant for this study remains. It is clear that Paul, for all his miraculous healing power, himself suffered from painful and humiliating disease at least for one period of his life.

One further passage bears witness to the fact that Paul endured considerable suffering from some disease. This is the much controverted "thorn in the flesh" passage in II Cor. 12:7-10. Though there have been some important exceptions, the majority of competent commentators refer this to some bodily affliction. The phrase "in the flesh" can hardly be understood any other way in this context. Alford says:

On the whole, putting together the figure here used, that of a thorn, occasioning pain, and the *κολαφίζῃ* buffeting

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<sup>45</sup> Ernest D. Burton, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1928, p. 239.

<sup>46</sup> Alford, op. cit., Vol. III, p. 45. (Italics his.)

or putting to shame, it seems quite necessary to infer that the Apostle alludes to some painful and tedious bodily malady, which at the same time put him to shame before those among whom he exercised his ministry.<sup>47</sup>

If this interpretation is correct, this passage is highly significant in the formulation of a doctrine of divine healing. For the verse then teaches that God sometimes sends sickness for disciplinary purposes. For Plummer says of "given to me":

Of course, by God, as ἵνα ὑπεραίρωμαι shows. It was sent to preserve the Apostle from spiritual pride . . . Satan is regarded as an instrument for effecting the divine purpose, as Judas in the case of the Atonement . . . Satan is ever ready to inflict suffering, and is sometimes made to be instrumental when suffering is needed for the discipline of souls. But if St. Paul meant that it was Satan who was the agent in this case, he would have used a less gracious word than ἐδόθη which he often has of the bestowal of Divine favours.<sup>48</sup>

Three passages in the Pauline epistles indicate that Paul was not alone in his physical suffering. Phil. 2:25-30 describes Paul's assistant Epaphroditus as having been "sick nigh unto death." His recovery is attributed to the mercy of God, but there is no indication that his cure was in any way miraculous. In I Tim. 5:23 Paul advises Timothy to "use a little wine for thy stomach's sake and thine often infirmities." This is important for a doctrine of divine healing not only because it indicates that a trusted and valuable assistant of Paul frequently suffered from afflictions without any supernatural healing, but also because Paul here prescribes a medicine. This is important because many of the more extreme exponents of divine healing

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., Vol. II, p. 713. (*Italics his.*)

<sup>48</sup> Plummer, op. cit., p. 348.

regard the use of any medicine or surgery as disobedience to the clear will of God. Finally, in II Tim. 4:20 Trophimus is spoken of as being left behind at Miletus because he was sick. Again for some reason a valuable assistant was not healed by Paul.

3. The final passage in the epistles that seems to promise further data for the construction of a doctrine of divine healing is James 5:13-15.

This is a fairly simple and straightforward passage. The verses promise that if a sick churchmember calls for the recognized leaders of the church, and if they pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord, and if the prayers are offered in fulness of faith, he will be healed. The context clearly indicates "saved" here means "healed, made whole." The word is used in this sense in many New Testament passages, e.g. Matt. 9:22, Mark 10:52, Luke 17:19, etc. The problem of sickness is the one under discussion (ver. 14) and forgiveness of sins is spoken of distinctly (ver. 15b).

There are several details that ought to be noticed here.

Plummer points out:

In the present case the sick person is not to send for any members of the congregation, but for certain who hold a definite, and apparently an official position. If any Christians could discharge the function in question, St. James would not have given the sick person the trouble of summoning the elders rather than those people who chanced to be near at hand.<sup>49</sup>

This is worth noting, especially in view of the fact that many who

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<sup>49</sup> Alfred Plummer, The General Epistles of St. James and St. Jude, A. C. Armstrong and Son, New York, n.d., p. 324.

advocate a strong doctrine of divine healing often make extensive use of this passage without noticing this apparent limitation to the elders of the church. This is not to be pressed too far, however for, as Mayor points out, "From v. 16, however, it would appear that the office of prayer and anointing and receiving confessions was not confined to them."<sup>50</sup> And besides, on the basis of the Canons of Hippolytus, Dawson says, "If a layman possessed the gift of healing, it was considered as an indication of his choice by the Holy Spirit for ordination."<sup>51</sup>

The mention of the use of oil is interesting because its parallel in Mark 6:13 indicates that the Twelve also used oil, although it was not specifically commanded by Christ. Meyer offers a sensible explanation:

Probably James mentions the anointing with oil only in conformity with the general custom of employing oil for the refreshing, strengthening, and healing of the body, since he refers the miracle not to the anointing, but to the prayer, and, presupposing its use, directs that the presbyters should unite prayer with it, and that they should perform it ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι τοῦ κυρίου, that is, in a believing and trustful mention of the name of Christ (less probably God).<sup>52</sup>

This point is not essential for purpose of a New Testament doctrine of divine healing. Commentators differ sharply as to whether the oil is used medicinally or sacramentally, and there apparently is no

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<sup>50</sup> J. B. Mayor, *The Epistle of St. James*, Macmillan and Co., Ltd., London, 1913, p. 232.

<sup>51</sup> Dawson, *op. cit.*, p. 146.

<sup>52</sup> H. A. W. Meyer, *The General Epistles of James, Peter, John and Jude*, Funk and Wagnalls, Publishers, New York, 1887, p. 157.

single decisive factor to resolve the conflict. If it is used medicinally, this passage clearly teaches that the use of means is not incompatible with reliance upon God for direct divine healing. If it is used sacramentally, it points up the importance of faith, for then its main practical value would be as an aid to the faith of the one to be healed.

One highly significant detail should not escape attention.

Meyer draws attention to the fact that in the middle of verse 15:

$\kappa\alpha\iota$  is not, as is done by most expositors, but against linguistic usage, to be resolved by and if, but by even if (so also Lange). By the sins here meant are such as formed the special reason of the sickness. Accordingly, the meaning is: even if he has drawn his sickness upon himself by special sins. By  $\eta \pi\epsilon\pi\omicron\lambda\eta\kappa\omega\varsigma$  the effect of the sins is represented as existing. The apodosis  $\alpha\phi\epsilon\theta\eta\gamma\epsilon\tau\alpha\iota \alpha\upsilon\tau\omega$  expresses that even in this case the healing will not fail. The forgiveness of sins is here meant, which is confirmed by the removal of the special punishment produced by the particular sins.<sup>53</sup>

This acute observation by Meyer is extremely important as indicating the relation that at least sometimes may exist between specific sins and a particular sickness. This will prove to be important in the following chapters.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p. 158.

<sup>54</sup> For the sake of completeness it should be mentioned that there are in the New Testament several references to the performance of miracles by those who are not true disciples of Christ. These references generally group themselves into three categories: (1) Miracles may be performed by Satan or his agents, cf. Matt. 24:24, Mark 13:22, II Thess. 2:9, Rev. 13:14-15; (2) miracles may be performed in the name of Jesus by those outside the recognized fellowship of believers, cf. Mark 9:38, Luke 9:49; (3) miracles may be performed by hypocritical professing Christians, cf. Matt. 7:22. The possible bearing of these passages upon the claims of non-Christian and sub-Christian healing groups is an intriguing question, but one that lies outside the province of this thesis.

#### D. Summary

The aim of this first chapter was the gathering and classifying of the New Testament data with respect to divine healing. This survey was necessary to lay the groundwork for understanding the traditional views described in the second chapter, and also these facts must be the building bricks of a well-built doctrine of divine healing.

This survey revealed that the New Testament abounds in material about divine healing. In the Gospels and Acts it was discovered that Christ issued a commission to heal to His apostles, to the seventy and to those who should believe in Him. No record of the abrogation of that commission came to light. The Gospels and Acts further revealed that the apostles, the seventy and the believers of the early church put their commission to practical use in the actual performance of many miracles of healing. The only suggested limits were those implied by the frequent mention of "faith" and by the explanation that these things were done "in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth."

The survey of the data in the epistles largely confirmed the glowing reports of the narratives in the Gospels and Acts. Paul taught that among the spiritual gifts bestowed upon the church were gifts of healings and of miracle working. And the Apostle James did not hesitate to state flatly that the prayer of faith, especially in conjunction with anointing and confession, would heal the sick. The only mitigating factor in the entire survey was the discovery

that, although he had remarkable powers for healing others, Paul was himself seriously and painfully sick at least for a time. And three of his most valuable assistants were likewise ill at various times.

Now after preliminary groundwork, it will be possible to advance to consider the traditional interpretations of this New Testament data. It will be necessary to consider again some passages that have been crucial in the controversy over this doctrine. But this initial survey has given the broad and general approach that will make it possible to discern the basic issues in coming to grips with the perplexing fact that equally evangelical, Bible-believing Christians may be completely at odds on the question of divine healing.

CHAPTER II

THE TWO TRADITIONAL INTERPRETATIONS  
OF DIVINE HEALING



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OF DIVINE HEALING

A. Introduction

At first thought it might seem that little more remains to be done to arrive at the New Testament teaching on divine healing. One would think that the examination of the data culled from the relevant Scripture passages would bring to light the underlying principles, which, ordered into a logical and coherent whole, would be in fact the New Testament doctrine of divine healing. And it would seem to follow that the doctrine thus directly derived from the Scriptures must command the loyalty of every evangelical Christian.

Such an expectation is natural, but unfortunately the hard facts are radically different. For, since the Reformation at least, Christians whose loyalty to Christ and His gospel cannot be questioned have differed sharply on divine healing. The theologians of the Reformed tradition have quite generally held to the view that gifts of healing passed away with the last of the apostles along with all other charismata, whereas the majority opinion in the Anglican tradition has been that such gifts disappeared gradually over the space of two or three centuries.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, there have always been Christian groups, some well within the main stream

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<sup>1</sup> Warfield, op. cit., p. 6.

of the Protestant tradition, others rather marginal in character, who have claimed to experience in their midst the apostolic gifts of healing. Among these groups some of the better known are: Waldenses, Moravians, Huguenots, Friends, Baptists, and the early Methodists.<sup>2</sup> Since all these groups profess utter loyalty to the word of Scripture and regard the Bible as finally authoritative in every matter of faith and practice, it is evident that the two must somehow place altogether different constructions upon the relevant New Testament data. It is the purpose of this chapter to examine and evaluate these two traditional interpretations of divine healing. First, the view that healing miracles, along with all other miracles, ceased at the close of the apostolic or sub-apostolic age will be presented as found in the writings of three of its leading representatives. Some evaluation of the position will be given. Then the view that every Christian may be healed will be described. The pertinent writings of two of its leading representatives will be presented, and the basic principles of their position evaluated.

This examination will reveal that both these traditional interpretations of the New Testament data are inadequate. But when the shortcomings of these two most generally accepted theories of divine healing are understood, the way will be cleared to attempt a more adequate interpretation of the New Testament teaching on divine healing that will do justice to the valid insights of the traditional

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<sup>2</sup> A. J. Gordon, *The Ministry of Healing*, Howard Gannett, Boston, 1883, p. 65.

views but will avoid their deficiencies.

## B. The View that Miracles Have Ceased

### 1. The view stated.

#### a. The view as stated by three of its leading representatives.

The most direct approach to the understanding of this view is the examination of the relevant writings of its three outstanding representatives. The three men selected have been chosen because they are well-known in evangelical Protestant circles and because each has set forth his views on the cessation of miracles quite clearly and explicitly in a major work. The three men are: R. C. Trench, J. B. Mozley and B. B. Warfield.

1) R. C. Trench. - Archbishop Trench has expressed his views of the cessation of miracles in a section called "Preliminary Essay" in his justly famous work, Notes on the Miracles of Our Lord.<sup>3</sup> To understand his view of the early cessation of miracles it is necessary first to know what he conceived to be the function of a miracle. His view on this point is that miracles were to be credentials commanding an attentive hearing for those who come claiming to bring a new message from God. He says, "The miracles shall be credentials for the bearer of that good word, signs that he has a special mission for the realization of the purposes of God in regard of humanity."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Trench, op. cit.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 20.

The working of just any miracle does not accomplish this, however, because genuine miracles can be wrought by the messengers of Satan as well as by those sent from God. But the working of a miracle does entitle the performer to close and thoughtful attention.<sup>5</sup> The character of the miracle will indicate its source. If it has been wrought through the power of God, it will be designed to secure the highest moral ends and never be merely a wanton demonstration of power for show and ostentation. The true miracle is redemptive, "an index and a prophecy of the inner work of man's deliverance, which it accompanies and helps forward."<sup>6</sup> If the discerning examination of a miracle according to these standards establishes it as the work of heaven rather than of hell, and if the accompanying doctrine commends itself to both the mind and conscience, then the miracle becomes the authenticating sign which proves that the doctrine which the mind perceives to be good is actually divine. The function of the miracle, then, is to serve with respect to a messenger from God as the finally authenticating sign. It is proof, according to Trench, that:

. . . he is to be heard not merely as one that is true, but as himself the truth; or, at least, as a messenger standing in direct connection with Him who is the Truth; claiming unreserved submission, and reception, upon his authority, of other statements which transcend the mind of man,--mysteries, which though, of course, not against that measure and standard of truth which God has given unto every man, yet cannot be weighed or measured by it.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 19.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 24.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 20.

On the basis of this view of the function of miracles, Trench goes on to enumerate several reasons why they would naturally and necessarily cease early in the history of the church. In the first place, for at least two reasons there was a strong antecedent presumption that miracles would not continue in the church for a long period of time. One of these is derived from the history of God's earlier dealing with His people. Trench says:

We do not find the miracles sown broadcast over the whole Old Testament history, but they all cluster round a very few eminent persons, and have reference to certain great epochs and crises of the kingdom of God.<sup>8</sup>

He names two centers around which there were outbursts of miracles: These are the exodus from Egypt, the wilderness journey and the entrance into Canaan under Moses and Joshua, and great crisis in the struggle between idolatry and true worship in which Elijah and Elisha were central figures. This suggests, in Trench's view, that miracles are reserved against the day of extreme needs in the kingdom of God. They are not frequent occurrences in the ongoing life of the kingdom.

A second reason for a presumption against the continuance of miracles is the universally observable fact that beginnings are unique in their very nature because they ordinarily involve features that are not characteristic of the later stages of development. Trench says, "We find all beginnings to be wonderful--to be under laws different from, and higher than, those which regulate ulterior

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 36.

progress."<sup>9</sup> On this view it is only natural to suppose that the miracles which were a large factor in the glory of the infant church might gradually disappear as the normal process of growth brought the church beyond its primitive stage.

Not only is there strong antecedent presumption against the continuation of miracles, but moreover, according to Trench's view, the situation of the church is such that there is no need for miracles to continue. At the beginning miracles were needed as authenticating signs of revealed truth, but now the character and prestige of the church as a divine institution are such as in themselves to vindicate fully the truth she proclaims. Trench says:

. . . the Church of Christ, with its immense and evident superiorities of all kinds over everything with which it is brought in contact, and some portions of which superiority every man must recognize, is itself now the great witness and proof of the truth which it delivers.<sup>10</sup>

And besides, the inspired record of the miracles still stands, so that those same miracles bear their witness to the truth as it is in Christ to every succeeding generation. Trench writes: "The miracles recorded there [in the Scriptures] live for the Church; they are as much present witnesses for Christ to us now as to them who actually saw them with their eyes."<sup>11</sup> The necessity for miracles soon<sup>12</sup> passed away in Trench's view, because the character of the

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 37.

<sup>10</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 38.

<sup>12</sup> Trench declines to set a definite date for the cessation of miracles. He believes that the power to work miracles subsided by degrees, so that the transition was too gradual to be marked even by the church. See further p. 42 f.

church became such as to vindicate her right to proclaim divine truth, and because the original miracles of the apostolic age continue to bear witness in the pages of Scripture.

Trench adduces one further consideration in support of his view on the cessation of miracles. He maintains that the character of the later ecclesiastical miracles in most cases is so different from that of those performed by Christ and His apostles as to make it plain that they do not have a common origin. "A very large proportion of the later miracles presented to our belief," he says, "bear inward marks of spuriousness."<sup>13</sup> They are mostly aimless freaks of power, utterly lacking in the high ethical aim and the spiritually redemptive purpose of the New Testament miracles, so that most of them are discredited by their very character even before one has begun to examine their unsubstantial historical foundation.

Thus, the position of Archbishop Trench with respect to the cessation of miracles, including of course miracles of healing, is this: Since the primary purpose of miracles is to stamp as divine that revelation which commends itself to the mind and conscience, the need for miracles passed away as soon as the church grew strong enough to proclaim the truth without their help. This was to be expected by analogy with the distribution of miracles in the Old Testament and with the unique character of most beginnings. And it is confirmed by the evident spuriousness of most of the later ecclesiastical miracles.

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 39.

2) J. B. Mozley. As with Trench, the logic of J. B. Mozley's view on the cessation of miracles grows naturally out of his conception of their purpose. In his view the one primary purpose of miracles is to authenticate divine revelation. He says:

A revelation is, properly speaking, such only by virtue of telling us something which we could not know without it. But how do we know that that communication of what is undiscoverable by human reason is true? Our reason cannot prove the truth of it, for it is by the very supposition beyond our reason. There must be, then, some note or sign to certify to it and distinguish it as a true communication from God, which note can be nothing else than a miracle.<sup>14</sup>

Mozley's position is slightly different from Trench's in that he holds that no other signs are adequate to attest the truth of divine revelation. The character of the revelation, regardless of its moral worth and intrinsic appeal to the human mind and conscience, can never prove beyond doubt that the supposed truth may not be the work of the subjective imagination.<sup>15</sup> Nor is the character of the revealer sufficient to guarantee its authenticity, for however faultless his external conduct may appear, goodness finally depends upon the inward motive, and that no man can measure.<sup>16</sup> And even the glorious history of the church cannot establish beyond peradventure the truth of all she proclaims, for candor compels the admission that her success has been largely tempered by failure; always among

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<sup>14</sup> J. B. Mozley, *Eight Lectures on Miracles*, Longmans, Green, and Co., London, 1902, p. 5.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 11.



the wheat there have been tares.<sup>17</sup> In view of the merely relative nature of the testimony of these witnesses, miracles are absolutely necessary as the direct and final credentials of divine revelation.

With this view of the purpose of miracles it is easy to see why Mozley holds that miracles have ceased. "If we do not expect miracles now," he says, "there is a natural reason for it, viz. that the great purpose of them is past."<sup>18</sup> The miracles of Christ and the apostles were necessary to authenticate their revelation, but once that purpose was adequately accomplished there was no need for further miracles.

But though the original miracles are necessary for the proof of doctrine, subsequent miracles cannot plead the same necessity; because when the doctrine has once been attested, those original credentials, transmitted by the natural channels of evidence, are the permanent and perpetual proof of that doctrine, not wanting reinforcements from additional and posterior miracles; which are therefore without the particular recommendation to our belief, of being necessary for the great result before us.<sup>19</sup>

Mozley's position, then, is quite precise and unambiguous. Since the primary purpose of miracles was to serve as credentials of revelation, the need for them in the Christian church has been completely satisfied in the miracles of Christ and the apostles, and the doctrine so thoroughly attested in its first presentation has no need for further authentication by more miracles. Therefore there is no reason to expect miracles of healing, or of any other sort, in the church today.

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 159.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 156.

3) B. B. Warfield. The position of B. B. Warfield on the cessation of miracles is even more sharply defined than that of Mozley. His view of the function of miracles is virtually the same. A few selected sentences may serve to indicate his viewpoint with sufficient clarity. He writes:

If we once lay firm hold upon the biblical principle which governed the distribution of miraculous gifts, in a word, we find that we have in our hands a key which unlocks all the historical puzzles connected with them. . . . This deeper principle may be reached by us through the perception, more broadly, of the inseparable connection of miracles with revelation, as its mark and credential; or, more narrowly, of the summing up of all revelation, finally, in Jesus Christ. Miracles do not appear on the page of Scripture vagrantly, here, there, and elsewhere indifferently, without assignable reason. They belong to revelation periods, and appear only when God is speaking to His people through accredited messengers, declaring His gracious purposes.

. . . . .  
By as much as one gospel suffices for all lands and all peoples and all times, by so much does the miraculous attestation of that one single gospel suffice for all lands and all times, and no further miracles are to be expected in connection with it.<sup>20</sup>

This position is consistently and rigorously carried out to its logical consequences by Warfield. The sole purpose of the miracles wrought through the apostles was that they might serve as credentials to prove that these were divinely ordained apostles of Christ. Concerning the apostolic miracles Warfield says that "the immediate end for which they were given is not left doubtful, and that proves to be not directly the extension of the church, but the authentication of the Apostles as messengers from God."<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Warfield, op. cit., pp. 25-27.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 21.

With this view of the function of apostolic miracles it is not surprising that Warfield will not permit miracles to continue even for the three centuries most historians allow. He takes issue with the commonly held theory that miracles gradually subsided only as the infant church slowly acquired enough maturity to survive without their support. He maintains that miraculous gifts disappeared abruptly with the death of the last apostle.

These gifts were not the possession of the primitive Christian as such; nor for that matter of the Apostolic church or the Apostolic age for themselves; they were distinctively the authentication of the Apostles. Their function thus confined them to distinctively the Apostolic church, and they necessarily passed away with it.<sup>22</sup>

Warfield, then, restricts the function of the apostolic miracles to the sole purpose of authenticating the apostles as messengers from God, and he does not hesitate to follow out the logic of this position in saying that miracles ceased with the death of the last apostle.

It is apparent that this general view presents its most severe aspect in Warfield, and yet from the standpoint of logic his is the most cogent presentation of the position. He sees clearly the inconsistency of those like Trench and Mozley who permit miracles to continue through the first difficult years of the church up until perhaps the time of Constantine. He writes:

If the usefulness of miracles in planting the church were sufficient reason for their occurrence in the Roman Empire in the third century, it is hard to deny that it may be sufficient reason for the repetition of them in, say, the Chinese Empire

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 6

of the twentieth century. And why go to China? Is not the church still essentially in the position of a missionary church everywhere in this world of unbelief?<sup>23</sup>

The question is inescapable. It can hardly be denied that Warfield is right in maintaining the miracles must be regarded as the exclusive prerogative of specially designated messengers from God in periods of revelation, or else they cannot, in principle at least, be denied to other Christians and other ages than those of revelation.

b. The characteristic features of the viewpoint.

These summary statements of the main points in the view that all miracles have ceased as found in the writings of three representative advocates of the view indicate plainly enough the basic principles involved. The principal structure of the view can almost be reduced to one basic assumption and one logical inference from that assumption. The assumption is this: miracles were intended primarily to authenticate revelation. Their main purpose was to serve as credentials that would infallibly mark those who had been sent as messengers from God. The logical inference from this assumption is: since the revelation of God has been completely and finally summed up in Christ, and since the primary purpose of miracles is to authenticate divine revelation, there is no reason to expect that miracles would continue long beyond the time of Christ and His apostles. In fact, any miracles performed after the period of revelation would be worse than useless; they would be misleading.

The determining factor in this view, then, is the conception

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 35.

of the nature and purpose of miracles. It is from the perspective of this dominating idea that the New Testament records of the historical facts and of the divine promises are viewed. If all miracles are outlawed after, say, the 300 A.D., then certainly miracles of healing are out of the question as legitimate objects of prayer for modern Christians. To some earnest Christians this will seem like a very serious consequence. Can this view be sustained in its present form?

## 2. The view evaluated.

In evaluating this view the first thing to be noted is that its strongest point is its appreciation of the evidential value of miracles. This has not always been recognized in recent times. The older apologists stressed the miracles as evidence of the deity of Christ in such a one-sided and uncritical manner that a reaction against it became inevitable. The pendulum has swung to the other extreme. As a result, in more recent times it has been theologically fashionable to say that faith in Christ gives credence to the miracles, rather than that our belief in the miracles generates or augments faith in Christ. As usual in such cases, both extremes are wrong.

In the face of explicit statements of Scripture, it cannot be denied that the miracles of Christ and of His apostles did have, and were intended to have evidential value. This is indicated in the words of Christ:

Jesus answered them, I told you, and ye believe not: the works

that I do in my Father's name, these bear witness of me.<sup>24</sup>  
 . . . . .  
 Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me: or  
 else believe me for the very works' sake.<sup>25</sup>

It is further illustrated in the case of the paralytic borne of four. When the indignant scribes, aroused because Jesus forgave the man's sins, protested that only God can forgive sins, Jesus tacitly conceded their point and then asked whether it was easier to pronounce forgiveness of his sins or to command the man to rise up and walk. The obvious answer was that it is easier to say the words of forgiveness than to command a crippled man to walk. Then Jesus proceeded to heal the man, giving as His explicit reason, "that ye may know that the Son of man hath authority on earth to forgive sins."<sup>26</sup> In other words, Jesus' stated purpose in the performance of this miracle was to demonstrate incontrovertibly that He had unique spiritual authority, in fact, authority that both He and the scribes recognized as belonging to God. This is to say that here Jesus expressly intended this miracle to be evidential.

This same viewpoint appears elsewhere in the New Testament. Peter referred to the miracles of Christ as evidence of His being sent from God in his sermon at Pentecost: "Ye men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God unto you by mighty works and wonders and signs which God did by him in the midst of you, even as ye yourselves know."<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> John 10:25.

<sup>25</sup> John 14:11.

<sup>26</sup> Mark 2:10.

<sup>27</sup> Acts 2:22.

The writer to the Hebrews regarded the apostolic miracles as authenticating signs from God: "God also bearing witness with them, both by signs and wonders, and by manifold powers, and by gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to his own will."<sup>28</sup> This same view is expressed in Mark 16, where is said concerning the disciples after Christ's Ascension: "And they went forth, and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word by the signs that followed."<sup>29</sup>

In the face of such explicit Scriptural statements as these, it is manifestly impossible to deny that the miracles of Christ and His apostles were intended to have evidential significance. It is to the credit, then, of the interpretation here being evaluated that it recognizes that the miracles are in some sense credentials. The miracles in their intention and in their result do give strong and consistent witness to the divine person and work of Christ and to the divinely-ordained mission of His apostles.

The question still needs to be asked, however: If the miracles of Christ and His apostles are evidential in purpose and result, what is their bearing, to what do they give evidence? It is at this point that the interpretation under examination falls down. The miracles are regarded as accrediting doctrine. This was particularly evident in a quotation from Mozley given above in which he speaks of

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<sup>28</sup> Hebrews 2:4.

<sup>29</sup> Mark 16:20.

the miracles as "necessary for the proof of doctrine."<sup>30</sup> Warfield says that God has given to mankind "one organically complete revelation" and that since this all-sufficient revelation has been given once for all, the performance of miracles "cannot be expected to continue, and in point of fact does not continue, after the revelation of which it is the accompaniment has been completed."<sup>31</sup> Here it becomes clear that the inference from the evidential value of miracles to the necessity of their cessation depends upon the assumption that the evidence of the miracles is specifically related to the doctrinal content of the revelation they accredit. Christ and His apostles are given miraculous credentials, not merely to authenticate themselves as sent from God, but principally to establish as divine the teaching they brought. Their accreditation as revealers is in order to the acceptance of what they revealed as authentic divine revelation, so that once this has been accomplished, further miracles are not needed.

This view cannot be sustained, however, because the Gospels show that Jesus attributed quite another significance to the miracles, both His own and those He commissioned His disciples to perform. Two summary statements in Matthew give the first clue to the relation of healing miracles and the announcement of the kingdom of God.

And Jesus went about in all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues,

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<sup>30</sup> See above p. 34.

<sup>31</sup> Warfield, op. cit., p. 26.



and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of disease and all manner of sickness among the people.<sup>32</sup>

.....  
 And Jesus went about all the cities and the villages in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of disease and all manner of sickness.<sup>33</sup>

This relationship between healing miracles and the nearness of the kingdom of God is made very explicit when Jesus undertakes to defend Himself against the charge that He is casting out demons by the power of Beelzebub. He says: "But if I by the Spirit of God cast out demons, then is the kingdom of God come upon you."<sup>34</sup>

And this same relationship is twice indicated by Jesus in connection with the healing commission to the disciples. When He sent out the Twelve, the commission they received was two-fold. "And he sent them forth to preach the kingdom of God, and to heal the sick."<sup>35</sup> The direct and intimate relation between these two aspects of the double commission is explicitly declared by Jesus in the instructions to the seventy disciples when He first sent them forth. He instructs them to go from city to city and "heal the sick that are therein, and say unto them, The kingdom of God is come nigh unto you."<sup>36</sup>

It is abundantly evident from these passages that Jesus regarded

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<sup>32</sup> Matthew 4:23.

<sup>33</sup> Matthew 9:35.

<sup>34</sup> Matthew 12:28.

<sup>35</sup> Luke 9:2.

<sup>36</sup> Luke 10:9.

His own miracles and those of His disciples as evidential, not of the doctrinal content of their revelation, but of the coming near of the kingdom of God. It lies outside the province of this discussion to enter into the full New Testament significance of the New Testament terms "kingdom of heaven" and "kingdom of God." It may suffice to note the words of M. R. Vincent:

The kingdom of God is, essentially, the absolute dominion of God in the universe, both in a physical and a spiritual sense. It is "an organic commonwealth which has the principle of its existence in the will of God" (Tholuck).<sup>37</sup>

The kingdom of God, then, is both present and future, and is to be found wherever the will of God prevails. It is evident, therefore, that Christ did not regard the miracles as a sort of anticipatory authentication of the Chalcedonian Christology or any other static and fixed doctrinal content of revelation. They were rather the evidence of the nearness of God's reign, the sign of a kingdom not of this world for a moment brought nigh to those with the insight to perceive its presence.

On the basis of this interpretation of the evidential significance of the miracles of Jesus and His apostles, it no longer automatically follows from an appreciation of the evidential value of miracles that all miracles must have ceased. If healing miracles are the signs of the nearness of the kingdom of God, and if the kingdom of God is still a vital spiritual reality, even if not yet fully realized in human experience, there seems to be no reason why

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<sup>37</sup> Marvin R. Vincent, Word Studies in the New Testament, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1904, Vol. I, p. 310.

healing should not still in this present age announce the nearness of the kingdom. Therefore, Jesus' own interpretation of the evidential bearing of miracles does not at all eliminate the possibility of the continuance of miracles throughout all the ages of the church. Thus it is possible to join Trench, Mozley, Warfield and company in giving to the miracles their full evidential significance without following them in their inference that miracles of healing are no longer to be expected.

Thorough criticism of the view of miracles here being evaluated would take considerable time and space, and would involve much material not strictly germane to the present purpose. It has been necessary to go into the general interpretation of miracles in order to understand the reason for denying their present possibility. But it has been shown that the appreciation of the evidential value of miracles does not require the inference that miracles must have ceased early in church history. It might be shown further that the view under consideration has failed to take into account Jesus' compassion, which is so often given in the Gospels as the motive that moved Him to miracles of healing.<sup>38</sup> It is logical to suppose that the compassion that moved Christ to heal during the years of His public ministry may still lead Him to say to the believing sufferer, "Be thou healed."

Even more basic is the criticism that this position, particularly

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<sup>38</sup> Cf. Matthew 9:36, 10:1, 14:14, 15:32, 20:34; Mark 1:41, 6:34; Luke 7:13-15.

as it is presented in Mozley and Warfield, takes an altogether external view of miracles. It regards them as seals affixed to the outside of the envelope, rather than an intrinsic part of the revelation. But Alan Richardson writes:

The miracle-stories form an essential and inseparable part of the Gospel tradition, and their aim, like that of every other part of the tradition, is to deepen the understanding of the mystery of Who Jesus is and to set forth the implications of this recognition for the whole life and conduct of those who seek to follow Him.<sup>39</sup>

In the same vein Westcott says that the miracles "are essentially a part of the revelation, and not merely proof of it: pledges of a redemption wrought, foreshadows of a redemption realized."<sup>40</sup> If the miracles were part and parcel of the revelation of the character of Christ and of the redemption wrought through Him, then the continuance of miracles of healing would not in any way disparage the evidential value of the original Gospel miracles, but would indicate that the Risen Christ in glory still has the same loving, compassionate, sovereign character that He had while here on earth and that the effectiveness of the redemption He wrought has not diminished through the years.

But to continue the criticism of this view would only lead farther afield. These have been somewhat theoretical criticisms of the view here being evaluated. But what is the testimony of Scripture and of history?

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<sup>39</sup> Richardson, op. cit., p. 1.

<sup>40</sup> Westcott, op. cit., p. 3.

### 3. The validation of the view from Scripture and history.

#### a. The testimony of Scripture.

It is a striking fact, never adequately explained by the advocates of the early cessation of miracles, that the Scriptures do not anywhere indicate that miraculous gifts are soon to be discontinued. Thus Bushnell writes, "The scriptures nowhere teach, what is often assumed, the final discontinuance of miracles, and it is much to be regretted that such an assumption is so commonly made . . ."<sup>41</sup>

As a matter of fact, not only is the suggestion of the abatement of gifts conspicuously absent, but, on the contrary, there are indications that the glorified Christ will enable His followers to do more marvels. Acts 1:8, "But ye shall receive power, when the Holy Spirit is come upon you," was fulfilled for not only the eleven apostles, but for the one hundred-twenty. The promise of "greater works" in John 14:12 is to him "that believeth on me." The miraculous signs of Mark 16:17-18 are designated as "signs that shall accompany them that believe." At the very least, then, it must be said that the view that miracles must soon cease does not receive direct support from any explicit statement of Scripture.

Furthermore, the opinion which holds to "the confinement of the supernatural gifts by the Scriptures to those who had them conferred upon them by the Apostles,"<sup>42</sup> cannot be sustained. This is an attempt

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<sup>41</sup> Horace Bushnell, *Nature and the Supernatural*, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1907, p. 346.

<sup>42</sup> Warfield, op. cit., p. 24.

to restrict the distribution of spiritual gifts in such a way that they may be regarded exclusively as apostolic credentials. But if this were the Lord's intention, why did He confuse the issue by granting to the seventy the same gifts of healing? The apostle Peter assigned the outpouring of the Spirit with charismatic gifts to the sovereign act of God, not to his own apostolic decree.<sup>43</sup> The power of the indwelling Spirit by which Stephen and Philip wrought mighty works was not conferred upon them by the laying on of apostolic hands, for they were already Spirit-filled men even before their ordination.<sup>44</sup> Warfield adduces the case of the Samaritans in Acts 8 in support of his view, but Peter called the signs there granted the Samaritan believers "the gift of God,"<sup>45</sup> and he made no suggestion that it was his prerogative as an apostle to determine who should receive the gift. And Paul, who certainly regarded himself as a genuine apostle, though one "untimely born,"<sup>46</sup> received the gift of the Holy Spirit through the laying on of the hands of an otherwise unknown disciple.<sup>47</sup> All in all, it is impossible to make a case for the view that the miraculous spiritual gifts of the New Testament were always connected with the apostles in such a way as to make it evident that the said gifts were primarily apostolic credentials.

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<sup>43</sup> Acts 11:17.

<sup>44</sup> Acts 6:5.

<sup>45</sup> Acts 8:20.

<sup>46</sup> I Cor. 15:8.

<sup>47</sup> Acts 9:17.

The passages of Scripture usually brought forward by those who teach the present possibility of miraculous healings are rather summarily dealt with by Warfield. Mark 16:17-18 he throws out of court without a hearing on textual grounds.<sup>48</sup> James 5:14 exhorts Christians to pray in times of sickness, he says, but does not preclude the use of means and does not even hint that the healing promised is any more supernatural than normal cures.<sup>49</sup> He regards the Biblical cases of divine healing as irrelevant to the question of modern healings, and states that the enumeration of spiritual gifts in I Cor. 12 cannot be introduced as evidence.<sup>50</sup> He refers John 14:12 to purely spiritual works such as conversion.<sup>51</sup> It is difficult not to feel that Warfield's handling of these passages is somewhat arbitrary, and therefore unconvincing. It will be easier to form a balanced judgment after the opposing view has been presented, but it is already apparent that the Scriptures, if not decisive against the early cessation of miraculous gifts, at the very least cannot be said explicitly and directly to teach this view.

b. The testimony of history.

The intention to investigate the historical evidence for any particular miracle or miracles, whether Biblical, historical or

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<sup>48</sup> Warfield, op. cit., p. 167; but see above p. 5.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 169.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 173.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 174.

contemporary, was specifically disavowed above,<sup>52</sup> but it is in order to indicate briefly the bearing of the testimony of history in general, whether it is for or against the view that miracles ceased with the close of the apostolic or sub-apostolic age. It will not be unanticipated that the interpretations of the testimony of history vary in direct correspondence with the different views of miracles. For example, Percy Dearmer believes that a vast company of witnesses speak from the pages of history for the continuance of miracles.

He writes:

In the records of later Christian history we find the same entire absence of any distinction between neurotic and other diseases. It is true that there are many legends in Christian as in other history, and many inaccurate chroniclers, but if we apply to Christian history the same canons of evidence as are required in other departments of historical science, we find abundant records, based upon the best contemporary evidence, of organic disease being cured by religious means. And we find this evidence continued in modern instances.<sup>53</sup>

On the other hand, Warfield, speaking particularly of the patristic and medieval miracles, says:

We return now to the main question: What are we to think of these miracles? There is but one historical answer which can be given. They represent an infusion of heathen modes of thought into the church.<sup>54</sup>

To decide between these two interpretations by patient, exhaustive investigation of all the historical evidence is manifestly impossible here. However, it may be helpful to indicate the considered opinions

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<sup>52</sup> See above p. v.

<sup>53</sup> Percy Dearmer, *Body and Soul*, E. P. Dutton and Co., New York, 1909, p. 103.

<sup>54</sup> Warfield, op. cit., p. 61.



of two historians whose scholarly reputations are solidly established and whose partisanship in this controversy is not so pronounced as to prejudice their judgment. Adolf Harnack, describing some of the factors that account for the rapid expansion of Christianity in the early centuries, includes among those factors the healings performed by the Christians. He says:

Sick persons are brought to be healed by the missionaries, or by brethren who have been recently awakened; wild paroxysms of terror in God's presence are also soothed, and in the name of Jesus demons are cast out.<sup>55</sup>

And Henry C. Sheldon, speaking particularly of the period from 313 to 590, writes:

To accept the mass of reputed miracles, would be credulity rather than faith, a surrender of reason rather than its consecration, a disparagement of the Christian system rather than a tribute to its spirituality. At the same time, to affirm absolutely that there were no miracles in these centuries, is to indulge in the sheerest dogmatism.<sup>56</sup>

If these two respected historians have read the facts aright, the testimony of history, if not decisive against the theory of the early cessation of miraculous gifts of healing, at the very least cannot be said to offer any substantial support for the view. But what of the view that all Christians in every age of the church may be healed? Will this view stand up under close scrutiny any more successfully?

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<sup>55</sup> Adolf Harnack, *The Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries*, James Moffatt, translator, G. P. Putnam's Sons, New York, 1904, Vol. I, p. 252.

<sup>56</sup> Henry C. Sheldon, *History of the Christian Church*, Thomas Y. Crowell and Co., New York, 1894, Vol. I, p. 505.

### C. The View that All Christians May be Healed

#### 1. The view stated.

##### a. The view as stated by two of its leading representatives.

Although the prevailing view in Protestant circles since the time of Calvin has been that miraculous gifts passed away at a very early stage in church history, there has been a persistent minority that has strongly maintained that miraculous healing is the blood-bought prerogative of every Christian who has the faith to trust God for it. Two advocates of this view are particularly well-known. Henry Frost writes:

Among those persons whose names are closely associated with the doctrine of healing apart from physical means, two Americans stand out in particular conspicuousness. These are the late Dr. A. J. Gordon, of Boston, Massachusetts, and the late Dr. A. B. Simpson, of New York City.<sup>57</sup>

Each of these men presented his views on the question of divine healing at some length, Dr. Gordon in The Ministry of Healing,<sup>58</sup> and Dr. Simpson in The Gospel of Healing.<sup>59</sup> A survey of the salient points of these books will indicate the main elements in this view.

1) A. J. Gordon. Dr. Gordon begins to construct his case with a chapter entitled "The Testimony of Scripture." He adduces three main passages of Scripture in support of his view. The first of

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<sup>57</sup> Henry W. Frost, *Miraculous Healing*, Fleming H. Revell Co., New York, 1931-1939, p. 51.

<sup>58</sup> Gordon, op. cit.

<sup>59</sup> A. B. Simpson, *The Gospel of Healing*, Christian Publications, Inc., Harrisburg, 1915.

these is Matthew 8:16-17.

And when even was come, they brought unto him many possessed with demons: and he cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all that were sick: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken through Isaiah the prophet, saying, Himself took our infirmities and bare our diseases.

On the basis of this passage Gordon writes:

The yoke of his cross by which he lifted our iniquities took hold also of our diseases; so that it is in some sense true that as God "made him to be sin for us who knew no sin," so he made him to be sick for us who knew no sickness.<sup>60</sup>

This is to say, of course, that Christ made vicarious atonement for sickness as well as sin. Gordon goes on to indicate the logical inference from this: "If now it be true that our Redeemer and substitute bore our sicknesses, it would be natural to reason at once that he bore them that we might not bear them."<sup>61</sup> At first glance this is a rather startling doctrine, but further thought reveals that it is only what might be expected. Scripture indicates that there is a "subtle, mysterious, and clearly recognized relation of sin and disease."<sup>62</sup> Sin and suffering and disease are the result of the fall of man in Adam. But Christ is "the second Adam come to repair the ruin of the first,"<sup>63</sup> and if the redemption He brings is to be complete, it must restore physical as well as spiritual health.

The second passage emphasized is Mark 16:17-18.

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<sup>60</sup> Gordon, op. cit., p. 16.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., p. 20.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., p. 21.

And these signs shall accompany them that believe: in my name shall they cast out demons; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents, and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall in no wise hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick and they shall recover.

Gordon remarks:

It is important to observe that this rich cluster of miraculous promises all hangs by a single stem, faith. And this is not some exclusive or esoteric faith. The same believing to which is attached the promise of salvation, has joined to it also the promise of miraculous working.<sup>64</sup>

Gordon admits that there may be some problems in the interpretation and use of this passage, but he insists that most of the difficulties are caused by the Christian whose inadequate faith seeks to impose limitations that will reduce the scope of these promises to something that seems more reasonable. These promises have failed of fulfillment in the modern church only because there has not been appropriating faith to take hold of them and use them for the glory of God.<sup>65</sup>

The third passage used by Gordon as foundation for his doctrine of divine healing is James 5:14-15.

Is any 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 of faith shall save him that is sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, it shall be forgiven him.

This, says Gordon, is a command, and not merely a suggestion. It is as much a divine ordinance as baptism and the Lord's Supper.<sup>66</sup> And

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., p. 22.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., p. 24.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., p. 30.

if the prayer of faith is offered, "the promise of recovery is explicit and unconditional."<sup>67</sup>

The second part of Gordon's case he calls "The Testimony of Reason." The chapter is designed primarily to refute the view that miracles were a temporary manifestation intended exclusively for the period of the ministry of Christ and the apostolic church. He concludes the chapter as follows:

To sum up these observations then; is it reasonable to conclude that the office of healing through faith, resting on the same apostolic example, and held by the same tenure of divine promise and precept as the other functions of the Christian ministry, was alone designed to pass away and disappear within a single generation? . . . Is the Lord less likely to heal those who extend to him the touch of faith now that he is on the right hand of God, having all power in heaven and earth given to him, than he was while on earth?<sup>68</sup>

The largest part of the rest of the book consists in the citation of various testimonies to divine healing drawn from the pages of church history, from missionary fields and from persons who believe that they have been healed. What Gordon conceives to be the principal foundation stones of his doctrine has already been seen in the three passages of Scripture cited above. In general, his position is that the atonement of Christ made provision for bodily healing as well as salvation from sin, so that it is the right and duty of the Christian to receive in faith the New Testament promises of miraculous physical healing.

2) A. B. Simpson. The position on divine healing taken by

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p. 33.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., p. 56.

A. B. Simpson is much the same as that of A. J. Gordon. The most noticeable difference is not one of doctrine but of tone. Whereas Gordon is somewhat cautious and tentative in his presentation, Simpson is positive and dogmatic. His general approach is virtually the same, however. Like Gordon, his first chapter deals with the testimony of Scripture. He calls it "The Scriptural Foundation." It is significant that of the four passages on which he lays greatest stress, three are the identical passages Gordon adduced in support of the doctrine, viz. Matthew 8:16-17, Mark 16:17-18 and James 5:14-15.

On the basis of Matthew 8:17 Simpson asserts even more strongly than Gordon that healing is included in the scope of the atonement wrought by Christ on the cross. He writes:

Therefore, as He has borne our sins, Jesus Christ has also borne away and carried off our sicknesses; yea, and even our pains, so that abiding in Him, we may be fully delivered from both sickness and pain.<sup>69</sup>

Like Gordon, Simpson believes that Mark 16:15-18 is a permanent two-fold commission to preach and heal intended for all disciples of every age. He says: "Here is the commission given to them, the twofold gospel, and the assurance of His presence and unchanging power. What right have we to preach the one without the other?"<sup>70</sup>

And Simpson also holds that James 5:14 is a command meant to be absolutely binding upon the Christian church of all ages.

It is the Divine prescription for disease; and no obedient Christian can safely dispense with it. Any other method

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<sup>69</sup> Simpson, op. cit., p. 17.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., p. 21.

of dealing with sickness is unauthorized. This is God's plan.<sup>71</sup>

The fourth passage used by Simpson is John 14:12. He takes this verse as a promise to the apostles and to all who should believe in Christ. It embraces, to be sure, the geographical and numerical superiority of the disciples' works above their Master's; but since it includes doing the "same works" as well as the "greater works," it must mean that they would continue to heal the sick through the power of the Risen and Glorified Christ.<sup>72</sup> Several other passages are mentioned briefly, but these are the ones emphasized.

In the second chapter Simpson goes on to give what he calls "Principles of Divine Healing." Several of these are especially significant. The first principle Simpson lays down is, that "the causes of disease and suffering are distinctly traced to the Fall and sinful state of man."<sup>73</sup> This is but to say that in the final analysis Satan is responsible for all sickness.

Again, it (sickness) is distinctly connected with Satan's personal agency. He was the direct instrument of Job's suffering, and our Lord definitely attributed the diseases of His time to direct Satanic power.<sup>74</sup>

Now the logical inference from this, according to Simpson is that the atonement of Christ must be in part directed against sickness. "If sickness be the result of the Fall, it must be included in the

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., p. 25.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., p. 20.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p. 30.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., p. 31.

atonement of Christ, which reaches 'far as the curse is found.'"75  
 And this logical expectation that the scope of the atonement ought to be wide enough to include sickness is confirmed by other passages of Scripture, most notably Isaiah 53, Matthew 8:17 and I Peter 2:24. Concerning this last verse he writes:

Peter also states that "his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree. . . . by whose stripes ye were healed." In His own body He has borne all our bodily liabilities for sin, and our bodies are set free. That one cruel "stripe" of His-- for the word is singular--summed up in it all the aches and pains of a suffering world; and there is no longer need that we should suffer what He has sufficiently borne. Thus our healing becomes a great redemption right, which we simply claim as our purchased inheritance through the blood of His Cross.76

This leads to another principle of divine healing. Healing, as one of the blessings purchased for believers through the redemption wrought by Christ, must come through pure grace without the commingling of works. Every gift of God comes this way, and healing cannot be regarded as an exception. Simpson says:

There can be no works mingled with justifying faith. Even so, our healing must be wholly of God, or not of grace at all. If Christ heals, He must do it alone. This principle ought to settle the question of using "means" in connection with faith for healing.77

The third chapter is entitled "Popular Objections." Some of Simpson's comments on the more frequent objections raised against his doctrine of divine healing afford further insight into his view. For example, he discusses the objection that it is presumptuous to

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75 Ibid., p. 34.

76 Ibid., p. 35.

77 Ibid., p. 41.



claim healing from all disease as the prerogative of every Christian at all times because it may sometimes be the will of God to visit Christians with sickness. Simpson's answer is that the proviso, "If it be Thy will," must indeed enter into every prayer when the Christian is not certain as to God's will in a specific matter, but healing for all who come to God in simple faith is declared in Scripture to be God's fixed will. He writes:

The Word of God is forevermore the standard of His will and that Word has declared immutably that it is God's greatest desire and unalterable principle of action and will to render to every man according as he will believe, and especially to save all who will receive Christ by faith, and to heal all who will receive healing by similar faith. No one thinks of asking for forgiveness "if the Lord will." Nor should we throw any stronger doubt on His promise of physical redemption. Both are freely offered to every trusting heart that will accept them.<sup>78</sup>

Strictures regarding the use of means are given again, this time in dealing with the objection that God has provided means and intends them to be used. Simpson answers:

Without going further this much is clear: First, that God has not prescribed medicine. Secondly, He has prescribed another way in the Name of Jesus, and provided for it in the atonement, appointed an ordinance to signalize it, and actually commanded and enjoined it. And thirdly, all the provisions of grace are by faith, not by works or "means."<sup>79</sup>

And in the chapter entitled "Practical Directions," Simpson says of persons who have found the faith to pray for divine healing, "Of course, such a person will at once abandon all remedies and medical treatment."<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid., p. 79.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., p. 69.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., p. 90.

The rest of the book is taken up with a discussion of some of the healing miracles of the Bible and with a personal testimony to an experience of divine healing in the life of Dr. Simpson himself. Nothing essentially different from the principles already described appears in these pages.

A. B. Simpson, then, like A. J. Gordon held that the atonement of Christ includes in its scope physical healing, which is therefore the prerogative of every Christian who simply trusts the promises of God and abandons the use of other means.

b. The characteristic features of the view.

These summaries of the teachings of two representative Christian leaders who held that miraculous healing is the blood-bought privilege of every believing Christian have indicated with sufficient clarity the essential elements of this view. There are perhaps four principal factors. The first of these is the statement that all sin, suffering and disease must be finally attributed to the agency of Satan. All human sickness may ultimately be traced back to the Fall in Eden, and the Fall was, in the last analysis, the work of Satan.

The transition to the second point is made by assuming it to be a self-evident Scriptural truth that Christ came to undo the evil caused by Satan. If this is the case, then Christ could completely fulfil His mission only by destroying all the effects of sin, including disease. This He did. And since the work of Christ centered in the cross, it follows that His atoning death must have included in the scope of its redemptive results the healing of all

sickness. Healing through the atonement for every trusting Christian is the second point.

Now Christ frequently emphasized that He had come to earth to do His Father's will. If, then, the life of Christ with its many miracles of healing and the death of Christ with its provision for bodily healing were actually the Father's will, it follows that God must will that men should be healed from their diseases. The third point, then, is the statement that Christians never need to wonder whether their healing is the will of God, for He wills that all who so trust in Christ shall be healed.

And finally, it is evident that if healing is the gracious provision of God through the redemption wrought by Christ, it cannot be earned through personal merit or achieved by purely natural medical means. It is a cardinal spiritual principle that all the gifts of God are received through faith alone. Therefore, divine healing, if it is to be received at all, must be accepted on pure faith in Christ as Healer and in the Scripture as the infallible witness to God's immutable will to heal. There can be no admixture of works.

Four elements, then, form the basic structure of the view that all Christians may be healed: (1) All disease may ultimately be traced back to Satan; (2) the atonement of Christ includes provision for bodily healing; (3) it is always the will of God to heal the sickness of any of His suffering children; and (4) the use of means is incompatible with divine healing as the gracious act of God in Christ. Whatever variations there may be in superficial

details, these central points are held in common by all those who teach that divine healing is the blood-bought prerogative of every Christian.

## 2. The view evaluated.

The criticism of this view ought to be prefaced with the statement that its strongest point is the sincere desire evinced therein to pray for and obtain all that the manifold grace of God offers His children. The stalwart faith, the pious lives and the intellectual caliber of most of the leaders of the Christian healing movement have commanded the respect of all right-thinking people. These men have performed an important service in calling attention once more to the fact that the church has too often lived below her privileges in grace. Their influence has sent Christians back to their Bibles to see what promises of God they may have overlooked. Except for a few regrettable controversies, this has all been to the good.

Turning to the evaluation of the general view, the first point to be considered is the primary assumption that all disease may ultimately be traced back to Satan. Now, it should first be noted that Scripture makes very little attempt finally to explain evil. The fact of evil, the continuous activity of the personal agents of evil and the disastrous consequences of evil are prominent themes of Scripture, but there are only a few tantalizing hints concerning the origin of evil. This makes it altogether advisable to exercise extreme caution in dogmatizing about the ultimate origins

and causes of the evils that are the common lot of man.

On the other hand, there are some strong suggestions in the Scripture indicating that Satan is directly or indirectly the author of disease. Several of these are in the Old Testament and therefore outside the limits of this study. Three verses in the New Testament seem to indicate that at least some diseases are caused by Satan. When the seventy return to Jesus after their first preaching and healing mission, rejoicing in their victories over demons, Jesus tells them, "I beheld Satan fallen as lightning from heaven."<sup>81</sup> This is a somewhat difficult verse, but the simplest interpretation is that in some sense the victories over disease and demon possession constituted a defeat of Satan. More explicit is the description Jesus gives of a woman who had been bowed together by the spirit of infirmity for eighteen years: He calls her, "a daughter of Abraham whom Satan hath bound, lo, these eighteen years."<sup>82</sup> And Peter, preaching in the house of Cornelius, says of the public ministry of Christ, "he went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil."<sup>83</sup>

There seems, therefore, to be some Scriptural evidence for the general statement that many sicknesses are in some sense the work of Satan. Because Scripture concentrates on the realities rather than upon contrary to fact hypotheses, it is not expressly stated but it

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<sup>81</sup> Luke 10:18.

<sup>82</sup> Luke 13:11.

<sup>83</sup> Acts 10:38.

seems to be implied that if man had never sinned, there would be no disease. But to make this general statement is not the same as to say that every specific case of sickness can be traced to some particular personal or ancestral sin. Jesus made this point very clear. On one occasion His disciples asked concerning a case of congenital blindness, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man, or his parents, that he should be born blind?" His answer was quick and to the point: "Neither did this man sin, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him."<sup>84</sup>

On the other hand, some cases of sickness may be due to particular sins. This possibility seems to be envisaged in the last clause of James 5:15, "And the prayer of faith shall save him that is sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, it shall be forgiven him." And the same idea seems to be clearly implied by the warning of Jesus to the impotent man He had cured at Bethesda, "Behold, thou art made whole: sin no more, lest a worse thing befall thee."<sup>85</sup>

Therefore, it seems likely that it must be granted that, generally speaking, the diseases that plague mankind ultimately originate in the evil purpose of Satan and have been permitted by God to come upon mankind because of the Edenic Fall and the subsequent sin-laden history of the race. It is possible to go further and say that some particular cases of sickness are the result of

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<sup>84</sup> John 9:2-3.

<sup>85</sup> John 5:14.

specific sins. But this is not the explanation of every sickness.

And unless the Spirit of God reveals it to the conscience of the individual concerned, there seems to be no way to know which is the case in any particular instance. Therefore, the statement that Satan is, in the final analysis, the author of disease, while generally true, is to be used with the greatest reserve and caution in reference to individual Christians who happen to be afflicted by disease.

The view that bodily healing for every Christian is included in the provision of the atonement is somewhat more difficult to sustain. The key passage in the controversy is Matthew 8:16-17.

The verses read:

And when even was come, they brought unto him many possessed with demons: and he cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all that were sick: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken through Isaiah the prophet, saying, Himself took our infirmities, and bare our diseases.

This passage is the kingpin around which the whole case for the doctrine of healing in the atonement swings. Therefore its correct interpretation will do much to decide the case for or against the doctrine in question. As might be expected, this passage has almost as many interpretations as exegetes. Besides that of Gordon and Simpson, however, perhaps four more or less standard interpretations.

The simplest of these understands the passage to mean merely that Jesus effectively removed suffering and disease from the afflicted who were brought to Him. F. W. Green writes:

Matthew sees in the prophecy a reference to the healing work of Jesus, perhaps understanding by the words "taking" and

"bearing", the removal of them, for which there is evidence in medical Greek.<sup>86</sup>

Plummer thinks there may be a little more involved, although it is "impossible, and also, unnecessary, to determine what the Evangelist understood by 'took' and 'bare.'" He suggests:

But we may understand him as meaning that Christ's sympathy with the sufferers was so intense that He really felt their weaknesses and pains; and perhaps also that the physical exhaustion caused by the frequent exertion of healing power was very great.<sup>87</sup>

It is apparent that the interpretations thus far noticed have not dealt very seriously with the Isaiah reference. E. E. Anderson believes that this is the key to understanding the passage. Jesus felt the inward necessity of fulfilling the Isianic prophecy, not in a mechanical and external way to make His life square with prophecy, but "the necessity lay in Christ's loving nature and in His consciousness of His vocation, obedience to which was the fulfilment of the prophecy."<sup>88</sup> Anderson adds: "At the same time, Isaiah liii. had a vital share in mediating to Jesus the knowledge of His vocation, and therefore, Jesus would be conscious of fulfilling the prophecy."<sup>89</sup>

Some interpreters, noticeably the more conservative ones, go a little further. They relate the cross and the healing acts of

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<sup>86</sup> F. W. Green, *The Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1936, p. 157.

<sup>87</sup> Plummer, *Gospel According to Matthew*, p. 128.

<sup>88</sup> E. E. Anderson, *St. Matthew*, T. and T. Clark, Edinburgh, 1909, p. 56.

<sup>89</sup> Loc. cit.



Jesus, though not so directly as do Gordon and Simpson. For example,

Broadus says:

Christ took upon himself, and thus took away from us, sin and all the distresses produced by sin. These distresses were divinely appointed punishments of sin, and we may suppose that but for Christ's atoning work, God's justice would not have allowed them to cease. For believers in Christ, diseases and various mental sufferings do indeed still continue, yet not as punishments, but to discipline them for their good.<sup>90</sup>

G. Campbell Morgan writes in very much the same vein:

When He first dealt with physical need, He knew that His right to work these miracles was the right of the coming cross in which He should gather into His very heart the sin that lay at the back of all these things. In the cross was the right by which He distributed His virtues to the impure, and gave of His strength to the sick. . . . He acted as knowing that physical disability and moral malady are linked, and whenever He healed disease it was in the right of His coming Passion, in which He would deal not merely with these manifestations, but with the root of evil from which they sprang.<sup>91</sup>

And Morgan, like Broadus, adds an explicit statement that this does not involve the present privilege of divine healing for every Christian. He says:

All this does not mean that immediate physical healing is secured to us in the Atonement. This is not so, any more than immunity from natural dying is immediately secured. Ultimately freedom from disease and triumph over death are ours through the cross, but for the period of probation sickness is permitted, always with some value in the Divine purpose, even though at the moment we may not know what that value is.<sup>92</sup>

These four representative interpretations of the passage in question, it is clear, stand in opposition to any doctrine of present

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<sup>90</sup> John A. Broadus, Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew, American Baptist Publication Society, Philadelphia, n.d., p. 182.

<sup>91</sup> G. Campbell Morgan, The Gospel According to Matthew, Fleming H. Revell Co., New York, 1929, p. 82.

<sup>92</sup> Loc. cit.

healing privileges on the ground of the atonement. It will be noticed that these interpretations are not at all mutually exclusive, and there is no reason to doubt that each has laid hold upon a real factor in the total meaning of the passage. However, it is not necessary for the present purpose to reach a final decision as to the meaning of the passage. The principal thing is that every recognized exegete investigated in the course of this study accepted one of the above interpretations, or some variation thereof. No recognized scholar was found, outside the ranks of those pre-committed to find a doctrine of healing through the atonement, who interpreted these verses to mean that on the cross Jesus bore men's diseases in the same way He bore their sins.

This is not surprising because closer examination of the passage itself, especially in comparison with I Peter 2:24, which is used by Gordon and Simpson to bolster their view, reveals that these verses cannot bear the interpretation placed upon them by the advocates of divine healing for all. A fatal objection to this view is indicated by Bingham:

Now let us ask a question of Matthew. When and where did Christ bear our sicknesses, and fulfil Isaiah 53? And he replies, "at even" (Matt. 8:16), "in Capernaum" (Matt. 8:5). There is just the difference between bearing our sicknesses and bearing our sins that there is between Capernaum and Calvary. Christ bore the sicknesses and sufferings of mankind in His life, but our sins He bore in His death.<sup>93</sup>

Bingham goes on to note that the Greek words used conclusively show

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<sup>93</sup> Roland Bingham, *The Bible and the Body*, Evangelical Publishers, Toronto, 1921, p. 35.

that Gordon and Simpson have misconstrued this passage. He points out that the substitutionary word for "bear" used in the Septuagint's rendering of the Isaiah passage is deliberately dropped by Matthew in favor of another more common word which never is used in the Septuagint or the New Testament to signify propitiation or atonement. He writes:

The word used by Matthew (ebastasen), although quite common in the New Testament, is never linked with atonement, but is employed to express sympathetic bearing, as for example, when it occurs in Gal. 6:2, "Bear ye one another's burdens;" or as in Rom. 15:1, "Ye that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak."<sup>94</sup>

On the other hand, in I Peter 2:24 the word used for Jesus' bearing of sins is the same word [ἀνέκεν] used in the Septuagint version of Isaiah and a word which is often used in connection with sacrifice and offerings.<sup>95</sup>

Bingham adds one parting blow:

It is further worthy of note in comparing Matt. 8:16,17, with I Peter 2:24, that Peter in the statement "by whose stripes we are healed" uses a word for "healed" which can be applied either to physical or spiritual healing: whereas the word used by Matthew (theropeuo), is always associated with physical healing.<sup>96</sup>

This compelling argument on the basis of the passage itself makes it most evident that the interpretation which finds in these verses the doctrine of healing through the atonement simply cannot be sustained. And this linguistic argument is confirmed by logic.

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid., p. 36.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., p. 37.

<sup>96</sup> Loc. cit.

Warfield rightly asks:

What exact meaning can be attached, for example, to the phrase, "atonement for disease"? Is it intended to suggest that disease is a fault for which we are responsible? Atonement can be made only for a fault.<sup>97</sup>

Furthermore, the view that the scope of the atonement extends to wipe out all the effects of Satan's handiwork undertakes to prove too much. Sin is the result of Satan's handiwork. The same logic therefore that is used to prove the possibility of the present healing of all disease may also be employed to prove the most extreme form of perfectionism. Death, too, is the result of Satan's work. Why then must Christians die?

It is only too manifest that the theory that finds in the atonement provision for present bodily healing utterly fails before the tests of exegesis and logic. Since this is the pivotal point in the whole theology by which Gordon and Simpson sought to establish their teaching on divine healing, it appears that radical revision is necessary before the view can be regarded as Scriptural. It may be noted in passing that, while it cannot be said that present bodily healing is included in the atonement, the Bible does teach that the redemption wrought by Christ includes the whole man, body as well as soul. The relation of this to the present possibility of divine healing will be further discussed in the next chapter.

The third major point in the view under consideration is the statement that God always wills to heal every Christian. It is said

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<sup>97</sup> Warfield, op. cit., p. 175.

that Scripture declares it to be the immutable will of God to heal the bodies of His children of every infirmity. But this runs counter to the express statement of Paul in II Cor. 12:7-10. Paul believed that his "thorn in the flesh" had been given to him by God, as the use of ἐδόθη μοι in parallel passages clearly shows.<sup>98</sup> The benevolent purpose of the affliction, "that I should not be exalted overmuch," also demonstrates that the infirmity was bestowed by God. Whatever the exact nature of the affliction may have been, this passage is squarely opposed to the position taken by Gordon and Simpson, for the word Paul uses to describe it [ἀσθένεια] is the same word used in Matthew 8:17, and therefore, on their theory, was borne by Christ so that believers might be freed from such afflictions.

Furthermore, if the position is taken that God invariably wills to heal every one of His children, it logically follows that every professing Christian who is not healed must be regarded as a hypocrite who is actually not a child of God at all, or at best, a wayward child who has wandered outside the divine favor. Some advocates of divine healing have not shrunk from pressing this position to its logical consequences. For example, T. J. McCrossan explains why Timothy had stomach trouble:

Paul saw that there was much in Timothy which must be eliminated e'er God could effectively use him. He was too prone to listen to gossip (I Tim. 4:7). He was too much interested in athletics, as the writer once was (I Tim. 4:8). He did not study enough

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<sup>98</sup> Plummer, Second Corinthians, p. 348.

(II Tim. 2:15). He did not pray and meditate on God's word enough. (I Tim. 4:14-15). He was too fond of theological controversy (I Tim. 6:5). He was inclined to show partiality, etc. (I Tim. 5:21).<sup>99</sup>

Such exegesis is so far beside the point that it is difficult to refute. However, it is obvious that to pursue rigorously through the New Testament the exegetical principle that all apostolic advice and counsel implies that everything prohibited was already actually being practiced by the recipients of the letter would result in a rather low view of the moral life of the apostolic church. Certainly Paul does not hint that Timothy's spiritual and moral shortcomings are the cause of his stomach trouble. He seems to think it is something that may be cured by the medicinal use of wine. And, in any case, if the purpose of an affliction is the upbuilding of the spiritual and moral character, that affliction cannot be regarded as contrary to the will of God.

Christian experience is likewise opposed to this view. Radiant testimonies to the sense of the immediate presence of God on the lips of saints of God who have spent long years on beds of affliction have convinced by far the largest section of the Christian church that sickness cannot always prove that the sufferer is outside the will of God. Such persons have sometimes been used of God as they could never have been, had they kept their health. On the other hand, the doctrine that every Christian should by faith receive bodily health daily from the healing Christ has sometimes produced grievous

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<sup>99</sup> T. J. McCrossan, *Bodily Healing and the Atonement*, T. J. McCrossan, Publisher, Seattle, 1930, p. 62.

spiritual bondage in those who have suffered illness. As a matter of fact, this was true in the case of both Gordon and Simpson in their latter years. Henry Frost writes of these two men:

Each one, for a considerable time, fell under a spiritual cloud, each concluding that he had lost fellowship with God and was suffering from His displeasure and chastisement. But each one was finally delivered from spiritual darkness and was brought back into the light, though this did not result in prayer for healing being answered and healing being given.<sup>100</sup>

Thus, experience corroborates the teaching of Scripture. The doctrine that God invariably wills to heal all His children of every physical infirmity simply cannot be sustained.

The fourth element in the view here under consideration is the statement that faith in God for divine healing is incompatible with the use of means. But this position conflicts with Christian experience. For example, the manifest blessing of God upon the use of medical missions both in the opening up of new mission fields and in their continued service to needy communities shows plainly that neither physicians nor medicines are outside the will of God. Doctors of the deepest piety have felt no conflict between their professional and their Christian vocations. There is not the slightest evidence that Luke, whom Paul called "the beloved physician,"<sup>101</sup> ever abandoned his medical practice. In fact it is more reasonable to think that his medical skill was one reason Paul chose him for a travelling companion.

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<sup>100</sup> Frost, op. cit., p. 67.

<sup>101</sup> Colossians 4:14.

Further, this position is illogical. Frost points out the inconsistency. Persons who abhor the use of doctors and drugs regard figs as food provided by God to be received and eaten with thanksgiving. And when they eat them, they find them helpful to the digestion. But if a physician takes some figs, presses out their juice, puts it in a bottle marked "Syrup of Figs" and then prescribes it as medicine, they regard it as a temptation of Satan rather than the gift of God.<sup>102</sup>

Again, the position receives no support in Scripture. Jesus used both clay and spittle in some of His healing miracles. He never spoke disparagingly of physicians. In fact, the story of the Good Samaritan seems to endorse the use of remedies. And His saying, "They that are whole have no need of a physician, but they that are sick,"<sup>103</sup> implies that doctors fill a necessary place and meet certain legitimate needs. Paul prescribes wine, apparently as a medicine, when Timothy has been troubled by chronic indigestion.<sup>104</sup>

And further, the application of this same principle to the Christian life as a whole would lead to the most flagrant antinomianism. If all use of means is incompatible with receiving the gifts of God through faith, then the Christian may neglect prayer, Scripture reading, attendance at public worship, the sacraments and moral conduct. In fact, if Simpson's dictum that the Christian who would be healed

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<sup>102</sup> Frost, op. cit., p. 103.

<sup>103</sup> Mark 2:17.

<sup>104</sup> I Timothy 5:23.



by faith must at once abandon all medical treatment be taken seriously, then the same principle would seem to indicate that the Christian who would be saved by faith must immediately stop attending the mid-week prayer service. Thus, the fourth element, too, of the position taken by Gordon and Simpson seems to be against Scripture, reason and Christian experience.

Therefore, it appears that the view here under evaluation has failed before the tests of Scripture and of Christian experience. Of the four basic elements in the view that all Christians may enjoy present bodily healing as a blood-bought prerogative only the first has successfully survived closer scrutiny, and that only with some reservations and qualifications.

#### D. Summary

It was the purpose of this chapter to review the two traditional interpretations of the New Testament teaching on divine healing. These two positions were presented first through the writings of representative advocates of the respective views and then in terms of their characteristic features. Some evaluation of each view was given.

The first view described was that represented by R. C. Trench, J. B. Mozley and B. B. Warfield. Their position with respect to the continuance of miraculous gifts of healing was seen to be the logical development of their conception of the function of miracles. Their basic assumption was that miracles were primarily intended to authenticate revelation. The miracles wrought through the apostles,

like those performed by Christ, were first of all intended to mark them infallibly as divinely-ordained messengers, and thus to authenticate their teaching as divine revelation. The logical inference from this interpretation was that the accompanying miracles would cease with the conclusion of the period of revelation. On this view, then, miracles of healing ceased with the close of the apostolic or sub-apostolic age.

In the evaluation of this view it was pointed out that its strongest point is its appreciation of the evidential value of miracles. For it was found that Scripture definitely assigns that significance to the miracles of Christ and to those performed by His disciples. But the bearing of the evidence supplied by the miracles was seen to be that they were signs of the kingdom of God, rather than authentication of doctrine as such. And since the kingdom of God is a present spiritual reality, there is no reason in principle why miracles of healing may not still in this present age reveal the presence of the kingdom of God. It was also pointed out that this view fails to do justice to the compassion of Jesus as a motive for His healing miracles, and that it makes the miracles external adjuncts to revelation rather than an intrinsic part of the revelation. And, further, the testimony of Scripture and history proved to be against the view that all miracles ceased at the close of the apostolic age.

The second major section of the chapter discussed the view that all Christians may have bodily healing as a present privilege of grace on the ground of the atonement of Christ. The two leading

representatives of this position were A. J. Gordon and A. B. Simpson. This view was found to include four basic elements. All disease is attributed to the work of Satan. But since the work of Christ includes in its scope the restoration of everything lost in the Fall, it is held that the atonement provides for the bodily healing of every Christian. Christians never need to wonder whether it is the will of God to heal in any particular instance, for the Scriptures declare the immutable will of God to heal all who call upon Him in faith. Divine healing, as the gracious gift of God in Christ, must be received through faith alone, and therefore all use of means is excluded.

In the evaluation of this view it was pointed out that the statement that Satan is the source of disease must be used with caution in specific instances of Christians afflicted with some illness. It was seen that the key passage commonly used to support the doctrine of Christ's substitutionary bearing of men's sicknesses cannot properly be interpreted to support this view. The teaching that God wills complete physical health for every Christian was found to be contrary to Scripture and to Christian experience. And the assumption that all use of means is incompatible with faith in Christ's ability and willingness to heal was seen to be contrary to experience, logic and Scripture.

In the final analysis, therefore, both traditional interpretations of the New Testament teaching on divine healing were found to be inadequate. There were some useful insights in each, but neither is satisfactory as an attempt to give a full-rounded view of the

Scriptural teaching on this subject. Neither takes into full account the whole range of the New Testament data, and therefore each is one-sided and incomplete. There is need, therefore, for a doctrine of divine healing that preserves the values of these traditional interpretations without falling heir to their shortcomings. The next chapter is an attempt in this direction.

### CHAPTER III

#### A PROPOSED DOCTRINE OF DIVINE HEALING

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### A PROPOSED DOCTRINE OF DIVINE HEALING

#### A. Introduction

The examination of the two traditional interpretations of the New Testament teaching of divine healing conducted in the last chapter plainly revealed that these commonly accepted views cannot be regarded as adequate in their present form. Neither of them takes into account all the New Testament data accumulated in the survey undertaken in the first chapter. In spite of their undoubtedly sincere protestations of loyalty to the Scriptures as the final standard of faith and practice, these interpreters have not seen the Scriptural teaching steadily and they have not seen it whole. As a consequence, large sections of the evangelical church are without adequate guidance in their thinking on this difficult subject.

The practical urgency of this situation is intensified by the fact that the siren voices of many sub-Christian and non-Christian cults are luring those afflicted with mental and physical infirmities from the church with grandiloquent promises of healing. It is true that some are enchanted only temporarily; eventually they return to the church disillusioned and perhaps chastened by their experience. But many have been permanently lost from the church of Christ because they have not found in the regular denominations the forthright declaration of Christ's power to heal that they have needed. Therefore, the Christian church needs, now perhaps as never before, a

sound doctrine of divine healing, solidly based on the Scriptures. The church needs a doctrine of divine healing that avoids the extremes and vagaries of the super-belief healing cults without qualifying and reducing the divine promises until the supernatural has been eliminated. The church needs a doctrine of divine healing that acknowledges that God has chosen to bless scientific medical research in its outreach for more knowledge of the human body and of materia medica, but at the same time recognizes that the God of the Bible still lives and still has sovereign liberty to intervene in a saving way whenever and however He chooses.

In view of this need, it is the purpose of this chapter to attempt to sketch the basic outlines of a doctrine of divine healing that takes into account the New Testament data on this subject in such a way as to conserve the enduring values of the traditional interpretations without repeating their errors. The first step will be the discussion of four basic principles which must determine any doctrine of divine healing that is genuinely Biblical. Then, on the basis of these principles, the final step in the process will be the attempt to formulate a proposed doctrine of divine healing in a series of propositions concisely stating the main points of the New Testament teaching on this subject.

### B. Basic Principles

A sound interpretation of the Scriptural teaching on any given subject cannot be established on the basis of two or three proof-texts examined in isolation from the rest of the Bible. Rather, the basic

guiding principles that determine the content of any important doctrine must be drawn from the Bible as a whole, and then, when the broad outlines have been established, closer consideration of the individual passages will furnish additional details. Now, in connection with the New Testament teaching on divine healing there are perhaps four basic principles which must constitute the core of any sound doctrine on this subject. These four principles are now to be discussed.

#### 1. Christ's redemption the ultimate ground of healing.

The first basic principle to be considered involves the fundamental fact that all the benefits of grace received by Christians are made possible by the redemption of Christ. Henry Frost writes:

It is never to be forgotten that the death of Christ on Calvary's cross opened wide the flood-gates of God's love to all of His dear children. God always loved; but our sin had fast closed to us the gates of His stored-up love in Christ. When, however, Christ had put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself (Heb. 9:16), then those gates were flung wide open and love was poured forth upon us in a very torrent (Rom. 8:32).<sup>1</sup>

Scripture plainly teaches that sin had separated men from God and that the saving benefits of knowing Him were restored to them only through the atoning death of Christ. Paul writes to the Ephesian Christians concerning that radical change of their status because of the redemption wrought in Christ:

Ye were at that time separate from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of the promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus ye that once were far off are made high in the blood of Christ.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Frost, op. cit., p. 152.

<sup>2</sup> Ephesians 2:12-13.



Paul writes to the Colossians in a similar vein, reminding them that it was the will of God through Christ "to reconcile all things unto himself through the blood of his cross; through him, I say, whether things upon the earth, or things in the heavens."<sup>3</sup>

Among the benefits graciously offered to men on the ground of the redemption of Christ there are provisions for men's bodies as well as for their souls. I Cor. 6:20 suggests that the scope of Christ's redemption includes the body: "For ye are bought with a price: glorify God therefore in your body." And the specific term "the redemption of our body" occurs in Rom. 8:23. In other words, the salvation wrought by Christ includes the whole man, not his spiritual nature alone. Now, if the redemption of Christ includes benefits for the body, then the connection between the atonement and the healing miracles of Christ made by Broadus and Morgan in their comments of Matt. 8:17 probably must be accepted. Broadus said: "These distresses were divinely appointed punishments for sin, and we may suppose that but for Christ's atoning work, God's justice would not have allowed them to cease."<sup>4</sup> Morgan wrote:

He acted as knowing that physical disability and moral malady are linked, and whenever He healed disease it was in the right of His coming Passion, in which He would deal not merely with these manifestations, but with the root of evil from which they sprang.<sup>5</sup>

This, then, is the measure of truth in the view held by Gordon

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<sup>3</sup> Colossians 1:20.

<sup>4</sup> Broadus, op. cit., p. 182.

<sup>5</sup> Morgan, op. cit., p. 82.

and Simpson. The ultimate ground of divine healing is the redemption of Christ in just the same general way that Satan is the ultimate cause of all disease. If there had never been a Satan, presumably there would be no disease; and similarly, if Christ had not died to reconcile men to God, men's bodies would not be healed any more than their souls would be saved.

This is not at all to say that Christ's redemption provides present healing as the inalienable right of every Christian, however, for in the New Testament the redemption of the body is mainly an eschatological concept. Paul assigns the redemption of the body to that time when the final climax of the purpose of the ages has come, and the whole universe enters into the state of final perfection. He writes to the Romans:

For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth together until now. And not only so, but ourselves also, who have the first-fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for our adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body.<sup>6</sup>

I Cor. 15:22-25 contemplates the continuing power of death and decay until the final establishment of the Christ's kingdom. Paul tells the Philippians that only when the Saviour comes again from heaven will He "fashion anew the body of our humiliation, that it may be conformed to the body of his glory."<sup>7</sup> In the meantime, Paul expects the usual natural forces of dissolution to cause the deterioration of his body. "Wherefore we faint not; but though our outward man is

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<sup>6</sup> Romans 8:22-23.

<sup>7</sup> Philippians 3:21.

decaying, yet our inward man is renewed day by day."<sup>8</sup>

The theology that takes into account all these facts must therefore distinguish between the redemption wrought by Christ as objectively complete when first accomplished, and its subjective application in the lives of believers. There is a definite ordo salutis in the experience of the believer, although ideally he has all the benefits of salvation from the time the redemption was wrought upon the cross; or, for that matter, in the mind of God they have been his eternally. Experientially, however, the benefits of the redemption follow in regular sequence. In this train of benefits one of the last is the final redemption of the body, which takes place at the coming of the Lord, as the passages quoted above indicate. Divine healings, then, are proleptic physical benefits, foreshadowing the final redemption of the body. And they are therefore to be received as gracious gifts of God made possible only through the redemption wrought by Christ.

Thus, the first basic principle in the New Testament teaching on divine healing is the recognition that physical healing, like every other gift of God, comes to men only on the ground of Christ's redemption. When men by their sins had forfeited every right to divine favor, Christ offered Himself on their behalf the perfect sacrifice, winning back for them what they had lost. And now He grants to them, according to His will, healing of body as the earnest of their physical inheritance in Him.

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<sup>8</sup> II Corinthians 4:16.

2. The difference between the miracles recorded of Christ and those recorded of His disciples.

A second guiding principle for the formulation of a doctrine of divine healing grows out of the observation of the fact that in the New Testament records there is an appreciable difference in quality and quantity between the miracles performed by Christ and those wrought through His disciples. The most notable difference is the fact that none of the disciples is described as performing any miracles of sovereignty over nature, such as changing water to wine, multiplying loaves of bread, or stilling a tempest. In the Book of Acts, for example, the miracles described are all concerned with physical healing, except for the temporary blindness that fell upon Elymas at the word of Paul,<sup>9</sup> and that is in the same general area of the supernatural. And the proportion of the narrative devoted to description of miracles is much less than in the synoptic gospels. It is evident that the importance of miracles in the ministry of the first evangelists is considerably less than in the public ministry of Christ.

However, this distinction between miracles in the ministry of Christ and those in the ministry of the early evangelists must not be pressed too far. It is true that the only miracles actually described in Acts are healing miracles, but it is by no means certain that no others were performed. In fact, some of the summary statements seem to indicate that a variety of miracles was performed.

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<sup>9</sup> Acts 13:11.

This may be indicated, for example, in Acts 2:43, "And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles." It is possible that "wonders" is intended to indicate the psychological effect of the miracles, while "signs" suggests their deeper meaning as portents of spiritual truth. But it may be doubted whether this can suffice to explain all such passages.<sup>10</sup> Paul indicates that among the Corinthians the Holy Spirit had given to one "gifts of healings . . . and to another workings of miracles,"<sup>11</sup> which suggests that, at Corinth at least, some possessed gifts that enabled them to work miracles other than healings. Furthermore, among Jesus' most striking miracles were the raising from the dead of Jairus' daughter, the widow of Nain's son and Lazarus. But there were at least two instances of this among the disciples, viz. Peter's raising of Tabitha and Paul's raising of Eutychus. Therefore, on the basis of these facts, it is clear that the distinction between the miracles performed by Christ and those wrought through His disciples is one of degree rather than kind.

Perhaps the most significant difference in the two sets of miracles lies in the manner of their performance. When Christ healed, He could simply say, for example, to a leper, "I will; be thou clean." But the disciples had to refer their miracles to a higher Power. Peter said to the lame beggar, "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk." And he later explained the miracle to the crowd as wrought

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<sup>10</sup> See, e.g., Acts 4:30, 5:12, 6:8, 8:13, 14:3.

<sup>11</sup> I Corinthians 12:9-10.

through the power of Christ's name: "And by faith in his name hath his name made this man strong, whom ye behold and know."<sup>12</sup> This indicates the fundamental difference between the miracles of Christ and those of His disciples, or at least, the difference most significant for the purposes of this study. Christ worked His miracles by means of the divine powers resident in Himself. After a woman had touched the hem of His garment and received healing, He said, "I perceived that power had gone forth from me."<sup>13</sup> In contrast, the disciples were careful to make it clear that the healings they performed were not wrought through their own powers,<sup>14</sup> but rather they were wrought by the glorified Christ Himself. It may be noticed in passing that this fact explains why the distinction between the miracles of the Gospels and the miracles of Acts must not be pressed too far. For it is actually the same Jesus Christ of Nazareth who is working the signs and wonders, whether in person or through His disciples.

The second guiding principle, then, in the formulation of the New Testament teaching on divine healing involves a recognition of the fact that there is a qualitative and quantitative difference between the miracles performed by Christ and those wrought through His disciples. In the early church miracles played a real part, but still their role was minor in comparison with their importance in the public ministry of Christ. However, the one category of miracles

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<sup>12</sup> Acts 3:16.

<sup>13</sup> Luke 8:46.

<sup>14</sup> See, e.g., Acts 14:15.

that shows the least diminution is the miracles of healing, and there is no reason to suppose from the New Testament records that any cases became "too difficult" for Christ simply because He was now working through His disciples. The import of this observation, then, for the formulation of a New Testament doctrine of healing is not such as to diminish the expectation of healing miracles, but simply to temper the hope by the recognition of the historical fact that New Testament miracles after the time of Christ are generally somewhat less numerous and less wonderful in character. The practical value of this principle is that it explains why the church today, even where faith is active, does not experience the abundance of miracles characteristic of the Gospel records of our Lord, though it does not undermine confidence in Christ's power to work miraculously for His people when He so wills.

### 3. The importance of faith.

The third basic principle in the formulation of the New Testament teaching on divine healing involves the importance of faith. One of the strongest emphases of the Bible is the stress upon the necessity of faith for right relations with God.<sup>15</sup> D. S. Cairns finds this basic in the entire New Testament. He writes:

Surely when we sum up what He [Christ] says about the blessings of the Kingdom, and the need for faith, we have precisely the same emphasis as in St. Paul and in the Epistle to the Hebrews. In the Gospels the blessings of the Kingdom are the filial life in God, the hearing and answering of the prayer of faith, and the glory of the life to come. In St. Paul we have the same things expressed in terms of his rabbinical training

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<sup>15</sup> See, e.g., Hebrews 11:6.

in analogies borrowed from the life of his time--justification, adoption, sanctification, and the manifestations of the Spirits, gifts of "charismata" of "prophecy," "healing," "miracles"--the potent influences that had come into the life of the Church with Pentecost, and, finally, the blessedness of life in the coming aeon, when sin and death should be finally broken. All come from God by faith.<sup>16</sup>

The importance of faith as a decisive factor in miracles of healing is particularly noticed in such passages as Acts 3:16, and 14:9, and it is implied in Acts 9:34, 40. Faith frequently appears in connection with the healing miracles of the Gospels, and Cairns thinks that it is assumed in the cases in which it is not specifically mentioned.<sup>17</sup>

There are other interpreters, however, who do not find faith so crucial in healing miracles. For example, Fitzgerald, after discussing the question at some length, writes:

The above considerations seem to show conclusively that the enormous importance which Christian thought has attached to faith as an element in the healing of disease is not justified by anything in the attitude or the teaching of Jesus. He did not in any instance demand faith on the part of the sick person as a prerequisite to the cure.<sup>18</sup>

It is true that this statement must be evaluated in the light of the fact that Fitzgerald is writing in the interests of his peculiar theory of healing. But it is not without importance that he can say in support of his case, "In sixteen of the healing miracles, the narratives do not mention faith or belief, either as existent or

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<sup>16</sup> Cairns, op. cit., p. 209.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 72.

<sup>18</sup> David B. Fitzgerald, *The Law of Christian Healing*, Fleming H. Revell Company, New York, 1908, p. 117.



non-existent."<sup>19</sup> It is worthy of note, however, that he speaks only of Christ's miracles. For it is altogether possible, in view of the difference already noted between the miracles of Christ and those of His disciples, that Christ might be able on occasion to dispense with a positive and responsive attitude in the patients, even though the disciples may ordinarily require such cooperation from those needing healing.

In any case, it is evident that the demoniacs, for example, could not have had a clear and intelligent faith in Christ. And some rational persons did not have anything like full-orbed faith when they were healed, either. The impotent man at Bethesda did not even know who Jesus was,<sup>20</sup> and the man blind from birth only knew his Healer as "the man that is called Jesus."<sup>21</sup> Beth points out that the faith called for is not a full-blown theological belief, but a receptive attitude. He writes:

We are compelled, however, to affirm, according to the synop-  
tists, that absolute faith is not a condition for experiencing  
a miracle, but the direction of the spirit toward God, and the  
will aspiring after God, which on their part by the perception  
of the miracle can indeed become strengthened.<sup>22</sup>

Richardson writes in a similar vein:

The Gospels nowhere suggest that Jesus could not have worked  
a miracle if the belief that a cure would be effected had been

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 111.

<sup>20</sup> John 5:13.

<sup>21</sup> John 9:11.

<sup>22</sup> Karl Beth, *The Miracles of Jesus*, Eaton and Mains, New York, 1907, p. 33.

lacking; they stress the necessity of faith, but it is the faith which illuminates the inner meaning of the miracle, without which Jesus does not consider it to be fitting to accomplish the healing (cf. Mark vi.5 f.)<sup>23</sup>

Faith, then, is the proper attitude of receptivity that often leads to miracles. But faith cannot work miracles, nor is it an instrument to pry miracles from an unwilling Christ. It can only bring men into the right relation with the Worker of miracles.

This is not to suggest that faith is unimportant. The three foundational passages that form the core of the case for modern divine healing all regard faith as intimately related to the securing of that gift of God. Mark 16:17-18 speaks of exorcisms and healings as being among the signs accompanying "them that believe." The person who is to do greater works than those performed by Christ is designated in John 14:12 as "he that believeth on me." And in James 5:15 it is the "prayer of faith" that will save the sick. It may be noted that the belief in view in these passages is first of all the general sort of faith in Christ that is meant to be characteristic of all Christians. There is no suggestion that there must be some special kind of faith in Christ as Healer, as frequently is taught among groups that stress divine healing.

Thus, the third basic guiding principle in the New Testament teaching on divine healing is the importance of faith. Active trust in the power and love and gracious purpose of Christ brings men close enough to Him that they can touch the hem of His garment and be made

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<sup>23</sup> Richardson, op. cit., p. 63.

whole. Faith generates in men the receptivity that perceives and responds to the deeper significance of the healing miracle. In this way bodily healing has more than physical effects; the miracle also becomes spiritually redemptive. This is the sort of miracle Christ delights to work.

It is a mysterious and wonderful thought to believe that man, if he cannot completely determine his destiny, is at least able to place himself within or without the orbit of divine favor by his faith or disbelief. Dawson writes:

If God be, in truth, self-limited by the creation of free-beings, it is reasonable to believe, that more power is given to Him to work His will for physical health, when human wills coincide with the Divine will. Intercessory prayer is a powerful instrument for good, whatever be the underlying explanation of its potency.<sup>24</sup>

If it is true that intercessory prayer somehow facilitates divine healing, then certainly it is also true that the personal faith of the one afflicted places him in the position where God is most able and most likely to act savingly on his behalf. Such things are too wonderful for human comprehension, but the consistent emphasis throughout the New Testament upon faith reveals that faith is basic in right relations with God. A fundamental principle, therefore, in the doctrine of divine healing is the importance of faith.

#### 4. The sovereignty of God.

The fourth basic element in the New Testament teaching on divine healing is the principle of the sovereignty of God. The

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<sup>24</sup> Dawson, op. cit., p. 143.

importance of this principle has not always been seen by those who have attempted to formulate the New Testament doctrine on this subject. The sovereign liberty of God in the bestowal of His gifts of healing has been denied either by so sharply restricting miracles to periods of revelation that God is, in effect, made a prisoner of His own decree, or else by making faith the single condition of healing, so that the decisive factor is finally the human rather than the divine will.

But the New Testament is emphatic in its declaration of the divine sovereignty. Frost has seen this more clearly than any other of the writers consulted in the course of this study. He devotes a full chapter to "Christ's Sovereignty."<sup>25</sup> He points out that Christ exercised the highest degree of sovereignty in connection with His mission as a whole and in connection with His miracles of healing. Christ came at a certain point in history to a certain few villages and cities of a certain people in a certain country. He healed only a relatively small proportion of the sick of Palestine, to say nothing of the sick of the world. He proved in three instances that He could heal at a distance,<sup>26</sup> and therefore presumably could have healed the diseased of the whole world; but He did not choose to do so. Divine sovereignty was exercised in the bestowal of gifts of healing. For the writer to the Hebrews says of the evangelistic ministry of the disciples: "God also bearing witness with them, both

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<sup>25</sup> Frost, op. cit., pp. 130-144.

<sup>26</sup> Mark 7:24-30, Luke 7:2-10, John 4:46-54.

by signs and wonders, and by manifold powers, and by gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to his own will."<sup>27</sup> And Paul indicates the divine sovereignty in the distribution of spiritual gifts, including healing gifts, when he writes:

And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondly prophets, thirdly teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, divers kinds of tongues. Are all apostles? are all prophets? are all teachers? are all workers of miracles? have all gifts of healings? do all speak with tongues? do all interpret?<sup>28</sup>

One of the most fundamental axioms of Biblical theology is the sovereignty of God. And when this fact is coupled with these observations of the sovereignty exercised by Christ with respect to His own miracles of healing and with respect to the bestowal of gifts of healing in His church, it becomes evident that a basic element in the New Testament doctrine of divine healing must be the principle of the divine sovereignty.

The practical importance of this principle can be seen in the fact that its recognition counteracts the fundamental errors of the two traditional interpretations of divine healing. Due recognition of the sovereign liberty of God forbids the presumptuous attempt to circumscribe the saving activity of God by confining His miraculous working to certain special periods of revelation. It ill becomes men thus to set limits as to what God can and will do. Bushnell wisely observes:

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<sup>27</sup> Hebrews 2:4. (Italics supplied.)

<sup>28</sup> I Corinthians 12:28-30.

As little does it follow that, if the canon of scripture is closed up, there is no longer any use, or place, for miracles and spiritual gifts. That is a conclusion taken by a mere act of judgment, when plainly no judgment of man is able to penetrate the secrets and grasp the economic reasons of God's empire, with sufficient insight to affirm any thing on a subject so deep and difficult. There may certainly be reasons for such miracles and gifts of the Spirit, apart from any authentication of new books of scripture. Indeed, they might possibly be wanted even the more, to break up the monotony likely to follow, when revelations have ceased, and the word of scripture is forever closed up; wanted also possibly to lift the church out of the abysses of a mere second-hand religion, keeping it alive and open to the realities of God's immediate visitation.<sup>29</sup>

On the other hand, the due recognition of the sovereignty of God forbids the attempt to set certain conditions that are supposed invariably to lead to divine healing. A typical example of this is the following, given by T. J. McCrossan under the title, "What Conditions Must Saints Meet to be Healed":

- (1) We must make an absolute surrender to God: a 100% consecration. I John 3:22.
- (2) Our hearts must be pure. Ps. 66:18.
- (3) We must remember that our bodies belong to God, and that every organ, without one single exception, must be used in a way well pleasing to Him and for His glory, not for our own selfish or sensual pleasure. I Cor. 6:19, 20. Rom. 12:1.
- (4) We must exercise a genuine expectant faith in the promises of God. Mark 11:22-24.<sup>30</sup>

Such attempts to set conditions supposed invariably to lead to divine healing presuppose that God always wills to heal every one of His children. But it is evident that this seriously curtails the sovereign liberty of God. As a matter of fact, it is clear from Scripture that God sometimes purposes suffering for His children. For example, Peter writes, "Wherefore let them also that suffer according to the

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<sup>29</sup> Bushnell, op. cit., p. 431.

<sup>30</sup> McCrossan, op. cit., p. 77.

will of God commit their souls in well-doing unto a faithful Creator."<sup>31</sup> Elsewhere he says, "For it is better, if the will of God should so will, that ye suffer for well-doing than for evil-doing."<sup>32</sup> And Paul told the Philippian Christians, "To you it hath been granted in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer in his behalf."<sup>33</sup> Such verses as these make it clear that God does not always will perfect ease and comfort for His children, and there is no reason to suppose that bodily infirmities may not be among the things Christians sometimes have to suffer, even as there was given to Paul a "thorn in the flesh."

On the basis of these considerations, it is evident that a guiding principle of the New Testament teaching on divine healing must be the due recognition of the sovereignty of God, not only because this is fundamental to all Biblical theology, but also because this principle counteracts basic errors in the traditional interpretations of divine healing. It may be added that there is, of course, nothing about the principle of divine sovereignty to discourage the utmost freedom and confidence in prayer. The promise, "The prayer of faith shall save him that is sick, and the Lord shall raise him up,"<sup>34</sup> is subject to no more conditions than such general promises as, "And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father

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<sup>31</sup> I Peter 4:19.

<sup>32</sup> I Peter 3:17.

<sup>33</sup> Philippians 1:29.

<sup>34</sup> James 5:15.

may be glorified in the Son."<sup>35</sup> And in actual experience it probably will often be found, as Bingham says, that "the question of whether God intends to heal along natural or supernatural lines will generally be indicated in the consciousness of those called in to pray."<sup>36</sup> If the paradox between divine sovereignty and prayer cannot be finally resolved, at least for the Christian the edge is taken from the apparent contradiction by his confidence that informing the omnipotent will is almighty love, which was able to use even the murderous intent of Satan against His Son in His plan for life-giving atonement.

There are, then, at least four basic principles that must be determinative in any truly Scriptural doctrine of divine healing. They are: (1) Christ's redemption is the ultimate ground of all miracles of grace, including bodily healing; (2) there must be due recognition of the historical fact that there was a qualitative and quantitative difference between the miracles of Christ and those performed by His disciples; (3) active faith in the power and love of Christ is the principal factor in establishing and maintaining the kind of relationship to Christ that makes healing miracles most likely; and (4) Christ still exercises divine sovereignty in the bestowal of His gifts according to His own will.

#### C. The Proposed Doctrine of Divine Healing Stated

The next step in the process of arriving at the New Testament

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<sup>35</sup> John 14:13.

<sup>36</sup> Bingham, op. cit., p. 65.



teaching on divine healing is, on the basis of these guiding principles, to state in a series of propositions the basic outline of a New Testament doctrine of divine healing. It is not here intended to present in full detail the complete New Testament teaching, which would require exhaustive exegesis of every relevant Biblical passage, but rather the purpose is to set forth the central facts that must determine the basic character of the view as a whole.

1. The redemption wrought by Christ brings salvation to the whole man: body, soul and spirit. The scope of the atonement is as broad and as deep as the ruin perpetrated by Satan, and ultimately erases every physical and spiritual effect of the Fall. The redeemed, therefore, enjoy physical as well as spiritual benefits from the atoning work of Christ.

2. Christians now enjoy in actual experience only an earnest of the inheritance that in the consummation of the ages will be their full possession. The full redemption of the body from every disease is the promise of the gospel for the life to come, but it is not to be claimed as the inalienable right of every Christian in this present dispensation. The church may now rationally expect neither the plethora of miracles that characterized the ministry of Christ, nor the total absence of disease that will characterize life in the New Jerusalem come down from God.

3. There are explicit Scriptural promises of physical healing to be received from God through faith. Mayor says of James 5:15, "There

can be little doubt that St. James is here describing a miraculous cure following the prayer of faith."<sup>37</sup> If miraculous divine healing is an extraordinary event in the church today, it well may be that the principal reason is a general want of appropriating faith.

4. Ultimately, over-ruling divine providence determines who is to be healed. God, "who worketh all things after the counsel of his will," exercises sovereign liberty in the bestowal of His gifts of bodily healing. In His infinite wisdom and grace He may choose to heal persons whose prayer of faith consists in a desperate plea to some unknown higher power; and, on the other hand, He may see that a mature saint would be brought into richer and deeper fellowship with Him through a siege of illness.

5. Apart from direct divine guidance to the contrary, in times of sickness the Christian should seek the best medical care available. He should regard the physician's skill and materia medica as the gifts of God to be received with thanksgiving.

6. When a Christian becomes sick, as in every other situation he should turn to God in prayer. Recognizing that sickness sometimes is the consequence of some particular sin, he should ask the Spirit to reveal to him any spiritual failure or bodily neglect that may be the cause. When he is sure of unhindered fellowship with God in Christ, he should seek divine guidance. Unless God specifically reveals

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<sup>37</sup> Mayor, op. cit., p. 232.

that it is His will to heal directly and miraculously, the Christian should seek the needed medical treatment, uniting with these natural means the prayer of faith, inasmuch as he knows that ultimately all healing is of God, whether it is obviously supernatural or comes through the natural processes men call "normal." Because his main motive in life is to glorify God, the Christian should then cheerfully submit to the will of God in reliance upon His sufficient grace, whether he is miraculously healed or healed according to natural processes, or whether it is given to him to suffer. As he continues to offer the prayer of faith, God will heal or give grace to sustain, according to His infinite wisdom and gracious purpose.

#### D. Summary

It was the purpose of this chapter to propose a doctrine of divine healing that would do justice to the New Testament data and at the same time avoid the errors of the traditional interpretations. The groundwork for the statement of the doctrine was laid in the discussion of the basic guiding principles that must determine any truly Scriptural teaching on divine healing. These principles were found to be four in number. They were: (1) Christ's redemption is the ultimate ground of healing; (2) there is an appreciable qualitative and quantitative difference between the miracles performed by Christ and those wrought through His disciples; (3) on the human side, faith is important in divine healing as the attitude of receptivity that makes healing miracles most likely; (4) on the divine side, God exercises sovereign freedom in the bestowal of His gifts of healing.

Then, on the basis of these principles there was given a series of propositions concisely stating the essential elements in the New Testament doctrine of divine healing. These propositions represent the conclusions growing out of this study of the New Testament teaching on divine healing.

## CHAPTER IV

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

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#### A. The Problem Restated

It was the purpose of this study to discover what the New Testament teaches on divine healing. The particular emphasis of the investigation lay upon the question of the present possibility of miraculous healing with a view to establishing on the basis of the New Testament data a sound doctrine of divine healing that might serve to guide evangelical Christians in their thinking and practice in connection with this difficult subject. There was no intention to examine historical evidence for any specific miracles, nor to defend the idea of miracles philosophically. The purpose was simply to determine what explicit and implicit teaching there might be in the New Testament records that would warrant prayer for miraculous healing in the church today.

#### B. Summary

The first stage in the investigation was a survey of the data found in the relevant passages of the New Testament. This material was presented in two sections, the first setting forth the data from the Gospels and Acts, the second, the data from the epistles. In the Gospels and Acts it was discovered that Christ gave a commission that included power and authority to heal to the Twelve, to the seventy and, finally, to those who should believe. It was found that

this commission was immediately put into practical use by a progressively widening circle: the apostles, the seventy, the deacons, and then unnamed believers. It was significant that no time limit was stated or implied. Nor was there any suggestion that miraculous gifts were waning. The only limits suggested were those implied by the frequent use of "faith," with its suggestion of the importance of active trust in Christ, and "in the name of Christ," with its suggestion of Christ's power and sovereign choice in healing miracles.

In the epistles three lines of investigation proved rewarding in the search for further data concerning divine healing. It was discovered that Paul named gifts of healings and miracles in lists of the spiritual gifts distributed in the church by the Holy Spirit. His own miracles were so well known among the churches that he could appeal to them as evidence of his divinely ordained mission. On the other hand, it was clear from the narratives that Paul himself suffered for some time painful and humiliating physical affliction. Three of his most useful assistants were seriously sick at various times, and while they recovered eventually, there was no suggestion that they were miraculously healed, or even, for that matter, that Paul prayed for such supernatural healing. Finally, the Epistle of James offered specific instructions for dealing with the problem of sickness in the church. The prayer of faith, accompanied by anointing by the elders of the church, was explicitly said to bring healing of body, and, if needed, forgiveness for sin. This practice was apparently regarded as the regular procedure in the church. Thus,

the testimony of the epistles strengthened the impression gained from the Gospels and Acts that miraculous divine healing was regarded in the early church as a part of normal Christian experience. The only mitigating factor was the discovery that Paul and some of his assistants suffered illness at various times. On the whole, however, the survey of the New Testament data gave the impression that physical healing was a normal concomitant of the gospel of Christ.

The second major division of this study was the consideration of the two traditional interpretations of the New Testament teaching on divine healing. It was found that, although both interpretations are sincerely intended accurately to represent the Scriptural teaching on this subject, yet they place such different constructions on the New Testament data that their conclusions are diametrically opposed. Each of these views was examined and evaluated.

Although they differed in minor points, R. C. Trench, J. B. Mozley and B. B. Warfield took the same essential position. They maintained that inasmuch as the primary purpose of miracles was to serve as credentials authenticating divine revelation, there was no reason to expect their continuation for any considerable time after the close of the period of revelation. Thus, their fundamental assumption concerning the function of miracles was the determining factor in their position, and it led directly to the conclusion that all miracles, including, of course, miracles of healing, ceased with the apostolic or sub-apostolic age. In the evaluation of this view their strongest point was seen to be their appreciation of the evidential value of miracles, which was found to be a valid New



Testament concept. But their mistake lay in their understanding of the significance of the evidence. They took the miracles as the authentication of doctrine, while Christ and the New Testament writers were found to regard the miracles as evidence of the presence of the kingdom of God. This meant that miracles could no longer be assigned exclusively to periods of revelation; for there is no reason, in principle at least, why they might not still bear witness to the reality and presence of God's kingdom. The view in question was also found to be inadequate because it ignored the compassion of Jesus as a motive that often moved Him to perform miracles of healing, and because it made the miracles external adjuncts to revelation, rather than an intrinsic part of the revelation. And it was discovered that there is no explicit evidence in Scripture for the cessation of miracles. It also seemed to be contradicted by the testimony of history.

The second traditional interpretation was that represented by A. J. Gordon and A. B. Simpson. Four factors were found to form the core of this view: (1) All disease is the work of Satan; (2) the atonement of Christ provides present bodily healing as the prerogative of every Christian; (3) it is always the will of God to heal any who pray for healing with expectant faith; (4) healing must be received by faith alone and therefore all use of means is excluded. In the evaluation of this view it was seen that Satan may be regarded as the author of disease in general, but the fact must be used with the greatest caution in reference to particular cases. On the other hand, it was found that the contention that the atonement of Christ provides

present healing as the prerogative of every Christian could not be sustained. Proper exegesis of the key passage in the question revealed that the doctrine is without Scriptural support. And it was seen to be contrary to reason and to Christian experience. Likewise, the Scriptures were found to oppose the statement that God always wills the healing of every Christian. The prohibition of the use of means was seen to be contrary to Christian experience in medical missions. And further it was pointed out that the application of the same reasoning to salvation by faith would lead to antinomianism.

Thus, the examination and evaluation of the two leading traditional interpretations of the New Testament data on divine healing revealed that both these commonly accepted views must be regarded as inadequate. Their rejection made it necessary to seek further for a doctrine of divine healing that does justice to all the facts.

The final stage in this study was the proposal of a doctrine of divine healing. The necessary groundwork for this statement was laid through the consideration of the basic guiding principles that must form the heart of any attempt to state the full New Testament doctrine. These principles were found to be four in number: (1) Christ's redemption is the ground of all the gracious gifts of God, including bodily healing; (2) there must be due recognition of the historical fact that there was a qualitative and quantitative difference between the miracles performed by Christ and those wrought through His disciples; (3) active faith in Christ is the principal

factor in establishing and maintaining that kind of relationship to Him that most often leads to miracles of healing; (4) Christ still exercises sovereignty in the bestowal of His gifts of healing.

On the basis of these principles there was drawn up a series of propositions concisely stating the basic outline of the New Testament teaching of divine healing. The first of these indicated that the scope of the redemption wrought by Christ included benefits for the whole man, body, soul and spirit. In the second it was declared that Christians now enjoy only the earnest of their full inheritance, so that complete redemption of the body must be assigned to the future life. The third proposition called attention to the divine promises of healing and urged the church to more active faith in these promises. The fourth stated that overruling divine providence finally determines who receives healing. The fifth proposition indicated that apart from divine guidance to the contrary, the Christian should not hesitate to use the best available means whenever faced with sickness. The last suggested the proper steps in the Christian procedure for dealing with sickness.

These propositions represented the conclusions reached in the course of this study of the New Testament teaching on divine healing. They seem to do justice to the main facts of the relevant New Testament passages, and they have avoided the basic errors of the traditional interpretations.

### C. Conclusion

It has been pointed out in these pages that the church needs

a doctrine of divine healing which is solidly based on the Scriptural teaching. This study has been intended as a step in the right direction. To the extent that it succeeds in accurately representing the New Testament teaching, it is hoped that it may prove useful in getting before Christians a sound doctrine of divine healing. The importance of guiding earnest seekers along such Scriptural lines as have been here indicated is tragically illustrated in the wrecked lives and lost souls so often found in the super-belief healing cults. If the church does not awake to her supernatural resources for physical healing, but continues to slumber all oblivious to neglected privileges of grace, God will require at her hand the souls that have gone elsewhere seeking relief for physical needs. The church must proclaim Christ as the Saviour whose atonement makes provision for the whole man and who therefore can satisfy every human need. Thus to declare the whole counsel of God involves declaring the New Testament teaching on divine healing. It is prayerfully hoped that this study may suggest lines of thought that will lead to the beating heart of this doctrine which so clearly reveals the gracious purpose of God in Christ; to whom be the glory forever.

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