

## Should We Expect The Miraculous?

Is God still in the business of healing on a regular basis? Does God still speak words of prophecy to his people? Does God still give the supernatural gift of tongues to those whom he so chooses? There are three opinions to these questions: 1) The liberals believe that God never did any of these kind of miracles - If they are right then Jesus was never raised from the dead and our faith is in vain (1 Corinthians 15:17). 2) Many Evangelicals believe that the dispensation of the miraculous gifts has ceased. The gifts of healing, prophecy, tongues, etc. were only temporary until the Bible was written and so now they are no longer necessary. 3) God is the same today as he was yesterday (Hebrews 13:8) and therefore still has the miraculous gifts in his plan. I believe the third position is the only position that can be validated from the Bible. Let's look at the Biblical evidence:

Is there any indication from Scripture that the miraculous gifts would continue in the local church? Yes! First let's look at the book of Acts. In Acts 2 after the crazy experience of tongues which some claimed was due to drunkenness Peter addressed the crowds to explain that this was in fulfillment of Joel chapter 2. He said in verse 17, "In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit...." He then goes on to describe what this outpouring will look like, mentioning prophecies, dreams and visions given to the common servants both men and women. He said that these last days will culminate with signs, wonders, the sun being darkened and the return of Jesus (Acts 2:17-21). My question is: Have we passed the last days? Has Jesus returned yet? No, therefore we should still expect these things to take place, namely prophecies, dreams, visions as well as tongues which was the manifestation Peter was seeking to explain. If that is not enough Peter goes on to explain in verse 39 that "The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off - for all whom the Lord our God will call." This doesn't mean that everyone can have any or all of these gifts, but they are available to the Church as the Lord sees fit.

We then read through the book of Acts and see that the miraculous was common and expected. There is no indication that the miraculous was waning at the end of the book (Acts 28:5-9) or that it was supposed to cease once the Apostles died. The book of Acts seems to be a training manual using the history of the early church to teach us how the church is to be affective against the onslaughts of the world, the flesh and the devil. We need the supernatural power of God today just as much if not more than they needed it then. Their example in 4:29-31 teaches us to pray for and expect the miraculous. Often the miraculous was used to lead people to Jesus who otherwise may not have listened (8:6; 13:12; 14:3). These gifts were not just given to the Apostles as 6:8 and 8:6 indicate (neither Stephen or Philip were Apostles), though there does seem to be a special anointing given to the Apostles (4:33; 5:12,15; 19:11-12).

When we look at the local church setting in the Epistles of 1 Corinthians, Galatians and Hebrews, miraculous gifts are seen as common place. Galatians 3:5 says, "Does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you because you observe the law, or because you believe what you heard?" He uses their experience of the miraculous as proof of the orthodoxy of his gospel. In Hebrews 2:4 the writer says God testifies to the gospel of salvation through miracles and spiritual gifts. 1 Corinthians 12-14 has extensive teaching on the use and abuse of the spiritual gifts. In

1:7 Paul commends the Corinthians for not lacking in any of the gifts. He corrects their abuse of the gifts but never demands they stop using the gifts. In fact he concludes his section on the gifts by saying in verses 39-40:

Therefore my brothers, be eager to prophecy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues. But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way.

Today many churches could certainly use the same corrective teachings, especially concerning the gift of tongues but we should not throw out the baby with the bath water. Paul said he wished everyone spoke in tongues (14:5) and that he was glad he spoke in tongues more than anyone (14:18). He also said he wished everyone could be celibate in 1 Corinthians 7:7, so his wish does not prove that everyone can speak in tongues (12:28-31 indicates the opposite), but it does show his high approval of the gift. Chapter 13 clearly reveals that the gifts will not cease until Jesus returns (just like Acts 2). It says in verses 8-13 that prophecies, tongues and knowledge will pass away or cease (that is no longer be necessary) when the perfection comes. Some have tried to explain the perfection coming as the Bible being completed but this is very poor exegesis. The context agrees with the vast majority of Christian theologians and expositors that the perfection refers to the second coming of Jesus. Certainly knowledge hasn't passed away yet. We definitely don't see more clearly than the Apostle Paul. Since the perfection refers to the return of Jesus, then that means these gifts mentioned won't cease until his return. It would be silly for Paul to give such an elaborate teaching on the gifts in chapters 12-14 if they were going to cease in a few years. The Bible is for all of us not just a few that happened to be in the right time frame. These gifts are given to the common people (12:7-11) for the common good and were expected to be used on a regular basis even in the worship service or small group (14:26).

Mark 16:15-18 is still the great commission for today:

Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well.

The conclusion of Mark records that "the disciples went out and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with them and confirmed his word by the signs that accompanied it." We still need this confirmation from the Lord. As we see the end of the world approaching and the demonic activity increasingly destroying this world we need God to raise up a standard against the devil. God is doing just that. As his people read the Bible and believe in God's miraculous power we will see his mighty hand once again perform the miraculous and subdue the enemy. Certainly the devil will bring counterfeits and impostors; he always has in the past. This is his way of trying to discredit the real move of God. Use discernment; don't believe everything you hear, but do believe God is moving and he wants to use you.

You performed miraculous signs and wonders in Egypt and have continued them to this

day, both in Israel and among all mankind, and have gained the renown that is still yours (Jeremiah 32:20).

Hello ,

I read the paper on why God wants to heal everyone. I know that Dennis Bennett means well and is not like some of the charlatans who make the same claim in order to get rich, but I do believe that he has been deceived and is teaching a doctrine that is very harmful to the body of Christ. I have enclosed a paper I wrote some time ago confronting the claims of the Health, Wealth and Prosperity Movement, but I also wanted to address some of the things Dennis said.

First of all he makes his case by building a straw-man and then tearing it down. A straw-man is a character that the person claims represents the opposing view when in actuality no one or at least very few believe that view. It is proposed that there are only two choices, that of the author and that of the straw-man. I have never met anyone that believes God causes people to be sick for no other reason than that He might be glorified by their being sick. I am sure there are a few but they certainly don't represent the vast majority of Christianity. Dennis is absolutely right in saying God does not take any pleasure in seeing His people sick. There are cases in the Bible where God caused sickness on His people because of their sin, but in all other cases it is simply God allowing sickness (not causing it) to take place. He allows it because He can bring something good out of it. Job is an example. God did not inflict his suffering but He did allow it. Paul is another example. God did not inflict Paul's thorn in the flesh, that is why it is called a messenger of Satan, but He did allow it to keep Paul humble (see 2 Corinthians 12). It was not God's will to heal Paul. It was not God's will to heal Trophimus (2 Timothy 4:20). It was not God's will to heal Timothy (1 Timothy 5:23). And what about those who die? According to this view God doesn't want anyone to die accept possibly by martyrdom. If we say that this view excludes those for whom it is God's will to take home by natural causes, we fail to see two things: First, "natural causes" means the body wastes away and fails to function properly. Dennis says "The salvation Jesus offers includes the health and strength of the physical body." This would rule out "natural causes" as God's will. The second thing we would fail to see is that the proof-texts for God wanting to heal everyone don't say anything about the exception of death by "natural causes." Therefore, when taken to its natural conclusion, this view states that it is not God's will for anyone to die. The Bible says "Just as man is destined to die once..." God has destined all of us to die (with the exception of those who are raptured) even though this was certainly not His original plan and even though He grieves every time one of His children has to go through the agony of death.

Dennis also says that if you allow the possibility that God doesn't want to heal everyone you cannot have a successful healing ministry; you will have a "trickle" at best. John Wimber and the Vineyard movement disprove this. Because the Vineyard documents their cases of healing it can be shown that they are successful (see the book Healing: Fiction, Fantasy, or Fact by David Lewis which carefully documents this). John Wimber and the Vineyard movement specifically reject the idea that God wants to heal everyone.

Getting back to the straw-man, according to the Bible we are encouraged to continue to pray for healing unless God specifically says no (as he did to Paul in 2 Corinthians 12). So just because we believe that God doesn't want to heal everyone doesn't mean we should stop praying for healing. We still continue to practice faith in God. I sense that Dennis has an unbiblical view of

faith. He seems to teach that faith for healing means that you believe God **will** heal you; this is not what the Bible teaches. Matthew 9:28-29 says:

When he had gone indoors, the blind men came to him, and he asked them, "Do you believe that I am able to do this?" "Yes, Lord," they replied. Then he touched their eyes and said, "According to your faith will it be done to you"; and their sight was restored.

This passage teaches that faith is believing that God is "able" to heal, not that He "will" heal. Mark 1:40-41 says:

A man with leprosy came to him and begged him on his knees, "If you are willing, you can make me clean." Filled with compassion, Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!"

Notice there is no rebuke for lack of faith because this man did have proper faith - faith in God, faith that He had his best interest in mind, faith that God would take care of him, faith that God "could" heal him, but not necessarily faith that God "would" heal him.

Dennis did have some excellent points. "Faith is simply openness to receive what God has promised" has truth in it. It is true that many are not healed because of barriers in themselves. We do need to seek God with all our heart for His healing the barriers in us before we will have more success in physical healing. Quite often it is our fault for lack of faith, but not always. As you will see in the paper I have enclosed, this doctrine that God wants to heal everyone can be very destructive and should not be held by Christians because it is not true.

My practice has always been to teach the Bible. When I find myself in disagreement with a brother or sister I feel it is necessary to discuss the issue, especially when it is a potentially destructive issue. My practice is also to be able to completely accept a brother or sister who disagrees with me. I believe in the unity of the body of Christ even when we disagree. We should learn how to disagree agreeably. I hope that I have persuaded you. If I have not I still love you and accept you just the same. You are still fully welcome in our body. To disagree can often be good for us when done in love. It helps us accept one another; it helps sharpen and sometimes even change our position.

Finally I always encourage people to pray for healing. I believe in healing. I believe we will see many healed, but we will not see total healing until Christ returns.

[Another letter to a skeptic] I appreciate your responding to my article. As I said in my article, I believe the Bible teaches that we should expect the same kind of miraculous power as they experienced in the Bible. You asked if God's ways of working must be identical. Certainly not. I too believe in the complete sovereignty of God. Our job is not to convince God our idea is a good idea. Our job is to find out what God is doing and get in on that (John 5:19). I also agree with you that the Apostles did have a special anointing (Acts 4:33; 5:12) that probably will not be matched by any of us. But the book of Acts goes on to show normal people like us being used mightily in the miraculous (Acts 6:8; 8:6). I also admit I am a skeptic when I see the miracles on TV because I have no way of testing them. Our church is a small church right now but we have seen some wonderful works of God. I haven't seen the blind given sight or the lame immediately walk [I have now] so I would agree that the miracles we have seen so far are not identical with the New Testament miracles. Most of them are gradual and partial. I have seen colds and headaches disappear immediately. I saw a man who was in a coma for days with a prognosis of no hope from the doctor rapidly recover after prayer and he is now leading a normal life - and his family is now in church. The pastor in Tampa received prayer for muscle disorders that the doctors could not cure or even explain and he was completely healed. This could have been psychologically caused but I doubt it. I saw a street bum who had problems with his intestines and was left for dead by the doctors because they said they didn't get the infection out and could not operate anymore because of Randy's condition. We prayed and he was out of the hospital in two days - the infection was gone. My step dad was healed of epilepsy after prayer. He suffered grand mal seizures all of his life. We prayed and felt God's power like electricity go into his head. He felt nothing. We sensed that God would tell him when he was healed. A month later his dog began to have seizures and so he quit taking his pills. He has not had a seizure in 12 [25 years now] years. This too could have been psychosomatic (he had a very rough childhood), but the dog having seizures seems to have been a sign from God that God healed him. I prayed for a lady in our church [Nancy Losey] who had heart problems. She felt she wasn't supposed to have surgery so she tried collation (a new type of treatment). It wasn't working but she felt like God said he would heal her. One week she came to me and said that after prayer she has felt 100% better and now doesn't have heart problems. Her husband [Tony] was diagnosed with clogged arteries and was scheduled to have an angioplasty (spelling?). We prayed for him in kinship [Life Group] two days before he was scheduled to see the doctor again. They brought him in and rechecked him and there was no blockage at all. I do not know why we don't see more miracles - the sovereignty of God, our half-hearted seeking of God and our lack of faith are probably some of the reasons. But I do not base my beliefs on my experience; I base them on the Bible. If the Bible teaches one thing and my experience is another, I know which one is wrong. I don't expect to have modern day Apostles. But I do expect God's power to be seen in much greater strength, especially as the end is approaching. I hope this has helped.