

Is healing in the atonement?

By this Pentecostals and Charismatics mean that healing is an automatic privilege for Christians, conditioned only on faith. If people believe in their healing then they will be healed. What are we to make of this?

Firstly, God has given us laws by which we can remain healthy and prevent disease. Many afflictions today are the result of ignoring those laws. In general sickness, precautions taught by God (sensible diet, exercise, sleep, cleanliness, sanitation and personal hygiene) aid full recovery. Secondly, God has ensured that there are various ways that the body is kept well. There is natural healing, whereby the body applies inbuilt self-healing mechanisms; in fact doctors state that they never heal anyone, they just allow the conditions for the body to heal itself. However, for serious matters God has always provided doctors and medical practitioners to give aid when the body cannot deal with the level of the problem. Finally, on some occasions God chooses to heal supernaturally when it pleases him. He has also provided a means of healing in the church (James 5:14-15); but such occasions are rare in comparison to the earlier points and we cannot presume upon God's will.

The gift of healings was especially used by God to authenticate the message of the Gospel (Heb 2:4) and was usually done at the hands of the apostles or their delegates. This was to demonstrate the divine origin of the Gospel amongst the many cults claiming to be of God at the time. Though the gift has not been rescinded, the purpose of it is rarely necessary since the divine origin of Christ's message was established with the formation of the early church. There has been clear testimony to Christ's divinity and resurrection for 2,000 years. Even when the chief apostles were alive, we note that there is no example of a sick Christian being healed in the NT. Not one! However, there are several examples of Christian workers being sick and not healed (e.g. Timothy, Trophimus). This alone should give us God's perspective. If God is sovereign, then he has a purpose in allowing his children to be afflicted and the NT teaches the value of embracing it with faith, patience and thanksgiving (e.g. Acts 14:22; Rm 8:28; 2 Cor 1:5-7; Col 1:11; Phil 3:10). It is a lie to teach that it is not God's will that any should suffer, or that you should be healed of every illness. The claim that a failure to be healed is due to a lack of faith in the victim is cruel heresy. The texts that God heals you and doesn't give disease (Ex 15:26; Deut 7:15) were applicable to Israel at that point in the wilderness, as was the associated promise that their clothes would not wear out (Deut 8:4; Neh 9:21). In Ps 103:4 it refers to the scope of salvation, including renewed youth. Other refs. are to healing the sickness of sin (Isa 6:10, 53:5 cf. 1 Pt 2:24). If we claim these all mean physical healing, then we should also never buy any clothes, ever have sorrow or ever grow old. The claims and healings of Charismatic healers are no different from occult faith healers – they are lies.

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Understanding Ministries

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