

DIVINE HEALING

Scripture Reading: Acts 19:11, 12; I Timothy 5:23

“Do you believe God heals today?” We have been asked this question countless times, and our answer is always the same. “Yes, God heals today but not through the so-called divine healers.” We also like to point out that while God is fully capable of providing instantaneous, miraculous cures, these are the exception rather than the rule in this dispensation.

One of the promises God made to Israel was that if she would obey the covenant He made with them, the Lord would “take away from thee all sickness” (Deuteronomy 7:15). When Christ came to earth as “a minister of the circumcision (Jews)” (Romans 15:8a), He performed many healings to demonstrate His power and authority in Israel. All of this was done “to confirm the promises made unto the fathers” (Romans 15:8b).

When Israel rejected her Messiah, and refused the offer of the kingdom made through the twelve apostles (Acts 3:19-21), God raised up the apostle Paul to go to the Gentiles (Romans 11:13). Paul was given the “signs of an apostle” (II Corinthians 2:12) to confirm that he was divinely sanctioned.

As God began phasing out Israel's covenant, Paul was able to work “special miracles...so that from his body were brought unto the sick handkerchiefs or aprons, and the diseases departed from them” (Acts 19:11, 12). Yet only a few years later, Paul wrote to Timothy, “Drink no longer water, but use a little wine for thy stomach's sake and thine often infirmities” (I Timothy 5:23). When God brought down the final curtain on Israel's stage (Acts 28:27, 28), Paul's gift to heal was withdrawn.

JF

Notes:

WAS PAUL TOO BUSY?

Scripture Reading: I Corinthians 1:14-17

Too busy for what? Water baptism? Come now! Can God's man be too busy in God's work to do God's will—if indeed God's will includes water baptism? Preposterous!

Oh yes, Paul was busy; for in comparison with the twelve, he labored “more abundantly than they all” (I Corinthians 15:10). And for that matter, Paul's extensive imprisonments, sufferings, perils and “the care of all the churches” might have also been used by some to excuse Paul from the baptismal chore.

Why not listen to Paul's own stated reason for baptizing so few at the start and none in his later ministry. “Christ sent me not to baptize but to preach the gospel.” Peter could not have said that—nor could any of the twelve for that matter! Those clearly instructed by the risen Lord before His ascension were told to “make disciples of all nations baptizing them...” (Matthew 28:19). Now either Paul was more disobedient than they all, OR perhaps he was not laboring under that so-called “Great Commission”! Read the Lord's words from Heaven to Paul on the Damascus Road and later. Where do we read of the Lord telling Paul to pitch in and help the failing, carnal twelve who so lazily stayed by Jerusalem? If we may judge by present day standards, used by some preachers to measure their success, what better indication of response to the message than the preacher's baptismal record. No indeed. I submit that it is impossible for one man to “out baptize” twelve, unless the twelve were really derelict in their duty. We therefore conclude that Paul's God-given ministry did not include water baptism, but it did include and center in the merits of Christ's cross and God's sacred secret which He deposited to Paul's care!

Ivan L. Burgener

Notes:

ISRAEL'S RISING AND FALLING

Scripture Reading: *Isaiah 60:3; Romans 11:11*

God has always desired the salvation of the Gentiles. Yet throughout history, He has chosen different methods to bring this about. Before the time of Abraham, God dealt directly with the nations, manifesting His glory "by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead..." (Romans 1:20); but the nations responded only with wickedness and rebellion. This rebellion was manifested in the building of the city and tower of Babel, and their proclamation, "let us make us a name" (Genesis 11:4).

God's response was to scatter the Gentiles and choose a family to be a witness to the rest of the earth. Abraham was told, "I will make of thee a great nation...and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed" (Genesis 12:2, 3). God's design was to bless this nation (Israel) beyond measure to attract the interest of the nations around them. Therefore Isaiah wrote, "And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy *rising*" (Isaiah 60:3).

Unfortunately, as time went by, Israel failed to be the light to the nations. God tried to reach her through the prophets, through sending His own Son, and finally through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. Israel would not repent. Therefore, God allowed her to fall; but here is where we see God's great wisdom and grace. God is not mocked and His plans are not thwarted. Paul writes, "I say then, Have they (Israel) stumbled that they should fall? God forbid: but rather through their *fall* salvation is come to the Gentiles..." (Romans 11:11).

JF

Notes:

SEVEN CHURCHES OR SEVEN CHURCH AGES?

Scripture Reading: *Revelation 1:4*

"...For THE TIME IS AT HAND, John to the seven churches which are in Asia" (Revelation 1:3 & 4). I take this to mean that John wrote to seven literal Hebrew churches (synagogues). John names and locates them. This would not be hard to believe, except for the church Fathers and tradition who say this cannot be. They date this prophecy between A.D. 90 and 96. Their appeal is to history and the fathers and not to the Word itself. This would be some twenty to twenty-five years after the overthrow of Jerusalem. By this time, the churches of Asia had been thoroughly Judaized. "...all they which be in Asia be turned away from me" (II Timothy 1:15). This was A.D. 68. If this book was written after Acts 28:28, then all is confusion and contradiction: it simply does not fit in. If Paul had preached the gospel of the grace of God to these churches, and John some twenty or thirty years later exhorts them in the gospel of the kingdom, John contradicts Paul. But if John wrote to these synagogues about A.D. 43-45, just before the Jerusalem Council, all is in harmony, (except with the "church fathers and the historical church" who also turned away from Paul and led the Judaized church into the Dark Ages).

If in II Corinthians 12:2, the man in Christ above fourteen years ago was John and not Paul, talking about himself, it would date this prophecy about A.D. 43, just before the Jerusalem Council and contemporary with Matthew, Mark, James and Jude. John would be a young man in the Isle of Patmos for the Word of God (Revelation 1:9). He was still to "prophesy...before many peoples" (Revelation 10:11). He was admonished not to write the things that he heard (Revelation 10:4 confer with II Corinthians 12:4). Prophecy has a near and a future fulfillment. The overthrow of the temple under Titus would be the near fulfillment. The future fulfillment awaits the Rapture of the Church, when God resumes His prophetic kingdom purpose with Israel. Think about it. The Church, which is Christ's Body, is nowhere seen in this book in type or symbol.

John H. Balk

Notes:

MY GOSPEL

Scripture Reading: Romans 16:25

In three places, the apostle Paul refers to the message committed to him as "my gospel" (Romans 2:16; 16:25; II Timothy 2:8). Why does Paul personalize the gospel in this way? It is surely not out of pride or egotism, for Paul's words were written by divine inspiration.

Paul called his message "my gospel" to set it apart from the message preached by the twelve apostles. For you see, none of these men could call their gospel "my gospel" because it was not just revealed to one of them but to all twelve. But when God unveiled His message for the new dispensation of grace, He chose to reveal it to and through only one man, the Apostle Paul. Someone will ask, "Didn't the Apostle Paul preach the same Lord Jesus Christ as the twelve apostles?" The answer is "Yes, but in a different way." In the words of our text, Paul preached Jesus Christ "according to the revelation of the mystery which was kept secret since the world began" (Romans 16:25b).

The gospel preached by the twelve pertained to Christ's offer of the kingdom to Israel, and is called, appropriately, "the gospel of the kingdom" (Matthew 4:23). Paul's gospel pertains to God's gracious offer of salvation without works during this present dispensation of grace, and is called, appropriately, "the gospel of the grace of God" (Acts 20:24). The majority of churches seem intent on mixing these two messages, but the Word of God maintains a clear distinction between the two. By the grace of God, let us boldly proclaim the gospel of grace which Paul so passionately referred to as "my gospel."

JF

Notes:

TRANSFORMED!

Scripture Reading: Romans 12:2

It seems to be the undying goal of the world around us to "press us into its mold" and turn out uniform robots who are "politically correct." To live as a Christian in a non-Christian world definitely causes one to stick out like a sore thumb! Yet this is exactly what God calls us to do in Romans 12:2, "And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God."

Being different than the world is not an end in itself. It merely comes with the territory of being saved. Paul begins with a negative admonition, "be not conformed." This word "conformed" comes from the Greek word from which we get our word *schematic*. For those who are not electronics buffs, a schematic diagram is a detailed drawing of electrical circuits. It often seems that the church at large is attempting to see how closely it can imitate the world's schematic, or pattern, whether it be in dress, music or view of life. We must be careful not to be guilty of this.

On a positive note, Paul tells us how to avoid conformity to the world "by the renewing of your mind." True transformation (literally, metamorphosis) comes when the child of God fills his or her mind with the life changing Word of God. Only regular reading, study and meditation on the Scriptures will bring lasting and positive change in the believer. All attempts at mere self-reformation are bound to fail and do not glorify God. However, true transformation in the life of a believer proves, in a practical way, "that good and acceptable and perfect will of God." Is God's will being demonstrated in your life?

Joel Finck

Notes:

PROGRESSIVE REVELATION

Scripture Reading: Romans 3:21

Two of the smallest words in the Bible actually carry the greatest impact of how we understand Scripture. These two words are "but now." While the Bible is the Word of God from cover to cover, it was not all given at once or to the same audience. What was spoken to one group of people in an earlier time may not directly apply to another group of people in later times. This is called the principle of "Progressive Revelation," and we find many examples of this in Scripture.

In Romans 3:21, the Apostle Paul writes, "But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets." At one time, the law of Moses played an integral part in righteousness. Not that the law itself could bring righteousness, it could not; but before the dispensation of the grace of God was committed to Paul (See Ephesians 3:1, 2.), the law was God's prescribed method of demonstrating the righteousness which comes by faith. In other words, if a godly Jew under the law wanted to show that he believed God, there was only one way to do it: be in obedience to the law. Therefore, while the law did not bring righteousness, keeping the law went hand in hand with living a righteous life.

But according to Romans 3:21, God's righteousness is no longer associated with law-keeping. This is why Paul goes on to proclaim, "for ye are not under the law, but under grace" (Romans 6:14b). Those who do not recognize the principle of progressive revelation continue to draw people back under the law with its sabbaths and ordinances; but let us rather move on in grace!

JF

Notes:

SERVANTS OBEY YOUR MASTERS

Scripture Reading: Colossians 3:22-24

"Servants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh; not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but in singleness of heart, fearing God: And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; knowing that of the Lord you shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ."

God's Word through the Apostle Paul to the converted servants or slaves in the church at Colosse was just as clear to them as it is to us. These slaves, even though redeemed by the precious blood of Christ or rather *because* they were redeemed—were to obey. Really, blind obedience? Read the words—"in all things...." But what if their masters were not saved? Saved or not, the masters were held accountable for their commands. Slaves were to obey.

No doubt there was a sizeable number of the Colossian church saved in the social ranks of slavery. What should be their response to masters? We can well imagine the problem of a believing slave carrying out the orders of an unsaved master. And while serving a believing master might seem easier, yet there would be the problem of being subject to one who was a fellow member of Christ's one Body. To our aroused social consciousness continued slavery in the church might seem unthinkable, but the existing order was not abolished. Surely the grace of God would work out all these problems if given a chance to work. For those saved under that social system, they were to honor the Lord by being obedient and not just when their master was watching!

Perhaps the nearest setting in our free society today would be that of obeying our boss or supervisor in our work. We "serve the Lord Christ" by doing a good job!

Ivan L. Burgener

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