

# Faith, Healing and Miracles

August 3, 2014 | *Gift and Giver, ch. 6*

We should understand that many of these gifts overlap. If someone prays for someone else to be healed and the person was healed, was it the gift of healing or the gift of faith or even just a miracle? Maybe a little of all three. So sometimes there is some overlap.

**“to another FAITH by the same spirit”** (1 Cor. 12:9a)

All believers are given faith to believe God. Paul is talking about “manifestations of the Spirit for the common good” (v. 7) and he’s pointing out that the Spirit gives different gifts to different believers and FAITH is one of them. So he is apparently talking about a faith *other than* saving faith. (This gift only occurs in this list.)

So many of these gifts have universal analogous functions in all believers (faith, teaching, wisdom, knowledge, etc.). So when we’re talking about the “spiritual gift” we are talking about a spiritual manifestation that exists in a greater or stronger degree that goes beyond the ordinary, Spirit-given faith in all believers. This seems to be what Paul is referring to in 13:2 as “faith so as to remove mountains.” It is faith in a greater measure. John MacArthur: “The gift of faith is expressed toward God through prayer, appealing to and trusting God to do that which is beyond His normal provision.” (*The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: 1 Corinthians*)

Some important safeguards for understanding the gift of faith:

- It presupposes (like all faith) that what we are believing God for is according to his will. 1 Jn. 5:14 “And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us.” His will is explicitly revealed in Scripture.
- That’s not to say we cannot ask, pray and believe God for things that are not explicitly revealed in Scripture. But such requests should never contradict Scripture and they should be asked with pure and right motives (James 4:3).
- That means it is not faith in faith; not wishful thinking; not being an optimist.
- Example of George Mueller: He prayed for a need for a long time (many years) until God one day granted him the faith (a peace in his heart and an assurance) that God would meet the need he was praying about. God granted him a gift of faith. In fact, this type of faith (believing God for big things that seem impossible in the natural realm and seeing God actually do them) characterized much of his life and ministry. I would say Mueller had the gift of faith.

A definition:

- Gordon Fee: “supernatural conviction that God will reveal his power or mercy in a special way in a specific instance.” (*The New International Commentart on the New Testament: The First Epistle to the Corinthians*)
- John MacArthur: “. . . an intensive ability to trust God in difficult and demanding ways . . . to trust him in the face of overwhelming obstacles and human impossibilities.” (*The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: 1 Corinthians*)

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**“...to another GIFTS OF HEALINGS by the same spirit”** (1 Cor. 12:9b)

This gift shows up in both lists in 1 Cor. 12, where God has appointed “gifts of healing” (12:9) and in the question “Do all possess gifts of healing?” (12:30). Notice that it never mentions “healers.” For some of the gifts, we have that noun form of the gift: teacher, prophet, evangelist, etc. and the gift seems to be permanent. But we never see “healers.” There are gifts of healing in the NT and people are prayed for and healed, but we don’t see the office of “healer” like we do “teacher.” So it’s not a “resident gift.”

We typically think of a “gift” as an ability. But the word is really defined in 12:7 as “manifestation of the Spirit.” A gift is something we possess, but a manifestation is something someone else does. The word comes from the Gk. word *charis* (“grace”) and in this form can be understood as “an expression of divine grace.” (*UBS Lexicon*)

Healing is a foretaste of the age to come. Presently, prophecy functions in part, but in the age to come we shall know fully, even as we are fully known. Healing happens in part; it is temporary at best (we all still die). But it is a taste of the age to come when all our sickness and disease will be fully and finally healed, never to come back again. So present day healing is a foretaste of that day. In fact, it is the in-breaking of that age into this present evil age with a taste of what’s to come. In NT times, healing was one of the signs that the kingdom of God was breaking into this present evil age. And in our day, healing serves the same purpose: God cares, God is powerful, God is eager to deliver us spiritually (most important) and physically (if not now, in the life to come). How can we read about or teach the compassion of Jesus or the apostles for this in physical need and then say, “while they were ready and eager to ask God for healing in Bible times, God no longer operates that way today, so we shouldn’t expect that to happen”? No, God’s healing intervention in human suffering still serves as a sign that God is real and powerful and that the gospel is the only message offering any hope in the midst of a fallen, broken down, sick world. For Jesus and the Apostles, healing (and miracles) served to validate the message they proclaimed. If God saw a need to validate the message of the Living Word with healing and miracles, how much more would he want to validate the written word with healing and miracles?

Because we live in a fallen world and gifts operate “in part” until Jesus returns, 1.) all healing is partial, and 2.) no healing is guaranteed. Physical healing is not secured or guaranteed without exception. Nor is it conditioned upon the sick person’s faith. The bible does not teach that if you have enough faith, anyone can be healed – which would mean that if they’re not healed, you didn’t have enough faith. EX. Paul prayed three times (at least) that the thorn in his side be removed, which many believe to be a physical ailment. And God said no. This is the Paul who healed scores of sick people on the island of Malta. But in this case, God said no. If Paul couldn’t obligate God to heal anyone, then there’s no way we can.

Should we ask God for healing?

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- James 5:14 “Is anyone 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. 15 And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up.” Here, at the very least, elders are expected to be ready to pray in faith for those that are sick. But in 1 Cor. 12, healing is listed as one of the gifts given by the Spirit for the common good. So we can all pray for the sick that are among us.

Some people say that the gift of healing in the NT was a special (different) gift given only to Jesus and the Apostles and is no longer available today. They say that the difference between their gift of healing and healing in general is that they had the power to heal ALL who came to them, to heal them “instantaneously and totally.” But a closer examination of the NT would show that is not the case.

- 2 Cor. 12:7-8 If Paul had this ability, why did he not heal himself? Or why didn’t he ask someone around him who possessed the gift of healing to pray for him? The reason is that no one in NT times could heal anyone “instantaneously and totally.”
- 1 Tim. 5:23 When Timothy was sick with stomach problems and “frequent ailments”, Paul didn’t go over and heal him (but according to this view, he could have – maybe even *should have*.) Nor did he instruct Timothy to find someone with the gift of healing and get it over with. Instead, he gave him a prescription to treat his sour stomach.
- Phil 2 Epaphroditus was sick to the point of death and Paul does not go over and heal him (although if Paul’s gift of healing meant he could heal anyone “instantaneously and totally, then he could have). Instead, he says that God miraculously delivered and healed him, but not through Paul or someone with a “gift of healing.”
- 2 Tim 4:20, Paul is closing the letter and says “I left Trophimus, who was ill.” If Paul had the ability to heal totally and instantaneously, if he has any compassion, why would he leave someone in his illness?

Taken together, the gift of healing in the apostles was not an absolute, total power over illness as some would portray. For the Apostles, the gift functioned in part, just like for us. So Timothy wasn’t healed, Paul wasn’t healed, Epaphroditus was healed but not because someone with a healing gift prayed for him, and Trophimus wasn’t healed.

Aside from the fact that there is no biblical text suggesting this gift would cease, the way this gift functioned in the NT suggests that it too is a gift that is universally available to the church at all times. Availability doesn’t mean guaranteed outcomes (gifts function “in part”; he “apportions to each one as he wills”; “not all possess gifts of healings,” etc.). But it does mean that we can and should pray and ask God to heal.

What is meant by the “gift of healings”? We’ve established that the gift is not “resident” (no healers in the NT or today). We’ve established that healing is not guaranteed, is not total, is not absolute, is partial and temporary, and that healing is nonetheless something that flows from God’s heart of compassion for the sick and hurting and is therefore a “manifestation of the Spirit” for the common good.

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[ILLUSTRATION]

We can pray                      [sick person]                      God can heal

1. Do we believe we should pray for sick people?
2. Do we believe God can still heal people today?
3. What happens if we pray and God heals? I think we can say that person was used in the gift of healing. And if the gift does not seem to be a “resident” gift in the NT, then God can use anyone at any time in the gift of healing – that’s up to him.
4. Simply put, when someone prays for healing and God heals them, the gift of healing operated in that person and in that situation. Certainly, like with all the gifts, this gift can be more pronounced or function more frequently in some than in others. The gifts can all have a stronger or weaker expression in the Christian’s life.

I think if we understand the way healing functioned in the NT, it will help us see why we can’t find anywhere in the Bible suggesting that this gift will one day cease to function. On the other hand, if we incorrectly think that the gift of healing in the NT meant that someone could heal “totally and instantaneously all who came to him”, then we could end up with a very different conclusion. But that is not what the Bible tells us about healing in the NT; so the conclusion is neither right nor wrong. It’s a null set – the premise is false to begin with.

Recently, praying for Liam (“Lord, manifest the Spirit’s power in the gift of healing for Liam.”)

So let’s pray and ask boldly for healing, not making excuses for God, asking expectantly, believing that he can, and trusting him with the outcomes.