

The Divine Healer Verses Faith Healers

(Acts 9:32-42)

Dateline did an expose on Faith Healer Bennie Hinn. The expose revealed his lucrative ministry, 200 million a year, and also the heartbreak he brings to people who go to his healing services and are not healed because they are so severely handicapped. The expose also uncovered his false message that it is God's will for all people to be healed and not be sick. It was not God's will to heal eight year old Grace Brulotte, of Fernie, British Columbia who couldn't walk because of arthrogryposis multiplex congenital. Today she is a budding artist and singer.

At Bennie Hinn's website he states: "God's will for us to walk in divine health and a right relationship with Him is emphasized throughout His Word."

This misconception that it is not God's will for any person to be sick or poor is part of their Prosperity message. What about Jesus? Jesus was homeless and was murdered. Jesus did not experience a Prosperity Gospel.

In Acts 9:32-42, the apostle Peter heals two people that would be rejected by Bennie Hinn's screeners. In 9:32-35, Peter healed a paraplegic at Lydda. In 9:36-42, Peter healed a dead woman at Joppa, by the name of Dorcas, i.e., he raised her from the dead. Let's ask and answer three questions about divine healing and faith healing that you might be asking as we contrast divine healing that God has always performed and the faith healing movement: Why could the apostles heal severely handicapped people or even raise the dead? How did the apostles heal? What about healing today? Can we expect paraplegics or quadriplegics to be healed?

1. Why Could the Apostles Heal?

The apostle Peter performed such spectacular healings because he had the apostolic gift of healing. The same gift that Bennie Hinn claims to possess and all Faith Healers. The apostles had the same gift of healing Jesus possessed. In Mark 2:1-12, Jesus healed a paraplegic much as Peter did in Acts 9:32-35 at Lydda. In Mark 5:37-41, Jesus raised the dead much as Peter did in Acts 9:36-42 at Joppa.

Jesus and the apostles healed so the unsaved Jews would believe their message that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. The gift of healing was a sign gift. Paul in 1 Corinthians 1:22 says that the Jews require a sign because they lack faith to believe God's messengers. This description was not a compliment. Jewish Nicodemus said to Jesus: "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher from God: for no man can do these miracles that you do, except God be with him" (John 3:2). The same truth was preached by Peter in Acts 2:22: "You men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you."

This spiritual weakness of lacking faith and needing a sign has characterized the entire history of the Jews beginning in Exodus 4. When God called Moses to lead Israel out of Egypt, Moses said, “they will not believe me” (4:1). God gave Moses the gift of sign miracles “that they may believe that the Lord God of their fathers has appeared unto you” (4:5). One of those sign miracles was the sign gift of healing. God said, “Put now your hand into your bosom or shirt. And he put his hand into his shirt: and when he took it out, behold, his hand was leprous as snow. And God said, Put your hand into your shirt again. And he put his hand into his shirt again; and plucked it out of his shirt, and, behold, it was turned again as his other flesh” (4:7).

That authenticating sign healing is longer needed. Israel as a nation is now rejected because they rejected Christ as their Messiah. We have the completed canon of Scripture. Today the authenticating sign of a correct message is not healing but adherence to correct doctrine. This is the new litmus test as Paul defends in Galatians 1:6-9.

When the New Testament was nearly completed the gift of healing was already waning. Paul who healed many people in 2 Timothy 4:20 wrote, “Trophimus have I left at Miletum sick.” The answer to the first question, “Why could the apostles heal?” is they had the apostolic gift of healing. Paul told the Corinthians “truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you.” Because there are no more apostles who saw the resurrected Christ and were taught by Him, there is no longer the apostolic gifts.

2. How Did the Apostles Heal?

The apostles healed just like Jesus but not like the Faith Healers. The apostles and Jesus healed anywhere, completely, extreme cases, and the dead.

A. The Apostles healed anywhere.

Peter healed in homes in Acts 9. Faith Healers must be on TV or have staged platforms with screeners to accept only people who have backaches and headaches. Why do Faith Healers not go to hospitals and move from room to room and sick patient to sick patient and start healing? They could if they had the apostolic gift of healing.

B. The Apostles healed completely.

Peter’s healed paralytic walked away. Faith healer Kenneth Hagin in his book “*How to Keep Your Healing*” tells of a pastor who supposedly was totally healed of deafness in a large healing meeting. But by the time the meeting was dismissed, he couldn’t hear a thing. Hagin writes, “He put his hearing aid back on.” Hagin explains why some healings don’t last: “If you don’t have enough faith in you to hold on to what you have, the devil is going to steal it away from you” (Kenneth Hagin. *How to Keep Your Healing*, Tulsa: Rhema, 1989, 20-21). Peter did not ask the paralytic man in Acts 9:32-35 if he had faith. Obviously, dead Dorcas could not exercise faith.

In contrast to Tabitha being called a disciple in the second healing by Peter in Acts 9, Aeneas is not. Most likely Aeneas was not a believer. MacArthur writes, "There are no examples in the New Testament of believers being healed (though Lazarus, Dorcus, and Eutychus were raised from the dead) (MacArthur. The MacArthur NT Commentary, Acts 1-12, 281). These unbelievers did not have faith to be healed.

C. The Apostles healed extreme cases.

Jesus healed extreme cases in Matthew 4:23 "Jesus went about healing all manner of sickness" and 9:35 "Jesus went about healing every sickness" not just high blood pressure or bursitis. The people healed in the New Testament had to have severe maladies such as blindness, paralysis, or deafness to verify they were healed by Jesus and the apostles. Healing was a sign gift. The healing had to be visible and verifiable. The apostles were not screeners for Jesus so the handicapped could not be seen by Jesus. The opposite was true.

D. The Apostles healed the dead.

Peter raised Dorcas, Paul raised Eutychus. Jesus raised three people. If Faith Healers have the apostolic gift of healing why do they get sick and die. Faith healer Oral Roberts died. Faith healer Kathryn Kuhman battled with heart disease for 20 years before she died of heart disease in 1976. Why do Faith Healers not go to cemeteries during the day and raise the dead from graves and Funeral Homes in the evenings and raise the dead from coffins? They could if they had the apostolic gift of healing.

3. What about Healing Today?

A. God can still heal.

Sometimes we are accused of not believing in healing if we do not believe the apostolic gift of healing is operative today. This is incorrect.

This is Mark Driscoll's argument for the gift of healing for today: Some say that healings ceased in the first century; that they didn't exist thereafter; that this happened in the early church and it's not for us. Well, we say God is the same yesterday, today and forever. God doesn't change. People's needs don't change and additionally, there's nowhere in Scripture that says that healing will stop, right? They infer it from one section in 1 Corinthians 13, we'll get to in a few weeks, but there is no evidence in Scripture that healing was just for, you know, 70 years or 100 years. There's no evidence of that whatsoever.

This is a misrepresentation by Driscoll. We believe God still heals when it is His will. We just do not believe in Faith Healers like Bennie Hinn or the apostolic gift for today.

1) We believe God heals through confession of sin according to James 5:16: "Confess your sins one to another, and pray one for another, that you may be healed."

2) We believe God also heals through prayer. Peter prayed in Acts 9:40 before he raised Dorcas to life. James 5:13 asks, "Is any among you afflicted?" Then answers, "Let him pray."

3) God heals through doctors. In Matthew 9:12, Jesus said, "They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick." We are not like those who attend faith healing churches and believe going to a doctor is a lack of faith.

In March of 2009, Greg and Jalea Swezey saw their 17-year-old son Zachery fall ill. He was bedridden for days with a fever, diarrhea, and vomiting. The family summoned church elders from Olympia who anointed the ailing teenager's body with olive oil and prayed over him. But -- surprise, surprise -- this was no substitute for a good old fashioned appendectomy, a relatively safe and simple procedure that has reduced the mortality rate for appendicitis to less than 2 per 1,000,000 cases. Zachery, a high school junior who played basketball, wrestled, and participated in band and choir, died with his parents sitting at his bedside. Most rational people would head to the hospital in that situation, but the Swezeys are the textbook definition irrational. They are members of the Church of the Firstborn, and believe in "faith healing" -- praying to a higher power to cure sickness, rather than relying on the scientifically proven power of modern medicine (The Daily Weekly reported). Skeptics and Atheists love these stories. But these fringe examples do not represent Biblical Christianity.

Paul instructed sickly Timothy to "Drink no longer water but take a little medicine for your stomach's sake and your often infirmities" (1 Timothy 5:23). Luke who recorded many miracles in the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles was a physician. Obviously he was not against going to the doctor. When we are sick or our children are sick we should go to our medical doctor and pray to our Great Physician.

B. God doesn't always heal.

God can still heal. But believers who love God get sick. There are four cases of sick believers beyond the book of Acts. Three of the four were not healed. Epaphroditus was sick nearly unto death but got better (Philippians 2:27). Timothy had to take medicine for his sickness (1 Timothy 5:23). He was not healed. Trophimus was not healed by Paul (2 Timothy 4:20). Finally, the apostle Paul was sick with a thorn in his flesh (2 Corinthians 12:7). Paul prayed three times for healing and God said, "No." But God supplied him with sustaining grace instead so that the power of Christ would rest upon him. In other words, Paul would not have accomplished what he did had he been well. God's strength was made complete in Paul's weakness.

Joni Eareckson Tada has been a quadriplegic for 36 years as a result of a swimming accident when she was 17 years old.. She was interviewed by Christianity Today.

She begins every morning with a two-hour routine—washing, dressing, exercising. She needs at least seven helpers each week just to meet the day. Joni Eareckson Tada can do very little for herself—not turn over in bed, not brush her own teeth, not apply makeup.

She was 17 when she broke her neck, so most of her life has been spent in this condition, dependent on others for the most basic daily functions. Joni not only requires two hours in the morning to get ready for the day but she also requires two hours to go to bed each night. Since her body will tolerate the strain of sitting up for only so long each day, she needs to be prone by eight o'clock, sleepy or not.

She wrote in her book, *A Step Further*, about her hope and prayer for healing,

On a rainy afternoon in the early summer of 1972, about fifteen people gathered together in a tiny oak church not far from my home. The group consisted of close friends, family, and church leaders whom I had called together to pray for my healing. By the time our brief service was over, the rain had stopped. Exiting through the front doors of the church, we were greeted by a beautiful rainbow in the misty distance. It gave me just one more reassurance that God had heard our prayers. God had indeed heard . . . but He did not heal. By Stephen Davey in a sermon on Acts 9:32-42

The list of her accomplishments as a handicapped believer is staggering. She paints by holding the brush between her teeth. She has authored best sellers. She hosts a daily radio program. She speaks regularly. She has been a strong advocate for the disabled. Joni was a presidential appointee to the National Council on Disability for over three years. Like Paul and his thorn in the flesh, Joni has experienced the power of Christ on her life because she has accepted God's will for her life which has not included healing.

God can heal, but if He chooses not to heal His grace is all sufficient and His strength is complete in our weakness and we will uniquely experience His power unlike those who do not suffer.