

The Temporary Sign Gifts, Part 3

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 12:9, 28, 30

Code: 1858

This morning, we are going to continue in our study of the gift of healing. We are looking at I Corinthians 12 in our study, although we won't be looking at it in the passage this morning. In chapter 12, it mentions gifts that are given and one of them is the gift of healing, or gifts of healings. As we are continuing through I Corinthians, which is what we are doing now, we have stopped at verses 8-10 to consider each of the gifts. We find ourselves, at this point, discussing the gifts of healings.

Of course, this is a very important thing today. What I say to you this morning is important because I think it will help you understand what is going on around us. I think, and I say this in honesty and with all the force I can say it with, and yet with as much love as is possible, I believe that we face one of the most rapidly growing and deceiving movements in the history of the church.

Pentecostalism is its traditional name, but it has somewhere picked up the moniker the Charismatic movement. I think most all of its contributions are bad, but there are some benefits that have been derived indirectly from it. One of them is this, that it forces us to really examine the Word of God to see if the things that are being claimed are, in fact, so. That is good; to drive us into an understanding of the Scripture is vital.

It is important, I think, for us to be discerning. We hear today that all the miracles are still occurring, that all of the apostolic gifts are still going on, that if you're missing out on them, you're missing out on what God is doing.

Oral Roberts sends out in his mail and promises that if you invest in his ministry, he will give you the promise of God that you will get a miracle a day. There is a book called A Miracle a Day Keeps the Devil Away. I received in the mail this week my special miracle prayer cloth, and there it is. Small miracles. That's it. It says: "This special miracle prayer cloth, put in your pillow and sleep on it tonight. Or you may want to place it on your body or on a loved one. Use it as a release point wherever you hurt. First thing in the morning, send it back to me in the green envelope. Do not keep this prayer cloth; return it to me. I'll take it, pray over it all night. Miracle power will flow like a river. God has something better for you, a special miracle to meet your needs." This is just one in a long line of claims that are being made.

You turn on the television, and if you can find something other than a Christian program, you're fortunate. It seems as though television is being inundated by the Christian programming that is

really, in many ways, a misrepresentation of biblical Christianity. It is a sad thing. People are claiming miracles and healings ad infinitum, ad nauseam, on and on and on. You begin to wonder just exactly how perceptive people are.

I received a letter from one of our folks who said, "Do you know that some people in your church are very attached to the PTL Club or the 700 Club or whatever?" If that's true, I would say there are some things on there that can be very helpful. But many of the things on there are not helpful; they are very deceiving. They are claiming to be what they are not. You need to be very discerning lest you be caught in the error of their own way, and deceived about what is true.

We hear today that all of these gifts are still going on. Much is being said about healing; it never ends. I hear it continually. In every city I go to and every Christian group I talk to, the people who come up and ask me questions are forever asking me about this whole subject of healing. "Is God restoring this marvelous gift? What do you think of Kathryn Kuhlman? What do you think of Oral Roberts? What about such-and-such a healing? What about this program?" and so forth. These kinds of things are confusing to people across across America who aren't saved, to say nothing of the poor Christians who are untaught in Scripture and don't know what to do with it all.

So we have been endeavoring in our studies to try to get some clear thinking about what is going on. In our study of the temporary sign gifts, which I defined for you at great length in our last study, we mentioned that there are four of them: miracles, healings, languages, and the interpretation of languages. Those four are the miraculous sign gifts that were given by the Spirit to authenticate the new revelation that constituted the New Testament. Once the New Testament was finished, those sign gifts ceased to have a function. They do not belong to the continuing life of the church.

Stephen, you'll recall, in Acts 7, was citing the signs and wonders and miracles done at the time of Moses. He went on to say that it was in connection with Moses receiving the living oracles of God. It's the same thing in the New Testament. When God poured out a revelation of His Word, at that time, God attended it with signs and wonders. That was the purpose, and we've been into that in very great detail.

The people today who claim to have these abilities, and claim to see and allow for and to conduct and experience healings after healings after healings need to be carefully brought to the test of Scripture. The question is not, "Well, I had this experience, I had this experience, what's your experience?" That's not the issue. The issue is, what does the Bible say? That's what we want to talk about. I have no axe to grind with these people; I have no great vendetta against them, I have no vengeance in my heart. It's the same problem for me as any other problem; I simply want to deal with what the Word of God has to say about it. Then, having said that, let it settle itself.

Let me begin by saying this. The temporary sign gifts, healing, miracles, languages, and the interpretation of languages, do not exist today. I think that we have sufficiently seen in the Scripture, in our past studies, that this is true. We have studied the gift of miracles, or the gift of powers as it could be better translated, and have seen what it was. It was the ability to cast out demons with a word.

Now we are studying the gifts of healings. We will study the gifts of languages and interpretation of languages when we get to chapters 13-14 of I Corinthians. We are beginning, in our biblical study, at the person of Christ. Remember our last study? Let's start and review quickly right there.

We said that, in order to understand what the gifts of healings are, we must look at Christ, who was the pattern for all spiritual gifts. He sets down the basis for their functioning. We saw six characteristics of Christ's healing power. What were they? Number one, He healed with a word or a touch. Number two, He healed instantaneously. Number three, He healed totally. There were no malingering symptoms, no part of the disease remained. Number four, He healed everybody. Number five, He raised the dead. Number six, He healed organic diseases. Jesus healed with a word or a touch, instantaneously, totally, everybody, with organic diseases, and raised the dead. Now that is the set pattern for the gift of healing.

You say, "But that was Christ's pattern." Yes, and it is exactly that that He passed on to His apostles. Look at Luke 9; it is a key portion for us this morning. Here, our Lord passes on to His apostles this power. Verse 1.

"Then He called His twelve disciples together, and gave them power and authority over all demons." That is the gift of miracles, that was the gift of power. Keep in mind that the gift of miracles was never the ability given to the apostles and their associates to go around, working natural miracles, making food, walking on water, feeding a multitude, making a tree fall over dead, building an instant house, or anything like that. Never; the miracle gift was simply and only the gift of dunamis- power over Satan, the ability to cast out demons.

Secondly, the end of verse 1, "To cure diseases." He gave them the power over disease with an unqualified ability to cure diseases, period. They had that power. That was given to the Twelve.

Now go to Luke 10:1. Jesus extended these abilities to another group. "After these things, the Lord appointed other seventy," so He picked 70 others, sent them two by two, to preach. So He's got 12 apostles and the Seventy. Notice, in verse 9, among the things He said to them is this, "And heal the sick that are there, and say unto them, 'The kingdom of God is come near unto you.'" He gave to the Seventy the ability to heal the sick. This again is the gift of healing. The ability to heal sickness and disease. Now note, we see in the New Testament that it belonged to Christ, to the Twelve, to whom He gave it, and the Seventy, to whom He gave it.

You say, "Does anyone else in the New Testament have the ability to heal?" Yes. A few of the associates of the apostles to whom they were used of God to give the gift. So it belonged to Christ, His apostles and the Seventy, and some associates of the apostles. We never see it at random among those in the churches. We never see it just milling around in the multitude of believing people. It is a gift always associated with Christ, the Twelve, the Seventy, and the associates of the Twelve, such as Philip. We see that in the book of Acts. It never gets any further than that. It is a very limited gift in terms of the people who possessed it, as is the gift of miracles, or powers, or the ability to cast out demons.

As this early band - Christ, the apostles, the Seventy, and the associates of the apostles - as they went out preaching, proclaiming the Gospel of the Kingdom, this phenomenal, unbelievable new message, God gave them the ability to heal diseases instantaneously and totally in order to convince people that they were from God and thus, people would believe their message. So, these gifts were to authenticate and confirm the proclamation of these particular individuals. This is the way it worked all throughout the book of Acts.

If you look at Acts 3, you will see this very clearly. In Acts 3:1, Peter and John are going into the temple. Then in verse 2, "A certain man, lame from his birth," and we know from Acts 4:22 that he lame for over forty years, he was over forty years old. He was congenitally deformed, had never taken a step in his life. He was at the gate of the temple called Beautiful, and he was there every day, begging. He saw Peter and John and he begged.

Verse 4. "And Peter, fastening his eyes upon him, with John, said, 'Look on us.'" And he did, expecting Peter to give him some money. In verse 6, Peter says, "Silver and gold have I none, but such as I have, give I thee. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk.' And he took him by the right hand, and lifted him up; and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength. And he, leaping up, stood and walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God. And all the people saw him walking and praising God; and they knew that it was he who sat for alms at the Beautiful Gate of the temple; and they were filled with wonder and amazement at that which had happened unto him. And as the lame man who was healed held Peter and John, all the people ran together unto them in the porch that is called Solomon's, greatly wondering."

Notice, the healing drew the crowd. They were amazed; they wondered. Here was a man they knew had been crippled for forty years, instantaneously walking and leaping. It's incredible! And then the key, verse 12. "When Peter saw it, he answered the people."

The point is, the healing was simply to generate the amazement that could make the message believable, you see? Then Peter launched into a great sermon, he preached, verse 13, "The God of

Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified His Son, Jesus, whom ye delivered up and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let Him go. But ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted to you; and killed the Prince of life, whom God hath raised from the dead, of which we are witnesses," and on he goes. The point is, these miracles were signs and wonders pointing to the message they were preaching.

You find this all the way through the book of Acts. Paul goes into a city, performs a miracle, preaches a sermon. Peter goes in, performs a miracle, raise somebody from the dead, and people believe the Word. This is always the way. They were given to those who were proclaimers of the message to attend the message with divine confirmation, so people would know they weren't just giving their own opinion.

An illustration that might help you is in Acts 19:10. There are many, but this is one. Verse 10. "They continued in Ephesus for the space of two years; so that all they who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks." So the message got all over Asia. Verse 11. "And God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul," why? To confirm the message, "So that from his body were brought unto the sick handkerchiefs or aprons, and the diseases departed from them, and the evil spirits went out of them."

That's where this guy gets his handkerchief thing. The word for handkerchiefs in the Greek means sweat band. And the word for apron had to do with the apron Paul wore when he was making tents. In other words, Paul didn't do this. They actually came to where Paul was working and took his sweatbands and aprons, and put them on sick people. They saw these tremendous miracles, so tremendous that they knew this man had power. In Acts 5:15, Peter would walk along and people would try to fall under his shadow in order to be healed because of the power attending his preaching.

So remember this: the new message delivered by the apostles was confirmed by these signs. Once the message was written down, the signs ceased to be the confirming agent and the book itself confirms itself. You can't put yourself in the Jewish situation. The new message was so jolting, was so shocking. I mean, here came these guys saying this, "You have executed your Messiah." You can't imagine the potency of that message. "You have been set aside by God and He is calling out the church from among the Gentiles." You cannot imagine the drama of that message. This shook them, it literally blew them out of their sandals. I said 'socks' in the first service, but they didn't wear socks. This was so shocking, and so dramatic, and so transforming, their responses were absolutely amazing.

You read in Acts 2:37, "Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said, 'What shall we do? This is incredible! We've killed our Messiah! What do we do now?'" Those were the ones who heard it with spiritual ears. The others were furious and threw the apostles in jail and tore

their hair out. They said, "You have filled Jerusalem with this doctrine! You can't keep saying this."

The jolt that was involved in this was so tremendous that God had to attest to the truth of it by miracles and healings, or they never would have believed. But as it came with these tremendous signs and wonders, they believed it, and 3,000 were saved the first day. In Acts 5, 5,000 more were saved, and on it goes. Just to hear that they had killed their Messiah was enough to shock them. A new age had come, and so God gave miraculous ability so they would understand that this was true.

Now, in giving these men this ability, this power of healing, I want you to see that they healed in the exact way in which Jesus healed, there was no difference. Number one. Let's look at it in the book of Acts. They also healed with a word or touch, just like Jesus.

Acts 9:32. "And it came to pass, as Peter passed throughout all quarters, he came down also to the saints who dwelt at Lydda. And there he found a certain man, named Aeneas, who had kept his bed eight years, and was sick of the palsy." This is an organic disease. "And Peter said unto him, 'Aeneas, Jesus Christ makes you whole; arise, and make thy bed.'" This guy hadn't made his bed in eight years; he hadn't been out of it in eight years. "And he arose immediately. And all that dwelt at Lydda and Sharon saw him, and turned to the Lord." Why? Because it was attended by the preaching of the Gospel of the Kingdom. Peter healed with a word. "Aeneas, arise."

We also find that the apostles could also heal with a touch. In Acts 28:7, Paul is on the island of Malta, or Melita, after the shipwreck. Verse 8 says, "And it came to pass that the father of Publius lay sick of a fever and of a bloody flux; to whom Paul entered in, and prayed, and laid his hands on him, and healed him." Here the Apostle Paul healed with his hands. Earlier, Peter had healed with a word. Jesus healed with a word or a touch. They had the same power, the same ability. They even state 'in the name of Jesus Christ.'

The apostles, like Jesus, could heal with a word or a touch. Secondly they healed instantaneously. Acts 3:4 says, "And Peter, fastening his eyes upon him, with John, said, 'Look on us.' Then Peter said, 'Silver and gold have I none, but, such as I have, give I thee. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk.' And he took him by the right hand, and lifted him up; and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength. And he, leaping up," there was no rehabilitation there. They guy had never walked in his entire life. Peter said, "Get up," and the first thing he did was jumped. He ran right into the temple, walking and leaping and praising God. There was no rehabilitation, there was no therapy, there was no nothing, just instantaneous wholeness.

That leads us to the third thing. The apostles, like Jesus, healed totally; they healed instantaneously and totally. In Acts 9:34, Peter said, "Aeneas, Jesus Christ makes thee whole." There is no progression in any apostolic healing. There is no, "I've been healed and I am steadily getting better." There is no, "I'm feeling better all the time since my healing." No. There is instantaneous, total

healing.

Fourthly, the apostles, like Jesus, were able to heal everybody, everybody. I want to show this to you, this is so important. Acts 5:12. "By the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people." Miracles and healings. Let's see some of them. Verse 14. "Believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women, insomuch that they brought forth the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and couches, that at the least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them. There came also a multitude out of the cities round about unto Jerusalem," they were coming from everywhere now, "Bringing sick folks, and them who were vexed with unclean spirits; and they were healed every one," or all. The Apostle Peter healed every single one.

It isn't like when a person went to Kathryn Kuhlman's meeting and went away sick. She said, "Well, I don't do it, only God can do it." Anyone who had the gift apostolically operated the gift strictly on the basis of volition. The leper came to Jesus in Matthew 8:2 and said, "Lord, if Thou wilt, Thou canst make me whole." And Jesus said, "I will." It is the will of the one with the gift that operates it. That is why, in Romans 12, it says that if you have the gift of giving, give; if you have the gift of prophecy, prophesy; if you have the gift of showing mercy, do it. Any time there is a command to use your gift, there is the assumption that you have the will to control it. That is true of the gift of healing like every other gift.

The people today, the reason they do not say that they heal is because they're right; they don't. They have to say that because if they claim the gift, they would be forced into answering, "Why don't you heal this person or that person?" Their cop-out is, "It's not me, it's the Lord," when, in fact, that proves it isn't the real gift because the real gift was exercised at the will of the one who possessed it, like any spiritual gift.

So they healed totally, and they healed everybody. Back to Acts 28:9. "So when this was done, others also in the island, who had diseases, came and were healed." Who was healed? Everybody who came with a disease. Again, it's the same thing.

Now look, Jesus and His apostles healed the same way: with a word or a touch, instantaneously, totally, everybody. Also, they healed organic disease. They did not go around dealing with functional, symptomatic, psychosomatic things, but with actual organic diseases. Here was a guy, forty years plus, crippled. That's typical. It was always organic diseases. I said two weeks ago, they didn't go around healing lower back pain, migraine headaches, palpitations of the heart, things that were not visible or organic.

Sixth, and this is a really good one, the apostles, like Jesus, raised the dead. That was part of the gift of healing. It must have been so exciting for Peter who, most of his life had failed at everything, to be

able to go around raising dead people. Just think!

Acts 9:36. "Now there was a certain disciple, named Tabitha," or Dorcas, and she died, verse 37 says. Peter came to see her, verse 40, and put all the mourners out, knelt down, prayed, and said to the body, "'Tabitha, arise.' And she opened her eyes; and when she saw Peter, she sat up. And he gave her his hand, and lifted her up; and when he had called the saints and widows, presented her alive. And it was known throughout all Joppa; and many believed in the Lord." Again, you have the connection with proclamation and salvation.

Notice, Peter raised the dead. The next time someone claims to have the gift of healing, take them out to the cemetery and say, "Go at it! Lots of prospects here. One will be convincing for me; any one you pick." Listen, Jesus and the apostles healed with a word or a touch, instantaneously, totally, everybody, organic diseases, and raised the dead. I have yet to see anyone today who can do any of those things that way. That is the continuity of the apostolic gift of healing. They were confirming signs always connected with the preaching of the gospel. Listen, beloved, once the Word was complete, the signs ceased.

Joshua 5:11-12 says this, "And they did eat of the old corn of the land on the morrow after the passover, unleavened cakes, and parched corn in the very same day. And the manna ceased on the morrow after they had eaten of the old corn of the land; neither had the children of Israel manna any more, but they did eat of the fruit of the land of Canaan that year."

What that says is, the miracle of the manna was no longer needed when they entered the Promised Land, and the miracle stopped. It's the same thing. Once you get this book, which is the land of Canaan in that little allegory, you don't need the miracle of the manna anymore. The miraculous sign gift is no longer needed; we have the living Word. It was never intended to be used just to run around and keep Christians healthy all the time; it was to be used as a sign to unbelievers to get them to hear the Gospel.

Let me give you another thought on this. Paul had the gift of healing, we know that. Paul shows us the purpose of this gift, because Paul, with the gift of healing, never used it outside of its purpose. For example, look at Philippians 2:25.

"I thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother and companion in labor, and fellow soldier. For he longed after you all, and was full of heaviness, because you had heard that he had been sick. For, indeed, he was sick near unto death, but God had mercy on him; and not on him only, but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow."

Now here is Paul, and he says, "I have this wonderful friend with me named Epaphroditus. He's been sick near to death. But the Lord is good, because if he would have died, oh, I would have been sad."

You say, "Well, what's the big deal, Paul? Why don't you heal him? The gift of healing is something you can use at will. Why don't you heal him?" You know why? Because Paul did not pervert the purpose of the gift to his own personal ends. The purpose of the gift was not just to run around and keep Christians healthy. It was as a sign to unbelievers. It was at that point, when God revealed that the purpose was clear, and this is the time, and it was necessary for the proclamation that they use the gift.

Look at II Timothy 4:20. Paul says, "Trophimus have I left at Miletus sick." Hey, nice guy. You say, "You have the gift of healing. Why did you leave him sick?" Because the purpose of the gift is not to run around and keep the Christians healthy; it is a sign to unbelievers to hear the Gospel of the Kingdom.

Timothy was sick in I Timothy 5, and Paul didn't say, "Find someone with the gift of healing," he said, "Take a little wine for your stomach's sake," try medicine. He himself was wracked with a thorn in the flesh, yet he never healed himself and he never went to someone else to heal him. Why? That was never the purpose. Listen, I am so tired of hearing these people say that God wants every Christian to be well. There is a book God Wants You Well. I'm going to write a sequel, God Wants You Sick. God wants you sick; God even wants you dead sometimes. You say, "Yikes! That book will never sell." That's right.

God's healing purposes are not to be perverted and twisted as they are being done today, so that they are rampantly being claimed all over the place as the panacea for everyone's ills. You want to know one good reason why the Charismatic movement grows like it does? Because there are so many sick people looking for somewhere to get well.

Dennis Bennett, in his book The Holy Spirit and You, which is mostly wrong about both, says, "God has made it perfectly clear in His Word that it is His will to heal the sick, period!" The stupidity of that is then why are they sick? It seems a lot simpler if they just didn't get sick. Then people say, "Well, Isaiah 53:5 says that by His stripes we are healed." Folks, please don't associate that verse with physical healing. That corrupts the message of Isaiah 53. Jesus didn't die on a cross so you don't get a cold. Jesus didn't die on a cross for any other reason than to heal your soul of its diseases. This has been the promise of many of the cults, and they have grown like Pentecostalism because of the same thing; there is a tremendous market for this.

Listen, in a world where sin is not excluded from the permissive will of God, why should we assume that suffering is? Paul had no such exemption. He prayed three times for God to remove the thorn in his flesh, and He never removed it because He wanted him to have it. God wanted him sick, because he had so many revelations. Paul had so many revelations that he could have been proud, so God kept him humble by his illness. Read it in II Corinthians 12, it's all there. I

'll tell you, if every Christian was well and health were a part of the atonement, then people would all be running to get saved for the wrong reason, and God's whole picture of salvation would get muddied up. God wants people to come to Him because of sin and because of His glory, not so they can be healthy physically.

Listen to this, what nonsense would be made of such virtues as long-suffering, patience, and endurance - so highly prized in the New Testament - if we were all always well. What stupidity it would be that salvation provides physical wholeness on earth but you don't get that spiritual wholeness until you get to heaven. How foolish for God to decree that all of us must die but none of us can ever get sick. Paul was sick, and he left a lot of other people sick, and that's the way it is because God wants some people sick.

In Hebrews 12:6, "For whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives." Part of that scourging is, no doubt, illness. Listen to Exodus 4:11. This is an important thing for people to remember, "And the LORD said unto him, 'Who hath made man's mouth? Or who makes the dumb, or deaf, or the seeing, or the blind? Have not I, the LORD?'" God makes them. God makes people deaf and dumb and blind because it fits His purposes.

Sometimes, like in John 9, "Who sinned, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus said, "Neither have sinned, but he is blind because it is for the glory of God." God has His own purposes. So we have to keep very clear about this. Jesus, Peter, Paul, and all the rest could heal with an, "I will." They could use that gift any way, any time. That is true of any of the sign gifts.

Why do you think the whole of I Corinthians 14 was written? To regulate the gift of tongues, because they had control over it and they needed regulations. If it was something you had to stand there and wait until God did, you wouldn't need regulations because He wouldn't do it out of line. Do you understand? These gifts were used at the volition of the one who possessed them. Peter claimed to possess this: "Such as I have, give I thee," he said in Acts 3. So, when people come along and say, "I don't heal, it's God," that is strictly a cop-out. It's true, they don't heal. It's a cop-out to get the monkey off their back when you go and don't get well.

The question I hear all the time is, "John, how do you explain what goes on?" I hear this all the time. "I know a lady and she had a son and all this," or, "My friend's mother, and she went," and so on. "How do you explain it?" All right, let me ask you a question.

Since none of the healers can heal with a word or a touch, instantaneously, totally, everybody, organic diseases, and raise the dead; since none of them have received the gift of healing from Jesus or the apostles (they're not that old); since the Bible is complete, the revelation has ceased, and no more signs are necessary; since the Word needs no confirmation outside itself, "It is sufficient that the

man of God might be perfect"; since their healings are based on faulty theology of the atonement and salvation; since they disallow God His own purposes in having some people stay sick; since their personal lives are not known to manifest the fruit of the Spirit; since so many tricks, gimmicks, and special effects are often used; since the evidence is weak, unsupported, and so-called testimonies exaggerated; since they do not go to the hospitals where the sick are, as Jesus did; since they cannot heal all who come to them; and since they do not do things which can have no other possible explanations than that God has acted supernaturally; let me ask you this question: "How do you explain it?"

You can't explain it biblically. It is fraud; they are deceived. Giving them the benefit of the doubt, maybe they don't know they are deceived; maybe they are honestly deceived, but they are deceived. You say, "Are you saying God doesn't heal?" No.

Let me reiterate some truth. God answers prayer. Do you believe that? Second, God heals in answer to prayer. God heals miraculously in answer to prayer. God heals miraculously in answer to prayer where there is faith. God heals miraculously in answer to prayer where there is faith for His own glory. Don't ever say I don't believe God heals. I've seen Him heal. I've seen Him heal miraculously. I've seen Him heal miraculously to manifest His glory. I've seen Him heal miraculously to manifest His glory in response to faithful prayer. God heals. But, God does not heal everybody and God does not heal through the apostolic gift of healing. That has ceased.

I want to close by looking at this from another angle. Why are Christians sick? We have to understand that first, before we go around claiming healing. Let me give you several possibilities. Number one, God made them sick. He wanted them there. God has made the deaf and the dumb and the blind. God allowed the man in John 9 to be born blind. God wanted Lazarus dead, did you know that? Jesus wanted him dead; He stayed away.

Some people are sick because God wants them that way. You may have a little baby in your house, and there is something wrong. That is God's plan, and it is a gift of God's love, so He will reveal that to you as you seek His face in it. Some of you may have a congenital deformity. Some of you may have an illness. Read the book Grace Grows Best in Winter if you want to get a beautiful insight into why God allows these things to happen. It is a great book. It is by Margaret Clarkson, a woman who has lived all of her life with a congenital problem, an illness. God has purposes in this.

Secondly, it could be Satan. Satan makes some people sick. Satan makes me sick, frankly. Satan makes some people sick in the illness category. Luke 13:11 says, "Behold, there was a woman who had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years." Here was a woman who had a spirit of infirmity for 18 years. Here is a woman who had a spirit of infirmity. Some illness is the result of a demon. "She was bowed together, and could in no way lift herself up." This demon had bent her over into a humped position. "When Jesus saw her, He called her to Him, and said unto her, 'Woman, thou art loosed

from thine infirmity.' And He laid His hands on her; and immediately she was made straight, and glorified God." She had a spirit. Satan makes some sick, and God may choose to cast out those demons and heal that person of those infirmities.

It could be, too, that God lets Satan make someone sick for his own reasons. Job, right? God had a purpose; God said to Satan, "I want you to see that I have a man who can handle you. Every test, he can handle. Go to it." God may allow Satan to buffet you. In II Corinthians 12, Paul said that his thorn in the flesh was a messenger of Satan sent to buffet him. So, it could be God, it could be a demon, or it could be God letting it happen, letting Satan do it to perfect you.

Or, it could just be God doing it. God might allow you to catch a certain disease, or be in a situation where it's going to happen, because He has a purpose. You know what His purpose might be? Well, it could be a lot of things. David pours out his heart in Psalm 119:67. He says, "Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now have I kept Thy word." Have you ever noticed that? "Before I was afflicted, I went astray. But now I have kept Thy word." Boy, I can relate to that one. Almost every one of us could. Then verse 71 says, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I might learn Thy statutes." Sometimes illness, affliction, infirmity, and trouble drive us to His side. That is His intention. It is better for you to be sick and godly than well and ungodly, right?

So, it could be God, it could be Satan, it could be God allowing Satan, or it could be God just allowing it. Let me give you another one. It could be chastening for sin. God could be unloading the guns on you because of your sin. In Numbers 12:9, we could read a lot of verses on this, "The anger of the LORD was kindled against them; and He departed. And the cloud departed from off the tabernacle; and, behold, Miriam became leprous, white as snow." God got angry with Miriam and gave her leprosy. Then they had a little prayer meeting and the Lord healed her, because if illness comes as a result of chastening, if you will just get rid of the cause for the chastening, the chances are you will get rid of the illness.

I'll show you more. Deuteronomy 28:21, "The LORD shall make the pestilence cling unto thee, until He have consumed thee from off the land, to which thou go to possess it. The LORD shall smite thee with a consumption, and with a fever, and with an inflammation, and with an extreme burning, and with the sword, and with blight, and with mildew." Here, He says, "If you're sinful, I'll unload the disease on you." God uses illness as a chastening.

In II Kings 5:15, Gehazi sinned and got leprosy. You can read it. II Chronicles 21 and 26 both talk about it. Look at II Chronicles 26:5, "And he sought God in the days of Zechariah, who had understanding [talking about Uzziah], in the visions of God; and as long as he sought the LORD, God made him prosper." Verse 21. "And Uzziah, the king, was a leper unto the day of his death, for he was cut off from the house of the LORD." As long as he sought God, he was healthy; as soon as he didn't, he got leprosy. God uses disease as a chastening.

In Exodus 15:26, He said to Israel, "If you keep my commandments, I will put none of these diseases upon you." Chastening the Corinthians, what did He do? Because of their desecration of the Lord's Table, Paul said, "For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many are dead."

Now, if God makes you sick for His own intents and purposes, that is His choice. If it is Satan, then when you become a Christian I believe God will deliver you from the demon. I think salvation cleans you out. If it is God letting Satan do it, or God allowing it to be done to perfect you, then it will have to run its course until you are perfected the way He wants. Peter said, "After you have suffered for a while, God will make you perfect." If, in fact, it is a chastening for sin, then as soon as you deal with the sin I believe that God begins to withdraw the chastening.

That leads us to an important Scripture, James 5:14. "Is any sick among you? 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; and the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him. Confess your sins one to another, and pray one for another, that you may be healed. The effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much."

Notice. We don't have time to go into this in detail, but I want to give you the overview. Here is sickness related to chastening, because he says there are two things to do when you are sick. First, call for the elders and pray; and second thing is in verse 16. Confess your sins. That is the reason the elders are brought in. Every time you are sick, it isn't necessarily an issue for the elders, because, "the effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much." But when it is a sickness that is a result of sinfulness, then it is a matter of purity for the church. The elders are the overseers of church purity and they are involved in hearing that confession and joining you to seek God for the removal of that illness.

So, there is the promise here that when confession is made, and prayer to God, believing in His power and will to heal in regard to chastening, God will respond. God heals when you pray, believing, and confessing your sin, if that disease is the result of chastening. The first thing I tell people when they are sick is, "Have you checked out every area of your life for sin? Have you confessed it openly? If there's a sin in your life and you know it, meet with the elders, let's pray about it, and believe God." If all of that is done, your life is pure and the sickness is still there, then it is God's choice for your perfection." But it is ridiculous to say God always wants everyone well. The Bible doesn't teach that, yet you have the right to look to Heaven in every illness because it may be that He wants to remove it for His glory.

You have the right to look to Heaven, and I'll give you three reasons. Number one is God's person, because of God's person. In Exodus 15:26, God says, "My name is Jehovah Ropheka, the LORD that heals thee." He is a healer. You have a right to look to Him in every illness. Second, not only

because of His person, but because of His promise. He says, "Call unto Me, and I will answer, and show thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not." He promised to hear every prayer. He promised that whatever we asked in His name He would do. The promise of God is that if it is His will, He will heal.

So God's person, God's promise, and thirdly, God's pattern. God's pattern was established in Jesus. If you want to know how God feels about disease, look at Jesus. How did He feel about it? He went everywhere healing. I believe He gave us a pattern of God's attitude. "When the evening was come, they brought unto Him many possessed with demons; and He cast out the spirits with His word, and healed all that were sick, that it might be fulfilled spoken by Isaiah, the prophet, saying, 'He Himself took our infirmities, and bore our sicknesses.'" Here you have the promise that God heals because of His person, His promise, and His pattern.

At the same time, I want to add a footnote. Christians believe in doctors, did you know that? Christian Scientists, who are neither Christian nor scientific, they are like Grape Nuts - they're not grapes or nuts. Isaiah 38:1 says, "In those days was Hezekiah sick unto death. And Isaiah, the prophet, the son of Amoz, came unto him, and said unto him, 'Thus saith the LORD, "Set thine house in order; for thou shalt die, and not live.'" Then Hezekiah turned his face toward the wall, and prayed unto the LORD, and said, 'Remember now, O LORD, I beseech Thee, how I have walked before Thee in truth and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in Thy sight.' And Hezekiah wept bitterly. Then came the word of the LORD to Isaiah, saying, 'Go, and say to Hezekiah, "Thus saith the LORD, the God of David, thy father, I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy tears; behold, I will add unto thy days fifteen years.'" "

Now that is answered prayer! Miracle! Then verse 21 says, "For Isaiah had said, 'Let them take a lump of figs, and lay it for a plaster upon the boil, and he shall recover.'" What's the deal? If you are healed of God, why do you need the remedy? I think God is laying down a principle. Do two things when you get sick: pray, and go to the doctor.

There's more. Matthew 9:12. "They that are whole need not a physician, but they that are sick." Jesus assumed that sick people needed a doctor. It's interesting that, in the case on the island of Melita, where Paul healed the people, it says that Paul, "Laid his hands on him, and healed him." The Greek word iaomai means 'healing;' it is also used as a spiritual term for healing. Then it says that Luke therapeuothem. Paul healed them, and Luke practiced medicine on them; it's a terrific combination. So, if you get sick, find a Paul to pray for you and a Luke to help you get better. Just let God do His will.

Remember, it is God's will that you die sometime. May it be like Peter. Jesus said to him, "By this death you shall glorify God." I hope that in your illnesses, and everything else, you keep your biblical perspective and glorify God in His purpose. All the time, remember this, you do have the promise to

seek Heaven, because the One who lives there is Jehovah Ropheka, the Lord that heals. Let's pray.

Father, thank You for a clear word to us again this morning. We are challenged to be discerning and to realize the clarity with which Your Word speaks on this. For this two part series, Father, we ask Your blessing, that these tapes might go and touch many lives and unscramble much that has been confused. Help us, Father, to look to You, to accept Your will, and yet to seek Your face, as Hezekiah did, and pray with tears, believing that You are the God who heals. Do Your will in every life. For everyone that is here this morning and is ill in any way, all I can ask is that You would heal, if that's Your will. If it is not, that You would perfect, by this infirmity, that You may receive the glory either way. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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