
FAITH HEALING | *Benjamin B. Warfield*¹

And now let us very briefly sum up from our own point of view what it seems that we ought to think of Faith-Healing. First of all, as regards the *status quaestionis*, let it be remembered that the question is not:

- (1) Whether God is an answerer of prayer; nor
- (2) whether, in answer to prayer, He heals the sick; nor
- (3) whether His action in healing the sick is a supernatural act; nor

(4) whether the supernaturalness of the act may be so apparent as to demonstrate God's activity in it to all right-thinking minds conversant with the facts.

All this we all believe. The question at issue is distinctly whether God has pledged Himself to heal the sick miraculously,² and does heal them miraculously, on the call of His children—that is to say without means—any means—and apart from means, and above means; and this so ordinarily that Christian people may be encouraged, if not required, to discard all means as either unnecessary or even a mark of lack of faith and sinful distrust, and to depend on God alone for the healing of all their sicknesses. This is the issue, even conservatively stated. For many will say that faith gives us as clear a title to the healing of our bodies as to the salvation of our souls; and this is often interpreted to mean that it is the heritage of every Christian, if a true Christian, to be free from all disease and bodily weakness, and it is a proof of special sin in a Christian if he is a special sufferer from disease.

With reference to this question it is to be said at least:

- (1) No promise of such miraculous action on God's part exists in Scripture.
- (2) No facts have been adduced which will compel the assumption that such miraculous healing takes place.

(3) Such a miraculous method of action on God's part would be wholly unnecessary for the production of the effect desired; God can heal the bodily hurt of His people without miracle.

(4) The employment of such a method of working would be contrary to the analogy of God's mode of working in other spheres of His activity.

(5) It would be contrary to the very purpose of miracle, which would be defeated by it. If miracles are to be common, every-day occurrences, normal and not extraordinary, they cease to

¹ From *Counterfeit Miracles* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1918; reprint, London: Banner of Truth, 1972), pp. 192-95. Scripture citations and footnotes added by the editor of this version.

² Miracle: "a striking interposition of divine power by which the operations of the ordinary course of nature are overruled, suspended or modified." Chambers' Encyclopaedia. A more fully biblically informed definition: an immediate act of God in the external world, to effect, draw attention to, or confirm the interpretation of, His redemptive-historical purposes.

attract attention, and lose their very reason of existence. What is normal is according to law. If miracles are the law of the Christian life they cease to serve their chief end.

(6) The contention of the Faith-Healers overlooks numerous important biblical facts. Primarily the fact that the miraculous gifts in the New Testament were the credentials of the Apostle, and were confined to those to whom the Apostles had conveyed them—whence a presumption arise against their continuance after the Apostolic age.³ Then, again, that there are instances of sickness in the New Testament which were not removed by the prayer of faith. There is, for example, Paul's leaving of Trophimus at Miletum sick (2 Tim. 4:20), and his recommending to Timothy, when sick, not the seeking of healing by the miraculous act of God, but the use of medicinal means—the drinking no longer of water but of a little wine for his stomach's sake and his often infirmities (1 Tim. 5:23). It seems quite clear that Paul did not share the views of our modern Faith-Healers.⁴

(7) The Faith-Healing arguments presuppose or lead to many false doctrines. A desultory allusion to some of them here may not be without its uses.

(a) Sickness and sin are often connected in an utterly unscriptural manner. That all the sicknesses which afflict our race are a result of sin is true. But that special sickness infer special sin our Saviour Himself explicitly denies. (John 9:2-4; Luke 13:1ff)

(b) These arguments would be equally valid to commend perfectionism. If sinfulness is not to be removed in this life, neither is sickness. Both are the fruits of guilt, and both are removed on the basis of the work of the guilt-bearer; and both are removed only when the subjective salvation is completed. (1 John 1:8-2:1; 3:1-2; Rev. 22:1-2)

(c) They are founded on a completely unscriptural view of the functions of suffering, and the uses of sickness and pain. All sickness and suffering are spoken of as if they were from the evil one alone; as if they were sheerly the mark of the displeasure of God; and as if they were a fruit of particular sin. Scripture says: "Behold whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth." (Heb. 12:6) Sickness is often the proof of special favor from God;⁵ it always comes to His children from His Fatherly hand, and always in His loving pleasure works, together with all other things which befall God's children, for good. (2 Cor. 4:7-11; 5:1-8; 12:5-9; Rom. 8:16-25, 28)

(8) The Faith-Healing contention leads to contempt for God's appointed means, and this leads to the fanatical attitude of demanding from God apart from all means that for the attaining of which He has ordained appropriate means. We are not to refuse to cultivate the soil and then demand to be fed by miracle.

(9) The Faith-Healing practice leads to the production of "professionals," standing between the soul and God. There is grave danger in a soul permitting an unauthorized intermediary to take up a position between it and the gracious activities of God toward it. From this germ the whole sacerdotal⁶ evil has grown. And, on the other hand, to the practitioner himself there comes inevitable temptation to spiritual pride and autocracy, which is most disastrous to his spiritual life; and sometimes even something worse.

³ John 3:2; 2 Cor. 12:12; Acts 8:9-24; Hebr. 1:1-2; 2:3-4. Cf. *Counterfeit Miracles*, pp. 1-31.

⁴ See also Phil. 2:25-30.

⁵ "When I am in the cellar of affliction, I look for the Lord's choicest wines." Samuel Rutherford.

⁶ Belief in the divine authority of the priesthood.