

Newsletter December 2014

In this newsletter we shall discuss perpetual prosperity and health as a supposed basic right of all who profess themselves to be Christians. These delusional teachings have quite easily pervaded the prevailing humanism of today's churchianity, and they are closely aligned with occultism as well as liberation theology (cf. Newsletter February 2013). In many contemporary churches, the Gospel of salvation from sin through the death of Christ has been adulterated to become a teaching of salvation from all human want and suffering. Liberation from sin is no longer the main issue, but liberation from all the discomforts of mortal life – which are the direct consequence of sin in the world. It is the poverty-stricken, and the chronically ill that most easily fall into the seductive traps laid by the false prophets of perpetual wealth and health, while it is the materially rich and those who are enjoying physical well-being that are its strongest proponents – as they hold themselves up as alleged examples of the benefits of these false doctrines. These two doctrines become an offense to the child-like faith of the ill and the poor (cf. Mt.18:7).

The Power of Positive Thinking, a supposed self-help book written by Dr. Norman Vincent Peale and first published in 1952 is only one example of this kind of false teaching. Peale's use of hypnotic autosuggestion in his methods pushes them into the metaphysical realm. Robert H. Schuller's *Possibility Thinking* had espoused a similar doctrine inasmuch as it based human achievement upon visualization and belief in the power of the human mind to bring about success through an imaginative process. It is implied that the mind of man is so powerful, that belief in God is a mere placebo to aid man in the promotion of a desired result. The supposed power of positive thinking and possibility thinking are but more modern propagations of an old occult falsehood of human mind over matter. These two thought processes manifest themselves in various ways in today's churchianity but especially so through the prosperity doctrine wherein one can but think and speak themselves to wealth through a positive thought process and by repeatedly speaking aloud various self-motivating mantras (cf. *CRC Book III*, pages 439-441).

Rather than great material riches, Christianity is most often characterized by material poverty. As Jesus went about his ministry He did not even have a place to lay down his head to sleep at night (cf. Mt. 8:20). Jesus' disciples, some of whom were poor fishermen to begin with, did not experience any increase in wealth, but even set aside any possibility of gain from their occupations to follow Jesus (cf. Mt.4:18-20). One of Jesus' disciples, Matthew, was a publican who walked away from all that he had accumulated to follow Him (cf. Mt.9:9). Jesus' disciples occasionally needed to resort to gleaning in the fields to satisfy their hunger (cf. Lu.6:1). The Apostle Paul often suffered great hunger and want while on his missionary journeys, and he laboriously worked with his own hands to satisfy his own physical needs (cf. Ac. 20:34; Ph. 4:12). Some would dare use the verse in 2Co. 8:9 to suggest that all should be made materially rich through Christ's poverty, but in context we find that the riches that Jesus set aside were the prerogatives of his deity in his incarnation (cf. Ph.2:6-8); and the riches of which Paul spoke of as having been received by the Corinthians were faith, the utterance of truth, sound knowledge, and the joy received in giving out of their own material poverty as an expression of their love for others in Christ (cf. 2Co. 8:7).

Great material riches are actually a strong hindrance to faith; so much so that not many of the rich and powerful are called into God's kingdom (cf. Mt. 19:23; 1Co. 1:26). Many men have become rich by oppressing and taking advantage of the poor, not thinking that but for the grace of God they could find themselves in want in the future (cf. Ja. 2:6,7; Pr. 22:16). Almost certainly these wealthy individuals find themselves impoverished in matters of faith inasmuch as all their thoughts are constantly directed toward amassing additional wealth without regarding the cost to their souls (cf. Lu.12:16-18). Hence, great riches are not something that we as Christians should desire lest greed dominate our lives and egregious materialism draw us away from effectual faith (cf. Mt.6:25; 1Ti. 6:9,10). From a human standpoint it is as impossible for a rich man to be saved as it would be for a camel to pass through the eye of a sewing needle; but then with God nothing is impossible (cf. Mt.19:24-26). Accordingly, we find a select number of men who possess great riches but are nevertheless devout Christians. They understand that their riches have not been received as a right of faith, but as a peculiar gift to be used for the benefit of others. Nevertheless, a materially rich Christian remains the exception because of the severe obstruction prideful wealth and a resulting haughty spirit commonly places before saving faith (cf. Pr.16:18).

Some churches make use of the greed inherent in the prosperity doctrine when they state that the more you give to the temporal church through tithes and offerings, the more God will increase your material wealth. It is often the abundantly rich, who can easily pay tithes and afford large offerings that do not affect their life style in the least, who hold themselves up as living examples of this false doctrine to snare the less fortunate and the poor (cf. Mk. 9:42). The verses that are commonly quoted out of context in support of this notion are found in Malachi 3:10, which specifically applies to the old ceremonial law surrounding Temple worship that has been completely fulfilled in Christ to whom it pointed. In 2nd Corinthians 9:6 the Apostle Paul stated that “he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully.” However, the offering from the Corinthians that Paul was referring to was a special offering for the poor in Jerusalem, not a regular tithe or offering to support the operation of a local church. God does not reward Christians with increased material wealth as a consequence of their generous giving, but with far greater spiritual blessings that are priceless. When we give generously to the poor, we do so with much compassion for their lack of necessities; the blessing we experience is great joy in having been able to help those in need (cf. Newsletter June 2012).

The false doctrine of perpetual health is closely associated with the prosperity doctrine. Of course, God can and does continue to heal people of physical infirmities today just as He also imparts riches on those whom He wills to have it. He quite often grants healing in answer to prayer through an act of mercy (cf. Ja.5:14–16), but always to further accomplish his sovereign purpose and will. Most often God accomplishes physical and mental healing through quite natural means, but at rare times He does so miraculously in ways that defy medical science. Jesus compassionately healed many during his earthly ministry to verify his divine nature and authority as God come in human flesh (cf. Mt.9:35). After His crucifixion, his apostles and some of his close followers briefly exercised this gift as a sign pointing to the authenticity of the Gospel message (cf. Mt. 10:1; Ac. 3:6,7; 8:5-7 etc.). The false doctrine of perpetual health is closely associated with this gift of miraculous healing, which is being put forth because health is not truly perpetual in the life of a believer at all. The only biblical suggestion of this miraculous gift of physical healing being given to all believers without end or exception is found in a quite problematical passage in Mark 16:18. We must note that the text in Mark Chapter 16, verse 9 through the end of the chapter does not exist in two of the earlier and better Greek manuscripts. It is rather doubtful that Mark ever wrote those verses, but probably some “well-intentioned” scribe added them during copying or translation as a way to finish Mark's writing – which ends rather abruptly in verse 8. Since its authorship is in doubt, we must not base any major doctrine upon this text that is uncorroborated elsewhere by certifiable texts.

The Apostle Paul healed during his early ministry to the gentiles, but he himself suffered from a perpetual illness (most likely a disfiguring eye ailment) that was never healed though he prayed for it three times (cf. Ac. 28:8; 1Co.12:7-9). Timothy, his son in the faith, apparently suffered chronic stomach trouble that was only alleviated by small amounts of wine taken medicinally (cf. 1Ti.5:23). Paul speaks of having to leave another brother named Trophimus at Miletum sick and unable to travel (cf. 2Ti 4:20). Therefore, the doctrine of perpetual health is but a presumption that is not substantiated by Scripture. Human illness is deeply imbedded within the flesh of man's fallen nature as a persistent consequence of Adam's sin; only the soul is redeemed through the atonement of the cross. We must patiently await a sinless incorruptible body to be received when Christ returns for his own in the end-times (cf. 1Co. 15:44; 52-53).

Traditional Christians, who are deeply entrenched in superstitious ritual, such as Roman Catholics as well as many unenlightened and highly-emotional Protestants, are all too easily trapped into trusting a modern-day shaman who is knowingly or unwittingly a human agent of Satan. A large number of these so-called faith healers are embedded within various temporal churches that expound the perpetual health doctrine, confining their practice to local church members. They commonly find themselves “healing” the same people repeatedly of the same affliction – thus effectively denying the persistence of sound health. Other avowed faith healers travel about the evangelical circuits today claiming that God has given them an even greater healing ministry along the fringes of the unchurched population. Some of these men make great use of radio and television to extend their reach and raise additional funds to continue the delusion. Since most that go forward in these mass meetings are not genuine Christians, the “faith” that is being exercised is primarily directed toward the charismatic personality of the alleged faith healer himself and his supposed supernatural powers.

Some participants at these meetings may actually be mesmerized through emotionally heated ritualism into believing that they are healed for a short time before the mental euphoria wears off and painful reality returns. During that interim, the infirm may be able to do extraordinary things such as throwing off crutches and walking off a platform as the sudden flow of adrenaline temporarily overrides pain and triggers the emergency reserves of the body. Because of this temporary euphoria, which may last for hours or sometimes even several days through a continual denial of pain, it is barely possible that even the faith healer himself is deluded into thinking that healing is actually taking place. This is especially true of mass meetings on an evangelical circuit where the person that is “healed” may never be seen or heard of again by the practitioner. There can, of course, be little doubt that the greater number of these “miraculous healings” we hear about today are simply being faked by clever charlatans for personal gain. Their subjects are commonly preselected at some of their larger meetings based upon their emotional makeup, the exact nature of their malady, and their vulnerability to accept ritual experience for fact. This selection process is usually explained away as finding only those who have “sufficient faith” to be healed, when in fact the search is actually for those who have the necessary superstitious bent, emotional instability, and a basic ignorance of sound Scriptural doctrine.

Many are convinced that God heals men and women through the ritualistic efforts of faith healers through examples that are never medically authenticated. That is because the “healed” often are told that any attempt at confirming their cure through medical examination would be a breach of the “faith” that had cured them to begin with and which continues to keep them well; for them to attempt to confirm the restoration of their health would be tantamount to doubting God. Unfortunately, many individuals, who are persuaded of their healing, disregard sound medical advice and even stop taking prescribed medications. When symptoms return, the subject often attempts to ignore them believing that they are only the result of a weakness of their faith that they must overcome through determined mental effort. As a consequence, those imaginary “healings” can lead to increased physical difficulties and in the extreme case death.

The fortunate sufferers are those who are spiritually awakened to see their sins for what they are: the result of a depraved fallen nature through which all infirmity and disease has universally beset mankind. Rather than seeking a numbing anesthetic for their pain, they turn to seek out the One who is able to truly cure their greatest illness – their sin nature. Rather than “white-wash” our sins in the hopes of alleviating mental or physical pain, we must turn to the cross where all our sins are exposed and laid bare. Seeing them for what they are: the source of all pain and suffering in this life, we eagerly desire to repent of them. Even as we do so, we find that the Spirit of Christ has imparted a new birth to our spirit, our souls respond, our minds are cleansed, and often even our bodies are healed as a side-benefit of our increased mental well-being. Even so, most of the redeemed continue to suffer physical pain as much or more than before they were saved. This is all in accordance with God's will and purpose for our lives and is intended to draw us ever closer to Christ. It constantly reminds us of the far greater suffering that Jesus experienced on the cross as He died for our sins (cf. 2Co. 5:21; 1Pe.4:1).

In conclusion, it is evident that any need to exercise the sign of miraculous healing, which the Holy Spirit utilized to confirm the Gospel in the first century, has been greatly diminished today inasmuch as Scripture contains a sufficient record of Jesus' divine nature demonstrated through his authority over illness and death. This gift would be largely dismissed by today's sophisticated populace or merely looked down upon as an illusionist's trick or perhaps a false diagnosis, while the ignorant are more likely to stumble into superstition by worshiping the person in whom the gift is vested rather than Christ (cf. Ac.14:8-15). The marvelous message of the true Gospel is often lost under the fantasy that no one need ever be sick, and that if he only maintains sufficient “faith,” he can be healed of every disease and enjoy great material riches. Attempting to adorn the Gospel message with the false doctrines of perpetual health and wealth as a means to make it more attractive to the worldly unbeliever only thwarts the efforts of the Holy Spirit to convince the unsaved that God through Christ has provided a way of salvation from sin that is all of grace and grace alone. Trusting Christ will not automatically make us materially rich, nor will it insure good health and a long life. What it will provide is of much greater value: total propitiation for our sins thus making peace with God and ensuring eternal life within immortal bodies in Heaven after our necessary departure from these pain-riddled physical bodies through death (cf. 1Jn.2:2; Ro.5:1; 1Co. 15:53; 2Ti. 1:10; He. 9:27a). © Arthur J. Smith December 2014