

## **Thinking Theology, by Mike Endicott**

Two major views of healing theology have attained some prominence in these days - we can refer to them as the Eschatological and Atonement theories. Each one has, in their own right, justified the writing of a number of books, so it may only serve here to paint an overview of each one rather than debate them to any great extent.

The first theology, the Eschatological, relies on the undoubted fact that we are living in the 'In-between' times. Christ has already visited his people as Saviour and Suffering Servant but will come again from heaven as King of Kings and Lord of lords. Between these two visitations there is a difference. The kingdom is already here but not yet in fullness. If it was so, and full and complete healing in body, mind and spirit were to be granted to everyone on demand, then that must mean, for the Christian on being prayed for, that we would immediately be raptured into glorified bodies and everlasting life - in other words Christ would surely have returned because that is precisely what will happen when he does. Our healing of body, mind and spirit would be complete in an instant. But he has not yet returned. While we wait we only see in part. God undoubtedly wishes to see all of us healed but not, necessarily, yet. We must not, in that case, teach and uphold that all healing is freely available - we must not expect too much. What we do not see in miraculous cures we proclaim as the 'Mystery' of God, and, truly, what would our Almighty God be without mystery? What would he be to us if we could fully understand him?

And so we ask. We may all ask and we may all ask for anything. We must expect everything and expect nothing at the same time.

In terms of pastoral care, this theology of healing has the considerable advantage of explaining, to those not yet healed who feel that God may prefer others or that they have some sinful block of their own, that not everyone is supposed to be healed anyway. The feeling is that the avoiding of too much expectancy will reduce the level of disappointment and rejection.

However, such an attitude to healing grace is counter-productive. It is this same expectancy with which we do not wish to over-enthuse people (in case things do not work out for them) that acts as an effective lightening conductor in allowing kingdom healing to break through into our lives. Being advised to observe lower levels of expectancy reduces our open-ness to the flow of the sparkling river of grace. It acts to reduce the possibilities of God's work in his people.

On the other hand, the Atonement approach claims that through his wounds we are healed. He has carried all our sicknesses and born all our diseases and the power of them over us has been exhausted on the Cross of our Lord. It is finished. The work of the Cross is complete. Healing has happened already. It follows then, as it is with forgiveness and everlasting life, that all is laid up in heaven already for us and that all we have to do is ask for it. In it's simplest and most naïve form, all the Christian needs is enough faith (expectancy) and all is given. This Atonement theology of healing increases dramatically our wonder at the work of God on the Cross but tends to reduce in our minds his present mystery. It says that as long as we can grasp the fullness of Calvary we can come close to holding in our minds the fullness of God's gifts to us.

In pastoral terms, such a line of thought has the weighty advantage of lifting both the minister's and the supplicant's expectancy, of raising even higher into heaven our lightening conductor rods. Miracles follow. The disadvantage here is that the unhealed may be left either in a state of condemnation for lack of faith or in resentment and anger at having been hoodwinked into a temporary state of emotional over-drive. There is often a feeling of rejection and they are left with only one way forward into healing and that is by their own efforts - by working harder at their own faith - a most ungracious and ungodly principle.

Faith, we concern ourselves, may even be lost altogether, though a more likely reaction would be one of self-condemnation for lack of it. Both theologies, it would seem, serve little purpose in this world unless they fall out of the tips of our fingers with the compassionate love and power of God himself. Such debates may only serve as a thin soup for the nourishment of other theologians.

Behind all this thinking, however, is the beating heart of the people that knows that somehow there has to be more than there is, much more. There is a danger that our leaders may choose and develop their theology with their focus on pastoral inferences. Such cares as these are mostly misdirected as the unhealed are left with feelings of rejection either way. We know that our scientists and medics will do their utmost for us, that it may take time and may not even then be resolved but we expect God, if we expect anything of him, to work instantaneously. Such a common and illogical position leaves us wide open to feelings of rejection and the minister's theology will have little or no bearing on that fact.

Faith, however healing is taught among the people, is rarely lost in the face of unanswered prayer and, when it is, it may well have been a faith that was not worth the keeping. We know there is a sun when it is behind the clouds; we know that there is love in the world even on those days that we do not feel it and we know that there is a God, even when he appears to be silent.

The truth at ground level is that we know that he has placed everything under the feet of Jesus and yet we do not see everything behaving as if it were so. We know that Jesus has been given authority over all things but, so far, not everything, and certainly not our illnesses of body and mind, conduct themselves as if under holy instruction. Some do and for that we praise him. Some do not and we will always wonder why.

The healing theologian is pressed into choosing between the Eschatological and the Atonement view so that he might answer the question which is uppermost in the minds of many,

"Why is not every sickness and disease subject to him in reality? Why is not everyone healed?"

Which of these two theologies is more correct? Which view should we associate ourselves with? Which stand should we take? What is popular is not always right and what is right is not always popular.

Let us then go, with humility, in a third direction. Let us be the pilgrim minister driven on by the Holy Spirit into the things of God, asking only of himself and of his Lord,

"For the sake of your beloved ones, how can I help to see more evil behaving in holy submission? How do I do better battle for the oppressed? How do I see more under his feet? If I had more grace, more wisdom, more power and more submissiveness to God's authority, how much more can I do? How much, in this present world, are we supposed to see under his feet?"

This pilgrim servant healer is not so concerned as to the why's and wherefore's of failure but with the optimism and hope of more. Out of this third walk grows a third theology of healing.

It claims that healing flows from the foot of the Cross of Christ, that miracles happen by God's grace when that river meets with our expectancy. With sufficient direct, child-like expectancy, persistence and humility Jesus would want to see everyone healed who asks him. He has demonstrated our heavenly Father's will in these things in his own earthly ministry and God does not change. Healing should happen. There are no sins, no blockages, no hang-ups and no lack of religious fervour that can limit his love and prevent it.

It is only our lack of faith expectancy that gets in the way. Whenever two or three are gathered together in his name it should happen. Wherever God finds expectancy larger than a mustard seed it should happen. Whenever the body of Christ is in agreement in his name it should happen. Wherever the kingdom of God is near it should happen.

And this remains the mystery of God - it does not always work the way it should. There are times when heaven seems to fall silent.

The Eschatological view of healing dismisses all these apparently unanswered prayers as being the mystery of God and in that dismissal we ministers will cease to become pilgrims, locking ourselves into a lazy-minded state of lack of understanding, through submission to the *status quo*, which stifles growth. We say that we do our part by offering to pray and the rest is all between the supplicant and God.

The Atonement theory on it's own, at it's worst, can only blame the supplicant for lack of faith, thus blocking any further possibilities for growth in any other area than in the sufferer himself. Either way, the minister is excused responsibility. We may debate at length the emotional state or the spiritual receptiveness of the sufferer. We may argue the virtues of the Eschatological and Atonement theologies of healing. Does God wish to demonstrate his Fatherhood or not? Does he love to give us a foretaste of heaven to come or does he somehow enjoy to tease us with infrequent titbits of grace?

The variety of tensions between the various theologies and philosophies within the healing ministry are not a soft arrangement of cushions, not an easy-chair in which to relax in some afternoon meditation pose. The Healing ministry of the Christian church is a fort in enemy country and the forces arranged against us are most cunning and adept at surprise assault.

Inside our stockade, however, there can be nothing to fear. Our theologies and our ministries are not military or political positions for us to hold on to at all costs. But a stronghold in which we are kept, as long as, in the moment of attack, we fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith.

Hopefully, though, in the lull between the battles, we might step tentatively out of our fortresses onto the pilgrimage road, honestly and humbly clasping our ignorance in our hands, seeking not how we might understand but how we might serve. The question before us is not one whose answer we might use to justify our, or God's, apparent failings but this. How might we, as ministers of his grace, serve him more wonderfully than we do today?

Of course we may finish up anywhere - this is the risk of the pilgrim. We may even end our days having gone round in a circle, back into those earliest of ministry times when the church expected these things.

Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well."

After the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, he was taken up into heaven and he sat at the right hand of God.

Mark 16:16-19

- \* Jesus healed all those who asked him of all their diseases.
- \* All healing was full and without delay
- \* He claimed not to do or say anything unless God our Father is doing it - we may conclude that it is God's will today to see everyone healed today.
- \* Suffering, sometimes referred to Biblically as being of value, is not a function of illness but a function of persecution. It is not the will of God. It's continuing existence through ill health cannot be used to justify lack of healing.
- \* To Calvary's cross Christ took all our sicknesses and there he bore all our diseases - by his wounds we are healed. The treasure chest of healing grace is opened for us in heaven.
- \* Expectancy, persistence and humility work together as the components of the lightning conductor that earths heaven's grace in healing and wholeness.
- \* Although the expectancy of the minister and supplicant are of great value, the overwhelming openness to receiving grace is the corporate expectancy of the body gathered.

\* There is no sin, wound, demon, bondage or any other blockage other than unbelief that can restrict the power of God to heal the sick.

\* Not everyone is healed.

\* The prime, and insufficiently explored, reason for this apparent lack of answered prayer lies in the fact that Jesus has entrusted his healing ministry to the Church. Had he kept it for himself, and answered prayer down the lesser preferred route of sovereign intervention, it would work perfectly every time.

\* Jesus Christ has been given authority over all things, including sickness, and has passed on that authority to his disciples.

\* God has two ways of answering prayer - sovereignly and through his people. The second of these is his preferred route and is opened up not by prayer requesting sovereign action but by the church herself commanding and dismissing evil with the authority she has been given to do so.

\* The use of such authority in love is commanding and effective. The power of God always follows his given authority but only where that authority is deeply understood by the disciple and is maintained by that disciple in his or her own sonship.

\* God is willing and powerful to heal - we are left considering only three things:

1. the expectancy of the gathered body.(not the faith shortfall in the supplicant).
2. The exercise of authority in the deepest compassion by those who minister
3. the mystery of God and this only after the possibilities of the first two have been exhausted.

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