



The Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada

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In a desire to emulate the experience of the early church in the book of Acts, miracles and healings are an integral part of Pentecostal belief and practice. This paper outlines our basic theological position in this area.

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## MIRACLES AND HEALINGS

### Introduction

A core value of Pentecostals is a vital experience of faith. This leads to miracles and healings being an integral part of our belief system. In a time of sickness when we have a choice between coming down on the side of belief or unbelief, we firmly choose belief. This does not mean that we try to force God to heal nor that healing on earth even comes in every instance. But a positive affirmation of faith is our starting point based on the following premises flowing out of our belief in the Trinity.

First, our belief in God leads naturally to a belief in miracles. As Paul E. Little said, "once we assume the existence of God there is no problem with miracles because God is by definition all-powerful."<sup>1</sup> Roger D. Cotton makes the following significant observation, "The ideal king is one of the most consistently used images of God in the Old Testament, portraying Him relationally instead of defining him in systematic, propositional statements. Such an image gives a far richer understanding of God and his relationship with people. It especially affords the proper perspective on God's sovereign power. Nothing can compare with Him. As the eternal yet personal creator, he purposefully involves himself in his creation, saving and sustaining his creatures."<sup>2</sup>

Coming from an omnipotent heavenly Father, God's power and love remain constantly in operation in the lives of His children. While acknowledging the sovereignty of God in choosing who and when He heals, we preach the certainty of the fact that God desires to heal us.

Second, Jesus Christ, while on earth, performed a vast range of miracles and healings. Luke explicitly ties this in to Jesus' anointing and empowering by the Spirit (Lk. 4:14,18). This has direct implications for modern day healing ministry. The fact that Jesus' miraculous ministry was not peripheral is shown by the way the disciples on the road to Emmaus described his ministry as "powerful in word and deed." (Luke 24:19). In John 14:12-14, Jesus promised that his disciples would do even greater things than he did. Matt.10: 1 states, "He called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out evil spirits and to cure every kind of disease and sickness." The fact that Christ's miraculous ministry continues to this day is further proven by the fact the he is "the same yesterday and today and forever" (Heb.13:8).

Third, the Holy Spirit was actively at work in the book of Acts liberally bestowing spiritual giftings including miracles and healings. We see no biblical evidence to indicate that this ministry of the Spirit has ceased. The history in Acts, we believe, is just as significant in forming doctrine as the teaching portions of Corinthians. In fact, since so many miraculous events happened in the early church, we see Acts as a selective, not a random, history which reinforces our belief in its significance for doctrine.

## Foundation Concepts

In discussing the subject of miracles and healings, there are three errors to avoid. First, there is the error of cessationist theology which teaches that miracles ended with the close of the New Testament. The authority Jesus imparted to the disciples to drive out evil spirits and heal every disease (Matt. 10:1) was not rescinded after the resurrection and ascension; in fact, it was increased and extended to the ministries of others, including Stephen (6:8), Philip (8:6) Paul, and Barnabas (14:3-8), and others. The book of Acts does not have a formal conclusion because it is believed that the acts of the apostles will continue throughout the church age. The second error is a trivializing of the term, miracle, in which mere coincidences are described as miraculous. The third error is the health/wealth claim that everyone will be healed in this life and if they are not, it is the result of the presence of either sin or lack of faith in the sick person's life. Often this theology is linked to our overriding concern with materialism. This concern certainly could not be validated by the experiences of Christians in other eras of church history nor in other countries today.

Harold Horton comments on Jesus' healing of the lame man at the pool of Bethesda in John 5: "Bethesda's porches were filled with sick folk, all believers in divine healing, for they were all waiting for a heavenly miracle. And the minister on this occasion was one supremely gifted with the power of the Spirit. Yet only one was actually healed- the one who actually got into touch with Jesus' living power."<sup>3</sup>

In II Cor. 12:8 Paul's thorn – possibly physical illness - is not removed but instead he is given grace to live with his disability. Further I Tim.5: 23 points out Timothy has experienced chronic stomach trouble. According to R. Paul and Wardine Wood, "Believers can influence the activity of God but must not attempt to manipulate Him. The creature does not control the Creator."<sup>4</sup>

## Definitions

### (1) Miracle

In general terms, a miracle is defined as a supernatural act of God temporarily setting aside or changing the laws of nature. As Pentecostals, we believe that God is the creator of the laws of nature and these are usually in operation. However, because God is also sovereign, He has the prerogative to temporarily set aside the laws which He created.

In the Old Testament the two most common words for miracle/sign/wonder are "pala" and "mopet." Meaning "to be marvelous or wonderful," "pala" is used seventy times. "The word focuses on people's reaction when they are confronted by a miracle...miracles are intended to have an impact on the observer. They create a sense of awe and wonder, a sense of the inescapability of God as an active force within the world of time and space."<sup>5</sup> "Mopet" is used thirty-six times particularly in reference to God's miraculous acts in Egypt. According to Roger D. Cotton, "mopet" combines the idea of "miracle" and "sign" and "seems to emphasize that the supernatural event or wonder has meaning and significance."<sup>6</sup>

In the New Testament the two most common words for miracle/sign/wonder are "dunamis" and "semeion". Coming from the root meaning of "power", "dunamis" lays stress on the miracle as "spontaneous expression of God's elemental power" while "semeion" stresses the sign aspect as "an authenticating mark."<sup>7</sup> In I Corinthians 12:10,28,29, a derivative of the word "dunamis" is used to describe the gift of miracles or "miraculous powers"(NIV). It is significant that the context of evangelism and missions is where the terms miracles/signs/wonders are regularly found in the New Testament. Further, these terms should be used in a limited context. For as Harold Horton points out, "Though every conversion is a miracle, as life itself is a miracle, yet it is not a miracle in the sense of dividing a stream by the sweep of a mantle or turning common dust into living insects with a gesture."<sup>8</sup>

### (2) Healing

In the Old Testament "the state of being healthy is expressed in terms that indicate vigor, life, or simply 'shalom' which we usually translate as 'peace' but which really means the presence in a person or a relationship of all that ought to

be there.”<sup>9</sup> The most common word in Hebrew is “rapa”(used sixty-seven times).<sup>10</sup> The basic meaning is “to heal” or “to make healthy.” In Exodus 15:26, God proclaims to his children, “I am the Lord who heals you.”

In the New Testament the two most common words are “therapeuo”(“to heal or cure”) and “iamai”(to cure or restore”). In I Corinthians 12:9,28,30, the term is “charismata iamaton” and is translated “gifts of healing” in the NIV. It is noteworthy that in all three references in I Corinthians the Greek refers to “gifts” and “healings” in the plural. According to the Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements, this plural usage is “probably meant to evoke the sense of abundance and variety in the gifts that spring from faith.”<sup>11</sup> Further as noted by L.T. Holdcroft, “the one who receives the gift of healing is the person who is sick not the one who ministers the gift. Each instance of healing is sovereignly granted by God.”<sup>12</sup>

A final point should be made showing the difference between miracles and healings in the New Testament. Stanley H. Horton states that miracles are “direct interventions in the world of man and nature which are distinguished from healings.”<sup>13</sup> If healings refer to the miraculous work of God in the human body, then the working of miracles refer to all miraculous work beyond human beings (eg. turning water into wine, calming the sea and bringing fire from heaven).

### **Purposes of Miracles and Healings**

#### **(1) Redemptive**

Miracles and healings are an integral part of the plan of redemption as they become a dramatic proof of God’s reality and His claims on a person’s life. Miracles and healing are not intended as entertainment for curiosity seekers. As Bernard Ramm puts it, “To man in sin miracles are a means of breaking through to him for he is encased within the two shells of ignorance and rebellion.”<sup>14</sup> “The primary purpose of healing is to demonstrate tangibly God’s intention and ability to lead people to the ultimate salvation which is eternal life- i.e., the fruit of healing is conversion.”<sup>15</sup> For every person who witnesses the awesome power of God in miracles and healings, there is a responsibility to respond to God. In our modern non-committal culture we have often missed recognizing this responsibility.

#### **(2) The Authentication of the Message and the Messenger**

Both in the Old Testament with the prophets and certainly in the New Testament with Christ, the messengers of God and their messages were proven to be authentic through miracles and healings. In his sermon on the Day of Pentecost, Peter boldly proclaimed, “Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs” (Acts 2:22). By witnessing the miraculous, genuine seekers have their faith nourished and stimulated. “Physical healing does more than rectify disorders of the body; it makes God present to the one healed and to all those joined to that person.”<sup>16</sup> In Acts the working of miracles is closely connected with the ministry of the apostles and evangelists carrying the Good News to the frontiers of the faith (e.g. Paul’s deliverance from any effects of the viper’s bite- Acts 28:3-6). As well, the purpose of these miracles is not to develop a theology of miracles, but rather to confirm the developing theology of Christ. At Jerusalem, Paul and Barnabas did refer to miracles, signs, and wonders in their preaching (15:12), but more commonly, miracles were seldom the subject of sermons or teaching. The more common order was demonstrated by Philip at Samaria, (8:4,5) where he *preached* Christ and *performed* miracles. Even in Damascus, Saul’s message had been to “prove to the Jews that Jesus is the Christ” (9:22). It is clear however, from Pentecost and onwards, that the common story, history, or theology that was preached was a theology of Christ. It is not so clear that a theology of miracles surfaced in these narratives. Referring to the gift of healing, Donald Gee states, “As a ‘sign gift’ it has always been in the forefront and is just as powerful for that purpose today.”<sup>17</sup>

#### **(3) The Relief of Suffering**

Miracles and healings clearly show the compassion of the Lord in desiring to relieve human suffering. Referring to two blind men, Matthew 20:34 states, “Jesus had compassion on them...immediately they received their sight.”

#### **(4) The Demonstration of God’s Power**

In reference to miracles, Bernard Ramm says, “Here is a God greater than disease...death...nature.”

#### **(5) The Demonstration of Divine Judgment**

This purpose is clearly demonstrated in the untimely deaths of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11).

## Human Responsibility

While ultimately the occurrence of miracles and healing depends on the decision of the sovereign Lord, there is a human responsibility. "The Bible shows that human engagement with God demands preparation, evidenced by the Abrahamic covenant, the exodus, the mosaic covenant and the requirements for the church as the bride of Christ. It follows that a holy God requires believers to prepare for the manifestation of His presence and power."

There are certain Biblical principles of preparation for miracles and healing to occur.

The first is the exercise of faith or positive expectancy. In a climate where believers anticipate the healing power of God, healings happen. Where there is little or no anticipation, usually they do not occur. Hebrews 11:6 shows the overall significance of faith in the Christian life with the claim, "without faith it is impossible to please God." In the New Testament, faith came from a number of sources including the sufferer alone (Matthew 9:22), friends of the sufferer (Mark 2:5) or the minister as in the case of a coma or unconsciousness (Matthew 9:25). It is possible for a lack of faith to be an obstacle to healing as in the case of Jesus in Nazareth (Mark 6:5,6).

In the New Testament there are two types of faith. One is saving faith which is present in every believer and in its essence is relational. Faith here is "not merely mental assessment of the fact of God's redemptive work in Christ but faith involves a personal trust in Jesus to save us."<sup>18</sup> The second is the gift of faith (I Corinthians 12:4,7,9) and "is not practiced by every Christian but by select individuals" and "involves an unquestioning belief that God will come to our aid and deliver us with His miracle-working power. It is the kind of faith that can 'move mountains' (I Corinthians 13:2)."<sup>19</sup> This second type of faith is special because of the magnitude of the miraculous which is attached to it.

In faith the healing may be progressive rather than instantaneous. Progress should be reason to praise the Lord. As David Lim says, "positionally claim total healing, practically claim progress."<sup>20</sup> In the New Testament there are cases where the healing takes place over a period of time such as the blind man whom Jesus touched twice (Mark 8:22-25) and the lepers who were healed after they left Jesus (Luke 17:14).

The second principle of preparation for miracles and healings is the practice of righteousness. God tells Solomon in II Chronicles 7:14 that their land will be healed if they "turn from their wicked ways."

The third principle of preparation, prayer, is also substantiated from II Chronicles 7:14, which admonishes God's people to also "humble themselves and pray and seek my face."

The fourth principle is a commitment to the Word. The connection between faith and the empowering Word is seen in Romans 10:17 where Paul teaches, "faith comes from hearing the message and the message is heard through the word of Christ." Though this verse is in a soteriological context, in a broader sense it applies equally to healing.

The fifth principle is praise of God. As David Lim says, "praise helps us to see the world from God's perspective. Praise releases the problem to God; it is a step of faith anticipating God's best."<sup>21</sup>

The sixth principle is recognition of God's sovereignty. In any healing, there is a combination, which cannot be perfectly understood on this earth. First there is the input of active faith by a human being and second God's sovereign choice. "God provides no intellectual escape hatch nor an apology when miracles fail to occur. He has not called the church to defend his honour. Neither does He owe an explanation of why a petition is unanswered. Humans have limited perspectives but God sees all factors and does all things well. God can be trusted. He does not betray His nature or His people."<sup>22</sup> The primary purpose of miracles in The Book of Acts was not to demonstrate that a believer may expect a miracle every time a problem is experienced. It has been pointed out that even in the midst of this miracle-laden narrative,

- 1) Peter and John were arrested, imprisoned, and scourged (4:1-8)
- 2) Stephen was stoned to death (6:8-7:60)
- 3) Christians were persecuted (8:1-3)
- 4) James was executed (12:1,2)
- 5) Paul was stoned (14:19,20)

In the words of William and Robert Menzies, "Rather than complain when all are not healed, we should rejoice when any are healed!"<sup>23</sup> As a general statement this is true but in the specific context of hurt, the statement does not bring much comfort.

## Healing in the Atonement

In any discussion about whether the basis of healing lies in the atonement, the starting point must be Isaiah 53:4-5 ("surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows...by his wounds we are healed"). It is significant first to note in this passage the concept of substitutionary redemption with the contrasting pronouns, "he\we," "his\our," (Isaiah 53:4-6,8,11,12) The discussion then shifts to Matthew 8:14-17 which refers to Jesus' healing ministry and concludes with the words, "This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah: 'He took up our infirmities and carried our diseases.'" In exegeting this portion, William and Robert Menzies see these important points:

(1) the context indisputably centers on physical healing (Matthew 8:16, 'He healed all the sick.') and presents this as a fulfillment of Isaiah 53:4. Thus the fulfillment formula, so prominent in Matthew's gospel, is applied to Jesus' healing ministry.

(2) Matthew's use of 'infirmities' ('asthenia') and diseases ('nosos') in Matthew 8:17 clearly points to physical healing. The term, 'nosos', ... always refers to physical maladies. The term, 'asthenia,' is found only in this text in Matthew's gospel but elsewhere in the New Testament it too refers to sickness.

(3) a comparison of Matthew's citation of Isaiah 53:4 with the Septuagint is instructive. Matthew does not follow the Greek translation of the Hebrew text...; rather he offers his own rendering of the Hebrew text...regardless of how Isaiah understood his prophecy, Matthew understood it messianically and applied it to the healing ministry of Jesus."<sup>24</sup>

Rather than simply seeing the cross as dealing with the problem of sin, it is preferable to view the cross in the larger context of dealing with all of humanity's problems including spiritual, physical and emotional. In this interpretation, Christ is the victor over all that enslaves and limits humanity and the cross has cosmic significance.

In viewing healing in the atonement, a significant question is raised about the comparison between the experience of salvation and that of healing by the believer. The former seems to be immediate and complete with no exceptions or delays whereas the latter seems to be sporadic and limited with numerous exceptions and delays. William and Robert Menzies respond by noting, "In reality our experience of the spiritual dimensions of salvation is not so immediate and complete as we might assume. The salvation provided by Jesus as Lord and Savior is progressive in nature (II Corinthians 3:18)... According to Paul, when one becomes a Christian, one embarks on a journey of transformation through the Spirit- a journey that is progressive in nature and culminates in the ultimate transformation, the resurrection of the body (I Corinthians 15:42-54). This is why Paul speaks of the gift of the Spirit as deposit, guaranteeing what is to come (II Corinthians 5:5)".<sup>25</sup>

## Miracles and Healings in the Old Testament

(1) Introduction - "For I am the Lord who heals you"

For many Christians, the realm of the miraculous, and especially instances of divine healing, remain unexplored. Even for Pentecostals and charismatics, who emphasize divine healing and other miraculous interventions as a foundational aspect of Christian belief and experience, it is an oft-misunderstood subject in both theology and praxis. Much attention is focused on the earthly ministry of Jesus and His apostles, which aptly provides the Church with a Christocentric pattern to follow concerning the miraculous. However, these investigations can be flawed without the context provided by the Jewish Scriptures. The Pentateuch, the poetic Wisdom literature and the Prophets each contribute important concepts to the exploration of divine healing, bringing nuances that would be lost with a narrow survey of the Gospels and the Epistles.

Exodus 15: 22 - 27 provides an excellent starting point for this brief exploration of the possible patterns and principles of divine healing within the Old Testament. In this passage, the newly freed Israelites come upon the bitter waters of Marah. The Lord tests them at this unlikely oasis, creating a statute that reflects a central aspect of His character:

".. .If you diligently heed the voice of the Lord your God and do what is right in His sight, give ear to his commandments and keep all His statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you which I have brought on the

Egyptians. For I am the Lord who heals you" (Exodus 15: 26, NKJV). Although this verse applies to the plagues of Egypt, the principle applies more widely.

At Marah, God proclaims Himself "Yahweh Rapha" - "the Lord who heals". This ordinance, laid out even before the Ten Commandments and the rest of the Mosaic Law, demonstrates God's measureless compassion for His people and their broken condition. It also foreshadows its ultimate fulfillment in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

## (2) "Rapha" - the Holistic Nature of Healing and Health in the Old Testament

The Hebrew word in the Old Testament that we most often translate as the verb "to heal" is the familiar "rapha". According to Strong, "rapha" has the primary meaning of "to mend (by stitching)" with sub-meanings of "to cure, heal, repair, make whole."<sup>26</sup> This is the definition that remains prominent in evangelical and Pentecostal circles. However, in his book, *Israel's Divine Healer*, Michael Brown argues for a different translation, which he states reflects a more careful analysis of the biblical material. Brown believes that "rapha" should translate as "to restore, make whole" with the first sub-meaning to be "to heal."<sup>27</sup>

This argument better reflects the holistic nature of healing and health from the perspective of the ancient Hebrews. Unlike the materialistic and compartmentalized perspective that modern Christians hold concerning divine healing (that is that divine healing is primarily physical or spiritual in nature), the ancient Israelites appeared to have held a much more comprehensive view. Health and healing involved not only the physical, but also the spiritual, the psychological, the sociological, the environmental and the national. It was not an "either-or" concept but instead was grounded in the indivisibility of God and man as expressed in the Old Testament (see Exodus 3: 14 and Deuteronomy 6:4). The varied use of the word "rapha" throughout the Old Testament simply confirms this supposition: physical healing (2 Kings 20: 5); spiritual and psychological healing (Psalm 41: 4 and Jeremiah 3: 22); environmental healing (2 Kings 2: 21); and national healing (2 Chronicles 7: 14).

This holistic view held by the ancient Israelites also applies to human sickness and suffering. Sin, disease, emotional turmoil, dissension, and natural disasters were not considered entirely separate in nature. On the contrary, many instances of divine physical healing described in the Old Testament, especially in the Pentateuch and the Historical books, directly connect sin and disease. This correlation could be applied to the individual or an entire nation (see Numbers 12 and 2 Samuel 24 as examples). Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 detail the physical afflictions (the "curses") that would befall the Israelites should they fail to obey the Lord. King Saul was afflicted with mental illness due his arrogant rejection of God's commands (1 Samuel 16: 14 - 23). The concept of personal or national sin leading to sickness or plague is reinforced often in the Jewish Scriptures and is even reflected in the earthly ministry of Christ (see John 5: 14). The foreshadowing of Christ in Chapter 53 of the book of Isaiah also demonstrates this holistic view of sin and sickness, and of its ultimate cure:

Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows;

Yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities;

The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed (v. 4, 5)

## (3) Dual Patterns of Divine Healing in the Old Testament

Although the ancient Hebrews generally held a more holistic view of healing and health, the Old Testament itself describes two rather dichotomous patterns of divine intervention upon personal and national well being. The first is reflected best in the Pentateuch and can be called the Levitical pattern of divine healing. Sin and sickness were intimately connected and divine healing was a direct result of covenantal blessings. This was especially evident when dealing with leprosy and the other "scale" diseases. Leviticus 13 and 14 detail the diagnosis and priestly methods of healing leprosy and the personal consequences for a person being pronounced leprous. Health and longevity were central blessings for the Israelites in their covenant with Yahweh and were maintained so long as the Hebrews remained faithful to God and His ordinances. A divine judgment of illness or plague was remedied only after an anointed authority interceded on behalf of the individual or the nation.

The second or prophetic pattern of divine healing is more clearly delineated in the works of the prophets. Unlike the Levitical pattern, which emphasized the link between sin and sickness, the prophetic pattern shows no such linkage. The prime example of this is the healing of Naaman, the Syrian leper (2 Kings 5: 1-19). Naaman, a Gentile army commander, is described as "great and honourable" and "a mighty man of valour". It is important to note that nowhere in this passage is Naaman's leprosy attributed to sin and personal repentance is not asked for or required. The prophet simply instructs Naaman to wash in the Jordan River seven times (which Naaman does, albeit reluctantly)

and he is healed. The raising of the Shunammite's son (2 Kings 4: 17 - 37) and the healing of King Hezekiah (2 Kings 20) also reinforce this pattern of healing.<sup>28</sup>

Both of these patterns of divine healing are demonstrated in the earthly ministry of Jesus Christ. The Levitical pattern is seen when Jesus healed the leper (Matthew 8: 1-4), the ten lepers (Luke 17: 11-19), the paralytic (Mark 2: 1-12), and the healing of the man at the pool of Bethesda (John 5: 1-15). The healings of the paralytic and the man at Bethesda are especially poignant as Jesus directly connects physical and spiritual healing. However, this connection is not always implied in the ministry of Jesus and is even refuted on one occasion (John 9: 1-12). Jesus' earthly activities exemplified the prophetic pattern as well. The healing of the centurion's servant (Luke 7: 1-10), the raising of the son of the widow of Nain (Luke 7: 11-17), the healing of the man with the withered hand (Matthew 12: 9-14), and the healing of the woman with the issue of blood (Matthew 9: 20-22) all fall within the prophetic pattern as laid out in the Old Testament.

#### (4) Practical Implications

From this brief examination of the Old Testament, modern Christians can glean the following principles:

- a) divine healing should not be relegated to miraculous interventions upon a person's physical being, but instead a more holistic view of healing that includes the psychological, spiritual, environmental, social and national aspects of humanity should be explored and emphasized.
- b) the Old Testament does not describe any one person specifically as a healer. Priests and prophets were the anointed authorities through which Yahweh Rapha could fulfill His covenantal commitments and His restorational ministry upon the earth. While evangelicals and many charismatics affirm the Protestant belief in the "priesthood of all believers", the use of anointed authorities (i.e. elders - James 5: 14, 15) does seem to extend past the Old Testament provisions. By this same token, the modern church should resist labelling any individual as a "healer", giving primacy to the Great Physician Himself.
- c) both patterns of divine healing should be fully explored and understood by the modern church without a preference being given to either. Both the Levitical and the prophetic patterns are evident in the earthly ministry of Jesus and in the New Testament writings. Any possible connection between sin and sickness must be carefully discerned and the principles of compassion, grace and mercy should be most evident when individuals request prayer for any illness or disease.

### **Healings and Miracles in the Gospels**

#### (1) Introduction

Jesus performed many miracles such as turning water into wine, healing the hopelessly disabled, multiplying fish and loaves, walking on the sea, stilling the storm, and raising the dead. His disciples also performed miracles such as healing the sick, casting out demons, and raising the dead.

It is evident, that Jesus' earthly ministry abounded in supernatural power from God to positively affect lives. He also sent out His disciples and commanded them to heal the sick and cast out demons (Mark 6:7-13; Luke 9:1,2; 10:9, 17).

#### (2) Importance in the Ministry of Jesus

Healing of the body was a core expression of the ministry of Jesus. His healing ministry closely connected with His saving, forgiving ministry (Mark 2:5-12). On numerous occasions, His healing miracles parallel his preaching of the gospel (Matt.4:23; 9:35,36).

He never turned any away but healed everyone who asked him (Matt.12:15; 14:14).

Sickness can be the result of the activity of Satan (Luke 13:16) or the presence of sin (John 5:14). Similarly in Paul's teaching about the Lord's Supper in I Cor. 11, he states, "he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgement to himself, if he does not judge the body rightly. For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep" (vv. 29,30). On other occasions, sickness is not directly related to sin but is rather an opportunity for God to be glorified (John 9:2,3; Mark 2:12).

Matthew, writing to us in the light of the cross and the resurrection, presents Jesus to us as the promised Messiah and Savior. He applies an Old Testament prophecy from Isaiah 53:4 to Jesus' healing ministry: "He took our infirmities (sicknesses) and carried our diseases (physical maladies)" (Matt.8:17).

This passage includes healing from both the spiritual and physical effects of our sins. It applies to more than Jesus' earthly ministry in regards to healing; rather, it is a summary of the messianic mission of Jesus, which reaches fulfillment on the cross. Thus the salvation the Messiah-King brings includes physical wholeness and healing.

### (3) Faith

Miracles and signs do not necessarily produce faith. During the ministry of Jesus, doubters (i.e. Pharisees) readily explained away every supernatural act He did. Faith is not based on an abundance of miracles. This often is but knowledge based on sensory perception. God does more. Faith is created through God's Word. It is based on a relationship with Jesus and is a product of the working of the Spirit within the spirit of man.

Healing, in Jesus' time, was a privilege for those who believed in him. Jesus said to the woman who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years: "your faith has healed you" (Mark 5:34). In Nazareth, unbelief hindered the reception of healing (Mark 6:5,6). At the foot of the Mount of Transfiguration, the healing of a boy with an evil spirit required an expression of faith by prayer and fasting (Matt.17:14-20; Mark 9:29). Jesus required, in most instances, a demonstration of faith by an individual before healing him/her (Matt.9:2; 9:27-29; Mark 10:52; John 4:50).

## **Miracles and Healings in the Book of Acts**

The Book of Acts develops a number of themes surrounding the founding of the church. The most noticeable include: the growth of the church and its leadership patterns; the emergence of common body of belief, teaching, or doctrine, based upon the life and work, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ; and the continued demonstrations of His power and authority through the Holy Spirit, confirming the message of the leaders.

The belief and practice of Pentecostal people in the twenty-first century with respect to miracles and the continued demonstration of the supernatural is solidly rooted in the "many...miraculous signs and wonders" which characterized the church at the beginning.

### (1) The Structure, Style, and Intent of the Book of Acts

The literary style of The Book of Acts is typically described as historical narrative. The unnamed author, commonly regarded as Luke the Physician, engages this style not to imply a diminished instructional value of the book, but rather to graphically link the ministry of Jesus to the work of the Holy Spirit through the church in fulfilling the commission to the uttermost parts of the world.

As historical narrative, the Book of Acts ought not be assigned a lesser significance than the directly didactic portions of scripture. Rather, the text is inspired to detail the history and at the same time convey a deeper intended meaning. The narrator has taken care to include history which demonstrated to an ancient audience, and now to the modern reader, that miracles, signs and wonders, have been given to glorify God and validate the proclamation of His word, and further continue as the normative experience of all believers, everywhere.

The text demonstrates essential principles for an empowered church:

- a) The credentials of the apostles and the early church flow directly out of the Pentecostal commission which sends the church to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8).
- b) The empowerment of the Holy Spirit is the foundation for the ministry of the miraculous, and is the same empowerment which was demonstrated in the life and ministry of Christ Himself.
- c) The development of the church is a multifaceted extension of the ministry of Christ. The church's development flows seamlessly from the commissioning by Christ (1:8), to the endowment of the Holy Spirit, to inspired proclamation, to the formation of a corporate community, spiritually if not geographically, defined. This spiritual community is characterized by the grouping of believers in fellowship, by the development and calling of leaders and by the linking of local groups of believers to other groups through the ministry of the apostles and leaders, through works of benevolence and through doctrinal solidarity.
- d) Throughout the narrative, power demonstrations are seen as an integral part of the spread of the church, always linked to the ministry and proclamation of the word.

## (2) Power Evangelism

For Luke, there is an important connection between evangelism and the miraculous. The latter allows the evangelist to first gain an audience with the unconverted and then the miraculous authenticates the message as being from God. This same principle of acts of power bringing people to God is at work in our world today.

According to William and Robert Menzies, "Luke's perspective on signs and wonders is rich and full. He clearly acknowledges the important role that miracles played in the ministries of Jesus and the early church. His narrative is replete with references to the miraculous. At almost every opportunity, he reminds us that word and sign go hand in hand. Furthermore, in Luke's perspective signs and wonders should characterize the ministry of the church in these last days (Acts 1:8; 2:19). In all of these respects Luke is an advocate of signs and wonders."<sup>29</sup>

Menzies adds a necessary balancing statement when he says, "Luke's attitude towards signs and wonders may be described as positive but not uncritical. This is most clearly reflected in his emphasis on proclamation; for Luke the primary manifestation of the Spirit is not miracle-working power but rather bold and inspired witness."<sup>30</sup>

## (3) Approach to the Subject

This review relies primarily on survey and analysis to isolate the nature and occurrence of miracles, the commonalities associated with the miracles, obvious principles and patterns attached to these demonstrations of power, and the purpose and the effect of these miracles.

However, the limitations of survey and analysis need to be recognized. Used in isolation, analysis sometimes contributes to the erosion of an abiding confidence in the miraculous. By merely abstracting, fragmenting, and segmenting data, it has potential to devalue the ethical, mystical, and experiential dimensions which are essential to the reception of the whole counsel of God. As Brian McLaren notes, modern analysis and reason have typically espoused an "antipathy toward any invisible mystery which cannot be broken down into controllable parts..." So an approach to the Book of Acts through typical analysis may satisfy modern minds, but will not guarantee the rise of the miraculous among us. In fact, this very propensity for analysis could be one of the stumbling blocks to miracles among us, reflecting our need to be the controlling practitioners, in control of the miracle...thus setting ourselves on the throne.

Analysis must be accompanied by spiritual hunger, faith, dependence on God, and a willingness to look beyond the data to discover the intentions and convictions of the revelator.

As is the case with much of scripture, the Book of Acts is not constructed around an analytical approach to the miraculous. Nor was the world view of the early church characterized by systematic dissection and analysis. They lived in a world which integrated story, drama, and experience, in contrast with our enlightened world which has for centuries disparaged these approaches to reality. The members of the early church were more comfortable with a sense of wonder, mystery, excitement, inspiration, and individuality. These became for them keys to knowledge and truth.

The primary approach of both evangelicals and modern liberals has focused on the pursuit of truth through processes of reason, logic, objectivity, and analysis, although evangelicals are quick to point out, with different results. All this to say, we are compelled to approach an understanding of the miraculous which includes the realm of the mind and the realm of the heart. Something more than scientific objectivity is needed to release the demonstration of God's word, His presence, and power in the life of the church. The church certainly benefits from the conventions of reason (Isaiah 1:18), yet it must move past apology for the yearnings of the heart toward recognition that truth and power exist above and beyond mere rationalism, in miraculous signs and wonders.

## (4) Some Common Principles Associated With the Miracles

- a) 14:9 Faith: At Lystra, Paul and Barnabus encountered a lame man. Paul observed that the man had faith to be healed. The faith was not the cause, nor the condition of the healing. It was however an incentive, a catalyst, or an encouragement to Paul to become a vehicle of God's grace.

Notice the response of the people of Lystra who said "the gods have come down to us in human form" (v .11). In our modern context, we would probably have responded, "We ought to study this event, and objectively observe what is really going on here, and, if this is significant, we will build a structure and

ideology to replicate and institutionalize this type of thing.” In the postmodern world, observers might be likely to say, “Come, let’s celebrate the wellness of this man. We don’t know how this happened, we just know he is well.”

Paul and Barnabas used the event to point men to God, who has not left men without a testimony.

b) The mediacy of human ministers:

- i) 15:12 Paul and Barnabas recounted the miraculous signs and wonders done among the Gentiles through them.
- ii) 16:18 Paul’s rebuke of the woman at Philippi...it arose from his own spirit, and was sustained by the Spirit of God
- ii) 19:11 God did extraordinary miracles through Paul. It needs to be pointed out however that the miraculous is not restricted to high profile men of God like Paul. Instead, all of the gifts of the Spirit can be exercised through any believer based on our belief in the priesthood of all believers. Rev. 1:6 states, “He has made us to be priests” and I Peter 2:5 similarly says, “you...are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood...”

c) Demonstrations involving natural events for divine purposes:

16:25 The earthquake at the Philippian jail

- d) Ministry to individuals: the emphasis at Ephesus (19:11,12) seems to be ministry to individuals and their needs. Nevertheless, even here, (19:17) “...they were all seized with fear and the name of the Lord was held in high honor.” The ministry to individuals had a group impact.
- e) The relationship between miracles and preaching: Miracles typically followed the preaching. Does preaching set the stage for miracles? The question assumes that the point of preaching is to produce a climate for, or to become a catalyst for, miracles. However, the Book of Acts does not demonstrate the elaboration of a theology or doctrine of miracles, nor does it demonstrate preaching designed to produce miracles. Rather, preaching was designed to lead to conversion and the exaltation of Christ. The miracles followed as confirmation of the message.

### Miracles and Healings in the Letters of Paul

It could well be said that central to understanding the miraculous/healing in Pauline thinking and practice are the words i) power, ii) partial and iii) place. *Because* he adamantly believed that the Kingdom of God was primarily about the unleashing of God’s power (I Corinthians 4:20) (climatically in the finished work of the cross I Cor. 1:24), Paul expected and accepted that the miraculous should/would be “common place” there.

*Because* he recognized that “now we see through a glass darkly” (I Cor. 13:12) and live in the times in between where, “the mystery of godliness is great” (I Tim. 3:16), Paul does not demand (or categorically predict) a formula through which that miraculous power would always be unleashed. On this matter, he refused to ‘put God to the test’, but rather urged that faith and prayer (as a concrete manifestation of faith) be expressed (Eph. 3:16-17) as the essential prerequisites for experiencing God’s miraculous power. Beyond that, the variegated manner in which the Lord had manifested His power in his own life and ministry (ie. compare II Cor. 12:8-9 to 12:13) led Paul to conclude that, in this area (as in many aspects of the kingdom), we still only “know *partially*” His ways (I Cor. 13:9a).

*Because* it is the Spirit of God and He alone who universally distributes these miraculous gifts of power (I Cor. 12:11), Paul experienced (and taught) a “variety of *place*” (ie. offices, venues and modes) in which God’s miraculous power was demonstrated. This “variety of *place*” included seeing God’s Power manifest in i) personal/office gifts of signs/wonders/miracles (II Cor. 12:12) ii) ongoing action of the body gifts (I Cor. 12:9b & 10a) and iii) his own weakness (II Cor. 12:9) – see below on his “theology of endurance or suffering.”

(1) The Power of God: Why the miraculous/healings were expected/accepted in Pauline Thought and Teaching

Paul not only believed that the cross represented the ultimate manifestation of God’s power (I Cor. 1:21), but he longed for believers to grasp that God’s inherent aseity (the power of life within Himself) could really be actualized in their concrete life circumstances. For instance, in his first Ephesian prayer (1:19), he forsakes his favorite “power”

word (*dunamis*), and combines the three words *energia* (releasing/unlocking), *kratos* (effectiveness) and *ischys* (inherent essence) to demonstrate his intense desire that . . . (vs. 18) “a light will go on in their inner man” and (1b, 19) they will grasp how completely the Spirit of God wishes to exercise (*energeia*) with effectiveness (*kratos*) the actual essence of His Power (*ischys*) in them/us daily. Why then, would the miraculous, including healings, not be expected? Repeatedly, Paul prayed that, “. . . all the saints would experience miraculous gifts of revelation, knowledge and power (*dunamis*) at the level of resurrection power that the Lord experienced (See I Cor. 12:6, 14:1,5,24,39; Gal. 3:5-14; Eph. 5:18; Col. 1:9-14).

When this concept of power is used by Paul, however, it is certainly not restricted to a set of power – denoting words. So real was that power in his experience that he sees it as being both comprehensive and cosmic in nature. That is, this “power of the Spirit” miraculously alters all it touches. In Pauline thinking, this includes: i) the power to save and bring life – transforming conformity to holiness standards and levels of love (Rom. 1:16, 5:12-8:39; 1 Cor. 1:18, 13L 1-13; Eph. 3:16-19, 5:12), ii) power against “the powers” (*kosmoskratoi*) of evil (Eph. 2:1-3, 4:27; 6:10-18), iii) power to serve in strength beyond his own ability (Col. 1:28-29, I Tim 1:12, II Tim. 1:7:2:1), iv) power in weakness (II Cor. 1:8, 13:1-13, 12:9-10) and certainly, v) power to receive/experience gifts of physical healings (Acts 14:8-18; 16:16-18, 19:11-12, 20:7-12 – Lukan accounts of miraculous manifestations of this power in Pauline practice). Any attempt to limit this power to the “spiritual” dimensions of life only, would, in Pauline thought, be seen as a truncated view both of God’s power and His (God’s) high value of the body (I Cor. 6:12-20). Thus, because God’s power, and salvation/atonement are cosmic in nature, Paul expected and accepted, the very real possibility of physical healing, and wholeness even before the time of “achieved Victory – Parousia (I Thess. 4:14, I Cor. 15:42-44) when all will be healed.

## (2) The “Partial” Aspects of Understanding/Experiencing the Miraculous/Healing in The “Pauline Thought/Teaching

If “power” (of God’s Spirit released) describes the certainty with which Paul expected and accepted the miraculous, then “partial” may be used to describe his understanding of that supernatural power in his own experience and ministry. For example, while boldly claiming to have been given supernatural insight (revelation) into things such as the mystery of the church’s make-up (Eph. 3:1-13), Paul never extends similar claims to the mysterious ways in which God’s miraculous power is unleashed in this age. Rather, in the context of understanding and utilizing the gifts (*charismata*) of power (I Cor. 12-14), he continues to use the imagery of “poor blurry mirrors”, and “partial knowledge” (I Cor. 13:12). In a similar vein and in harmony with Jesus’ teaching (Matt. 7:21-23), he denies that the presence (or absence) of power gifts/the miraculous in one’s experience, can necessarily “predict” or guarantee (as by formula) anything about one’s spiritual status, or destiny (i.e., see II Thess. 2:9 where he warns that the “lawless one” will perform” signs and wonders by Satan’s empowerment). When mistaken for a “god”, following a miraculous physical healing at Lystra (Acts 14:8-18) Paul rebukes his would-be worshippers, reminding them that it was not some “special piety” that triggered this manifestation of God’s power. Rather he claims he was very much (*homopatheis*) – a man of the same nature as them, whom God used, sometimes inexplicably in this manner. This “reverent reticence” about being able to explain God’s miraculous/healing ways is reflected in his own experience. In Galatians 3:1-5, he unashamedly challenges the church to continue and mature in “works of power” (and not in the flesh), while noting in the same letter, what a trial his apparently unhealed body (*astheian tes sarkos*) was to them during that initial visit (Gal. 4:12-20). Similarly, while documenting under inspiration his ability to perform “wonders and attesting miracles” (II Cor. 12:13), he describes in the previous paragraph how he was left to labour with a “thorn in the flesh” (*skolops tas sarx*) despite three requests for its removal. In summary, Paul acknowledges that, between the “assured victory” of the Cross/Resurrection (I Thess. 4:14) and the “achieved victory of the Parousia (I Cor. 15:42-52), there will always be some degree of mystery and partial understanding as to how God’s supernatural power would be released in miracles and healing. To claim anything more, for Paul, would be to make his God too small!

## (3) The “Place” where the Miraculous/Healing gifts (God’s Power) are manifest in Pauline Experience and Teaching

Because, in Pauline thinking, it is only through the creative and highly dynamic Spirit that miraculous gifts of power are distributed (I Cor. 12:11), it is not surprising that manifestations of this power should be seen in a “variety of places” (i.e., office, ministry, venue, mode, etc.)

One such “place” is found in Paul’s own apostolic/ministry office and service. As with the other foundational apostles (Matt. 10:18, Mark 6:13, Luke 9:8), Paul experienced “attesting miracles, wonders and works of power” and saw them as the “signs of a true apostle” (II Cor. 12:12, Rom, 15:18-19). He does not, however, marshal these “signs” as evidential proof or support of his orthodoxy or spiritual status, and neither does he use them primarily to “accredit the

gospel". Rather, they are presented simply as "concrete expressions" of the power of the Word which had been articulated, and which called for a repentant and believing response (see the case of the Serguis Paulos conversion (Acts 13:12) who . . . "believed when he saw what happened, *being amazed* at the *teaching* of the Lord" Thus, in the tradition of Jesus, who refused to use signs for evidential proof (Mark 8:11-12, Matt 12:38-39), Paul responded to the unbelieving demand for a sign, by continually preaching the "power of God (Christ crucified) to those who would truly receive it.

While Paul, in his own letters, makes little more of his being a miracle worker/healer (*iatros*) than is mentioned above, Luke confirms that his activities in that area were integral to his apostolic missionary work. Seven times in Acts (13: 4-12, 14:8-18, 16:16-18, 19:11-12, 19:20, 20:7-12, 28:7-10) Paul is depicted as performing miraculous/healings, and three times (9:8ff, 16:25-34, 28:3-6) he is a recipient or object of miracles. The contention of cessationist literature that Paul's miracles fade in the later part of Acts ignores the context of Acts 21-28 (where Paul is primarily imprisoned), and the fact that, when released, he was instrumental in practically emptying the island of Malta of its sick (Acts 28:9). This same school of thought has made much of the fact that in his later letters Paul demonstrates an "apparent inability or unwillingness" to heal his friends Epaphroditus (Phil. 2:27-30), Timothy (I Tim. 5:23) and Trophimus (II Tim. 4:20). From these case studies, they argue for a dwindling or ending of the 'signs of power' as Paul's ministry and the initial apostolic age closed. This "evidential" approach to the "gifts of power", however, is built primarily on an "argument from silence" which fails to recognize the highly selective and "issue orientated" nature of Pauline literature. Arguing that, because sick people are mentioned (without didactic conclusions being drawn) and "works of power" are not, the day of miracles/healings must therefore be past, is tantamount to concluding that the ordinance of communion had ceased, because it is *only* mentioned in the much earlier first Corinthian letter. Further, the positive mention of natural medicinal healing methods (I Tim 5:23) and the fondness with which Luke the "beloved physician" (i.e., lit. 'iamatron' - healer) is held (Col. 4:14, Acts 27:3ff), does not necessarily point to an absence of "power gifts" by Paul, but may simply be an acknowledgement by the apostle that "miraculous" and "natural" healing are not at odds, but may operate at times "in tandem".

Through his letters to the churches, Paul makes it clear that the "place" of works of power/miracles/healing would not be limited or end with the initial apostolic ministry. Rather, in his absence, these works could/should be expected and practiced through other individuals whom God would expressly endow for that purpose.

Thus, in the familiar I Cor. 12:7-11, 27-30 passages, the "working of miracles" (lit. working of power – *energian dunamis*) and "gifts of healing" (*charismata iamaton*) are presented as available to the whole body, on an ongoing basis, parallel with other supernatural "service" gifts given by God (Rom. 12:6-8, I Cor. 12:27-30). In that context, the working of miracles is distinguished from healing, indicating it may include both exorcisms and other interventions in nature. While it is outside the scope of this study to fully analyze the nature of these "power gifts" as presented there, it can be concluded that Paul's major thrust of thought about these gifts is that: i) they are sovereignly and diversely distributed by the Spirit only (vs. 11 & 18), ii) possessing them is not to elicit spiritual superiority or elitism in believers (vs. 14-17), iii) their usage is primarily for the good/building up of the body (12:7, 14:26) and iv) they may be more 'intermittent' than inherently possessed (ie. given for specific and different occasions) so members using them do not have to possess or use them at every occasion (12:19, 29; 14:26-30). That Paul expected the continual expression of such miraculous works of power 'placed' throughout the Church age is further seen in passages such as I Cor. 1:4-8; Phil 1:5-10; and I Thess. 1:5-8, 5:11-23. Climactically, the context of Paul's claim in Rom. 11:29 [that the gifts – *charis* – and calling of God are irrevocable] indicates that human failure to receive either God's call or His *charismata*, may suggest more that they have rejected the possibility, than it suggests their being sovereignly withdrawn from history. Paul sadly may have simply foreseen the danger of intellectualized quasi-deism in the body, where many would embrace "a form of religion", while denying its power (*dunamis*) (II Tim. 3:5).

While Paul expected and taught that God's miraculous power could be 'placed' in both apostolic and ongoing body ministry, he rejected a 'triumphanist attitude' to illness and healing, which would see those who were 'weak' or 'sickly' as never experiencing a place of that power. Rather, he had experienced and wrote of a third 'place' of God's power – power in weakness (esp. II Cor. 12:1-10)! Comparing his body to a clay pot in its fragility ( II Cor. 4:7), Paul was painfully aware of the present frailty and limitations of his human existence. This awareness however, did not lead him to conclude that he was necessarily a 'faith or healing failure', but rather issued in his developing a 'theology of suffering', which held that "when I am weak then I am strong" (II Cor. 12:10). Out of his own 'thorn in the flesh' experience (II Cor. 12:1-10) came the conviction that God's miraculous power may be expected and experienced both in instantaneous acts of intervening deliverance from weakness, *and* in supernatural long-term sustaining power in/through weakness. This enabled him in turn to learn more fully some of the Lord's 'disciplines of delay' in his life. Reflecting on this experience, Paul sees God's power (*dunamis*) unleashed (vs. 9), not only in his earlier instantaneously being 'cured' but also in his being miraculously healed of a proud spirit (*phusioo* vs. 7) and from the

temptation of self reliance in his service/ministry (vs. 9 – 10). These ‘more than natural’ changes only occurred, he concludes, because of the miraculous power (*dunamis*) of Christ dwelling in him (12:9b) producing no lesser a miracle than that of regaining sight (Acts 9:9ff), or being saved from a serpent (Acts 28:3-6). In experiencing this expression of God’s power, Paul discovered that living in the “power of the resurrection and the fellowship of His suffering” can be carried out simultaneously and is not a contradiction in terms (Phil. 3:9-10).

#### (4) Implications and Conclusions

In a culture permeated with subjective post modern thinking, it is tempting to reframe our thinking and consequent practice about God’s power in miracles and healing on the basis of our own subjective experiences, rather than on a fresh re-examination of scripture. It is hoped that this brief overview of scriptural material from a Pauline perspective, will assist us to once again hear (and heed) Paul’s warning to the Galatians (3:3), and ‘having begun by the Spirit’, we would not abandon God’s miraculous methods and attempt to complete our course merely in a ‘weakness of human flesh.’ Paul holds out a better, biblical way! It’s about expecting His *Power*, in humble *partial* understanding, to be *placed* in us, both delivering us from, and sustaining us through, our weaknesses.

#### **The Timing of Miracles and Healings**

Scripture declares the will of the Lord in terms of His power and will to heal His people. In Exodus 15:26 He refers to Himself as Jehovah Rapha, *the God who heals*, then in Psalm 103:3 David also declares the extent of God’s healing power; (He) “forgives *all* your sins and heals *all* your diseases”. The extent of God’s power and will to heal is presented just as certainly as His power and will to forgive sin. James then teaches in 5:14 that believers can expect divine healing in response to offering the prayer of faith. He asserts that “... the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up.”

These references as well as many others, present a clear invitation for Christians to believe God for healing. This includes healing in the natural, medical and supernatural realms. Naturally, God has designed a measure of re-creative / healing ability into creation. Medically, discoveries that cure disease, heal injury and extend natural life are also a result of God’s grace. Supernaturally there are also times when God breaks in to our lives, interrupts a natural law or circumstance, and performs a miracle. Given the Biblical invitations to expect supernatural healing miracles, how then do we explain the apparent contradiction that occurs when Christians do not experience healing during their natural lives? Even the Apostle Paul testified to having a persistent condition which he called his “thorn in the flesh” (2 Corinthians 12:7). Some believers even die prematurely due to sickness though fervent and faithful prayer has been offered, and every Biblical directive has been embraced. Can this apparent contradiction be reconciled?

The answer to this question depends on our understanding of God’s ultimate plan of redemption, designed specifically for human beings living in a fallen creation. The events in the Garden of Eden radically changed God’s initial intentions and set into motion a grand design for our redemption. Jesus Christ was chosen “before the creation of the world” (1 Peter 1:20) to rectify the many problems caused by sin, primarily sickness and death. Redemption however is a process that is not completed during the natural life span of the believer. It is rather a process, designed by God that extends beyond time spent on the earth, and gives hope to otherwise hopeless human situations. Life’s points of reference often begin with a birth day and end with a date of death. Scripture however, offers a different definition. At conception human life begins, created in God’s image. The created individual’s existence then perpetuates beyond any earthly life span, and throughout a timeless eternity.

The certainty of complete physical healing is apparent when the limits of life span are eliminated. Paul, in 1 Corinthians 15 provides the key to understanding God’s will in terms of healing when he explains death. In verses 13 and 15 he refers to the dead in Christ as those who have “fallen asleep”. He then teaches throughout the chapter that upon the rapture of the Church a profound reunion will occur. The dead in Christ will be raised and reunited, spirit with body, to experience the fullness and completeness of redemption. At that time every believer will experience all that God has provided through the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ. Ultimately he will “raise up” every believer who has “fallen asleep” regardless of the cause or timing of death. This is the full extent of God’s marvelous plan to redeem the world.

There are many examples today of God healing His people supernaturally, as well He continues to act providentially through natural and medical healing. When a believer does not experience healing during their earthly lifetime, the Lord’s complete plan of redemption still offers hope. There is complete physical, emotional and spiritual wholeness guaranteed for all eternity.

Norwegian theologian Ole Hallesby has written this prayer with respect to Divine Healing;

*“Lord, if it be to Your glory, heal suddenly. If it will glorify You more, heal gradually; if it will glorify You even more, may Your servant remain sick awhile; and if it will glorify Your name still more, take him to Yourself in heaven.”*

Though at times sickness remains, one day every Christian will experience wholeness that is the ultimate result of Jesus’ sacrifice. Until that day, the Lord alone understands the issues of life and death. He is beyond time and space. He is beyond the clock and the calendar. Regardless of our experiences on earth, including the inevitable death, we can be certain that the Lord is our Healer! His plan of redemption guarantees it. It is just a matter of time.

### **Miracles and Healings Today**

The significant starting question is why we do not experience a more pronounced demonstration of the miraculous, including gifts of healing, in North American ministry today? Some possible negative answers are:

- a. societal factors, including materialism and modern rationalism
- b. previous eras of inconsistency, manipulation and abuse
- c. generational cynicism, sometimes justified
- d. programmatic definitions of success. We may be more in sync with our programs and abilities than our appreciation for the attributes of God and His gracious purposes for us
- e. the recent dearth of preaching on this subject
- f. fear of “what if the miracle does not happen?”
- g. unbelief

Some possible, positive answers are:

- a. God’s will (see Hallesby’s prayer above)
- b. God’s timing

While recognizing there are reasons for the absence of the miraculous today, it is even more significant to recognize the need for the miraculous in our contemporary ministry. While we all recognize the need for spiritual revival in our nation and we preach about changing the course of history, there is little evidence that our preaching is making this kind of impact. We have been attempting to convert the world through intellectual presentation and argument and the world has not believed us. Most Canadians believe the church is either totally irrelevant or that Christianity is just another one of the many world religions. Most Canadians believe there are many paths to God.

We need to ask the question, “what is it going to take for a devout Muslim, or Hindu or atheist to accept Christ as their saviour?” It will take more than our preaching and our musical programs. It will take a demonstration of God’s power. When John the Baptist sent his disciples to Jesus, needing to know if He was the Messiah, Jesus did not give a theological reply. Rather, He said, “tell John what you hear and see...blind seeing, lame walking, dead being raised, good news being preached to the poor...” Because of the miracles, John would figure it out! Further, in Acts 8 they believed Philip’s message because of the miracles.

While we refuse to change our doctrinal position on salvation even though some people we have prayed for do not come to a saving knowledge of Christ, it seems that we find it easy to back away from healing just because some who we pray for are not healed. We don’t preach on healing because people aren’t healed; instead because people aren’t healed, we don’t preach on healing.

The good news from Scripture is that it is God’s will to heal the sick in the context of his sovereign plan. James 5 says, “is ANYONE sick...the prayer of faith will save the sick and the Lord will raise him up.” In John 14:12, Jesus said that anyone who has faith in Him would also do the works (i.e. miracles) that He did. He further declared that believers in Him would do even greater works than Him. How is this possible? He answers, “...because I am going to the Father.” Today He enables those who believe in Him to do greater works because of the Holy Spirit (the Helper, the Spirit of Truth) He has sent (John 14:16,17).

The simple and powerful truth is, the more people we pray for, the more people we will see healed. We need to recognize we are responsible for obeying. We are not responsible for results but we are responsible to pray. Faith must be built to encourage credible and modern day miracles. Faith begets faith – miracles and healings are

evidenced by faith; thus miracles and healings will also beget other miracles and healings. The reporting of credible miracles both in written and verbal form is a key to encouraging faith.

The majority story of the book of Acts demonstrates that preaching tends to precede miracles, that signs "...follow." However this is not always the case. On the Day of Pentecost the manifestation of tongues preceded Peter's public explanation of it. Further, as Tommy Reid has pointed out, pastors have a primary role beyond that of announcing the truth; "the role of the pastor is to be a conveyer of presence, and in the atmosphere of presence proclaim the truth." Pastors must cultivate the presence of God in the church services. Leaders can help convey the presence of God so that believers realize that God is among them. Believers can be assisted to recognize that the manifestation of God's presence is an opportunity for God to demonstrate His power. We desire for both the message to be biblically correct and for the presence of God.

How then does the Christian prepare himself/herself to be a conveyer of the presence of God rather than just a proclaimer of Biblical truth? A few of the possible ways are:

- a) his/her own prayer life. The Christian needs to be a person who knows what it means to personally cultivate his/her relationship with God through prayer and waiting on God.
- b) the practice of genuine pre-service prayer which involves a genuine waiting upon God and not just a pre-service hype-huddle of the professional participants
- c) through priority. The Christian must know that his priority is dependence upon God and his own personal invitation of God to be present, not as an ornament to a carefully planned service but as the foundation reason as to why the service has been convened.
- d) through attitude. The Christian must seek to have an attitude in himself/herself which desires and values the presence of God above all else.
- e) through intention. The Christian must intentionally, faithfully lay aside the pressing items for the priority items.
- f) through personal holiness. The Christian must be one who has responded to the voice of God to "be holy, for I am holy." This kind of holiness is not marked by the pursuit or avoidance of certain activities so much as it is marked in awareness of who God is, what is the nature of God and the ministers own gratitude that we can be like Him and possess a desire to be like Him.
- g) through dependence on the Holy Spirit. Paul acknowledged that He came "in weakness and (dependence on) a demonstration of the Spirit's power. (1 Cor. 2:3,4)

The result of this was faith in the hearers which rested not on human professional qualification, ability or power, but on God's power. The minister who is sensitive to the Holy Spirit is one who has learned to objectively differentiate between dependence upon self and the abilities of self and others and dependence upon God, His Word and His promises.

## **Conclusion**

The Scriptures continue to be our inerrant guide for faith and practice. As has been demonstrated in this paper, miracles and healings definitely took place in the Scriptures. Since God never changes, our belief is that miracles and healings can and do happen today. At the same time, if miracles and healings do not happen today in line with our prayers, then we rest on the character of an all-wise, all-loving heavenly Father.

## End Notes

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- <sup>1</sup> Little, Paul E, *Know Why You Believe* (Chicago: Inter-Varsity Press, 1969) p. 59.
- <sup>2</sup> Aker, Benny C. and McGee, Gary B., *Signs & Wonders in Ministry Today* (Springfield: Gospel Publishing House, 1996) p. 21.
- <sup>3</sup> Horton, Harold, *The Gifts of The Spirit* (Springfield: Radiant Books, 1975) p. 105.
- <sup>4</sup> Aker, Benny C. and McGee, Gary B., *Signs & Wonders in Ministry Today* (Springfield: Gospel Publishing House, 1996) p. 62.
- <sup>5</sup> Richards, Lawrence O., *Expository Dictionary of Bible Words* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1991) p. 444.
- <sup>6</sup> Aker, Benny C. and McGee, Gary B., *Signs & Wonders in Ministry Today* (Springfield: Gospel Publishing House, 1996) p. 23.
- <sup>7</sup> Richards, Lawrence O., *Expository Dictionary of Bible Words* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1991) p. 445.
- <sup>8</sup> Horton, Harold, *The Gifts of The Spirit* (Springfield: Radiant Books, 1975) p. 108.
- <sup>9</sup> Burgess, Stanley M. and McGee, Gary B. (Eds.), *Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1993) p. 350.
- <sup>10</sup> Richards, Lawrence O., *Expository Dictionary of Bible Words* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1991) p. 329.
- <sup>11</sup> Burgess, Stanley M. and McGee, Gary B. (Eds.), *Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1993) p. 352.
- <sup>12</sup> Holdcroft, Thomas L., *The Holy Spirit* (Abbotsford: CeeTec Publishing, 1999) p. 153.
- <sup>13</sup> Horton, Stanley, *What the Bible Says About the Holy Spirit* (Springfield: Gospel Publishing House, 1976) p. 275.
- <sup>14</sup> Ramm, Bernard, *Protestant Christian Evidences* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1971) p. 132.
- <sup>15</sup> Burgess, Stanley M. and McGee, Gary B. (Eds.), *Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1993) p. 352.
- <sup>16</sup> Ibid., p.353.
- <sup>17</sup> Gee, Donald, *Concerning Spiritual Gifts* (Springfield: Gospel Publishing House, 1972) p. 45.
- <sup>18</sup> Aker, Benny C. and McGee, Gary B., *Signs & Wonders in Ministry Today* (Springfield: Gospel Publishing House, 1996) p. 76.
- <sup>19</sup> Ibid., p.76.
- <sup>20</sup> Lim, David, *Spiritual Gifts* (Springfield: Gospel Publishing House, 1991) p. 292.
- <sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 293.
- <sup>22</sup> Aker, Benny C. and McGee, Gary B., *Signs & Wonders in Ministry Today* (Springfield: Gospel Publishing House, 1996) p. 72.

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- <sup>23</sup> Menzies, William W. and Menzies, Robert P., *Spirit and Power* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 2000) p. 168.
- <sup>24</sup> Ibid., pp. 166,167.
- <sup>25</sup> Ibid., pp. 163,164.
- <sup>26</sup> Strong, James, *The New Strong's Complete Dictionary of Bible Words* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1996) p. 522.
- <sup>27</sup> Brown, Michael L., *Israel's Divine Healer* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995) p. 29.
- <sup>28</sup> Ibid., pp. 105-112.
- <sup>29</sup> Menzies, William W. and Menzies, Robert P., *Spirit and Power* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 2000) p. 152.
- <sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 152.

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