

## Three prominent faith-healers

God always works to your advantage. You can believe for divine prosperity just as you can believe for divine health! When you truly believe, you should not get sick anymore. To have health, you must begin with a decision not to allow Satan to put sickness on you. You are sick and poor because you don't have sufficient faith. In general, this is the teaching of Christian faith healers in North America. I have chosen three prominent healers to illustrate what is being taught and practiced in the name of the Lord.

### Oral Roberts

Oral Roberts is a tall, dark-haired, and well-known radio and TV evangelist. He is an exceptionally talented and persuasive speaker. In 1962 he founded the Oral Roberts University, which contains all faculties, including a faculty of medicine. In 1968 he left the Pentecostal movement and joined the Methodist Church, though his theology has not made a noticeable change.

Oral Roberts' basic teaching is that God is good, and the devil is bad. God's will for us is to have health, wealth and well-being. The devil's will for you is sickness, poverty and depression. The choice is clear. You must choose for the good, for God.

Oral Roberts says in his book, *A Daily Guide To Miracles And Successful Living Through Seed-Faith*, that his greatest discovery about health, prosperity and spiritual blessing was the text 3 John 2: "Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth." He comments on the text: "What's the first word? 'Beloved.' 'Say it, say, I'm beloved of God.' Look up and tell Him, 'God, I'm Your beloved. I'm going to quit hating myself. And, God, You want me to prosper and be in health, even as my soul prospers.' Now, don't you feel better? That's got healing in it, friend! Healing for you, the person, your total self. And the whole of God's power is back of His wish for you to be well and have your needs met."

How successful has Oral Roberts been as healer? He has admitted to failures. He has said that his cures have not always been successful and if cures were reported that they were not always permanent. He mentions that he would be glad if 25 per cent of his cases were permanently cured.

Some claim that Oral Roberts gets his healing abilities from God. Others suggest the occult. Dr. Kurt Koch, in his *Occult Bondage and Deliverance*, says that Oral Roberts' founding and funding a university is no proof that he has derived his healing abilities from God. Koch claims that Oral Roberts is probably unaware that his power to heal is more indicative of a mediumistic ability than a gift of the Holy Spirit.

### William Branham

One of the most colourful. and interesting healers on-the American scene was William Branham. He became famous for his ability to name with astonishing accuracy the sicknesses, and often the hidden sins, of people whom he had never seen.

At first, he was welcomed by the Pentecostal movement, but he wore out his welcome after he announced that the millennium would begin in 1977, preached baptism " in the name of Jesus," and claimed that Cain was the son of a union between Eve and the Serpent, and that only Abel was the true son of Adam.

Branham died in the manner and at the time he himself had prophesied. His followers believed that he would be raised from the dead on January 25, 1966. They waited in vain. No resurrection took place.

Branham had a peculiar source for his healing powers. In 1946, an angel allegedly appeared to him, and told him, among other things, "I am sent from the presence of almighty God to tell you ... that God has sent you to take a gift of healing to the peoples of the world."

Branham never prayed for healing until he was conscious of the presence of the angel with him on the platform. The angel was described by Branham as a well-built man with dark hair who stood next to him. He had to obey whatever the angel told him.

He was asked: "Do you think your power to heal people comes from the Holy Spirit?" "No," Branham replied, "my angel does it." When he was ministering during a crusade in Jonesboro, Arkansas, Branham is even supposed to have raised a woman from the dead after he had prayed: "Almighty God, Author of eternal life, Giver of all good gifts, I beseech Thee in the Name of Thy dearly Beloved Son, Jesus Christ, give this woman life again."

Some have said that Branham's gift was his natural ability, whereas others declared that it was the result of occult powers. Great claims were made to Branham's effectiveness as healer, but only a small percentage of those who sought healing were in fact healed. What must a Christian think of the ability to heal by a man who held such strange views on the Bible? How can an angel replace the healing ministry of the Holy Spirit.

### **T.L. Osborn**

The healing evangelist T.L. Osborn was born on a farm in Oklahoma. After his conversion he became an evangelist and pastor in the Pentecostal movement. In 1948 he believed that God called him to the wider ministry of healing and evangelism. Later he saw in a vision the cross, the angel Gabriel and his trumpet, and Jesus Christ in person.

Osborn testified that he was strongly influenced by the teaching and healing demonstration of Branham. His mission tours led him all across North America and to many foreign countries. Humility is not Osborn's greatest virtue. In his *Healing The Sick and Casting out Devils* he cites marvelous success. "Hundreds of undeniable miracles

or healing have been wrought on the bodies of sufferers, and thousands of souls have confessed Christ as their Saviour."

Osborn has no great love for an academically trained ministry. Evangelism must be accompanied by healing if it is to be successful in these last days before Christ's second appearing. The masses will gladly follow Christ as they see the divine power to heal. "Sermons, pictures, lectures, education, hospitals, and institutions have never, nor will ever bring the masses of heathen to the feet of Christ, but the simple demonstration of God's miracle power will, and is turning them to the true Christ by millions. I have personally seen more souls saved in a single night, preaching the gospel of healing for soul and body than during the entire seven years I preached only forgiveness to the sinners."

Osborn teaches that it would be incomplete for an unsaved man with sickness in his body to become saved from his sin, and not be healed of his sickness. A new born Christian has the right to receive healing. Sin and sickness were borne by Christ on the cross.

"Sin and sickness need be borne only once. And since it is written that Jesus Christ has already borne them, then you need not bear them. If you bear them, then Jesus' bearing of them was entirely in vain, seeing that you have not been benefited. But I declare, that since Jesus bore them, you and I need never bear them and so by His stripes we are healed' and through His blood we have 'remission of sins.'"

The conclusion? Christians don't need to be sick as healing is always the will of God. If you don't get healed? Osborn doesn't need to shoulder the responsibility. He gives 20 reasons why some fail to receive healing. He lists such causes as: "The breaking of natural laws ... An unforgiving spirit ... Wrongs uprighted...Many hinder God by basing their faith on their improvement after prayer, rather than upon His promises." Anything can fall into these categories!

Did Christ really die once for our sin and sickness? Are faith healers correctly interpreting Isaiah 53:4,5 ?

What. Is the difference between the miracles worked by the apostles and the miracles claimed by faith healers today? In New Testament times healing services were never advertised days in advance. Certain healers today claim to know when the Holy Spirit is going to heal.'

The Saturday edition, July 5, 1958, of *The Albertan*, reported: "Rev. Gossett will be speaking at four great weekend rallies. This Saturday at 8, at a great jubilee meeting, the sick will be testifying, and the Incurable will be ministered to. Sunday morning at 11, Mr. Gossett will speak on 'The Power of Positive Living.' In the afternoon divine healing service, the topic will be: 'Walking, Leaping, and Praising God,' as the evangelist refers to the miracles in Acts."

Rev. Gossett appeared to have greater spiritual knowledge than the apostles. They could never predict, foretell or announce the performance of miracles. They never knew when and how the Holy Spirit was going to work.

Modern faith healing practices leave us with some important questions.

### **Why are not all the sick healed?**

If healing by faith was a permanent heritage of the church, and if the doctrine of healing in the atonement is true, why are not all Christians healed who seek it? Richard, Vineyard, of the Assemblies of God, explains: "Healing does not fail because of the will of God, but because of the unbelief of his children."

The blame for the failure to get healing is put squarely on the shoulders of the sufferers. The only thing that can make healing ineffectual in your life, say many faith healers, is your wavering in the faith. He that wavers, James 1:5-8 says, shall receive nothing from the Lord.

Kathryn Kuhlman wrote: "The only thing in existence that can limit the power of the Lord Jesus Christ is our unbelief." A favourite text is:

"And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive."  
(Matthew 21:22).

God, in response to this prayer of faith, will work miracles. Many are raised to health as God is asked to heal. Miss Kuhlman taught that the qualification "if it be thy will" destroys the healing power of prayer. Modern faith healers are also fond of citing Jesus' experience in Nazareth, where He couldn't perform miracles as the people had no great faith.

This "lack of faith" teaching is dangerous. All healing is then based on the ability to believe and on the strength of that belief. The apostle Paul had "a thorn in the flesh." He prayed most earnestly that God would remove it, but God refused.

John H. Gerstner, in *The Theology of The Major Sects*, observes: "First, the people who come to modern healers, in the very coming profess faith. They therefore, are not really unbelieving. Second, Christ never tried and failed as these healers, on their own admission, often do. People coming, apparently earnestly seeking healing, do not always get it, which occurrence we do not find in Jesus' ministry: Third, on many occasions Christ did work without faith as in the raising of the dead or healing absent persons on the request of others."

### **Faith healing and death**

If healing depends solely on faith, the obvious conclusion is that if our faith were sufficient we will never die. A Pentecostal evangelist, Jonathan Paul, remarked: "We do not say that a Christian can no longer sin, be ill or die. But we assert with the word of

truth in Christ Jesus that the living members of the body of Christ no longer have to sin. And since he has borne their sickness, they no longer have to be sick. And the hour is near when they will no longer have to die either."

Lura Johnson Grubb, an evangelist with the Assemblies of God, claims to have risen from the dead. She even produces her doctor's death certificate. But older Pentecostals dispute these phenomena. One said that In his 37 years of ministry In many different places, he has "never met one who raised someone who was really dead."

What is death for the Christian? Death doesn't belong to life. Before Adam's fall into sin, there was no death. Death is the result of sin. Christ, through the cross and the resurrection, overcame death. Christ's followers must resist death. We are meant to live. Yet we know that it is appointed to man once to die. We may think that we are going to be an exception. But this is just not so! Yet death is the pathway to life.

How do the more "traditional" Pentecostal leaders evaluate faith healing? At the World Pentecostal Conference in Toronto In 1988, Leonhard Steiner gave a lecture on, "Divine Healing in God's Plan of Redemption." In this lecture Steiner pointed out that faith healers have ignored the limitation that man must always make: "Thy will be done." He stated that the healing results were meagre. And he charged: "The apostles practiced divine healing without making a special point of preaching it, whereas we preach it, but fail to practice it." These remarks were suppressed in the conference report as it provoked besides agreement also strong objections.

Steiner is right! The Sovereign God cannot be made man's servant. God in His wondrous way may see it fit to heal a person at the instance of the intercessory prayer of God's people; and in His wisdom He may see it best to withhold recovery from another. He doesn't owe anyone an explanation.

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January, 1982