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Spiritual Healing



PREPARED BY THE

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on behalf of the Select Committee appointed by
Synod.



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WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

Spiritual Healing is the healing of ailments by Spiritual means. Such ailments may take the form of some mental or nervous disorder or even of organic disease, and in any of these forms may yield to Spiritual treatment. The influence of mind or spirit over bodily conditions is a fact of every day experience and observation, and when the Divine Spirit is brought into play and acts upon and through the human, there is hardly any limit that can be set to its health-giving power. When then we speak of Spiritual Healing, we mean the healing, quickening power of the Holy Spirit exercised through the channel of the human spirit upon man's nature, bodily and mental alike.

DOES SPIRITUAL HEALING DISPENSE WITH THE NEED OF MEDICAL SCIENCE?

It needs to be strongly asserted that Spiritual Healing makes no claim to supersede the work of doctor or surgeon; rather it claims to supplement it. Medical Science works on the physical plane and uses the knowledge of physiological processes in its treatment of the body: nor have we any right to ignore the application to bodily sickness of such knowledge as is attainable by human effort and research. But again and again the time comes in cases of sickness when the skill of the doctor taken alone proves unavailing and needs for its full effectiveness to be reinforced by some ally of a spiritual or psychical character which enables the restorative powers of Nature to have their way and to triumph over the adverse forces of disease.

IS SPIRITUAL HEALING THE SAME AS PSYCHOTHERAPY?

Similarly Spiritual Healing differs both in method and purpose from those varied modes of Psychotherapy, whether known as Suggestion or Psycho-analysis, the essence of which is the inducement of certain mental or psychical conditions which make for bodily recuperation or health. These methods, carefully tested, are coming into increasing prominence, and are winning increasing recognition in scientific circles; these too, like the science of medicine, are, we believe, from God. But the power of healing on which they claim to draw, comes from within the individual patient, and not from without, and has no direct connection with faith in God or in Christ.

DOES GOD WILL SICKNESS?

It is often asked whether God sends suffering and sickness; and the belief that He does is often made a ground of unbelief in His love and care for men. We have no space here to deal with the mystery of pain; but this we believe: that while God allows He does not will or cause suffering. His Will for men, as revealed by Jesus Christ, is that they may have life and have it abundantly. His purpose for men is perfect wholeness or health, of body, soul and spirit alike. Suffering and sickness He permits and seeks to over-rule for higher ends; and He places within our reach powers of restoration by which, where that wholeness has been broken or impaired, it may be given back to us in greater fulness than before.

IS, THEN, CONTINUED SUFFERING A PROOF OF SIN?

What then are we to say of those who continue to suffer and for whom no available means of bodily recovery are effective? Are they being punished for their sins? Those of us who have, in ourselves or in others, witnessed the powers of suffering, patiently or cheerfully borne, to sweeten and refine the character can give the answer. It is that God has chosen some better part of them than bodily recovery. His Will for them, we believe, is that in being called to share the Cross of Christ they should thus be made perfect through suffering. It

is thus, too, that some can render their best service to others and to the world. For some at least of the saints of God, it is from the soil of bodily affliction that the flower of Christian character comes to perfect fruition.

WHAT DID CHRIST TEACH?

Yet the fact remains that the teaching and example of Christ, Who in this, as in all else, revealed the mind of God, points to bodily recovery and health as the Divine Will for men and shows the way to it. Christ taught that suffering and disease were part of that bondage of Satan from which He had come to set men free. When they questioned whether or no He were the Christ, He pointed to the blind who had received sight, to the lame who had been made to walk, and to the lepers who had been cleansed, as visible proof that the Kingdom of God had come on earth. Much of His time was occupied with the healing of the sick, which formed as essential a part of His ministry as the preaching of the Word. He bestowed the utmost care upon individual cases of sickness brought under His notice, and wherever He could elicit a response of faith there His compassion was effective for help and healing. He came to save men to the uttermost, and wherever He was confronted with the forces of destruction, sin, sickness, even death itself, by the power which proceeded from Him, He proved Himself the Saviour and Deliver of men.

DID SPIRITUAL HEALING CEASE AT CHRIST'S ASCENSION?

Nor did the powers of healing exercised by Him cease when His visible presence was withdrawn from earth. He promised that His followers should do the works that He did, and even greater; and the declared purpose of His departure from the world was that through His Spirit, present and abiding in His Church, the powers which had worked in Him might have a vastly increased range and efficacy. And so it proved in effect. He confirmed the Word with signs following. The Apostles believed that power to heal in their Master's Name had been conferred upon them, and practised healing as an integral part of their ministry. Like Him, they went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed of the devil,

and so bore witness to a Christ Who through them was still triumphing over sickness and pain, and all that injured the human soul or body.

IS SPIRITUAL HEALING NEEDED TO-DAY?

And so the work of healing continued to be carried out as part of the redemptive ministry of the Church. The gift and power of healing by Spiritual means was never withdrawn, though its exercise became less frequent and general as the centuries passed. More particularly did the rise and development of Medical Science leave less room, so it was thought, for Spiritual Healing. For a time it was believed that medicine and surgery covered the whole ground in the practice of the healing art. Gradually, however, Spiritual Healing has won back its rightful place, as the limitations of Medical Science have come to be increasingly recognised. The more eminent members of the medical profession are the first to acknowledge that there is room for healing by other means than their own, and where their own have failed; and so in our day we are beginning to re-discover, in belief and practice, a forgotten side of the Gospel as a message of healing for the body as well as of redemption for the soul.

WHAT METHOD IS USED IN SPIRITUAL HEALING?

It may be said at once that there is no fixed method by which alone the Divine grace of healing may reach the sick. Our Lord was Himself bound by no one method. Sometimes with a word, sometimes with touch accompanying the Word of Power, sometimes without any contact with the sick He put forth the virtue of healing which was in Him; and to-day the methods are as various. One such is that of Laying on of Hands with prayer. Such is the method followed by Mr. James Hlickson, a layman of the Church of England, who has conducted a series of Healing Missions in countries East and West, and is expected to visit Australia at the beginning of next year (1923). Again Spiritual Healing may be regarded as part of the normal service of the ordained minister, whether specially gifted or not. It is here that the rite of anointing the sick with oil, together with the use of prayer, has come into widespread use. But once again there is also the method of prayer

apart from any outward act or sign; where two or three are gathered together in united intercession for the sick, there too is the healing power of Christ released and made available for those for whom they pray; and nothing can do more to bring back this forgotten truth of the Gospel than the formation here and there of little informal groups of faithful people who will agree to pray together for the healing of the sick.

MUST THE SICK PERSON CONTRIBUTE ANYTHING TO HIS HEALING?

Our Lord healed only those who had faith in Him—faith manifested by the sufferer or by those to whom he was dear; where there was unbelief, there His healing power met with a barrier which even it could not overcome. So it is to-day. It is still Christ Who heals, whatever the channel along which His healing power finds its way: and that power still needs, if it is to be effective, to be met with a response of penitence and faith on the part of the recipient; of penitence because it is unrepented and unforgiven sin which often lies at the root of the trouble, physical or mental; and of faith because faith is the faculty by which alone spiritual gifts can be received. Hence there is great need of spiritual preparation for those who are to receive this treatment, preparation directed to bringing them to that clearness of conscience and that attitude of keen expectancy which are the conditions on man's side of receiving the Divine gifts.

HAVE CURES BEEN EFFECTED BY THIS METHOD?

Spiritual Healing, as we shall see in the concluding paragraph, is not to be tested only by results in the physical sphere. Yet well-authenticated records of restoration to bodily health and activity are numerous and remarkable enough. Mr. Hickson's journal, *The Healer*, quotes many instances of such as resulting from his Healing Missions in different parts of the world. They include cases of the healing of blindness and dumbness, of paralysis and of distorted limbs, of imbecility and lunacy. Such healings are sometimes partial, sometimes complete, and again sometimes instantaneous, more often gradual. One instance only may be quoted in detail. In 1898 Bishop Mylne resigned from the Diocese of Bombay as inflicted

with incurable cancer. He returned to London and visited an eminent specialist who confirmed the diagnosis of the Bombay surgeon, and declared the disease so malignant and deep-seated that an operation was impossible. The Bishop then went to Mr. Hickson, who on a number of occasions layed on hands with prayer. The symptoms disappeared, and in the opinion of the same specialist, the disease was cured, and Bishop Mylne lived on till 1918.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF SPIRITUAL HEALING?

The purpose and result are not limited to bodily recovery. God's Will, we have seen, is the health of the whole man, body as well as soul, soul as well as body; and in Divine or Spiritual Healing the spiritual results must stand first in importance. Where indeed the bodily healing is effected, this should be regarded less as the end in view than as the means and pledge of a new spiritual outlook and uplift. Those who have had long experience of Spiritual Healing, whatever the results in the physical sphere, testify again and again to the newness of hope and life which it has brought. It takes not the body or the mind only, but the whole man into view, and asserts the supremacy of the spiritual element in human nature. Through weak human vessels it is the conferring on sinful and suffering humanity of the redemptive gifts and graces of Him Who came that they might have life, and might have it abundantly.