PASTORAL CARE OF THE SICK IN ABEOKUTA SOUTH BAPTIST ASSOCIATION: A CHALLENGE TO THE CONTEMPORARY PASTORS

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ABSTRACT

Pastoral Care Of The Sick In Abeokuta South Baptist Association: A Challenge To The Contemporary Pastors sought to research into how the church can provide healing to the sick and hurting ones. As the Murphies described it, Christians *know* that their past sins are forgiven and that they are new creatures in Christ. They equally *know* that when they die they are going to heaven and have an eternity with God the Father through Jesus Christ. However, many of these Christians ask, "How can I feed my children *today?* How can I get healing for my sick child *today?* How can I deal with the problems of the *now?"*(50). Of course, they have needs in the 'here and now'. Empirical research using descriptive survey design was made to look into the awareness of the healing ministry of the church in which 94.4 percent of the 107 respondents indicated believe in the divine healing preached by the church with only 30.8 percent attesting to false claim of healing. Still more, 81.3 percent attested to the relevance of healing in the church with 88.8 percent indicating they had experienced divine healing and that their pastors preach healing. In relation to factor causing ill health, 77.6 percent of the respondents attributed it to parents' or ancestors' sin. While 72.0 percent attributed sin as a major cause of ill health, 34.6 percent indicated that personal sin causes physical sufferings. Though 72.9 percent of the respondents indicated 'No' to God inflicting with ill health, 75.7 percent actually acknowledged that Satan has the power to inflict it. That 32.7 percent of the respondents indicated that ill health does good to or serve some purpose for the sufferer, 79.4 percent, however, admitted that it draws sufferer closer to God. Furthermore, 65.4 percent indicated that lack of healing in churches is a cause of exodus of members from church to church and 59.8 percent indicated it as a reason why some pastors use diabolical powers. It is revealing that 78.5 percent subscribed to the use of anointing oil as often practised in Pentecostal churches. However, 60.7 percent objected to the use of herbs solely for the purpose of cure. Churches conduct of regular healing services is on the low side, which was 43.9 percent and is equally seen in the percentage of the respondents indicating that their churches do not regularly hold healing services which is 46.7 percent. Pastors and ministers of the Gospel should incorporate "divine healing into their philosophy of ministry" (Wagner 208). Ministers of the Gospel should encourage members of the sick to show love to their sick ones and pray in faith for God's healing. In this is God glorified. Pastors should not feel ashamed to make referrals of the sick but acknowledge professionalism. The inability to exhibit the miracle gift of healing is not a proof that God is not working with them for we do not have the same gifts. Furthermore, the use of orthodox medicine should not be discouraged by pastors.

5.2 CONCLUSION

Ill health is not God's will for His people. He above all things wants them to be in good health and prosperity. The church is aware of this as pastors preach healing as part of the salvation package. Where healing is not experienced, members seek other means. While some go from church to church, others consult with traditionalists and spiritists. It is obvious that members appreciate the use of anointing oil. However, its use should be as taught by the Scriptures. Medication is not at all forbidden going by the result of the analyses. The use of herbs was disapproved by a good percentage of the responses obtained from the field work. However, if only for the sole purpose

of cure without invoking and conjuring spirits, the use of herbs, at calculable quantity, should be embraced for God has given us all things to enjoy, including herbs. Pastors who hold other specialized trainings in human health could charge fees for the services rendered as endorsed by the respondents.

5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

The body of Christ should acknowledge the fact that it is God's will to heal all today. The ministry gift of healing is as much real in the church today as it was in the days of the apostles. Thus:

1. Pastors and ministers of the Gospel should incorporate "divine healing into their philosophy of ministry" (Wagner 208). Pastoral orientation is to view all therapy or healing action as effected by the activity of the Holy Spirit (Anderson 69).Pastors should be bold in exercising their authority in Christ over all human problems.

2. Pastors must realize that while not all pastors possess the gift of healing, theirs is to carry out pastoral care to the sick by bringing hope back to them. The weak must be visited and strengthened. They should not wait until the sick invite them before they look out for them. They should obey the injunction of the Scripture of anointing the sick and praying in faith. Their prayer of faith would bring the sick in contact with the power of God they need for their healing. They can also work hand in hand with other member of the congregation who are so gifted. They should always remember and bear in mind that "There is no secret formula, ritual or process, which, when used correctly, makes the healing happen and that God does the healing, and we cannot write His script for Him" (Wagner 223).

3. Parishioners should be made to constantly bear in mind that mortal men made in the image of God know joy and pain together (Tada and Estes 248). They should also be made to acknowledge and recognize God's sovereignty over matters of life. If

it pleases His pleasure to heal, praise God. If otherwise, let God be praised. As pastors, "We are called to speak his Word, communicate his touch, receive and share his love, stand for his principles, share his pain and be infectious with his life and his healing" (Lawrence 116). Thus, Pastors should encourage them to put their complete trust on God who alone can bring them the needed healings and solutions to their problems. They will do well to note that, "In sickness or in health, stability of faith is of great value. It comes from the power of God obtainable through wholehearted surrender to God with devotion to His Word and genuine thirst for the fullness of His Spirit" (Ojo 52).

4. Ministers of the Gospel should encourage members of the sick to show love to their sick ones and pray in faith for God's healing. In this is God glorified. The words of Grudem applies here that, "Not all Christians have the gift of healing..but nevertheless every Christian can and does pray for God to heal friends or relatives who are ill" (1024).

5. Pastors should not feel ashamed to make referrals of the sick but acknowledge professionalism. The inability to exhibit the miracle gift of healing is not a proof that God is not working with them for we do not have the same gifts. "Teamwork by experts" is encouraged (Igenoza 155).

6. As much as divine healing is achievable, the use of orthodox medicine should not be discouraged by pastors. "Miraculous healing does not preclude medicine" (Ajibade 173). God has given us all things for our benefits. The advancements in the fields of science and technology are all to make life easier and comfortable for man.

7. Pastors should bear in mind that "Africans believe in anointing, healing and in miracle generally, and they want to see it take place in their churches. They want to experience that power that supersedes the power of the devil the used to know about"

(Ajibade 175). Pastors should therefore, present the full Gospel using all the available resources therein. Wagner did mention some elements used by some healing ministers when praying for the sick such as oil, holy water, consecrated salt and the sacrament of Holy Communion while others use none of these ones but depend solely on prayer (Wagner 228). The bottom line is that these elements should not be idolized and ministers should not make merchandize of them. The use of anointing oil should be embraced as taught in the Holy Scriptures but its misguided use should be avoided. They should allow God to lead them in whatever substance they choose to use.

8. Churches and pastors should bear in mind "that elders should be invited to pray for the sick who should be anointed with oil. The prayer of faith will then heal the sick. Jesus' disciples did it. It was known with the early church and the church father... It is still been practiced today with results" (Ajibade 176).

9. Pastors should make it known to members of their congregations who go to spiritists, wizards and necromancers that the Bible "bitterly condemns spiritualistic practices" (Newport 133).

10. Pastors should have a specialized knowledge of their work as the craftsman knows his tools, the material he has to work, and has mastered the technique of his trade (Koch 300). This will enable them effectively minister to the needs of the people who come to them.

11. Pastors, along with human qualities such as the ability to listen, ability to keep a confidence, the gift of understanding, should possess the spiritual life that is in constant fellowship with Jesus Christ (Koch 297). They will do well to heed to August Villar as quoted by Koch: "Oh, you must not speak to the sick and the dying about strength of soul, and courage, and patience, and the immortality of the soul; you yourself must give them strength, courage, patience and, above all, eternal life" (298).