

DIVINE HEALING: A CHALLENGE TO CHURCH GROWTH

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ABSTRACT

The two versions of the Great Commission of Jesus to His disciples (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-18) combine to form the basis of this thesis. Both versions opened with the charge to go and proclaim the Gospel to unbelievers. Matthew's special emphasis was that the disciples should educate the new converts doctrinally and nurture them for their spiritual edification. This implies the coming together of all the saints to form a church. It implies church planting. Mark's special addition was an unveiling of a comprehensive list of spiritual gifts which mark out believers from unbelievers. Among these was the gift of divine Healing: "they shall lay hands on the sick and they shall recover" (Mark 16:18b). Both internal evidences from the scriptures and external evidences from literature review in addition to churches and hospitals from far and near have shown the value of this gift for accelerating the rate of the numerical growth of churches.

Divine Healing in its broad sense covers all non-pagan modes of healing such as healing through pure herbal medication, healing through scientific medication, and healing through prayer of faith to God in Jesus' name. However, the last named is the focus of this essay, and for expediency, it is sometimes referred to as absolute divine healing.

Though adherence to Absolute Divine Healing gives the devotee a special joy and confidence in God probably unknown to non-devotees, it is not the requirement for acceptance by God. Furthermore, an

abuse of divine healing is dangerous and must be guarded against with utmost seriousness.

Finally, in Luke 10:9, Jesus commanded the seventy disciples on evangelistic outreach that wherever they were received, they should heal the sick and also announce to the people the coming of the Divine Kingdom. In Luke 10:20, however, as the disciples returned rejoicing, He cautioned them regarding their motive for rejoicing. They were not to rejoice because they were able to heal the sick in His name, but because their names were written in heaven. For effective ministry of soul-winning and church-planting with healthy numerical church-growth in view, both the command and the caution are necessary and inseparable. The command, we note, is to heal the sick and the caution is to regard, not healing but salvation, as the optimum purpose of evangelism. This is the gist of the essay.

CONCLUSION

A. PASTORAL COUNSELLING ON SUCCESSFUL EVANGELISM AND CHURCH GROWTH

A number of missionaries and reputable evangelists have expressed a variety of views from the wealth of their experiences on the rudiments of successful evangelism and church growth. These views will certainly be useful for building a strong viable church. This researcher deems it expedient to adapt and incorporate some of these ideas into the counselling scheduled for this section of the essay.

Russel and Veda Locke jointly say "Man's sinfulness, his condemnation, and his eternal doom call for evangelism by God's people. An evangelistic church is a growing church."¹

Dr. Clyde M. Narramore has this in one of his books: One of the greatest privileges in life is to share the Gospel with another. There is no experience to match that of being used of God to lead a person to a saving knowledge of Christ. Contrary to what people may think, soul-winning is not limited to adults. Children may also have this experience. One of the best ways to help your child grow in faith is to show him how to witness to other boys and girls, and in fact, to adults.

Your own example will mean more to your son or daughter than anything else. It is also important for you to talk with your

¹Russel and Veda Locke, Evangelism and Church Growth (Ibadan: The Publishing Board, Nigerian Baptist Convention, 1990), p.6.

child about witnessing.²

John Ferguson, a former Professor of Classics at the University College, Ibadan (now University of Ibadan) asked a rhetorical question and answered it: "Do we in the churches show what true Christianity is? A picture of the true church is beginning to emerge, and our churches are but distorted reflections of it."³

Donald C. Posterski on his own part observes that

The world needs to see what Christian life looks like. People who think God is unnecessary, or just optional in life need fresh images of how life is meant to be lived. They need hard evidence that following Jesus really makes a difference. Otherwise, those who have no regard for God will continue to bypass the Christian faith as a worthwhile option.⁴

The renowned international Preacher, T. L. Osborn says:

World evangelism is every Christian's task. This is the purpose of being filled with the Holy Ghost - not just to "talk in tongues," but to give proof of the resurrection, to boldly witness of Christ to believers. Many young people lose interest in their church because the real meaning of Christian living is not held before them. If it is just "to be regular", to "sing pretty", to "give tithes", etc. this does not challenge them.⁵

The popular Baptist Evangelist, Billy Graham in his foreword to another author's book, asked a most heart-touching question

²M. Narramore, How to Help Your Child Develop Faith in God (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1975), p.30.

³John Ferguson, Christian Byways (Ibadan: Daystar Press, 1968), p.57.

⁴Donald C. Posterski, Re-Inventing Evangelism (Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1989), p.31.

⁵T.L. Osborn, The Purpose of Pentecost (Tulsa: T.L. Osborn Evangelistic Association, n.d.), p.17.

and left it for us to answer;

The question arises, he said: HOW do we go forward with our evangelism - a widening of the circle of faith so that it includes more and more people who have transformingly trusted Christ as Saviour - that is continuous, contagious, and compelling?⁶

At the close of a great crusade in Chile, South America, a Presbyterian Pastor said, "More has been accomplished in these three weeks of miracle evangelism to convince this city of the Gospel than in the past hundred years of preaching our traditional sermons of theology."⁷ Rev. Antonio Sandoval, a Presbyterian Pastor who participated in one of the Central American Campaigns held by the T.L. Osborn Evangelistic Association, said:

How can a church call itself a church and not believe in miracles? I cannot read four pages anywhere in the Bible without encountering miracles! And the God of the Bible is the same today!⁸

At the end of the Crusade, Rev. Sandoval's church grew by an addition of over one hundred and forty new families.

Reinhard Bonnke in his book titled Evangelism by Fire testifies that when he was a young missionary in Africa, he worked on what was considered to be the proper methods of missions without any significant result of soul-winning. But when he discarded those methods and gave himself properly to God, God responded by filling his soul with the Holy Spirit and a tremendous change came into his ministry. As a result of this,

⁶ Robert E. Coleman, The Master Plan of Evangelism (Grand Rapids: Fleming H. Revell, 1993), p.15.

⁷ Osborn, The Purpose of Pentecost, p.32.

⁸ Osborn, p.19.

he has seen as many as 150,000 people claiming salvation in a single meeting and two million in a single year. "Our crowds are greater than ever," he continued. "Multitudes have been healed and filled with the Holy Spirit."⁹ He tries to inspire greater involvement in spirit-filled evangelism by stating that God will not give the whole world to any one man or woman. He wants to raise up an army of anointed people widely spread all over the world. He said that God has laid down the basic means for the salvation of souls. The answer is not to be found in human schemes and mechanical faithfulness to a prescribed method, but in full-yieldedness to Christ and commitment to spiritual principles. Bonnke closed this section of his challenge to evangelism by saying "To die in the work of Christ may be the purpose of somebody's life. Christ is glorified whether people are won for Him by our deaths or by our lives. It is all the same."¹⁰

To correct the lopsided emphasis on miracles in several "power crusades" today, we want to reiterate that "signs and wonders" are not an end in themselves but means to an end. The following dialogue between Jesus and the seventy disciples who had just returned from an evangelistic tour corroborates this:

And the seventy returned again with joy saying, Lord, even the devils are subject unto us through thy name. And he said unto them "I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven. Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions

⁹Reinhard Bonnke, Evangelism by Fire (Eastbourne: Kingsway Publications, 1991), p.10.

¹⁰Bonnke, p.11.

