

“You didn’t have enough faith!” How unlike the supposed faith healers of our own times!

After over a century of Pentecostalism (including Charismaticism and Neo-charismaticism), where are their undeniable miracles? Lots of sick people were supposedly healed but are as ill as they ever were. Others have traipsed to many healing meetings seeking a cure but have not even claimed to have received healing. There have been multitudes of hoaxes and exposures. Christ’s name has been repeatedly discredited before the world by these charlatans and yet gullible people are still falling for it.

How different from the apostle Paul! “Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds” (II Cor. 12:12). Paul is telling the Corinthians, in effect, “You saw God’s power in, and you marvelled at, miracles wrought by my hands. They are signs of my apostolic office—you yourselves being eyewitnesses and you cannot deny it.” On the other hand, the pretend miracles and incomplete cures (at best) are signs of an impostor, a false teacher with a false gospel, often one who is out to fleece the people.

One charismatic describes how someone knows when he or she has been “Touched for Healing.” “Usually you will feel extreme heat all over your body. Then after a few minutes, most will feel a wonderful and supernatural peace from the Lord Jesus Christ. You will know when this happens, it feels so wonderful. It’s like heaven on earth. You will know when this happens and you will have zero doubt. You will know it is the Holy Spirit of Jesus Christ touching you ... Sometimes you will feel a wind first. Really!!!! Just like a real wind or a lightly swirling breeze, even in a completely closed room. Sometimes you will feel like a warm blanket of energy wrapped around your entire body. When this happens, it is like supernatural clothing. It feels like a part of you perfectly. Sometimes you will smell a heavenly jasmine or other wonderful fragrances. You will know this smell is heavenly and holy when it manifests itself in the fullness of the Holy Spirit. If you ever smell these wonderful fragrances, you are having an extra special visit from the Lord Jesus. You will know without any doubt when you smell them.”

What is one to make of all this unbiblical tomfoolery? Where is there anything like this in all of sacred Scripture? Did you notice how often the writer speaks of how it usually “feels” (six times in the paragraph above)—the feeling of heat or peace or the wind or a blanket or perfectly fitting clothes—or “smells” (four times)—heavenly jasmine or another wonderful fragrance? (Roman Catholic mystics often speak of supposed divine visitations in similar language.) Remarkably, it does not even say that you know that you have been healed when you are actually healed! Beloved, a true sign of a biblical apostle is real healing without any of the mumbo-jumbo in the previous paragraph, as II Corinthians 12:12 and the New Testament teach!

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The Nature of Apostolic Miracles

In the last issue, we introduced the signs of an apostle (II Cor. 12:12) and listed various types of miracles (Matt. 10:8; Mark 16:17-18). But what about the miracles claimed by Pentecostals and Charismatics in our own day? A lot of them are non-verifiable, such as the “healings” of bad backs and headaches or psychosomatic illnesses. How does one prove that a person actually had these pains, that he or she no longer has them and that this was due to a miracle performed by a charismatic? What about their performing “difficult” miracles, like raising people from the dead, cleansing lepers, causing people born lame to walk, etc.? Claims regarding these things by Pentecostals and Charismatics are rare, and few stand up to even a little investigation.

Victor Budgen relates this amusing story of a healing meeting in London: “in the middle of the Albert Hall rally the chairman announced that a person in the congregation who had been taken ill was in the St John’s ambulance room, and if there was a doctor in the house would he please go there quickly” (*The Charismatics and the Word of God*, p. 100). Where was the faith of the chairman and the attendees in the healing power of the charismatic leaders? Why did they need to turn to medics?

The miracles of II Corinthians 12:12 were both real and undeniable, as they had to be in order to serve Paul’s point. Clearly, while he was in Corinth for some 18 months (Acts 18:11), the apostle had performed a plurality of miracles that provoked wonder in those who beheld them and pointed to the truth of the gospel that he preached: Jesus Christ crucified and risen for sinners! Besides the references to miracles performed by Paul in the book of Acts and II Corinthians 12:12, the apostle speaks of his miracles in Galatia in central Turkey (Gal. 3:5), and even from Jerusalem all the way north and west to Illyricum, roughly the former Yugoslavia (Rom. 15:19).

Pagan opponents, unbelieving Jews and false apostles would dearly have loved to be able to deny the wonders that Paul performed. But, like the miracles of Christ (John 11:47), and of Peter and John (Acts 4:14-16), Paul’s mighty deeds could not be gainsaid.

Notice, first, that the apostles healed people *totally*. Paralyse Aeneas was bedridden for eight years. Peter announced to him, “Jesus Christ maketh thee whole,” and he arose and made his bed (Acts 9:32-35). Aeneas did not merely show improvement or make progress. Instead, he had unimpaired power in his limbs.

Second, the apostles healed people *instantly*, like the lame man of Acts 3. There was no need for any therapy afterwards or a process of rehabilitation.

Third, the apostles healed *everyone* who came to them seeking healing (e.g., Acts 5:12-16). They did not try to heal someone but fail, and then blame it on the sick person:

Is the Church Our Mother?

Our question for this issue comes from a friend in South America: “Besides the church being the bride or wife of Christ, according to Galatians 4:26 and other verses ... is the church also the mother of believers or Christians?”

Scripture does not in so many words call the church the mother of believers. Nevertheless, the expression is, we believe, warranted by Scripture. Revelation 21:9 suggests it for, if the church is the bride of Christ, then it follows that she is also our mother.

Isaiah 66:10-11 exhorts us, “Rejoice ye with Jerusalem, and be glad with her, all ye that love her: rejoice for joy with her, all ye that mourn for her: That ye may suck, and be satisfied with the breasts of her consolations; that ye may milk out, and be delighted with the abundance of her glory.” Jerusalem was a name for the church in the Old Testament and continues to be a name for the church in the New (Heb. 12:22-24; Rev. 21:2). Isaiah certainly is describing Jerusalem as the mother of believers, therefore.

The verse mentioned by our South American friend, Galatians 4:26, is closest of all to an actual reference to the church as our mother: “But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all.” Here again, in an allegory, the name Jerusalem is a name for the church and the church is called “the mother of us all.”

The church is our mother in the sense that she gives birth to us. It is not the church which regenerates, justifies and sanctifies us, but it is through her ministry that God performs His work of grace in us. Thus Paul calls the members of the church, “My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you” (Gal. 4:19).

The Christian church has always recognized the propriety of this name. The church father Cyprian said, “No one can have God as Father who does not have the church as Mother” (*The Unity of the Church*, chap. 6) and Calvin wrote several times in his *Institutes* of the church as the mother of believers. Here are a couple of his famous quotes:

“I will start, then, with the church, into whose bosom God is pleased to gather his sons, not only that they may be nourished by her help and ministry as long as they are infants and children, but also that they may be guided by her motherly care until they mature and at last reach the goal of faith. ‘For what God has joined together, it is not lawful to put asunder’ [Mark 10:9 p.], so that, for those to whom he is Father the church may also be Mother. And this was so not only under the law but also after Christ’s coming, as Paul testifies when he teaches that we are the children of the new and heavenly Jerusalem [Gal. 4:26]” (4.1.1).

“But because it is now our intention to discuss the visible church, let us learn even from the simple title ‘mother’ how useful, indeed how necessary, it is that we should know her. For there is no other way to enter into life unless this mother conceive us in her womb, give us birth, nourish us at her breast, and lastly, unless she keep us under her care and guidance until, putting off mortal flesh, we become like the angels [Matt. 22:30]. Our weakness does not allow us to be dismissed from her school until we have been pupils all our lives” (4.1.4).

This name “mother” has been misused, especially by Roman Catholicism which uses the name to buttress its absolute authority. Because the church is our mother, so they think, we must bow to her authority as we would bow to the authority of the Word of God: unreservedly and without question. Such abuse of the name, however, is easily answered with a reminder that no mother is a good mother who does not come with the Scriptures in hand and whose authority is not founded on that Word.

While rejecting the errors of Romanism, thinking of the church as our mother serves as a reminder of some important things about the church. It is a reminder of the unity of the church of Christ in all nations and all history. Believers have only one mother, though the visible church is fragmented and divided. We all—no matter our background, skin colour, nationality, language, etc.—not only have the same Father but also the same mother. Names such as Jerusalem and Zion are names for the church, both in the Old and the New Testaments (Gal. 4:24-27; Heb. 12:22-24), and are an example of this wonderful unity which transcends time.

The name mother reminds the church and her leaders that she must be like a mother to her members, and not like a tyrannical and over-bearing monster. It serves as a reminder to the members that the church is the place where they should expect to be fed, nourished, comforted, corrected and guided (Isa. 66:10-11). They should not leave her side, unless she in her visible manifestation becomes a whore rather than a mother. Though the name Mother is not used in Revelation 22:17, the idea of the church as our mother, the one through whom God provides for His children, is certainly to be found there: “And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.”

In some churches, all the emphasis is on “saving souls” but what is done for those who are so saved? “Mother” church does little or nothing to nourish and care for her children. Nothing is said about church membership to the evangelized, and those who do become church members are left untaught and unguided. That same misguided emphasis on “saving souls” often leads to the neglect of those who have been long time members of the church, especially the elderly, the widows, the sick and the poor. It leads all too often to neglect of the youth as well. Though under the care of mother church, they remain untaught and it is no surprise that they go their own way in the end.

As our mother, the church deserves our respect and love and obedience. Christians ought to put ourselves under her care, “maintaining the unity of the church; submitting themselves to the doctrine and discipline thereof; bowing their necks under the yoke of Jesus Christ; and as mutual members of the same body, serving to the edification of the brethren, according to the talents God has given them” (*Belgic Confession* 28).

When our mother is seriously ill, as she sometimes is, we must not immediately abandon her, but must seek her healing and well-being, through prayer, standing for the truth and, if necessary, church reformation. All too often those who would not think of abandoning their natural mother give up on mother church when she is ill and falls short of the standard for spiritual health set by the Word of God. *Rev. Ron Hanko*