

## **Faith and the Fall**

This paper is significantly edited from its original presentation given at the 2016 Mockingbird Ministries conference in NYC. It does retain its main purpose and its opening content has been moved to the 'Rediscover' page of [thedeathandresurrectiondoula.com](http://thedeathandresurrectiondoula.com). This paper was inspired by the book, *The Christian Life: Cross or Glory*, by Steven A. Hein.

*"Everything is possible for anyone who has faith."* (Mark 11:22-24)

*Jesus answered them, "Have faith in God. Truly I tell you, if you say to this mountain, 'Be taken up and thrown into the sea,' and if you do not doubt in your heart, but believe that what you say will come to pass, it will be done for you. So I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.* (Mark 11:22-24)

It is my claim that if we are to make any real sense of looking at a faith-healing ministry focused on the cross we will need to begin at the very beginning:

*The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it. And the Lord God commanded the man, "You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die.*

*Now the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God say, 'You shall not eat from any tree in the garden'?" The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die.'" But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not die; for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves. (Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7)*

It is a popular idea to place a ministry's emphasis on reenacting biblical healings or drumming up new missions in hope of fixing up society with religious efforts, but these miss the focus of the Gospel. Instead, it is from a place of perfect despair and nothing that God wills to work in creating His creatures as they ought to be. A contemporary, yet right

practicing healing ministry delivers this message: It is by way of the cross that God works death in us in order to bring us to new life.

The promise for God's healing power to be "released" if we just rally our faith or meet specific conditions drawn from the law doesn't work, but there are many healing practices that teach us our works have a coercive effect over God's will. Good works, or living by the rigidity of the law, will not secure more blessings for us. This claim of prosperity gospel teachers is a false use of the ministry of Christ in an attempt to secure a more comfortable life. While we may recognize the absurdity of extremely distorted doctrines like works-based agendas and positive thinking, because of our nature, we easily find ourselves seeking out other theologies in which the cross and the law are means to a kind of prosperity. These are theologies of glory that emphasize "becoming better" is necessary and possible by additional grace added to will power.

The theology of the cross on the other hand, says, as sinners we are in need of an intervention from outside of ourselves because inside we are addicted to sin and our desires will never be satisfied by what we acquire. We constantly want more in order to declare independence from God so we must be put to death and raised to new life in Christ.

I believe false gospels have perverted the victory of the Christian and the role of faith in the healing ministry of Christ. You may have heard before that Mary conceived Christ through her ear. Recalling the words of St. Ephrem: "Through her ear the Word entered and dwelt secretly in her womb". And by Jacob of Serug, who writes: "see how Eve's ear inclines and harkens to the voice of the deceiver when he hisses deceit to her. But come and see the Watcher (Gabriel) instilling salvation into Mary's ear and removing the insinuation of the serpent from her and consoling her. Instead of this virgin (Eve) another was chosen: truth was spoken to her in her ear from the Most High. By the door which death entered (i.e. the ear), by it entered life and loosened the great bond which the evil one has bound there".

Satan's words of deception made Eve doubt God's goodness, and she believed she could take care of herself and provide for her own well-being. But, through words of conception spoken to Mary by the Angel Gabriel, God has given us His Word in flesh to remind us that our well-being flows from Him by the grace and blessings that are ours through the Gospel of Christ.

Satan's temptation of Eve preyed on her natural instinct of self-love that flows from our divine nature as God's creation. But, because of sin, we strive to live out strategies that secure our personal well-being independent of God and the Lordship of Christ. Pride lies at the center of our rebellion so we pervert self-love and place God and others in the service of ourselves. God created us for community, but sin has made it so that we are

hell-bent in finding ways to achieve significant status and have meaningful impact at the expense of others. Pride makes us want to be more than we are, and we end up being less than what God created us to be. But while we were still sinners, to save us from our pride that separated us from God, Christ humbled himself to the shameful death on a cross.

Charles Spurgeon says, “The wounds of Christ are His glories, they are His Jewels and precious things.” Our Creator left His throne and took on His own wounds for you and me, and He connects His wounds to ours as He rightly brings us to dwell again under the dependence of His Lordship.

God’s will for all people is health and salvation and He has guaranteed this for us by sending His Son. Christ has defeated death on the Holy Cross and He has risen with healing in His wings. As we live life in the cross of Christ, our experience is a life of daily baptism, daily death and resurrection – The new man rising as our sinful nature is continually dying. We have been fully healed since the splashing of grace in our Baptism, but the blessings of the Gospel will not be fully realized in this life. Instead, we live with a hidden healing in the risen Christ.

***“Give me the Biblical Christ or give me nothing.” – RC Sproul***

In preaching the Gospel, the cross of Christ should not be emptied of its power (1 Cor. 1:17). Christ crucified is the chief message for the church (2:2), and that includes the ministry of healing prayer. What is faith? How do we find healing? I believe Healing finds us.

***“For by grace you have been saved by faith. And it is not your own doing, it is the gift of God, not a result of works so that no one may boast.” (Ephesians 2:8-9)***

Just as God’s words brought forth the creation of Adam, the power of forgiveness in God’s word *creates* faith in the human heart of the new creation in Christ. We are not saved and healed because of the faith we offer. Faith is a condition and a result of His choice and His commitment to us, not ours to Him. Faith flows from His will and work. Faith receives the saving gifts; it does not create them. Our justification ends conditional thinking and the language of the law and it is there we can find rest from any beliefs that we must perform in any way for God to demonstrate His healing power.

The cross is not a popular conversation to have with someone who is looking for a release from suffering. The Christian life is not a pilgrimage where we triumph over sin and affliction by devotion to the law or have them removed all together by God’s mighty power. The cross is the experience of the journey itself as it stands as a stamp on our lives reminding us of our sin and our salvation. It is the mark of ownership by God

Himself; it is the heartbeat of our faith.

The crucifixion of Christ means the crucifixion of the believer. God demands the death of the Christian on the same cross that crucified His Son. By God's grace in Christ, He plucks us from our self-procured devastation. As our Savior, He reaches His mighty hand right into our lives to save us from the sin of rebellion and self-righteousness. He brings us to the end of our rope by hitching a cross to our back and He says, "Follow Me." He brutally kills us off with His law, fully exposing our piety and spiritual deadness. He hammers us to repentance exposing our false gods, our self-made plans, and our loveless treatment of God and our neighbors acted out in the ultimate concern of ourself. He heals our ears to hear the Gospel - to know that God Himself has saved us from His own wrath. He heals our eyes to see that we have nothing to offer towards our own justification, and He gives us a saving faith securing our salvation in Him.

When the crushing work of Christ takes away our strength, our prayers will start to take the shape of Jesus in the Garden on the eve of His crucifixion as we realize God is serious about our death, "Yet not my will, but yours be done". (Luke 22:42) Our appreciation of His grace will always be tied to the alarming realization of our own sin. By His grace, He returns the earth and our lives to us as a gift with a new obedience that flows only from Him.

It shouldn't come as a surprise to us that the life of the Christian is full of conflict, suffering, and sin. Our personal battle is part of a larger cosmic battle that ends at Christ's return when He ushers in the fullness of His victory over Satan won at the cross. Faith expresses itself in loving and serving Christ in the needs of others and the most courageous place we can serve one another is to live in honesty and forgiveness over the reality of our sin. We are broken people living under God's grace and mercy.

It is in the pain of what Satan has used to bring us to unbelief that God holds us to him and the cross. Temptation is therefore nothing more than unbelief. It is a refusal of God's gracious gift of salvation given in Christ. The good news is that it is precisely where we do not believe that God makes us into what he has created us to be. Where Satan has planned for damnation, God has planned for salvation. When the disciple, Peter, is called by Jesus out of the boat to walk on the water and begins to sink, it is Jesus who reaches out his hand and says, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" (Matt. 14:31) Our Savior reaches right down in the places we don't believe and he saves us.

It is on the cross that God poured out his love for His creation and took His victory over sin, death, and the devil. Through the suffering and death of his own son, God has turned evil on itself giving us hope. The cross shatters the illusion of our perception of good and evil after the fall. To believe is to reside in the new kingdom. To fall into unbelief is to reside in the old world where Satan keeps us in doubt that God is good. It is why Jesus

teaches his disciples to pray: “Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one”. (Matt. 6:13)

The New Kingdom comes by the way of the cross, not by the way of glory. If our inveterate theology or understanding of God is one of glory on our own terms, then we cannot understand what is truly good. Therefore, suffering is inevitable because our will is attached to visions of glory and we can only misunderstand good and evil. Our new creation is born through the cross where the old self has died against its wood. For it cannot go beyond its beams to eternity where evil resides no more. It cannot go because Christ has been raised from the dead and because we are in Him, we are also raised.

The Ultimate Good is brought forth again in Jesus as the New Kingdom spreads throughout the world, penetrating itself into each and every particularity of our lives. God in Jesus Christ was slain to be made our redemption, a suffering in which stands the future of the cosmos. God’s work in Christ turns evil against itself as where there is light, there cannot be darkness: *“Where light shines there cannot be darkness. When light comes, darkness proves to have been simply the absence of light. Where there is good, evil is driven out; it proves to have been simply and absence of good.”*<sup>1</sup>

Augustine found that the story of creation and salvation, the entire history of the cosmos, begins and ends with the good. God has already provided the final cause, the fulfillment of creation in Christ and now we move forward each day in constant dependence on the reality of God’s actions as we wait for for the fullness of time and the wholeness the present creation is lacking. This wholeness is more than Eden ever was. Pastor and counselor, Dan Allender, encourages us on the journey, “Waiting is the crucible that purifies hope”.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> G.R. Evans, *Augustine on Evil* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 2.

<sup>2</sup> Dan Allender, *The Healing Path* (Colorado Springs, Colorado: Waterbook Press, 1999), 40.