

Series: Healing	Reference: Acts 19:11-22	Title: The Faith Formula	Date: 01.20.18
<p style="text-align: center;">Website Writeup:</p> <p>This week we look at the false teaching labeled the Faith Formula. The Faith Formula defines faith as ‘the human will to believe’; the dominant feature is its human-centeredness. Its focus has ceased to be on Jesus, the author & perfecter of our faith, shifting to the individuals ability to believe, and their own self-righteousness.</p>			

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Acts 19:11-22, *God did extraordinary miracles through Paul, ¹²so that even handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched him were taken to the sick, and their illnesses were cured and the evil spirits left them. ¹³Some Jews who went around driving out evil spirits tried to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who were demon-possessed. They would say, “In the name of the Jesus whom Paul preaches, I command you to come out.” ¹⁴Seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, were doing this. ¹⁵One day the evil spirit answered them, “Jesus I know, and Paul I know about, but who are you?” ¹⁶Then the man who had the evil spirit jumped on them and overpowered them all. He gave them such a beating that they ran out of the house naked and bleeding.*

¹⁷When this became known to the Jews and Greeks living in Ephesus, they were all seized with fear, and the name of the Lord Jesus was held in high honor. ¹⁸Many of those who believed now came and openly confessed what they had done. ¹⁹A number who had practiced sorcery brought their scrolls together and burned them publicly. When they calculated the value of the scrolls, the total came to fifty thousand drachmas. ²⁰In this way the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power.

²¹After all this had happened, Paul decided to go to Jerusalem, passing through Macedonia and Achaia. “After I have been there,” he said, “I must visit Rome also.”

²²He sent two of his helpers, Timothy and Erastus, to Macedonia, while he stayed in the province of Asia a little longer.

I had a friend who was a Presbyterian Pastor. At one point his parents got caught up in the Christian Science Church; Mary Baker Eddy & all that. The Christian Science Church doesn't believe in using medicine. Instead they believe, a persons faith can & will heal anything. His mother contracted cancer. At the advice of her church, she didn't go to the doctor, although, it most likely would've been treatable. Long story short, she died. My friend went to the funeral of his own mother very angry with the Christian Scientists he sat next to. In his opinion, their theology had killed his mother. He sat next to man who had an open cancerous lesion on his head, who also refused treatment. It was too much. He too believed in healing, but his views on faith didn't discount the much needed knowledge & work of doctors.

In 1983 there was an article in Christianity Today reported by Doctor Paul Brand about a family named the Gilmores. This is what he said: *David Gilmore told about an illness of his 15 month old son, Dustin Graham Gilmore, which began in April of 1978. At first the child came down with flu-like symptoms. The Gilmores took him to their church &*

the pastor prayed for him. Members of that church believed faith alone heals any disease & that to look elsewhere for help - for example, to medical doctors - demonstrates a lack of faith in God. Gilmore & his wife followed the church's advice & simply prayed for their son. Over the next weeks they prayed faithfully as his temperature climbed, prayed when they noticed he no longer responded to sounds, and prayed harder when he went blind.

On the morning of May 15, 1978, the day after the pastor preached an especially rousing sermon about faith, the Gilmores went into their son's room & found his body a blue color. He was still. Dead. Again they prayed, since their church also believed the power of prayer can raise the dead. But Dustin Graham Gilmore stayed dead. An autopsy revealed the infant died from a form of easily treated meningitis.

The shame is, in the issue of healing, a few stories have dominated the Christian mind, creating extremes of thinking; but again, Jesus is somewhere in the middle & where our faith should be centered, on Him, nothing else. Aggressive faith's good, but when faith becomes a tool to manipulate the power of God it becomes destructive. In other words, when faith's taken off of Jesus & placed on our abilities as feeble human vessels, it ceases to be a faith which is solid & should be relabeled as pride.

We've looked already at two theological roadblocks to healing & power against demonic activity; the concept of *Sanctification through Sickness & Divine Determinism*. Today we'll look at the third roadblock, *The Faith Formula*. This is the formula, in some form, of not only the Christian Scientists, but also the proponents of the Health & Wealth, or Prosperity Gospel. Sometimes found in the Pentecostal Church; however, many Pentecostals would also reject it in the extreme form. It's not my intention to bash my Pentecostal brothers & sisters, we have much to learn from them & have our mistakes as well, that much is certain. If we criticize we do it with humility.

The Faith Formula defines faith as '*the human will to believe*'. The dominant feature is its human-centeredness. Its focus ceases to be on Jesus, the Author & Perfecter of our faith, shifting to the individuals *ability to believe*. Thomas Smail, a Scottish Theologian, laments the human centered orientation of Arminius & Charles Finney, two men to whom we can trace this thinking. He says this thinking "*...is deeply engraved in modern Pentecostalism out of its background in Methodist holiness teaching. The baptism of the Spirit & our reception of His gifts is dependent upon our fulfillment of the conditions God lays down. If we know enough, repent enough, pray enough, at the end we shall have them, but if not, we shall not.*"

It's an actual form of law masquerading as faith. Another attempt to claim self-righteousness before God & others. It proposes to build up, but actually destroys faith. It says, "If you fulfill God's conditions by believing enough, God will heal. If you don't fulfill his conditions by believing enough, he won't." It says, "Failure to be healed must always come back to a lack of faith." In the end, a person is racked with guilt since they can never be good enough, either to be healed, or heal someone else - the focus is on self. This teaching focuses almost solely on the benefits to the individual & doesn't

address the depravity of humankind at all. To them it sounds negative or depressive to think of yourself as unworthy before a holy God, or counterintuitive to think they might actually be self-righteous & therefore all works are as filthy rags, useless before God (Is 64:6a).

However, like Calvin once said, *“Man cannot, without sacrilege, claim for himself even a crumb of righteousness, for just so much is plucked & taken away from the glory of God’s righteousness.”* In other words, as soon as the focus becomes anything but Christ, I’ve lost sight of the Gospel. Scripture tells us that it’s by grace we’ve been saved & by the gift of God, not by works, lest any man should boast (Eph 2:8-9). Peter too, says we’ve been called to the hope of salvation so that *‘we may declare the excellences of him who called us out of darkness into his marvelous light’* (1 Peter 2:9).

In 1 Cor 1:30-31, Paul says every part of our salvation rests in Christ that we may glory in him alone. In essence, if we revert back to works, doing something to move God, we eclipse his righteousness & place ourselves in the light of glory. However, Romans 3:25 reveals to us, the reason God bestows his righteousness on us in Christ is *‘to show his own righteousness’*. To any extent we seek to impress God, even with our faith, we stand in the way of him. It’s not faith any longer, but self-reliance which *wavers, varies, flies up & down, hesitates & vacillates* - as it’s focused on self. In comparison, *faith in Jesus strengthens the mind with constant assurance & perfect confidence, it gives it a place to rest & plant your foot* (1 Cor. 2:5 & II Cor. 13:4) (Calvin Institutes, Vol. 1 p 766).

The Faith Formula says three things; **Firstly**, it holds to a strict causality between faith & healing. To be clear, that means, if I have enough faith I can heal, or will be healed. In short, human faith is a prerequisite for it to happen.

It’s true Jesus said to some, *‘Go, your faith has healed you’*, or that he *‘looked & saw they had faith to be healed.’* However, we notice, when you study the healing/miracle texts in the NT there isn’t a consistent tie, nor a prerequisite of faith in the passages.

- Mt 8:28-34 the healing of two demon possessed men; no evidence of faith in this passage outside of the demonic entities.
- Mt 9:18-26 the people laugh & the girl is dead, the father may show some faith, but we can’t extrapolate that this healing is an end result of his belief.
- Mark 9:24 A man with a demon possessed son; ‘I do believe, help me with my unbelief!’
- Lk 7:11-17 out of sheer compassion Jesus raises a boy from the dead without any discussion beforehand.
- Lk 8:22-25 Jesus calms the storm & then asks, “Where is your faith?” because they apparently hadn’t any.
- Lk 13:10-17 woman healed on the spot only at the prompting of Jesus.
- Lk 4:31-36 Jesus drives out an evil spirit without prompting.
- Jhn 4:43-54 this healing of a child seems to produce deeper faith/belief in the father, then in others.
- John 5:1-15 the guy doesn’t even know who Jesus is when asked by the Pharisees.

- Jhn 9:1-12 man healed of blindness & when the Pharisees say they know Jesus is a sinner, he replies, *'Whether he is a sinner or not I don't know, but I can see!'* [vs 25]
- Jhn 11 Lazarus - a mixture of belief & unbelief, and he seems to raise Lazarus to bolster their belief.

Some had faith, some didn't, some very little & sometimes it was difficult to heal someone (Mark 9:29). Jesus heals some who seem to have no faith at all, some who do & some who have doubt. Jesus did miracles of feeding thousands without any inclination of faith from those present, he just did it. The disciples seem surprised that, at the name of Christ, demonic spirits flee (Lk 10:17) - 'surprise' seems to indicate a lack of faithful expectation on their part, their experience seems to build their faith. Ken Blue states, most healing is incremental, over time, with consistent prayer & many times when he lacked any clear faith, the person was healed anyway. Jesus' work isn't bound by our faith, yet he's pleased when we have it & act in obedience to him.

So the question is, what's our faith in? An emotional display, conjuring belief or faith in order to manipulate the power of God? Do we need to show God, the author of our faith, how strong our faith is? Or, do we simply need to remember, our righteousness lies in & depends on Christ alone? The Truth is, God heals & delivers & isn't dependent on my feelings, nor bound by my minuscule belief. God's people should have faith & that's where the subtly of the lie's found.

John Wimber, growing up with in the theological view that miracles & the gifts of the Spirit ceased with the Apostles began to notice no scriptural evidence of that view. To test this he prayed healing for no less than 200 people to no avail. Discouraged & lacking faith as a result, a woman approached him & asked him to pray for healing. He did so reluctantly & admittedly not expecting results...she was healed.

There used to be a commercial where guys are talking in different situations, the barber shop, an office, on the street, intently focused on each other. But when a beautiful woman walks by, for a split second all conversation stops. Their heads swing to the woman. When she's out of sight, they resume talking.

That's what we're like with Christ. Intent on Him, until something catches our eye & focus is diverted. The problem is, sometimes those things which draw our gaze away are the benefits of life in Christ. As soon as that happens, the focus is actually not on the thing, but on us & what we can do to attain it. We do well to make sure, our faith isn't dependent on self, but on Jesus. To continually realize our works are worthless, God's righteousness has been imputed to us freely. We should strive to have faith in Him, not in our ability to move him by an emotional show of faith. As good as it looks, it does nothing but damage to us & others. *Here's a worthy quote: 'False teachers invite people to the Masters Table because of what's on it, not because they love the Master'. Let us always adore the Master & not be diverted by what we want him to give us.*

Secondly, the Faith formula says to us, divine blessings such as health & prosperity are constantly & fully available to all Christians, all the time.

However, when we hold to this thinking, we're only left with two options when a person isn't healed, or things don't work out as we've prayed. Those are, *guilt before God & anger towards God*. These feelings come in succession after a long period of self loathing at not being good enough, not believing enough, or not having enough faith. Pride manifests itself in insidious ways - often self-centered pride can look very pious on the outside. It wears the cloak of faith & bandies the name 'Jesus' about liberally. If you lovingly try to confront this type of person, you're labeled as lacking faith. When we strip it all off, it's about the person, not faith in Jesus. Faith in a humanistic ability to conjure enough faith, back to works based righteousness. Faith becomes the tool to manipulate God's power.

The Faith Formula is *Contractual*, not *Covenantal*. It says, "*If I live up to my side of the bargain, you're obliged to live up to your side.*" It negates Grace, the complexities of the spiritual realm & the Lordship of Christ. It waits for the proper quality & quantity of faith from God's people in order to move God. This view demands a certain amount of faith, or work, from his people before God releases his blessings. In a contractual relationship, God's boss, not father, bound to an employee/employer contract. This accounts for a lot of the show & emotionalism since God's believed to respond to our work, rather than out of Grace.

God's basically reduced to a Babylonian fertility god, subordinated to the offerings of his creatures; if your faith is strong enough, you can '*name it & claim it*'. A naive belief, the Kingdom of God has fully come now, discounting the partial & provisional nature of the Kingdom of God this side of the Second Coming of Christ. Suffering isn't a welcome word in this theological position, since suffering isn't a part of the Kingdom life now. But Paul definitively says we share in Christ's suffering NOW (Romans 8:17) & rejoices in his sufferings (Col 1:24).

Thirdly, the faith formula proposes, health & wealth can be instantly appropriated by God's Children if they know enough & believe enough at any time.

However, in Hebrews 11:32-39 we notice, some by faith won great victories, while others suffered & died. Immediate vindication & total victory this side of the Second Coming of Christ, aren't promised, but have been saved for the end of the age (Hebrews 10:35-36). We're held in bondage to decay (Romans 8:21) & will continue to be until the redemption of our bodies (Romans 8:23). There's no condemnation for God's people (Romans 8:1), but we inwardly groan as we eagerly await the adoption as sons & redemption of our bodies (Romans 8:23). We live in God's healing power today as we await the full consummation of that reality in the future. When we're not healed, there's still hope; listen to Thomas Smail again: '*When the prayer made in faith isn't answered & the healing for which many have sought doesn't come, we aren't to look for someone to accuse of failure in faith. Rather, we're to remember that besides faith there's hope. Hope has to do with God's promises which are still future & hidden, just as faith has to do with God's promises which are here & now. To the person who's believed for today but hasn't seen*

the answer come today, there comes the call to hope. Hope says, "Tomorrow also is God's. Enough has happened already to assure you that the rest is on the way."

So, the mature Christian lives under grace even in the issue of healing. It's Christ' work, not ours. Any glory's to be had is His. We realize there are complicated & unexplainable issues surrounding it this side of the Second Coming. So, we hold onto hope of the future, even when we may not see power manifested in a certain situation now. **We also hold onto the love of Christ for us NOW (Romans 8:38-39). Therefore, the mature Christian, acts in faith in Christ, not using their faith as a manipulative tool to gain favor. They realize the effects of a fallen world which are still evident around & within us. When we pray & someone isn't healed, we don't respond with guilt or anger as if our eyes are only on the results, but with hope for the future & trust in the character & ultimate purposes of God as if our eyes are forever on the Master.**

'Any gospel of healing which can't be spoken with confidence & received as comfort at the death bed isn't the gospel of Jesus Christ.' -Ken Blue- The Prosperity Gospel can't be preached at the deathbed with comfort & confidence since none of this fits into that theology.

The Faith Formula is there only to get results *for me*; a self-centered endeavor. About the individual, not the glory of Christ. *Contractual*, not *Covenantal*. In many passages faith preceded healing (Mt 8:10; 9:18;14:31; Mk 2:4; 5:36; Lk 7:50; 17:6). Yet, as we said earlier, sometimes the results weren't a result of faith at all, or sometimes very little, rather they produced faith (Mt 11:4, Lk 24:13-35, Jn 9:1-38, 10:37, 12:37, 20:31). The end effect of this teaching's been, many equate any talk of healing with the fringe extremists of the Health & Wealth Gospel, or Faith Formula teachers. So, some have gone to the other extreme denying healing happens at all. One denies medical attention, the other trusts only in it.

That's unfortunate, since we do have a God who heals & delivers & wants his people in prayer about these things. God doesn't want us to throw out our minds & deny the healing powers of the medical community. He's in the middle between the two extremes, he's the God of grace, a Father who loves, the God of hope & God of power. We're in a covenantal relationship with him, not a legalistic contractual relationship. It's not dependent on our level of faith, emotion, or work, remembering we're not God, He is. Our faith is important, God desires our obedience in these matters, yet our faith needs to center on Christ only. He wants us to be active, but not limited by us. We let God be God.

Our task in all these issues is to keep our eyes focused on Jesus, on the Master, not on the benefits of his table - not on results in a fallen world. It's a journey of faith fraught with victories, defeats & mistakes. Grace allows room for all that. Let's not let the fear of mistakes hold us back from being interactive children of God in these matters. Because we *are* children of God in Christ, saved by grace, not by works, so that none of us can boast. There's nothing which can separate us from the love of Christ, not even our misguidance & mistakes.