

The Scriptural Use of Tokens in the Church

“And God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul: So that from his body were brought unto the sick handkerchiefs or aprons, and the diseases departed from them, and the evil spirits went out of them” (Acts 19:11-12).

In the Bible, symbols and tokens represented actual things. We see oil, wine, water, rain, and fire as being symbols of the Holy Spirit.

In many churches today we find the use of different symbols and tokens. Many of these are taken to extremes. When it comes to healing we must understand that God can perform healings and miracles without the use of any symbol or token. Psalm 107:20 says, “He sent his word, and healed them, and delivered them from their destructions.” We can receive healing and miracles through faith in the Word of God and His power. However, it seems that God also allows symbols or tokens to be used as a visible point of contact to release faith in the hearts of His people. There is not any power in either handkerchiefs or anointing oil. The power comes from God and is received by having faith in His ability to touch us.

When using tokens/symbols there can be two extremes to avoid:

1. Totally avoiding the use of handkerchiefs and anointing oil.
2. Over emphasizing, misusing, or becoming unnecessarily dependent on the use of these items.

These lead to the same practices used in spiritualist churches. Some people have used items like holy water, anointing oil, and anointed pieces of cloth to enslave ignorant people. We must be careful of both extremes. Just because some misuse these tokens does not mean we should avoid them altogether. We need to follow the Scriptural principles and manner of which they were used in the Word of God.

We need not try to be strange by coming up with all sorts of tokens and symbols to make us different from everybody else.

We must also be careful not to begin idolizing the tokens used. We should not have faith in handkerchiefs or anointing oil. It would be easy to develop faith in the symbol/token and not in the God who is behind it. It is not the object that is powerful. As ministers we must direct the faith of God’s people to God and not into an object.

Eastwood Anaba in *Operating Spiritual Gifts* suggests five reasons why God allows the use of symbols and tokens in the church.

1. The release of faith.

2. Multiplication of the minister (when we cannot reach someone, the anointing from the ministry is multiplied to them). In Acts 5:15 it appears that the shadow of Peter healed people. In effect, there were two Peters.
3. Symbols provide variety (different points of contact).
4. They prove the sovereignty of God. He uses the foolish things of this world to confound the wise (1 Corinthians 1:27).
5. Actions of faith. Sometimes God instructs you to do things in the Holy Ghost that symbolize what God is trying to do in your life.

Agabas bound both his hands and feet with Paul's girdle and then prophesied (Acts 21:11).

Jesus used saliva when He opened the eyes of a blind man (John 9:6, 7).

Handkerchiefs

With sending handkerchiefs to the sick, note the following:

1. It is not the handkerchief that is anointed but the people who pray over the handkerchief. In the Biblical example taken from Acts 19 it says, "from his body." Paul was anointed, and the cloth was a point of contact with that anointing. It would not be wise for everyone to start distributing anointed cloths. Some even charge money for this. This was not the intent with Paul. He merely was multiplying the empowerment that was on him by using tangible means. He began to have an impact on more people than he could lay hands on.
2. In Acts 19 the handkerchiefs and aprons were brought to the sick people. The sick were not in the same location as Paul. This is why we occasionally send an anointed handkerchief from our prayer ministry to someone who may be sick. We cannot actually get to them.
3. There is no reference in the Bible that would indicate we are commanded to continue to send out handkerchiefs. There is no proof this became a practice in the New Testament Church. What we do see is that those anointed men of God made an impact on their world and miracles were done.

Anointing Oil

In James 5:13-15 oil is used. This oil was specifically used for healing, not like the mass anointing services we hear about today. The only other New Testament reference to anointing people with oil is found in Mark 6:13 and was for the use of healing the sick.

1. We are to call for the elders of the church when we are sick.
2. It is the elders of the church who will anoint us with oil. It is not something every member of the church should do. Some want to carry little bottles of anointing oil in their purses, etc.
3. There was not any power in the oil. It merely represented the power of the Holy Ghost and is used to aid us with faith. The power was in doing it in the "name of the Lord" (James 5:14)

and in praying over the person. The Bible says, “the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much” (James 5:16).

Study Questions

1. What are two extremes to avoid when considering using tokens? _____

2. Provide one Scripture that shows that you can be healed without the use of a token. _____

3. What are the five suggested reasons for the use of symbols and tokens? _____

4. In the use of handkerchiefs and oil what is actually anointed? _____

5. Where do we find the use of oil as it relates to healing in the Bible? _____

6. There is not any power in the oil but the power is in what/who? _____

7. Who should anoint the sick with oil? _____

Additional Notes

