

Excerpts of Archived Lecture:

SIGNS OF AN APOSTLE – PURPOSE OF MIRACLES

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In the study of the topic assigned, we face a discussion of what is certainly one of the major doctrinal problems facing the church now. False ideas of the Spirit and His work are especially troublesome among our “institutional” and “sponsoring church” brethren, and perhaps Pat Boone is the most famous example of the encroachment of tongue-speaking Pentecostalism among us. Of even more recent discovery is the turmoil presently disrupting the already unscriptural atmosphere in the Highland church of Abilene, Texas (Herald of Truth headquarters), over related matters. Compounding my own concern in dealing with this subject is my own personal sense of inadequacy; it is one very difficult to deal with in clearness, and certainly one which cannot be treated exhaustively in the short space allotted to me. In fact, it has been hard to decide what aspect of the question to emphasize—my choice has been largely to deal with an affirmative statement of scriptural teaching concerning the signs and their purpose, with perhaps a brief consideration of some false concepts at the close.

The substance of our subject is suggested by the statement of the Apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 12:12, where he said, “Truly **THE SIGNS OF AN APOSTLE** (caps mine-ACB) were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders and mighty

deeds.” Among those at Corinth there were some who refused to accept Paul as a true apostle of Jesus Christ, and a significant part of this letter to them is concerned with calling to mind the factual basis of his ministry as an apostle of the Lord. Some had registered a counter-claim to the effect that THEY were true apostles, and so Paul’s concerns were two: 1. *He discredits the claims of the false apostles by:* (a) showing the inadequacy of their message (3:6–18); (b) Exposing the deceitful tactics they employed (4:2; 10:1–15); (c) By denouncing them with the force of HIS established apostolic authority (11:12–15). 2. *He establishes his own apostleship by:* (a) Appealing to the value of his message (3:16–18); (b) Affirming the rightness of his tactics (10:1–5); (c) Putting those Christians themselves (in their obedience to Christ) as proof of his ministry (3:1–6; 1 Cor. 9:2); (d) Claiming selfless devotion to Christ as shown by the extent of his sacrifice (11:16–28); (e) Calling attention to the fact that he had done “the signs of an apostle” (12:12).

It is, of course, the final point which claims our attention in this lecture, and such is directly connected with the divine element in the work of the apostles. “The Role of Scriptural Authority,” as it has been studied this week, is a most worthwhile theme, and important to its completeness is making a connection between the Scriptures and their Divine author. *This* will, hopefully, be the contribution this lesson will make to the main idea of the program.

Fundamentally, our thoughts begin with God, “... who will have all men to be saved, and come to a knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2:3, 4). His interest in man gained its highest expression in Christ, and we are told that “... God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (Jno. 3:16). Yes, there was God’s plan for man but it was simply a plan in His mind. Then Christ accepted the humiliation of human existence and gave up His life on the cross. Provisions toward man’s

forgiveness were made. Still, so long as the plan remained concealed in the mind of God, man remained ignorant of the potential glory within his reach. No matter how strong his desire for better things, they were beyond his capacity to know, for "... what man knoweth the things of man, save the spirit of man which is in him? *Even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God*" (1 Cor. 2:11).

We can thank God that the story does not end there and rejoice in the completion of the Divine purpose as stated in the next two verses of 1 Corinthians 2. "Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth..." And so, God not only devised the plan and gave His Son to effect it, but he also through His Spirit provided man with both a complete revelation and the external signs (miracles) which made it credible.

I. THE PLACE OF THE APOSTLES IN THE PLAN:

There is a close and vital relation between the revealing and confirming of the Divine message and the work of an "apostle." This office was instituted by Christ, and a special group of men was brought into being. "... he (Jesus) called unto him his disciples; and of them he chose twelve, whom also he named apostles" (Luke 6:13). True, others in the New Testament are also called "apostles" in that word's basic meaning of "one sent." Barnabas, along with Paul, is so designated in Acts 14:14. Jesus Christ himself is called "the Apostle and High Priest of our profession ..." (Heb. 3:1). But, in a special sense, denoting a special function, we have the twelve—men who were singled out to serve as the personal ambassadors of Christ and physical eyewitnesses of the earthly events of the incarnation,

crucifixion and resurrection of our Lord. A comprehensive look at Christ's purpose in ordaining them is found in the lengthy discourse he held with them as recorded in John chapters 13–17. These passages leave no doubt of the unique nature of their work. Notice a few representative excerpts:

15:16—“Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain....”

15:20—“... If they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also.”

15:26—“Ye shall also bear witness, because ye have been with me from the beginning....”

16:13—“When He, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth; for he shall not speak of himself ... and he will show you things to come....”

17:6—“I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world; thine they were, and thou gavest them me....”

17:18—“As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world....”

In Acts 1:8, Christ has them all together again, and reminds them of their unique task: “Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you; and ye shall be witnesses unto me ... unto the uttermost parts of the earth.” After the fulfillment of this promise in Acts 2, these men *do* become witnesses, and they carry the gospel message by tongue, pen, and through the gifts they are now able to impart to others. There is no doubt that they sensed their destiny and the work they did is characterized by an awareness of the application of their message to all men.

For example, in 1 Cor. 4:17, Paul sends Timothy to the Corinthians to remind them of “... my ways which be in Christ, as I teach everywhere in every church.” In his letter to this

young preacher, he tells him that, "... the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also" (2 Tim. 2:2). It is, you see, much more than a local, limited message. Rather, it is to be passed from mind to mind, and become the guideline for many. There is an awareness in these witnesses that their message carries an importance beyond any merely human communication. Paul's satisfaction over the Thessalonians' reaction to the message he brought is an example: "For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh in you that believe..." (1 Th. 2:13). Or, as Peter writes in 2 Pet. 1:19 "We have a more sure word of prophecy, to which ye would do well to take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place ..." Paul insisted, in 1 Cor. 14:37, "If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord."

Their perception of the authoritative nature of their teaching comes from the fact that they were guided directly from heaven. As Paul said in Gal. 1:11, 12; "But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ." This is the gospel of Christ (Rom. 1:16; 1 Cor. 15:1-4), given to them by the Spirit in the very words which he chooses (1 Cor. 2:12, 13). It must be exactly conveyed to man, and any deviation is severely condemned. In Gal. 1:6-9, this is the clear import of scripture: "... though we, or an angel from heaven preach any other gospel than that we preached unto you, let him be accursed."

These men are gospel preachers, but they are much more. It is to the function peculiar to the apostles that Paul refers in 2 Cor. 4:7, when he says, "But we have this treasure in earthen

vessels ...”, and in 2 Cor. 5:19, 20 “... that God ... hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now then we are AMBASSADORS FOR CHRIST (caps mine-ACB) ... we pray you in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God.” The earthly containers of the gospel were the apostles, the earthly representatives, or “ambassadors,” of Christ. The church is built upon the foundation of their teaching (Eph. 2:20) and their work in revealing and confirming the Divine plan still remains as the essential link between the mind of God and the mind of man. They did what was needed, and what they did was final. In Jude 3, men are now admonished to “... contend earnestly for the faith once (for all) delivered unto the saints...” The “once for all” character of the faith they delivered is stressed in a statement in 2 Tim. 3:16, 17, which emphasizes that the Scriptures (the result of their work) are given “that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.”

II. THEIR UNIQUE QUALIFICATIONS:

And so, these were special men, chosen for a special work. The circumstances within which they were equipped for the office of “apostle” are not subject to duplication, thus ruling out the possibility of a line of succession. Notice these essential points; matters peculiar to the apostolic office:

A. *They were chosen and called by Christ Himself:*

They are to be HIS personal representatives, HIS witnesses, and so are personally singled out by HIM. He appears to each one in person, calls him to the work, and provides for his development.

Lk. 6:13—“And when it was day, he called unto him his disciples, and of them he chose twelve, whom also he named apostles.”

Acts 1:2—“... after that he through the Holy Ghost had given commandments unto the apostles whom he had chosen...”

Although Paul’s call differed in some respects from the others, it is comparable in that he received a personal call from Christ. Acts 26:16—“I (Christ) have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness...”

B. They were eye and ear witnesses to the life and work of Christ:

In 1 John 1, when John declares the basis of man’s fellowship with God, he is able to give personal eyewitness testimony of the fleshly incarnation of Christ: “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life ... for the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness...”

That such a qualification was absolutely necessary to the office is made obvious in the events and statements surrounding the selection of a successor to Judas. In Acts 1, the problem that Judas’ suicide presented is introduced by Peter in v. 16, and a prophetic statement from the Psalms (69:25; 109:8) serves as the basis for a direct selection of a replacement. In verses 21 and 22 we find the required background for such a person: “Wherefore of these men which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us, **MUST** one be ordained to be a witness **WITH US** (apostles) of His resurrection.”

Even with the apostle Paul, whose inclusion in the apostleship was absolutely unique even within this unique group (he himself acknowledged that the Lord “last of all was seen by me also, **AS OF ONE BORN OUT OF DUE TIME** (caps mine-ACB), for I am least of all the apostles ...” (1 Cor. 15:8, 9), this essential requirement had to be met. As we read earlier,

from Acts 26:16, Christ told him, “for I HAVE APPEARED UNTO THEE (caps mine=ACB) . . . to make thee a minister and a witness . . . of these things which thou hast seen. . . .” Later, when Paul’s position as an apostle was questioned, this point was put forth as one factor in establishing his claim: “Am I not an apostle? am I not free? HAVE I NOT SEEN JESUS CHRIST OUR LORD?” (1 Cor. 9:1).

In fact, it seems highly likely (in my personal opinion) that the difference in the extent and character of Paul’s qualification as an eyewitness relative to the other apostles served as an occasion that his opposers took shrewd advantage of, and may have helped them make their opposition credible. Admittedly, we are not given nearly so extensive a record of the trials of the other apostles, but little if anything is said of any difficulty they might have encountered in being accepted among brethren as true apostles of Christ. As a matter of record, Paul had to face this problem constantly. And this is not in any degree to minimize his qualifications as a true apostle; it simply serves to add to the significance of being an eyewitness. It was a matter which Christians of that day considered as essential, and its absence from the background of one who claimed apostleship rendered his claim untenable.

III. THE SIGNS OF AN APOSTLE:

Perhaps we might also consider this as a qualification, for the power which signified the true apostle also qualified him to be one. Thinking back to the discourse in John 13–17, we recall that at that time Jesus told them plainly that he must leave them, but, to help them in His stead, He would send the Comforter, the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit, when he came, would “guide them into all truth” (Jn. 16:13), and “bring to their remembrance all things” that Christ had said unto them (Jn. 14:26). In order for this to happen, Christ must go away. Just before he left earth,

he repeats and strongly reenforces this promise. At the time of his ascension, he appeared once more to his apostles and "... commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father ... for John truly baptized with water, but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence.... Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you; and ye shall be witnesses unto me ... unto the uttermost part of the earth ..." (Acts 1:4–8).

Following the Lord's ascension, the apostles returned to Jerusalem to wait, and in the ten-day interval saw to the replacement of Judas by Matthias. On Pentecost, the promised Spirit came to baptize them, and the accompanying power became immediately evident. They began to speak in tongues (Acts 2:4); they were led to unfold the mystery kept secret since the world began (2:14–36); and many wonders and signs were done by them (2:43).

As we follow their actions through the book of Acts, we see the Divine Power vested in them repeatedly manifested, and their claims as apostles constantly vindicated. Acts 3—Peter and John healed the lame man at the gate of the temple, and even the enemies of the gospel were forced to concede the supernatural character of the healing (4:14). Acts 5—Many signs and wonders were wrought by the hands of the apostles among the people. Acts 6—they laid hands on seven men out of the Jerusalem church; one of these, Stephen, then began to do "great wonders and miracles among the people." Acts 8—another of the group upon which they laid their hands, Philip, went to Samaria, where he performed most convincing signs and miracles. During this time, we learn that there is a vital connection between the laying on of the apostles' hands, and the transfer of the power of the Holy Spirit. After many of the Samaritans were baptized, word came to the apostles in Jerusalem of the success of Philip's ministry, and Peter and John were sent down to supply what was lacking. We are told that,

when they arrived, they “prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost, for as yet he had fallen upon none of them ...” (8:15, 16). The record also plainly states that “... Simon saw that through laying on of the apostles’ hands the Holy Ghost was given ...” (8:18). Acts 9—Peter healed a man who had been sick of the palsy for 8 years, and raised Dorcas from the dead. Acts 13—Paul was instrumental in the blindness which came upon Elymas the sorcerer, who opposed the gospel message. Acts 14—Paul and Barnabas did many signs and wonders. Acts 16—Paul cast a devil out of a young girl and thus provoked the wrath of the multitude. Acts 19—Paul laid his hands on some newborn Christians at Ephesus, who then began to speak in tongues and prophesy; also “special miracles” were wrought by him.

The introduction of these miraculous signs to confirm the gospel message meets an inherent need in man—that of seeing a religion which purports to be divine supported by events that accord with its claim. We necessarily believe that, if an infinite Being acts, His action will be above that of finite man. By the same reasoning that concedes our acts to be above those of the animals because of our superiority to them, so will true Deity’s acts transcend ours, because of His superiority to us.

In order for God to appear to us on a level at which He may communicate His ideas to us, he must descend to the human level of action, else His every act would be to us a miracle. Yet, if He did NOTHING in the revealing of Himself to man that was above the ability of man, we could not distinguish His acts from our own. If God desired to reveal His will to man, and yet this revelation was not accompanied by evidence of His superiority to human beings—if His messengers did not have their message confirmed by supernatural evidence of its Divine origin—none could be persuaded that God was its author. And so it is with the religion of Christ, the gospel of our salvation. Christ came to earth, and lived as a man, but the actions and

events of His life were such that compelled acceptance of Him for what He claimed to be. These were the things that caused Nicodemus to say: "... for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him ..." (Jno. 3:2). And, even though we are not even told of all that He did, we have an abundance of evidence of His divinity in the things that we *are* told: "... Many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book; but THESE ARE WRITTEN THAT YE MIGHT BELIEVE (caps mine-ACB) that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God ..." (Jno. 20:30, 31). In His case, the ultimate testimony to his Divine Sonship was His bodily resurrection, which "declared him to be the Son of God" (Rom. 1:4).

The same sort of supernatural evidence became a part of the work the apostles did, as seen in the portions of scripture we have already referred to. They preached the Word and their miracles confirmed their preaching: "... so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard Him; God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to His own will ..." (Heb. 2:3, 4). The supernatural was so evident, and so convincing, that on one occasion those who observed the wonders considered Paul and Barnabas as gods (Acts 14:11). As an extension of their work as the earthly spokesmen for Jesus, the apostles were commissioned to pass on the miraculous gifts of the Spirit so that other men could speak with divine authority, and perform confirming gifts. In the last chapter of Mark, we read that "... these signs shall follow them that believe; in my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover ... and they went forth and

preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following ..." (16:17–20).

IV. FALSE VS. TRUE APOSTLES:

Coincident with the appearance and activity of the apostles of Jesus Christ, others began to appear with NO divine commission, and NO divine credentials, but who claimed to be apostles. Paul speaks of "... FALSE apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ ..." (2 Cor. 11:13–15). John warns us not to believe every spirit (prophet), but to try them (1 Jn. 4:1). In Rev. 2:2, the Ephesian church is commended because they had "... tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars..."

Although not very much is specifically revealed as to what these "signs" were, we can see some indications of their nature. In the first place, though, we know that *no man* today can be a true apostle and witness of Jesus Christ. The fundamental requirement of a witness is that he "witness," or see and hear that to which he is testifying. This fact alone, from now on and forever, brings an end to the apostolic work with the passing of the only generation of men able to qualify! None today has seen the Lord in his earthly ministry and this was essential to being an apostle. Regarding the things which the apostles did, some things are distinctive. It is not just the fact that they did miracles, for other Christians were able to perform miracles (Philip-Acts 8; Stephen-Acts 6; Philip's four daughters-Acts 21, etc.). However, indications are that the majority of men who could perform supernatural feats were not possessed of ALL of the various gifts of the Spirit (1 Cor. 12:28–31), and more than likely possessed only one or two of them. Yet it seems to be a fair conclusion to draw that the apostles were able to do *all* of them! It was certainly through them (the laying on of their hands) that these gifts were imparted to other men (Acts 8:18),

and the conclusion seems inescapable that if they had all the gifts to the extent that they could impart them to others, they must have been able to exercise them. So, from these comments, we draw two distinctive marks of apostles: (1) Their “signs, and wonders and mighty deeds” involved the exercise of ALL the spiritual gifts, (2) They were able to convey the ability to perform spiritual gifts upon other men.

SUMMARY:

We now have a basis for making some summarizing statements, and offering some additional material.

(A) The Apostles were a select group of men, chosen to be witnesses of Christ’s resurrection and ambassadors to proclaim His message (Lk. 6:13; Jno. 15:16; 17:18).

(B) In the performance of this work they: 1) Spoke by inspiration—(1 Cor. 2:12, 13), 2) Proved their commission by “signs, wonders and mighty deeds” (2 Cor. 12:12; Heb. 2:3, 4), 3) Conveyed Spiritual gifts to various N.T. Christians by the laying on of their hands (Acts 8:18; 19:1–6; Rom. 1:11; 2 Tim. 1:6).

(C) The purpose of the miracles that were done, both by the Apostles and those to whom they passed on the gifts, was to confirm, or to establish, the message that they preached (Mk. 16:20; Heb. 2:3, 4).

As further information on this point, we can see in the New Testament that the miracles were not used primarily to benefit men physically. 1) Trophimus was left sick at Miletus (2 Tim. 4:20). There would have been immediate personal and functional advantages to his healing, but it did not serve the overall purpose of the miraculous, and hence he was not healed. 2) Timothy was not instantly healed, but encouraged to use natural means for a stomach disorder (1 Tim. 5:23). 3) At one time another of Paul’s companions, Epaphroditus, was “sick nigh

unto death ...” (Phil. 2:25–30). 4) Paul himself was plagued by a “thorn in the flesh,” which seems to have been some physical shortcoming (2 Cor. 12:7, 8). In these cases, the miraculous was not exercised. This is certainly consistent with the fact that miracles were for the purpose primarily of confirming the word—not for personal benefit.

(D) The exercise of spiritual gifts was attendant to, and involved vitally in, the delivering of the faith. There is no Scriptural basis for supposing that they were to continue after the achievement of that goal. We offer these reasons for so stating: 1) The power to perform these miracles was given to the apostles by Holy Spirit baptism, and to other Christians by the laying on of the apostles’ hands. Since the apostles were the vital link between the Spirit and the church in the dispensing of the gifts, their death marked the breaking of the link, and signaled the end of the miraculous gifts. 2) The Scriptures expressly teach that these gifts were temporary.

In 1 Cor. 13:8–13, Paul identifies the gifts, and then points out that “when that which is perfect is come, that which is in part shall be done away....” The word “perfect,” is in contrast to the “know in part,” and refers to the totality of the knowledge God intended to impart to man. We have already learned from Jude the 3rd verse that the faith is “once for all delivered unto the saints,” or that it has been given in its totality. In 2 Tim. 3:16, 17, this revelation is said to be adequate, “that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto every good work”. Thus, “that which is perfect” *is* come, and so “that which is in part” has been done away. Another passage which teaches the same truth is Eph. 4:8–16. 3) As this revelation was being given, part by part, it was being confirmed—its validity was being established by the accompanying miracles (Heb. 2:3, 4; Mk. 16:20). The testimony of the Apostles and others in the first century was proven valid by *their* miracles, “God bearing *them*

witness with ... divers miracles” (Heb. 2:4). Such demonstrations confirmed the word *then*, and those same demonstrations confirm the word *now*. Once a matter has been confirmed, it stands or falls on the basis of its primary confirmation. When a man is sworn in at court-of-law, his word is confirmed, and he need not be sworn in again in that court; once a will has been witnessed and notarized, it has been confirmed, and the original confirmation is never required to be repeated.

The Old Testament, or will of God, was confirmed as God worked with Moses, its lawgiver, in miraculous demonstration. Once confirmed, it continued as the established law of God, and even during the time of Christ, men were expected to submit to what was *written* in it. The statement of God is to the effect that if the evidence upon which this law was proved valid would not convince a man, he would remain unconvinced even by an immediate miracle (Lk. 16:19–31). The only need for a miracle today would be to confirm a new message. The message we now have has already been confirmed. If the message is new, or different from that already confirmed, the curse of God rests upon it (Gal. 1:6–9).

The principle of producing faith in a religion by performing miracles has led many to bolster the claims of their system as being divine through “miracles.” Anyone claiming today the ability to work miracles shows, first, that he does not understand the design of miracles, or second, that he is trying to propagate a new and different religion from that already confirmed by miracles, or third, that he doesn’t regard the testimony of the apostles as of such credibility as to warrant belief without further miraculous intervention by God.¹

¹ Belue, A. (1974). [The Signs of an Apostle—The Purpose of Miracles](#). In Bible Faculty of the Florida College (Ed.), *Biblical Authority: Its Meaning and Application* (pp. 96–108). Marion, IN: Cogdill Foundation Publications.