

Divine Healings Occur Often But Not Miracles

By David Lee Burris



Healing: A Doctor In Search of a Miracle by William A. Nolen M.D. (1974)

Nolen, an M.D., explores healings outside of regular western medicine and concludes that he can find not a single example of organic healing, i.e., healing in which a visible external difference is made in the patient, e.g., the disappearance of a tumor or a cancer, or the healing of a withered leg.

Christians will have no problem with his exposé of Philippine psychic-healers. Depending on their position on such matters, they may be disappointed to learn that his (admittedly incomplete) investigation of Kathryn Kuhlman's ministry resulted in a conclusion that no organic healings could be confirmed despite (evidently sincere) claims to the contrary. As in other research I have done, there seems to be a sizable gap between the sweeping claims made and the on-the-ground reality.

His book is cited favorably by atheist skeptics and Christian cessationists, i.e., those who believe that apostolic-grade healings have ceased.

From a miracles-investigation point of view (POV), this book is valuable for:

* his methodology for investigation, e.g., letters, phone calls, soliciting permission to speak to a patient's doctor, direct on-the-ground investigation, etc.

* its categories of medical conditions, e.g., functional - "ailments caused by the malfunction of an organ or system under the control of the autonomic nervous system"; hysterical, e.g., mind-induced; and organic - such as a broken bone, cleft palate, cancer, or gall stones. According to Nolen, the first two categories respond well to the suggestive nature and nurture of faith-healing, the third does not.

Another set of categories he uses is: self-limited, e.g., a cold, which goes away of itself anyway; cyclical, i.e., diseases which ebb and flow in their intensity and symptoms, and, once again, psychosomatic or hysterical.

* his observation that medical doctors are in a better position to evaluate miracle testimonies than laypersons. For example, being able to breath deeply on stage is NOT evidence that lung cancer has been cured!

*** his findings in exposing fraudulent miracle workers and the deficiencies of an evangelical ministry such as that of Kathryn Kuhlman. Kathryn Kuhlman remains an important figure today because she is looked up to and used as a model by many modern-day miracle ministries. Notably, Bennie Hinn, John Arnott, and Bill Prankard.**

Skeptics love this book because of its hard conclusion: modern-day miracles don't happen, and, when it appears they do, it is because they are "soft" miracles based on the power of suggestion rather than (necessarily) a supernatural act of God.

A question for miracle investigators is this: Is it true, as Dr. Nolen asserts, that there is no medically-credible evidence for an organic-grade evangelical miracle? Can his assertion be refuted?

Interestingly, Dr. Nolen, a nominal Roman Catholic, does not mention Roman Catholic miracle claims in his book. He essentially dismisses them without even mentioning them!

The intersection between faith and science is an interesting one. As are the intersections between the natural and the supernatural, and the material and the spiritual.

Bennie Hinn's Nephew Exposes Scam

No Money? No Miracle!

In one sermon I heard growing up, my uncle taught us that if we wanted God to do something for us, we needed to do something for him. This applied to everything—especially miracles. Whenever possible, Benny would preach to the masses that if they wanted a miracle for their sickness and disease, they needed to give money to God. No money? No miracle! Giving to God was the secret to unlocking your dreams. It was the secret to job promotions. It was access to our divine bank account. My uncle often told the story of how he got out of debt using this system of belief. His father-in-law had told him that in order to be debt free, he needed to pay God. Benny explained that once he started emptying his bank account and giving money away to ministry, money started showing up from everywhere!

This principle on giving was a serious one in our family. We believed we could be guilty of robbing God if we weren't giving him enough, so there were times that retroactive payments were necessary. I remember thinking, *For all the time I have spent living for my own pleasures, I will need to devote nearly two years to God if I am to have my prayers answered and fulfilled.*

One of Uncle Benny's heroes who taught him about this system of believing, giving, and receiving was Oral Roberts. It seemed he could open the windows of heaven and cause them to rain down blessings on his own life. It was a simple money-in, money-out transaction, with God as the banker. Oral Roberts wanted to help more people understand it and take the risk to put it into practice. He taught that this way of thinking was used by Jesus and the apostles. For Roberts, it was faith that forced God to do what we wanted him to do. Believing enough, thinking positively enough, and giving enough could control the Creator! Roberts had used his teachings on money and faith to rise out of obscurity and into stardom, then helped others do the same.¹ Now, so was my uncle.

Over decades, Roberts coached my uncle Benny and they became close friends. Uncle Benny and Oral would shoot television programs together, share ideas, and promote each other within their respective ministries. This sort of "stage sharing" was how ministries exploded onto new frontiers. Oral's audience became Uncle Benny's, and vice versa.

Cancer in the Family

For a long time, things went well for the Hinn family. We were happy, healthy, and rich. But inevitably, real life intruded for my mom's side of the family. That's when we went into damage control mode.

When I was in fourth grade, my uncle George was diagnosed with cancer. He was not an actual uncle but rather my mom's cousin's husband. He had been pastoring at our church after my dad hired him, and I thought the world of him. We were saddened by his diagnosis.

The situation worsened. After a skin graft, the best efforts of doctors, and our prayers for healing, Uncle George experienced a stroke, along with setbacks to his health that eventually led to his passing away. It was devastating. Sunday after Sunday, we heard from the pulpit, "God has guaranteed healing! Just have faith and God will do whatever you ask him to do." So many people had been brought up on stage and declared healed. So many people, but not Uncle George? Only one explanation could satisfy the confusing question that became the elephant in every room we occupied: *How in the world did he not get healed?*

Before I knew it, my auntie Debbie had distanced herself and my five second cousins from us and the church. Intense drama unfolded as other people left both before and after that time, including my mom's brothers. It was a mass exodus of people we were close to. *Why, God?* I wondered. *Was it because of Uncle George? Other reasons?* It hurt so bad to see Uncle George die, but why did all these people I loved have to leave the church as well? We were supposed to be family. And our family was supposed to be different—blessed and anointed.

Soon we were given an explanation for his death. We rationalized that Uncle George (and his family) must have done one or more of the "big four," which caused him to lose whatever declared healing he was guaranteed. The big four, or a short list of reasons why God didn't heal people, went something like this:

- Making a negative confession: using negative words about your physical condition would hinder your healing.
- Hanging around negative people: allowing the negative words of others about your physical condition would hinder your healing.
- Not having enough faith: not believing or giving enough money to prove your trust that God would heal you.
- Touching the Lord's anointed: speaking against or opposing a man of God who is anointed.

Turns out, as the story went, that Uncle George and the people around him did all four of these. Most of all, we were told that Uncle George had started to hang around with people who spoke negatively about my father and our church. There was a zero-tolerance policy in our belief system for this sort of thing.

The “touching the Lord’s anointed” teaching came from a biblical principle observed in the Old Testament. In 1 Samuel 24:6, King David had just held back from an opportunity to kill his enemy and attacker, King Saul. He sneaked up on him and cut a small piece of King Saul’s robe off and later showed it to him as a sign that he meant him no harm and could have killed him but didn’t. The principle that guided David was that King Saul was still an anointed king of Israel and it was not David’s place to kill him or “touch” him. On this Old Testament principle of not killing kings, our church took touching the Lord’s anointed very seriously.

The story I was eventually told is that Uncle George started playing softball on Sundays to try to stay active during his battle with cancer, which was a serious no-no in our church. When my father confronted him about this, Uncle George did not follow orders and perhaps had a few other opinions as well. Since Uncle George had begun to hang around with negative people who weren’t mesmerized by my father, they had corrupted his life and removed him from God’s favor. While playing softball one day and rounding third base, Uncle George had a stroke and collapsed, doctors could do nothing for him, and he eventually died because he let negative people into his hospital room and into his life. That was the simple explanation. Whether or not this was true, it was the simple explanation.

Many people left the church over the following years, and if they died anytime after leaving the church, they also joined the illustration file of those who had touched the Lord’s anointed. Throughout the nineties, the same storyline was revealed in my uncle Benny’s ministry as well. Some of his ex-employees were dying, and others, like my aunt Karen, who had voiced her displeasure with his ministry antics and handling of money, were suddenly struck with illness. All of this served as proof that we were anointed by God. Mess with us, and you’ll be under a divine death sentence. Despite the exodus of church members and dwindling Sunday attendance, my family knew no lack. Somehow money kept pouring in and blessings kept raining down.¹

¹ Hinn, C. W. (2019). [*God, greed, and the \(prosperity\) gospel: how truth overwhelms a life built on lies.*](#) Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

A Life-Changing Passage

John 5:3—“ . . . a *multitude* of those who were sick, blind, lame, and withered . . .”: Jesus saw a multitude of sick people but only healed one man in this story. Why didn't he heal them all? What was so special about this man? Did he have more faith than others? Was he a friend of Jesus?

John 5:6–7—When Jesus asked the man, “*Do you wish to get well?*” The man answered with a sort of complaint and a sob story. He didn't say, “YES! JESUS, HEAL ME!” Or, “I HAVE FAITH TO BE HEALED!”

John 5:8–9—“Jesus said to him, ‘**Arise**, take up your pallet, and walk.’ And **immediately** the man **became well**, and **took up his pallet** and **began to walk**.” This shows Jesus' creative power. The healing was immediate! No process. No music. No special service. No offering. No fanfare. He healed the sick man with a word. Arise!

John 5:12–13—“They asked him, ‘Who is the man who said to you, “Take up your pallet, and walk”?’ But he who was healed **did not know** who it was; for Jesus had slipped away while there was a crowd in that place.” The Greek word for “know” that is used here is *eido*. This word means “to know, to perceive, be aware of.” That means that the man didn't even know who Jesus was. How could he have faith to be healed if he didn't even know who Jesus was? How could he even believe in Jesus if he didn't know Jesus? Was faith involved at all? How could faith be involved if he was passive in receiving his healing and ignorant of who the Healer was? Was any money involved? There is no indication of this man doing anything for Jesus to get a healing. Jesus seems to have healed the man out of his own volition and desire to do so.

Each one of these observations put a devastating crack in the foundation of my theology within the first couple of hours of study. I couldn't believe what I was reading, but at the same time, it was all starting to become clear, like a camera slowly shifting focus from blurry to high-definition resolution.

First of all, Jesus healed one man out of a multitude of sick people. I always believed and was taught that everybody was always supposed to get healed. Prosperity theology teaches that it's always God's will to heal everybody, and that if they are sick, it's their own fault because they don't have enough faith or haven't given a special offering to get healed.

Healings in my world were also said to be a process sometimes. That way we could take their money and say something like, “Keep on believing in faith that God will do it in a day or so.” But Jesus healed this man immediately. We always had hours of music, special healing lines, healing products like oil, and special commands given to people in order to get their healing. It was as though we were offering a menu for people to get their healing, but Jesus just went in and healed without a problem. He most certainly didn't have catchers, nor did he knock people over repeatedly or tell the man to give him a seed-faith offering to receive his healing.

My heart was racing. I needed to know more and do some digging, so I reached for the commentary Pastor Tony had given me. I opened the commentary and began to read John MacArthur's notes on the passage:

Unlike many alleged modern healings, Jesus' healings were complete and instantaneous, with or without faith. This one proves the point, since the man exhibited no faith in Jesus at all. Yet he was healed instantly and wholly. John records that "immediately . . . he became well, and picked up his pallet and began to walk." One of the cruelest lies of contemporary "faith healers" is that the people they fail to heal are guilty of sinful unbelief, a lack of faith, or a "negative confession." In contrast, those whom Jesus healed did not always manifest faith beforehand (cf. Matt. 8:14–15; 9:32–33; 12:10–13, 22; Mark 7:32–35; 8:22–25; Luke 14:1–4; 22:50–51; John 9:1–7), and this man is a prime example. This incident perfectly illustrates God's sovereign grace in action (cf. v. 21). Out of all the sick people at the pool, Jesus chose to heal this man. There was nothing about him that made him more deserving than the others, nor did he seek out Jesus; Jesus approached him. The Lord did not choose him because He foresaw that he had the faith to believe for a healing; he never did express belief that Jesus could heal him.

I had traveled the world, seen all there was to see, and lived like royalty, but this moment outshone the brightest diamonds we'd ever owned. The words seemed to leap off the page, and the once-blurry picture of who God is and what the gospel is suddenly came into sharp focus. He doesn't heal *if* we just have enough faith. And he most certainly does not require money, special music, and a mystical healing televangelist to accomplish his divine purpose. I saw in my mind the faces of so many hurting people and was broken to pieces over the role I had played in exploiting them with false hope. For so long, I had wanted answers but couldn't find them. Now I could finally see the full truth. Over the course of what seemed to be hours, I repented of my sins, false teachings, and life of hypocrisy. I confessed to God that I had twisted his gospel for greedy gain, and I asked him to forgive me and give me a fresh start. I committed to studying the truth, preaching the truth, and standing up for the truth no matter what the cost.

"It was a lie! We twisted Scripture! We manipulated people! We smeared the gospel!" I was in high gear without any sign of slowing down. "I have to do something about this! Innocent people are being hurt. Worst of all, Jesus is being misrepresented. I know things no one does, and everything makes sense now. I've got to do something about this!"²

² Hinn, C. W. (2019). [*God, greed, and the \(prosperity\) gospel: how truth overwhelms a life built on lies.*](#) Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Don't Put God in a Box

Whether I was witnessing thousands of people speaking in tongues without interpretation, or talking with someone from our inner circle who admittedly faked being slain in the Spirit by flying through the air at the wave of the white jacket (to make it look *really* powerful), questions were quenched by several key phrases. The first of which was, "Don't put God in a box." What this means is that if you didn't accept or agree with what was being taught or the antics that were being displayed, you shouldn't assume God wasn't behind such a thing or you could be found guilty of limiting God. Sometimes it seemed like we were being forced to accept insanity. Other times, what we witnessed was so opposed to the Bible it seemed like we were rewriting it altogether!

One Sunday during a healing service, we declared everyone healed, even though half the people were still sick when they left. Don't put God in a box. We must believe something is true even if our eyes don't see it. At another service, people were being ripped out of wheelchairs left and right and barely limping across the stage. An elderly woman winced in pain as she was forced to walk in front of the crowd and told, "Just move your legs in faith! Don't limit God with your unbelief! He is healing you right now!" She was still in her wheelchair the next time I saw her. What's the problem here? I wondered. Did God really just curse that old lady back into her wheelchair because she was boxing him in with her weak faith? During another service, a woman had a brace ripped off her body as she screamed in pain. The pastor shouted, "That's the devil of infirmity coming out of her!"

Our faith healing heroes of the past had set the course for this behavior, so I wasn't about to go against them. Smith Wigglesworth, a British evangelist who ministered in the early 1900s, was the pioneer of using physical violence as a form of healing. He allegedly walked into a mortuary and threw a man's corpse up against a wall in an effort to raise him from the dead. While many of the more outlandish stories can't be verified, in one of his books, Wigglesworth admitted to beating on people to heal them and said he was attacking the devil in them.² I often cringed at the stories I heard about Wigglesworth, but I was intrigued by the risks he'd taken. That risk factor, I was told, was the hallmark of a faithful Christian. We even celebrated Wigglesworth's violent antics. "Sometimes, you need to throw away your medicine, fire your doctor, and dare God to heal you!" my uncle would roar from the platform. "Wigglesworth had crazy faith!" my father would tell me as he explained the audacious moves we needed to make to tap into God's power.

Were we abusing people? Were the heroes of our faith false teachers we'd followed into infamy? Or was I guilty of putting God in a box because I doubted what appeared to be insanity? As I started the car and pulled out from Uncle Benny's driveway, the sound of a familiar voice began to play through the speakers. It was Kathryn Kuhlman—we'd listen to her and reminisce about her powerful ministry in days gone by. This famous leading lady of the televangelist circuit loved to spend donations on the finer things in life. She was a staple in our ears and the model for our ministry, both on the stage and in the stores.

Unfulfilled Prophecies

Another aspect of the prosperity gospel is an emphasis on prophecy. I knew this side of our ministry quite well. People would fly in from all over the world to seek out prophetic wisdom from my father and uncles. Hanging on their every word, these desperate people based every decision they made on the prophecy given. We used a strategy we called shotgun prophecy, firing off numerous predictions in the hope that one of the prophecies might hit the target and we'd be considered accurate and reliable.

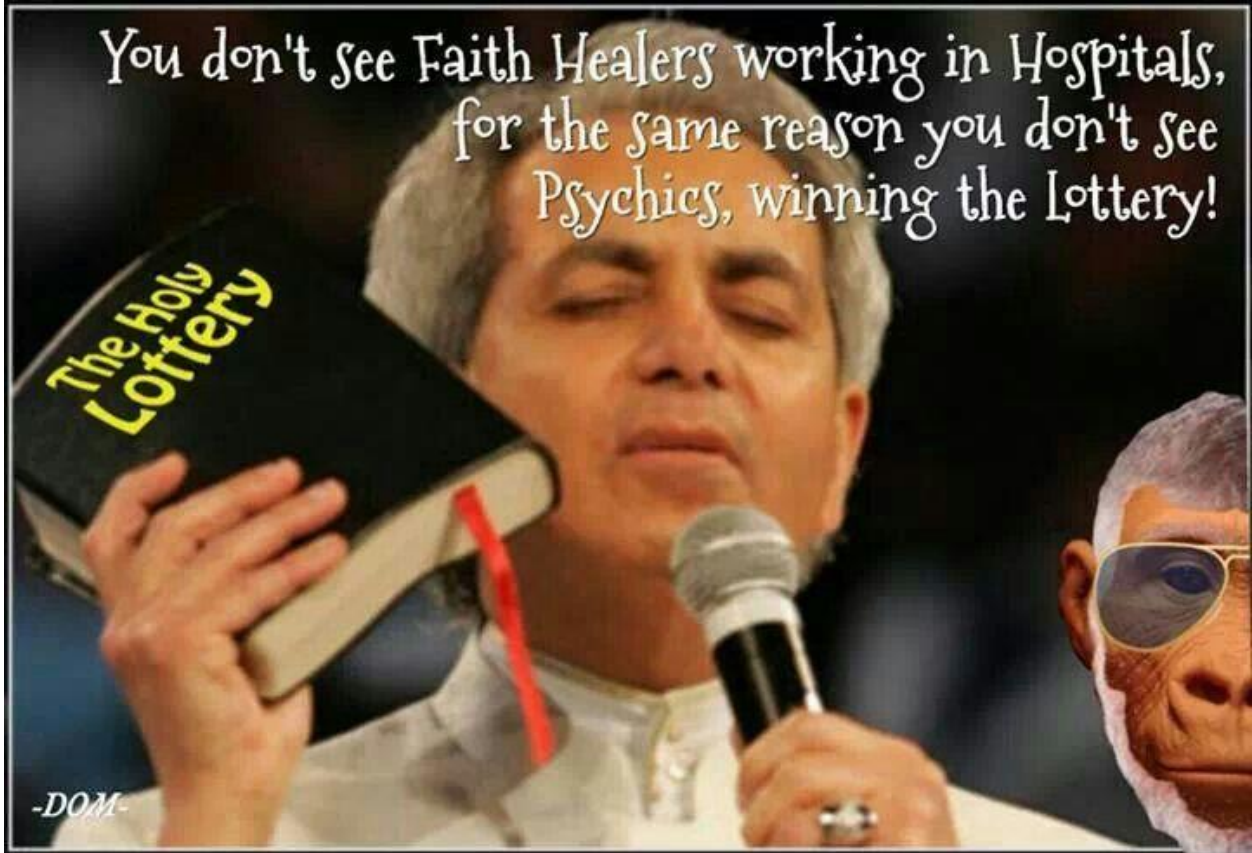
One day, while browsing at a Christian bookstore, I came across a thick book titled *The Confusing World of Benny Hinn*. Its authors spent many years putting together hundreds of quotes by my uncle, then biblically explaining why he was a heretic. Up to that day, my confidence abounded, money was not a problem, and criticisms rolled off my shoulders because of the global influence my family was privy to. *Who cares what people say?* I would tell myself. *Our family is the most anointed in the world.* But as I stared at the book in my hands, it felt like it weighed one hundred pounds. That night, my entire house was dark but for the reading light next to my bed. Alternating between my favorite yellow highlighter and a fine-tip pen, I pulled an all-nighter and devoured the book.

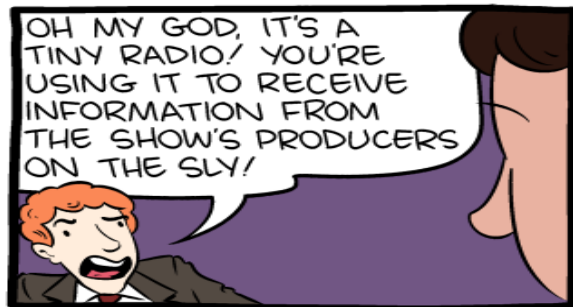
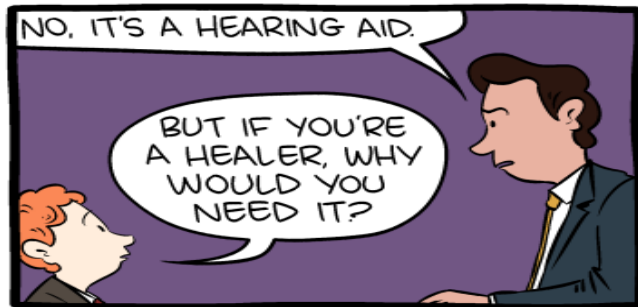
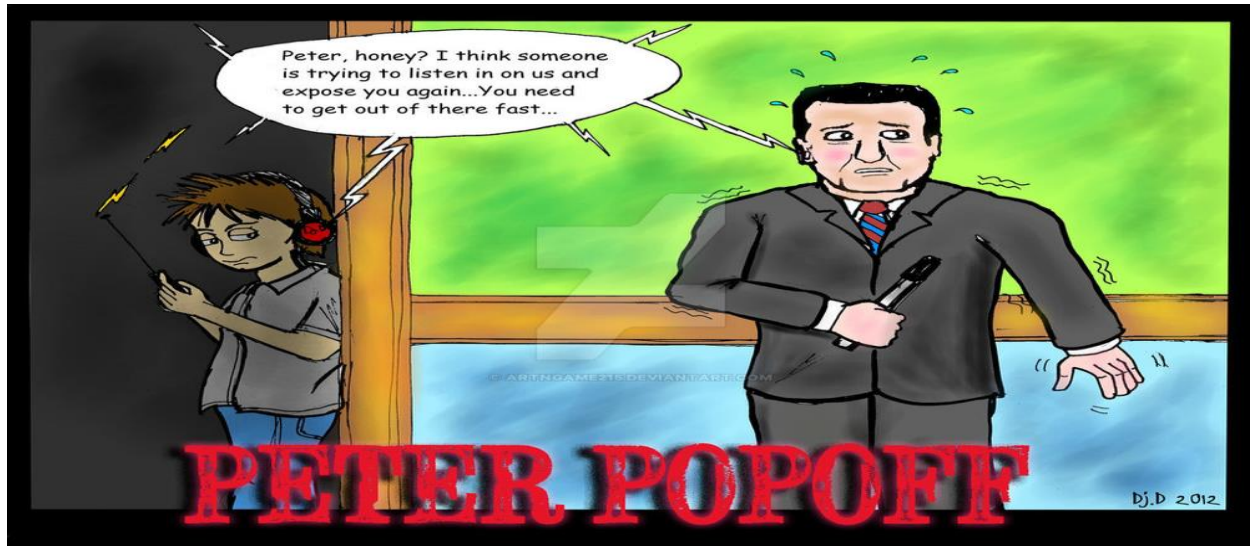
The thrust of the book taught that God does not take kindly to leaders going around lying to people in his name. Deuteronomy 18:21–22 specifically instructs the children of Israel not to trust or fear someone who falsely prophesies: “You may say in your heart, ‘How will we know the word which the LORD has not spoken?’ When a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the thing does not come about or come true, that is the thing which the LORD has not spoken. That prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him.” Then the authors detailed a number of Uncle Benny’s unfulfilled prophecies.

One unfulfilled prophecy stood out to me. The authors had gotten ahold of the cassette tape for the December 31, 1989, Sunday-night service. In the service, Uncle Benny prophesied, “The Lord also tells me to tell you that in the mid-nineties, about ’94 or ’95, no later than that, God will destroy the homosexual community of America.” Hinn’s declaration was greeted with loud applause from his congregation. Uncle Benny continued, “But he will not destroy it with what many minds have thought him to be. But he will destroy it with fire. And many will turn and be saved, and many will rebel and be destroyed.”³ As I read, my mind exploded with shock, but denial quickly rushed in. I began to reason, frantically trying to process emotions and facts. *God was going to burn all gay people by 1995? It has been more than twenty years since then, and we’ve yet to see fire come down from heaven on them.* This was no typical Christian viewpoint on marriage being defined as between one man and one woman, nor was it one of those angry demands for homosexuals to repent. This was an unfulfilled prophecy, which meant Uncle Benny would be considered a false prophet by the Bible’s standard.

I remembered hearing my uncle tell us that God frequently changed his mind about certain prophecies if people prayed hard enough. *Maybe that’s what happened?* I reasoned, trying to understand why his prophecy hadn’t been fulfilled.³

³ Hinn, C. W. (2019). [*God, greed, and the \(prosperity\) gospel: how truth overwhelms a life built on lies.*](#) Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.





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Defenses of Faith Healers

By Frank Jamerson

When Scripture is quoted to show that miraculous gifts accomplished their purposes and ceased, those who believe in faith healers make several responses. We will notice some of them and reply to them.

The first response is usually, “Don’t you believe that God has the power to heal?” When we challenge faith healers, we are not denying God’s power to do whatever he chooses. God has the power to make men out of dust and women out of ribs, and he once did it, but he is not doing that anymore! The Devil knew that Jesus had power to turn stones into bread, but the fact is that he did not choose to do so. He did produce water out of a rock for Moses, but faith healers never have duplicated that one. The question is not whether he has the power to do what he chooses, but what does the Bible say about miraculous gifts?

Another frequent response is, “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever” (Heb. 13:8). Then the conclusion is inferred that if he ever gave miraculous gifts to men he must continue to do so, or he has changed. This is a classic case of “proof-texting” - taking a verse out of context to try to prove a preconceived opinion. The verse was written to give assurance to Christians that God would be with them and that the Christ who had been preached to them by others has not been superceded and would never change. This does not prove that God’s ways have never changed. In fact, the same writer had earlier written, “For the priesthood being changed, of necessity there is also a change of the law” (Heb. 7:12). The fact that God changed his law did not mean that God has changed. Paul wrote the Corinthians that when “the perfect” (the completed revelation) came, then that which is “in part” (partial revelations) would cease (1 Cor. 13:10).

Faith healers try to make “that which is perfect” refer to Christ and the second coming, but even if it did refer to that, it would not fit their interpretation of Hebrews 13:8. The passage says that Jesus would remain the same “forever,” and that would include after the second coming! So, according to their argument that miraculous gifts cannot cease because Jesus is “the same yesterday, today and forever,” miraculous gifts will have to continue eternally.

The favorite argument of many faith healers today is that physical healing is in the atonement and all a person has to do is “claim his healing.” They misuse Matt. 8:16,17, which is used of the work Jesus did before the atonement. The death of Christ was for forgiveness of sins, not physical healing. “Who himself bore our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness – by whose stripes you were healed” (1 Pet. 2:24). If physical healing is in the atonement, then it should be as universal as spiritual healing! What sick person would not “claim physical healing” if it was as available as forgiveness? A little bit of “good old country honesty” would help here! Why did Paul not “claim his healing” if it was in the atonement (2 Cor. 12:7-10)? Why did he leave Trophimus at Miletus sick (2 Tim. 4:20), instead of telling him to “claim his healing”? Why aren’t all who claim to be saved by faith healers today also healed of their infirmities? They should have no sick disciples if their doctrine is correct! (One sure way to know whether your sins were forgiven would be if you could “take up your bed and walk!” Instead, they have many devout believers who continue on their beds.)

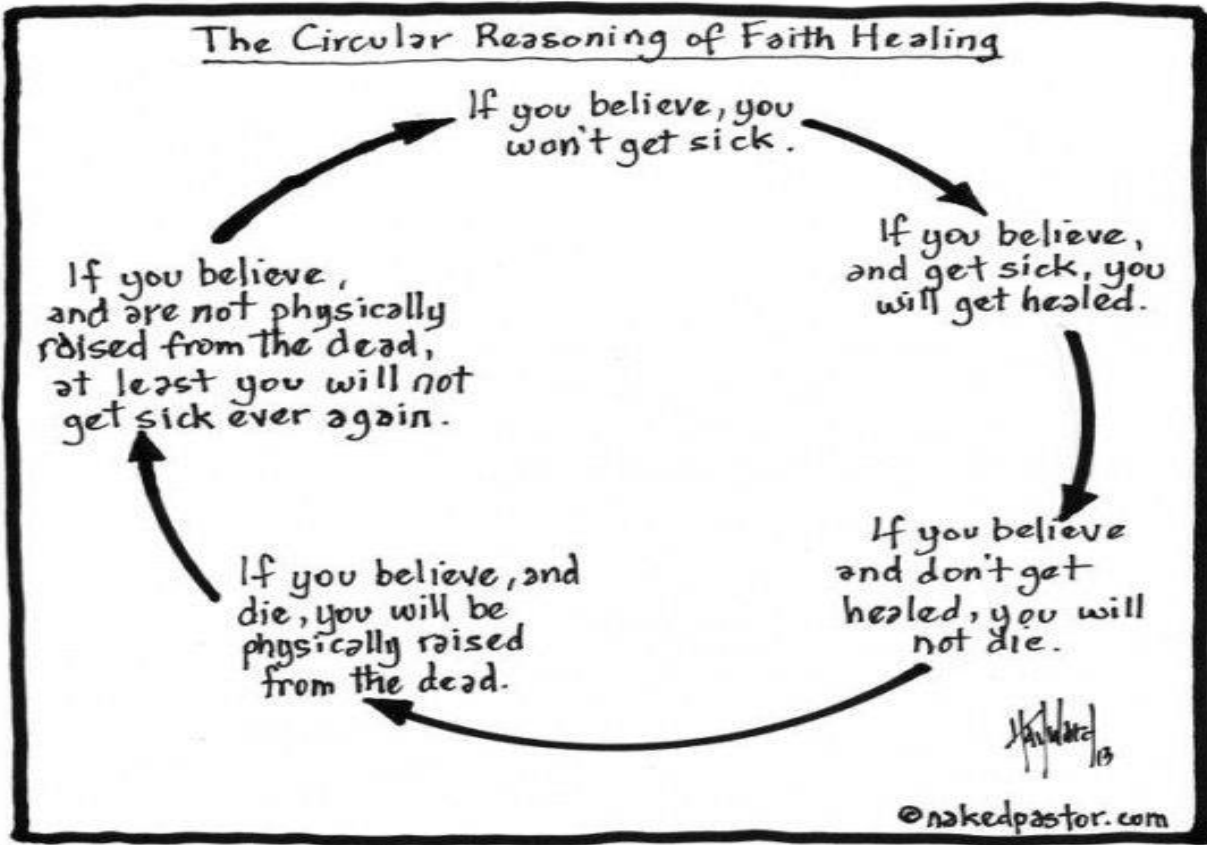
Another response is, “Don’t you believe in the power of prayer?” The implication here is that if you do not believe in miraculous gifts today, then you do not believe in praying for the sick. This does not follow at all. We believe in praying for our “daily bread” (Matt. 6:11), but we do not expect to receive it like the Israelites received manna (Exod. 16:4), or like Elisha multiplied the widow’s oil (2 Kgs. 4:1-7).

God can answer prayers through his providence. We believe in praying for prosperity and health (3 Jn. 2), but God does not have to perform a miracle in order to answer these requests. God answers prayer, but he hasn't promised miraculous powers to men today. There is a difference between "divine healing" (which the Bible teaches), and "miraculous healing" (which has ceased).

Faith healers claim that "power will go forth from my hands," but when they fail, the tune changes to "I have no power, God does the healing." In this they tell the truth! They do not have any power, and that is a contrast to what the apostles claimed. Peter said, "Silver & gold I don't have, but what I do have I give you: in the name of Jesus of Nazareth, rise up and walk" (Acts 3:6). Peter was authorized by Jesus to perform miracles and he plainly said that he had that power. The apostles also could lay hands on others and give them that power (Acts 8:18), but those claiming miraculous powers today have not had the hands of an apostle laid on them and they cannot do what the apostles did.

The apostles of Christ used miracles to prove that the message that they preached was from God (Mk. 16:15-20). Faith healers today use the word to try to prove that they can do miracles. The miracles of the apostles confirmed the terms of salvation - "he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." Faith healers deny the message that was confirmed, teach salvation by faith only, and argue that they have apostolic powers!

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“Faith Healer,” Heal Thyself

By Donald P. Ames

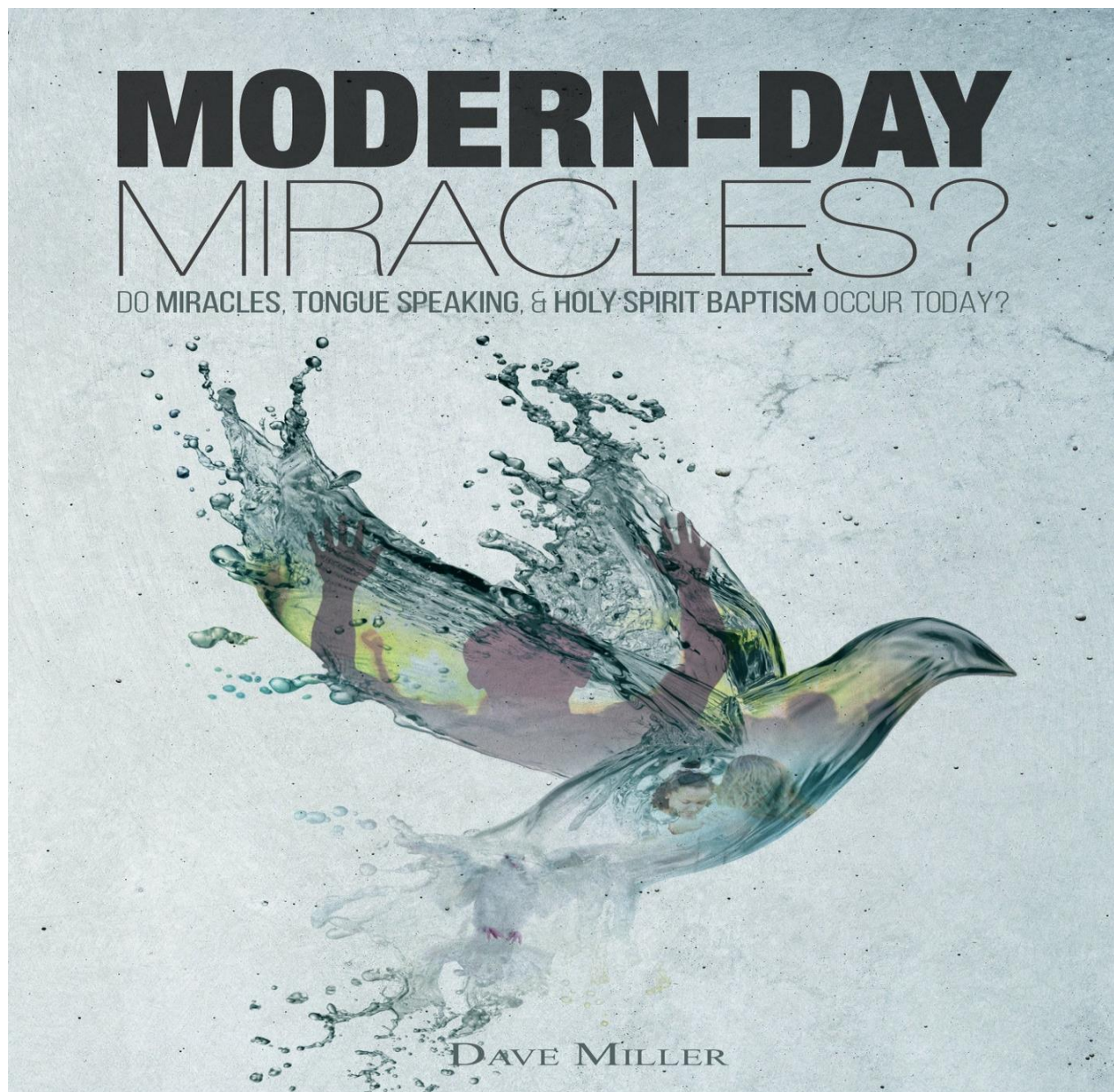
During a recent visit to one of the local hospitals to see some there who were sick, I looked up and was surprised to see Steve Dyson, Minister of the United Pentecostal Church in Newport, Arkansas. Mr. Dyson and I have been acquainted, and good friends, as a result of the fact our radio broadcasts on Sunday morn are within a half-hour of each other and also because of mutual acquaintances in the past. Yet, neither of us has had any hesitation in opposing what we believe to be false doctrine regarding the positions taken by the other (although Steve Dyson has let it be known he has no desire to engage in a public discussion of these differences). I point this out to note one can disagree without always being disagreeable, and that friendship does not mean that one must appease the falsehoods taught by others (Galatians 1:10).

But, to return to the discussion at hand, I enquired from Mr. Dyson as to the nature of his visit and problem; and learned that his throat was swollen and so sore that he could hardly swallow. I then asked him, since the Pentecostals believe they have the ability to perform miracles today as the apostles did in the times of the N.T., why didn't he just heal himself? The only reply I got was “even Paul had his `thorn in the flesh.’ ” This was the same reply I received from Bill Lewis, Minister of the First Apostolic Church (same fellowship) in Aurora, Illinois when he lost his voice during a debate with Larry Hafley (see my report on the Hafley-Lewis-Bishop Debate, Truth Magazine, July 20, 1970), and also when he later had to undergo heart surgery and was laid up for about six months.

Now, I am wondering about their consistency in using this passage in light of what Paul actually said-and why-in 2 Cor. 12. Paul received his “thorn in the flesh” because he had been caught up into the third heaven, and this “messenger of Satan” was to buffet him, “lest I should be exalted above measure.” What had happened to him in this instance was not something that was common to man, and therefore God used this “thorn in the flesh” to keep him humble. Did either Mr. Lewis or Mr. Dyson experience such a glorious view of the third heaven? Surely, they will not contend problems of being “a great speaker” necessitated God going to such measures nor that they are so much greater than others that God had to go to such measures to make them learn the lesson of humility (and not do the same to their fellow-man as well).

Secondly, when Paul sought the Lord for relief, He replied, “My grace is sufficient for thee” (2nd Corinthians 12:9), and from this the Apostle concluded, “Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.” However, both Mr. Dyson and Mr. Lewis sought relief at the hands of a medical doctor. Now, if they are going to use part of a passage, why not use the rest? If God will not heal their infirmities, why not accept the fact “My grace is sufficient for thee”? Or, do they think they can circumvent the “judgment of God” by obtaining relief from another source and thus destroy God’s “purpose” in giving them this “thorn in the side”? The very fact Paul and others of the apostolic age had physical ailments that were not healed (Phil. 2:27, 1 Tim. 5:23, 2 Tim. 4:20, 2 Cor. 12:7) is evidence that physical healing was not the goal of Christ, but that these miracles were to confirm the word (Mk. 16:20, Heb. 2:4), and that not even the apostles could use them for other purposes (such as their own healing or general healing)-and that once that word had been confirmed, the miracles were to cease (1 Cor. 13:8-10, Eph. 4:11-13, James 1:25, John 20:30-31). It would seem that being caught in such a contradictory position would cause some of these “faith healers” to take another look at their own doctrine in light of the Word of God (see Romans 10:2).

Chapters From the Class Book
“MODERN-DAY MIRACLES?”
“Modern Miracles” & “Spirit Baptism”



Modern-Day Miracles, Tongue-Speaking, and Holy Spirit Baptism: A Refutation--EXTENDED VERSION

by [Dave Miller, Ph.D.](#)

Numerous religious groups commonly claim the assistance of the Holy Spirit in their lives. Famed religious television personalities boldly announce the active influence of the Holy Spirit even as they speak. Supposedly, the Holy Spirit talks to them personally, heals viewers instantaneously, and enables them to babble uncontrollably in an “unknown tongue.” All of this is claimed to be “proof positive” of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Do miracles still happen? Can people speak in tongues today? Does God, in the 21st century, supernaturally countermand the laws of nature and heal people miraculously?

“Come now, and let us reason together.” (Isaiah 1:18). It is absolutely imperative that we examine **Scripture**—not our feelings, not what someone else says happened to them, and not our own experience. The only sure and certain approach is to ask: What does the Bible teach? The reader must ask: “Do I honestly believe the Bible to be the Word of God?” Answers to critical questions of human existence require that a person be willing to spend time in the Word, “rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15). One must “search the scriptures” (Acts 17:11). One must be honest and willing to go where the evidence takes him. If you had to choose between what you genuinely think you have experienced or seen firsthand and what the Bible actually says, which would you choose? You must ask yourself: “Will I honestly accept God’s written Word on the matter of miracles?” If you will, I invite you to join me in an examination of what the Bible teaches pertaining to miracles.

THE DEFINITION OF MIRACLES

First of all, what exactly is a “miracle”? How does the Bible use the word? The three central terms used in the Bible to designate a supernatural (as contrasted with a natural) manifestation are: (1) “miracle” (*dunamis*); (2) “sign” (*semeion*); and (3) “wonder” (*teras*). All three terms occur together in Acts 2:22, Hebrews 2:4, and 2 Corinthians 12:12. Related terms include “work” (*ergon*) and “mighty deed” (*kratos*). The occurrence of a miracle in the Bible meant that God worked **outside** the laws of nature. W.E. Vine, whose Greek scholarship, according to F.F. Bruce, was “wide, accurate and up-to-date” (Vine, 1952, Foreword), stated that “miracle” (*dunamis*) is used in the New Testament of “works of a **supernatural** origin and character, such as could not be produced by **natural** agents and means” (1952, p. 75, emp. added). Otfried Hofius noted that a “sign” (*semeion*) “contradicts the **natural** course of things” (1976, 2:626, emp. added) and, similarly, “wonder” (*teras*) referred to events that “contradict the ordered unity of **nature**” (2:633, emp. added). Thus a miracle in the Bible was not merely an event that was astonishing, incredible, extraordinary, or unusual--like the the birth of a baby, or a flower, or the narrow avoidance of an accident. A miracle in the Bible was a **supernatural** act. It was an event that was contrary to the usual course of nature (Arndt and Gingrich, 1957, p. 755). The miraculous is not to be confused with the **providential**, where God operates **within** the usual course of nature.

THE DESIGN OF MIRACLES

Second, it is absolutely imperative that one recognizes the **purpose** of the miraculous. Miracles in the New Testament served the singular function of **confirmation**. When an inspired speaker stepped forward to declare God's Word, God **validated** or **endorsed** the speaker's remarks by empowering the speaker to perform a miracle. Many New Testament passages articulate this fact quite plainly. For example, the apostles "went forth, and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, and **confirming** the word by the **signs** that followed" (Mark 16:20, emp. added). The Hebrews writer asked: "[H]ow shall we escape, if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be **spoken** by the Lord, and was **confirmed** to us by those who heard, God also **bearing witness** both with **signs and wonders**, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit" (Hebrews 2:3-4). Referring to the initial proclamation of the Gospel to the Samaritans, Luke stated: "And the multitudes with one accord heeded **the things spoken** by Philip, hearing and seeing the **miracles** which he did" (Acts 8:6). The apostles prayed to God: "[G]rant to Your servants that with all boldness they may **speak Your word**, by stretching out Your hand to **heal**, and that **signs and wonders** may be done" (Acts 4:29-30). These passages, and many others (e.g., Acts 13:12; 14:3; 15:12; Romans 15:18-19; 1 Corinthians 2:4; 1 Thessalonians 1:5; cf. Exodus 4:30), show that the purpose of miracles was to **authenticate** the oral/spoken word as God's Word. Miracles **legitimized** and **verified** the teaching of God's messengers, as over against the many false teachers (like Simon in Acts 8:9, or Pharaoh's magicians in Exodus 7:11) who attempted to mislead the people. In the late 19th century, Greek lexicographer Joseph Thayer worded this point well when he noted that "sign" (*semeion*) was used in the New Testament "of miracles and wonders by which God authenticates the men sent by him, or by which men prove that the cause they are pleading is God's" (1901, p. 573). Even the miracles that Jesus performed were designed to back up His claim (i.e., spoken words) to be deity. Consider two examples: (1) Using the parallel term "works" (a key word in the book of John), Jesus remarked to Philip, "Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? the **words** that I say unto you I speak not from myself: but the Father abiding in me doeth his **works**. Believe Me that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me: or else believe Me for the very **works'** sake" (John 14:10-11, emp. added); (2) Nicodemus said to Jesus: "Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God; for no one can do these **signs** that thou doest except God be with him" (John 3:2, emp. added). This pattern is repeated in the New Testament many times over (e.g., John 2:23; 5:36; 6:14; 7:31; 10:37-38, 41-42; 20:30-31; Acts 2:22). In other words, Jesus performed signs and miracles to prove His divine identity and thereby authenticate His message. His message, in turn, generated faith in those who chose to believe His teachings (cf. Romans 10:17). Here is the consistent sequence presented in Scripture:

Signs → Word → Faith

(1) Signs confirmed the Word; (2) the Word was presented to hearers; and (3) faith was created (by the Word) in those who received it. An excellent demonstration of this process is provided by Luke in his report of the conversion of the Roman proconsul, Sergius Paulus. Elymas the sorcerer attempted to thwart Paul's effort to teach Sergius the Gospel. So Paul performed a miracle by striking Elymas blind. Luke next recorded: "Then the proconsul, when he saw what was done, believed, being astonished at the **teaching** of the Lord" (Acts 13:12, emp. added). One might well expect the text to have said that Sergius was astonished at the **miracle** that Paul performed. But Luke was careful to report the situation with precision. The miracle that Paul performed captured Sergius' attention, causing him to recognize the divine origin of Paul's Gospel message. The Gospel message, in turn, generated faith in the proconsul—in harmony with Paul's later affirmation to Christians in Rome that faith comes by hearing the Word of God (Romans 10:17). Over and over again in the New Testament, a close correlation is seen between the performance of miracles and the preaching of the Word of God (cf. Mark 6:12-13; Luke 9:2,6).

MIRACLES CONFIRM THE WORD			
PASSAGE	MESSAGE	CONFIRMATION	RESPONSE
Acts 4:29-32	"Speak Your Word with all boldness"	"by stretching out Your hand to heal and that signs and wonders may be done"	"those who believed were of one heart and soul"
Acts 8:5-12	"the things spoken by Philip;" "Philip...preached Christ"	"hearing and seeing the miracles which he did"	"they believed Philip as he preached the things...and were baptized"
Acts 13:7-12	"sought to hear the word of God"	"You shall be blind, not seeing"	"the proconsul believed...being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord"
Acts 14:2-3	"speaking boldly in the Lord"	"The Lord...was bearing witness to the word...granting signs/wonders to be done"	"a great multitude...believed"
Romans 15:18-19	"I have fully preached the gospel of Christ"	"in mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God"	"to make the Gentiles obedient"
1 Corinthians 2:4-5	"my speech and my preaching"	"in demonstration of the Spirit and of power"	"that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God"
1 Thessalonians 1:5-6	"our gospel did not come to you in word only"	"but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance"	"you became followers of us and the Lord, having received the word"
Hebrews 2:1-4	"so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord"	"God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit"	"give the more earnest heed"
Mark 16:15-20	"preach the gospel...they went out and preached...the word"	"the Lord working with them and confirming the word through the accompanying signs"	"he who believes and is baptized will be saved"
John 2:22	"He had said this...the Scripture and the word which Jesus had said"	"when he had risen from the dead"	"they believed"
John 2:23	"in His name"	"they saw the signs which He did"	"many believed"

Other Purposes: Super-Spiritual?

But some maintain that there are other reasons for divine healing and tongue-speaking. Some say tongue-speaking is a sign that the tongue-speaker is super-spiritual. Others say miraculous healing serves the purpose of making the believer well—a mere act of mercy to relieve his pain and suffering. They say God does not want us to suffer, and so He will heal us just to ease our pain in this life because we are His children.

Regarding the first claim, in Paul's admonitions directed to the church of Christ at Corinth, he insisted that the person who possessed the ability to speak in tongues was not spiritually superior to the one who had no such ability. The tongue-speaker had a responsibility to utilize his gift appropriately, i.e., to help others (1 Corinthians 14:6,9,12,19). His gift no more placed him in a spiritually superior position than did any other gift possessed by any other member—whether the ability was miraculous or non-miraculous (1 Corinthians 12:11-27). Tongue-speaking was simply one miraculous capability among many bestowed by God without regard to a member's spiritual status, let alone his spiritual **superiority** over another member (1 Corinthians 12:7-11,28-30).

Other Purposes: To Make Well?

Regarding the second claim, certainly, the compassion of God was evident when people received miraculous healing in New Testament times. And, surely, relief from suffering would have been a side effect of being healed. But the Bible teaches that **relieving suffering was not the purpose of miracles**. Such a purpose would contradict—even thwart—the divine intent of this created Earth as a place where hardship exists to prepare us for eternity (see Warren, 1972). Death and sin entered the world due to human choice, and God allows the circumstances caused by human decisions to take their course. God is not going to interfere with the natural order of things to show partiality to some over others. The Christian is subject to the same diseases, the same tragedies, and the same physical death that befall non-Christians: “for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return” (Genesis 3:19). The Bible, in fact, warns Christians that they can **expect** to be the recipients of all sorts of hardship, opposition, temptation, and suffering (e.g., 1 Corinthians 10:13; 2 Timothy 3:12; 1 Peter 4:12-17). Commenting on the purpose of miracles, J.W. McGarvey wrote: “[T]o say that they were wrought for the single purpose of showing divine compassion toward the sick, and those oppressed by the devil, would be to ignore a purpose which is easily discerned, which is openly avowed by Christ himself, and which is of much greater importance (1910, p. 354). That purpose was “to support his proclamation...a necessary proof of the claim of Jesus” (pp. 355-356).

If God's intention was to exempt Christians from sickness and disease, He certainly has fallen down on the job, since the vast majority of Christians throughout the last 2,000 years have experienced the exact same afflictions suffered by unbelievers. If miracles in the first century had as their object to improve the health or physical well-being of the recipient, then Jesus and the apostles were failures, because they left untouched a lot of sick and dying folk! Jesus healed the minority of the sick people of Palestine, and healed **none** outside of that tiny geographical region (with the exception of the Canaanite woman's daughter). In fact, one would be forced to conclude that God's compassion did not extend to **everybody**. But the Bible affirms that **God loves the entire world of humanity** (John 3:16; Romans 5:8). Hence, miracles did not have as their central purpose to demonstrate God's compassion, nor to ease pain, sickness, and suffering. Writing in 1898, McGarvey made the following observations:

[U]nlike these modern advocates of “divine healing,” the apostles were never known to go about exhorting people to come forward for the healing of the body. They effected miraculous cures in a few instances, “as a sign to the unbelievers,” but they never proclaimed, either to saints or sinners, that the healing of all diseases was a part of the gospel which they were sent to preach. These so-called faith-cure churches, therefore, and the preachers who officiate in them as “divine healers,” or what not, are not modeled after the apostolic type, but are misleading the people by humbuggery (p. 351).

Insufficient Faith?

The usual rebuttal to these observations is that the reason some people do not receive a miracle is that “they do not have sufficient faith.” But this objection is likewise unscriptural. It is true that some individuals in the New Testament were commended for the faith that they possessed **prior** to being the recipient of a miracle (e.g., Mark 5:34). It does not automatically follow, however, that faith was a **necessary** prerequisite to miraculous reception. Many people were **not** required to have faith as a prerequisite. For example, all individuals who were raised from the dead obviously were not in a position to “have faith” (e.g., John 11:44). Nor did those possessed by demons have faith before being healed, since they were not in their right mind (e.g., Luke 9:42; 11:14). The man who was blind from birth actually showed uncertainty regarding the identity of Jesus (John 9:11-12, 17, 25, 35-36). The man who was healed by Jesus as he laid beside a pool of water, in fact, did not even know who healed him (John 5:13). On one occasion, Jesus healed a paralytic after observing, not **his** faith, but the faith of **his companions** (Mark 2:5). Additional texts indicate that many who received the benefits of miracles were not required to have faith (Luke 13:12; 14:4; Acts 3:1-10).

The opposite was true as well. There were individuals who possessed faith, and yet were not healed of their ailments. The apostle Paul obviously had plenty of faith. He had an “infirmity” that was so painful that he called it “a thorn in the flesh” and “a messenger of Satan” (2 Corinthians 12:7-10). Yet his earnest prayers to God for relief did not result in his being healed. Timothy was a faithful and effective servant of the Lord. He had “frequent illnesses” and stomach trouble of such severity as to warrant Paul referring to it by inspiration. But rather than simply healing him, or telling him to “pray for healing,” Paul advised him to use a little wine as a tonic (1 Timothy 5:23). Another Christian worker and companion of Paul in his evangelistic travels, Trophimus (Acts 20:4; 21:29), had to be left at Miletus due to his sickness (2 Timothy 4:20). Epaphroditus was an extremely valuable worker in the kingdom of Christ, so much so that Paul referred to him as “my brother and fellow-worker and fellow-soldier...and minister to my need” (Philippians 2:25). When he became sick “nigh unto death” (Philippians 2:27,30)—likely due to his exhausting kingdom activity and service to Paul—Paul did not heal him. These examples demonstrate that personal faith was not prerequisite to the reception of a miracle in the first century. Miracles were inextricably bound to the authentication of the spoken Word of God.

But what about those verses that seem to indicate that faith **did** have something to do with whether a miracle would be forthcoming? For instance, what of Matthew’s observation that when Jesus went to His own country, He “did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief” (Matthew 13:58)? Notice that the text cannot be correlating the presence of the miraculous with the presence of belief. After all, “not many” implies that **some** miracles were performed—even though unbelief was rampant. The point that Matthew was making, therefore, was that when Jesus performed a few miracles to authenticate His oral claim to deity, the evidence was rejected, making it superfluous for Christ to offer any further miraculous demonstrations. Albert Barnes explained this matter succinctly:

We are not to suppose that his [Jesus—DM] **power** was limited by the belief or unbelief of men; but they were so **prejudiced**, so set against him, that they were not in a condition to **judge of evidence** and to be convinced. ... It would have been of no use, therefore, in proving **to them** that he was from God, to have worked miracles. ... He gave sufficient proof of his mission, and left them in their chosen unbelief without excuse (1956, p. 150, emp. in orig.).

Jesus was simply doing what He instructed the Twelve to do: “whatsoever place shall not receive you, and they hear you not, ...shake off the dust that is under your feet” (Mark 6:11). He also had said: “[N]either cast your pearls before the swine” (Matthew 7:6). If performing additional miracles would have confirmed the Word, Jesus would have performed them.

John actually settled this question for the unbiased searcher. He worded the thematic statement of his Gospel record in the following words: “Many other **signs** therefore did Jesus in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book: but these are written, **that ye may believe** that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye may have life in His name” (John 20:30-31, emp. added). John said that belief occurs **after** the miracle—not before, in order to receive a miracle! The New Testament teaches the very opposite of those who claim that miracles occur today. They say a person must have faith **before** he or she can receive a miracle. The New Testament teaches that miracles were performed to authenticate the divine origin of the speaker’s message and/or identity. The message, in turn, generated faith in the hearer (cf. Romans 10:17). Hence, **miracles preceded faith**. Even tongue-speaking was designed to convince the **unbeliever** to give heed to the message (1 Corinthians 14:22).

SUMMARY

A good summary passage that pinpoints precisely the purpose of miracles throughout the Bible is seen in the incident concerning the widow of Zarephath to whom Elijah was sent for assistance in surviving the famine during the reign of King Ahab. When her son’s serious illness culminated in his death, Elijah brought the boy back to life, raising him from the dead. Her subsequent verbal observation summarizes succinctly the function of the miraculous: “Now by this I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the LORD in your mouth is the truth” (1 Kings 17:24). The miracle fulfilled its intended purpose: to verify that, as a genuine emissary of the one true God, Elijah was a communicator of God’s Word. The restoration of the life of her son--though magnificent and thrilling in itself--was secondary to the verified realization that Elijah was a legitimate communicator of the Word of the one true God.

THE DURATION OF MIRACLES

These observations bring us to a third extremely critical realization: once God revealed the entirety of the information that He wished to make available to mankind (later contained in what we call the New Testament), the need for miraculous confirmation of the oral Word came to an end. Now, people can sit down with a New Testament, the written Word of God, and, with honest and diligent study, conclude that it is God's Word. Many preachers and teachers today have failed to acknowledge this crucial biblical factor. They fail to face the fact that we have absolutely no need for the miraculous. Since the purpose of miracles has been achieved, the miracles, themselves, have ceased. I repeat: the Bible teaches that miracles are no longer necessary. We have everything we need to function in this life, to be pleasing to God, and to survive spiritually (2 Peter 1:3). Spiritual maturity is now within the grasp of every single individual who chooses to access the means to maturity—the written Word of God. To insist that we have need for the miraculous today is to undermine, and to cast aspersions upon, the all-sufficiency of God's Word (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:22; 2 Timothy 3:16-17).

The most detailed treatment of the phenomena of miracles in the New Testament, including tongue-speaking, healing, and prophecy, is 1 Corinthians 12, 13, and 14. These three chapters were written to Christians at Corinth because miracles were being abused and misused. Chapter 12 defines the miracles. Chapter 13 indicates their duration. Chapter 14 explains their disposition. In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul argued that the body (the church) should function harmoniously by using miraculous gifts properly. In 1 Corinthians 13, Paul argued that love is a more excellent attribute than miraculous gifts. After all, miraculous gifts (i.e., prophecy, tongue-speaking, supernatural knowledge, etc.) were going to fail, cease, vanish, and be done away (13:8). These miraculous gifts are identified in the text with the expression "in part" (13:9-10). The "in part," or miraculous, would cease and be done away when the "perfect" had come. But to what does the "perfect" refer?

The Greek word translated "perfect" is *teleios*. The term does not refer to "perfect" in the sense typically understood by the average modern English reader, i.e., to be sinless. Following this faulty notion, some have concluded that the "perfect" refers to Jesus—since He has been the only perfect person. Other interpretations apply "perfect" to heaven (the only perfect place that will be free of sin and imperfection), or Christian maturity and perfect love (the perfect condition or quality). But, in context, Paul was not contrasting qualities or places. He was contrasting quantities, i.e., those things that were incomplete and partial (miraculous gifts) with that which would be total and complete (the fully revealed Word of God). The inaccuracy of these interpretations is seen further in the Greek definition of *teleios*. The word refers to totality, that which is whole, brought to its end, finished, and lacking nothing necessary to completeness (Delling, 1972, 8:73; Arndt and Gingrich, 1957, p. 816; Thayer, 1901, p. 618). When referring to persons, *teleios* refers to being full-grown, adult, and mature (Arndt and Gingrich, 1957, p. 817; Thayer, 1977, p. 618). Used in its neuter form, Paul was referring to a thing—not a person—something that, when completed or finished, would replace the incomplete or partial, i.e., the miraculous gifts—which clearly had only temporary significance. Commenting on the abolition of the miraculous gifts of prophecy and supernatural knowledge (mentioned in vss. 8 and 9), W.R. Nicoll observed that "these charisms are **partial** in scope, and therefore temporary: the **fragmentary** gives place to the **complete**" (1900, 2:900, emp. added). Kenneth Wuest agreed: "In 1 Corinthians 13:10, the word means 'complete,' and is contrasted to that which is incomplete" (1943a, pp. 117-118). Whereas James used the term *teleios* to refer to the all-sufficiency of God's Word in its ability to achieve everything it was intended to do (James 1:25), the exegete is forced to conclude that Paul's use of "perfect" referred to the completed revelation or totally revealed New Testament Scriptures. The revelation of God's will was completed in its entirety when the final book of the New Testament, Revelation, was written by John prior to A.D. 100.

Paul offered a useful illustration to clarify his point. When the church possessed only bits and pieces of God's will, as revealed through scattered miraculous gifts and the gradual production, between approximately A.D. 57 and A.D. 95, of the written documents from the inspired writers of the New Testament, it could not achieve full spiritual maturity. It therefore was like a child (13:11). It lacked the necessary constituent elements to reach spiritual adulthood. However, when the totality of God's will, which became the New Testament, had been revealed, the church then had the means available to become "a man" (13:11). Once the church had access to all of God's written Word, the means by which the Word was given (i.e., miraculous gifts) would be obsolete, useless, and therefore "put away" (13:11). Notice that in this illustration, Paul likened miracles to "childish things" (13:11). In other words, miracles were the spiritual equivalents of pacifiers that were necessary while the church was in a state of infancy. Now that the church has access to "all truth" (John 16:13), the use of tongue-speaking and other miraculous enhancements in the church today would be comparable to an adult man or woman sucking on a pacifier!

Paul then explained his point by making a contrast between the initial necessity of miracles to reveal and confirm God's Word, and the idea of looking through a clouded mirror (see Workman, 1983, p. 8). Once the entire contents of the New Testament had been revealed, the miraculous gifts no longer would be necessary. Having all of God's revealed Word would enable one to be face to face with that Word rather than "looking through a clouded mirror," i.e., having partial access. Paul wrote (13:11): "Now I know in part [i.e., my knowledge of God's revelation is incomplete and partial due to limited access via the miraculous element—DM], but then [i.e., when all of God's Word is revealed—DM] shall I know fully even as also I was fully known [i.e., I shall be made to know or taught thoroughly (which is the figure of speech known as heterosis of the verb in which the intransitive is put for the transitive—see Bullinger, 1898, p. 512)—DM]."

Paul made essentially the same point to the Ephesians that he made to the Corinthians. Miracles—the "gifts" given by Christ (Ephesians 4:8)—were to last "till the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God" (Ephesians 4:13, emp. added). Two significant observations emerge from this latter verse. First, the word translated "till" (Middle English for "until") is *mechri*, and was used as a conjunction to indicate the *terminus ad quem* [finishing point] of the miraculous offices (mentioned in vs. 11) bestowed as gifts by Christ. [For treatments of the use of *mechri* in this verse, see Thayer, 1977, p. 408; Arndt and Gingrich, 1957, p. 517; Moulton and Milligan, 1982, p. 407; Blass, et al., 1961, pp. 193-194; Robertson, 1934, pp. 974-975; Dana and Mantey, 1927, p. 281; see also the use of the term in Mark 13:30 and Galatians 4:19]. Nicoll observed: "The statement of the great object of Christ's gifts and the provision made by Him for its fulfillment is now followed by a statement of the **time** this provision and the consequent service are to last" (1900, 3:332, emp. in orig.). Paul was "[s]pecifying the **time** up to which this ministry and impartation of gifts are to last" (Vincent, 1890, p. 390, emp. added).

Second, the phrase "the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God" often is misunderstood to refer to the eventual **unifying** of all believers in Christ. But this conclusion cannot be correct. Both Scripture and common sense dispel such a notion. Complete unity within Christendom will never occur. Those who profess affiliation with Christianity are in a hopeless state of disunity. Catholicism and Protestant denominationalism are fractured into a plethora of factions and splinter groups—literally thousands of divisions and disagreements. Besides, Protestant denominationalism did not exist in the New Testament era, and the New Testament neither countenances nor legitimizes any such "manifestation" of Christianity. Nor will unity ever be achieved even within churches of Christ. The first-century congregations did not attain complete internal unity. Nor have the post first-century congregations achieved unity within.

In contrast with this interpretation, notice the use of the articles in the phrases: “**the** faith” and “**the** knowledge.” Contextually, Paul was referring to **the system of faith** alluded to so often in the New Testament. Jude urged his readers to “contend earnestly for **the** faith” (Jude 3). Paul referred to himself when he quoted others as saying, “He that once persecuted us now preacheth **the** faith of which he once made havoc” (Galatians 1:23). Luke reported that “a great company of the priests were obedient to **the** faith” (Acts 6:7). Elymas sought to “turn aside the proconsul from **the** faith” (Acts 13:8). The early disciples were exhorted to “continue in **the** faith” (Acts 14:22). Due to Paul’s repeat visits in Lycaonia, “the churches were strengthened in **the** faith” (Acts 16:5). So “the faith” and “the knowledge” refer to the **completed body of information** that constitutes the Christian religion. Indeed, eight verses earlier (Ephesians 4:5), Paul already had referred to “the faith” as the summation and totality of Christian doctrine—now situated in the repository of the New Testament. An honest exegete is driven to conclude that once the precepts of New Testament Christianity were revealed on Earth, the miraculous element no longer was necessary. Miracles lasted until “the faith” was completely revealed. They had served their purpose, in the same way that scaffolding is useful while a building is under construction. However, once construction is complete, the scaffolding is removed and discarded as unnecessary and superfluous paraphernalia.

THE TEMPORARY NATURE OF MIRACLES IN CORINTH AND EPHESUS	
1 Corinthians 12-14	Ephesians 4
“Gifts” (12:4,9, 28,30,31)	“Gifts” (4:7-8)
“no schism in the body” (12:25)	“joined and knit together” (4:16)
“one body, many members” (12:12,14,18-20,27)	“whole body, every part” (4:16)
“apostles, prophets, teachers” (12:29)	“apostles, prophets, pastor-teachers” (4:11)
“prophecies, knowledge” (13:8)	“prophets, evangelists, pastor-teachers” (4:11)
“fail, cease, vanish, done away” (13:8-10)	“until” (4:13) “we come to the unity of the faith” (4:13)
“when perfect comes” (13:10)	“the knowledge/the fullness of Christ” (4:13)
“shall know” (13:12)	“the knowledge/the fullness of Christ” (4:13)
“child” (13:11)	“children” (4:14)
“man” (13:11)	“man” (4:13)
“put away childish things” (13:11)	“grow up” (4:15)
“love” (13:1-8)	“love” (4:15-16)
“edification of the church” (14:3-5,12,17)	“edifying the body of Christ” (4:12)

THE DISPLAY AND DISPOSITION OF MIRACLES

Fourth, the actual exercise of miraculous gifts by Christians is addressed in 1 Corinthians 14. In this context, Paul used the term “gifts” (*charismata*, from *charisma*) in a technical sense (like *pneumatika*) to refer to miraculous abilities, designated by Thayer “**extraordinary** powers...by the Holy Spirit” (1901, p. 667, emp. added; cf. Arndt and Gingrich, 1957, p. 887). Hans Conzelmann stated that the term indicated that “[t]he operations are **supernatural**” and of “**supernatural** potency” (1974, 9:405, emp. added). [The word is so used in the Pauline corpus in 10 of its 16 occurrences (Romans 1:11; 12:6; 1 Corinthians 1:7; 12:4,9,28,30,31; 1 Timothy 4:14; 2 Timothy 1:6). The only other occurrence of the word in the New Testament was Peter’s comparable use, i.e., to refer to supernatural ability (1 Peter 4:10)—see Moulton, et al., 1978, p. 1005]. In the Corinthian context of chapter 14, special attention was given by Paul to two of the miraculous gifts in particular: prophecy and tongue-speaking. Several relevant points occur with regard to the gift of tongue-speaking that help one to understand both the temporary nature of miracles as well as their irrelevance to a contemporary pursuit and practice of New Testament Christianity.

Holy Spirit Baptism

Where does the baptism of the Holy Spirit fit into this discussion? Today’s alleged practitioners typically associate the expression “Holy Spirit baptism” with the phenomenon that enables the believer to speak in tongues, heal someone, or work other miracles. In other words, Holy Spirit baptism is simply a generic reference to miraculous empowerment. Anyone who can speak in a tongue or perform any other miraculous action is said to have been baptized in the Holy Spirit. He is said to be “Spirit-filled.” However, it might surprise the reader to find that the Bible alludes to Holy Spirit baptism in a very narrow, specialized, even technical sense. Just because a person could speak in tongues or work miracles did not necessarily mean he had been baptized in the Holy Spirit.

The very first allusion to Holy Spirit baptism in the New Testament is John’s statement: “I indeed baptize you in water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me...will **baptize you in the Holy Spirit**” (Matthew 3:11, emp. added). From this statement alone, one might be tempted to assume that Christians **in general** would be baptized in the Holy Spirit. But this assumption would be a premature conclusion. John was not addressing a Christian audience. He was speaking to Jews. Nothing in the context allows the interpreter to distinguish John’s intended recipients of the promise of Holy Spirit baptism—whether all humans, all Jews, all Christians, or merely some of those in one or more of these categories. Likewise, the exact recipients of the baptism of fire (i.e., hell) are not specified. However, as is often the case in the Bible, the specific recipients of this promise are clarified in later passages.

Just before His ascension, Jesus told the apostles to wait in Jerusalem until “clothed with power from on high” (Luke 24:49). In John chapters 14-16, Jesus made several specific promises to the apostles concerning the coming of the Spirit—the “Comforter” or “Helper” (*parakletos*)—upon them, to empower them to do the peculiar work of an apostle (i.e., to recall the words Jesus had spoken to them, to speak and write by inspiration, and to launch the Christian religion). If these verses apply to all Christians, then all Christians ought to have been personally guided “into all the truth” (John 16:13), and thus would have absolutely no need of written Scripture (John 14:26). However, in context, these verses clearly refer to **the apostolic office**.

Jesus further clarified the application of Holy Spirit baptism when He told the apostles that the earlier statement made in Luke 24:49 applied to **them**, and would come to pass “not many days hence” (Acts 1:4-5). Jesus also stated that the “power” that they would receive would be from the Holy Spirit, which would enable them to witness to the world what they had experienced by being with Jesus (Acts 1:8). Notice very carefully that on this occasion Jesus made an explicit reference to the very statement that John had uttered previously in Matthew 3: “for John indeed baptized with water; but **ye** [apostles—DM] shall be **baptized in the Holy Spirit** not many days hence” (Acts 1:5, emp. added). Jesus specifically and explicitly identified the Holy Spirit baptism that He would administer (in keeping with John’s prediction) would take place within a few days, and would be confined to the apostles.

All one need do is turn the page to see the promise of Holy Spirit baptism achieve dramatic and climactic fulfillment in Acts 2 when the Spirit was poured out only upon the apostles. The antecedent of “they” in Acts 2:4 is “the apostles” in Acts 1:26. The apostles were the ones who spoke in tongues and taught the people. **They** were the recipients of the baptism of the Holy Spirit, as is evident from the following contextual indicators: (1) “are not all these that speak **Galileans?**” (2:7); (2) “Peter, standing up with **the eleven**” (2:14); (3) “they...said unto Peter and the rest of **the apostles**” (2:37); (4) Peter quoted Joel 2:28-32 and applied it to that occasion as proof that **the apostles** were not intoxicated; and (5) the text even states explicitly that the signs and wonders were “done through **the apostles**” (2:43). This pattern continues in the book of Acts: “And by the hands of **the apostles** were many signs and wonders wrought among the people” (5:12); “the Lord, who bare witness unto the word of his grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by **their hands**” (14:3); “what signs and wonders God had wrought...through **them**” (15:12).

The next direct reference to Holy Spirit baptism consisted of Peter describing the experience of the Gentiles in Acts 10. Referring to their empowerment to speak in tongues, Peter explicitly identified it as being comparable to the experience of the apostles in Acts 2. Note his explanation: “And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them, even as on **us** [apostles—DM] at the beginning. And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he said, John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized in the Holy Spirit. If then God gave unto them the like gift as he did also unto **us** [apostles—DM]...” (Acts 11:15-17, emp. added). Peter unmistakably linked the baptism of the Holy Spirit predicted by John in Matthew 3:11, and applied by Jesus to the apostles in Acts 1:5, with the unique and exclusive bestowal of the same on the first Gentile candidates of salvation. If the baptism of the Holy Spirit had occurred between Acts 2 and Acts 10, why did Peter compare the Gentiles’ experience with the experience of the **apostles**—rather than comparing it with many other Christians who allegedly would have received it during the intervening years? The answer lies in the fact that the baptism of the Holy Spirit did not occur during the intervening years. Baptism of the Holy Spirit was a unique and infrequent occurrence that came directly from deity.

This understanding harmonizes with additional facts. The great prophecy of the Old Testament, which made special reference to the coming New Testament era as the dispensation of the Spirit, incorporated a most noteworthy expression. God declared, “I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh” (Joel 2:28). Peter repeated it on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:17). What did God mean by the expression “**all flesh**”? Members of the charismatic community insist that “all flesh” means “**all Christians**.” They maintain that every Christian can receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit. They claim that to narrow the application of the promise of Holy Spirit baptism to a select group of individuals would deprive all other Christians of the opportunity to receive miraculous power. However, upon what **biblical** basis may such a claim be made?

Those who claim the presence of miraculous gifts are guilty of the very thing they condemn—narrowing the expression “all flesh.” Surely no one would take the position that it means all **animal** flesh—since animals are not the recipients of God’s spiritual provisions. Nor would anyone contend that it means all **human** flesh—since all wicked, disobedient, unbelieving people would hardly expect, let alone desire, to receive God’s Spirit. Those who agree that the expression “all flesh” must undoubtedly be qualified to exclude the animals and the unbelieving will nonetheless insist that narrowing the meaning to less than “all Christians” is unjustifiable.

To understand the proper meaning and application of the expression “all flesh,” one must examine the **biblical** use of the expression. “All flesh” often is used in the Bible to refer to the bulk of humanity (e.g., Genesis 6:12-13). It also can include all animal flesh (e.g., Genesis 6:17,19). However, with God’s special utilization of the descendants of Abraham in His scheme of redemption, “all flesh” often has the more technical meaning of “all **nationalities**.” The primary reason for this specialized use of the expression was due to the fact that most of the Old Testament was written against the backdrop of the presence of the nation of Israel. God is certainly “no respecter of persons” (Romans 2:11; Ephesians 6:9; Colossians 3:25; 1 Peter 1:17; Acts 10:34-35). He does not favor one ethnic group over another. However, since His redemptive intention included bringing Jesus into the world for the benefit of all, someone had to be selected through whom Jesus’ arrival might be achieved. That man was Abraham (Galatians 3:8,16) and, consequently, his descendents.

As a result of this circumstance, the Jewish writers of the Bible frequently divided humanity into **only two** racial groupings, i.e., Jew and non-Jew (Gentile). For example, in what is obviously a strongly Messianic passage, Isaiah (the “Messianic prophet”) predicted the coming of John the baptizer who would prepare the way for Jesus. He exclaimed: “The glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together” (40:5). The reference to “all flesh” was an unmistakable reference to the availability of salvation to both Jew and Gentile in the Christian era, as evinced by Luke’s quotation of the passage (Luke 3:6). The same is true in another prophecy that Isaiah uttered pertaining to the coming Christian era: “All flesh shall come to worship before Me” (Isaiah 66:23). The Jews of Isaiah’s day would not have been very pleased with Isaiah’s declarations, since they most certainly would have understood him to be predicting the incorporation of Gentiles into God’s favor—which the Jews felt they alone enjoyed.

Paul cinched the meaning of “all flesh” in his premiere treatise on justification by faith. He drew a clear distinction between the two ethnic categories by first declaring the sins of the Gentiles (Romans 1:18-32) and then declaring the sins of the Jews (Romans 2:1-3:8). Notice carefully his concluding remarks as he brought the first section of the book to its climax: “What then? are **we** [the Jews—DM] better than **they** [the Gentiles—DM]? No, in no wise: for we before laid to the charge **both** of Jews and Greeks, that they are **all** under sin” (Romans 3:9, emp. added). He then quoted a series of Old Testament verses, which verified his emphasis upon the two (and only two) categories of human flesh, using two significant terms: “none” and “all.” “None” means neither Jew nor Gentile. “All” means both Jew and Gentile. Then he articulated his grand and climactic conclusion: “because by the works of the law shall **no flesh** be justified” (Romans 3:20, emp. added). “No flesh” referred to Jew and Gentile. In other words, neither Jew nor Gentile could be justified by law alone. “No flesh” and “all flesh” were technical allusions to the two **categories** of human flesh, i.e., Jew and non-Jew (cf. John 17:2).

Observe, then, that the first recipients of Holy Spirit baptism, as we have seen, were the **Jewish** apostles on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2. It equipped them to establish the church and to write, speak, and confirm inspired truth. The second recipients of Holy Spirit baptism were the **Gentile** members of the household of Cornelius in Acts 10. It convinced

Jewish Christians that Gentiles were fit prospects for the reception of the Gospel, and valid candidates for entrance into the kingdom (Acts 10:34-35,45; 11:18). So Joel's statement, that God would pour out His Spirit on "all flesh," applied to the outpouring on **Jews** in Acts 2 and on **Gentiles** in Acts 10. The only other conceivable occurrence of Holy Spirit baptism would have been Paul, who would have received direct miraculous ability from God as well. His reception was obviously unique because (1) he was not an apostle when the Twelve received the Spirit, and (2) he was "one born out of due time" (1 Corinthians 15:8). Holy Spirit baptism, then, filled two unique and exclusive purposes: (1) to prepare the apostles for their apostolic (not Christian) roles, and (2) to provide divine demonstration that Gentiles were to be allowed to become Christians.

One additional consideration deserves comment regarding Joel's prophecy. If "all flesh" referred exclusively to the Jewish apostles and the first Gentile converts, why did Joel include "sons, daughters, old men, young men, servants, and handmaids" in the reception of God's Spirit (Joel 2:28-29)? As was typical of Hebrew prophecy, progressive, sequential, and complete fulfillment would be forthcoming. A prophecy could possess several features that found fulfillment in a variety of circumstances. It is apparent, on the basis of the references already discussed (e.g., Matthew 3:11; Acts 1:5; 11:15-17), that only the **first part** of Joel's prophecy was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost. The "last days" (Acts 2:17) referred to the **entire** Christian dispensation from Pentecost to the Judgment. The outpouring of the Spirit, therefore, would include more than just the baptism of the Holy Spirit that was confined to the Jewish apostles on Pentecost and the Gentiles a few years later. Though the peculiar phenomenon of Holy Spirit baptism was limited to those two specific ethnic groups (i.e., the twelve apostles and the household of Cornelius), **additional** activity of the Spirit would include the impartation of miraculous gifts through the laying on of the apostles' hands (discussed below). This conclusion is evident from the fact that no "**daughters**" or "**handmaids**" received Holy Spirit baptism on Pentecost. Nor is there any evidence of the occurrence of "**dreams**" or "**visions**" on Pentecost. With the Holy Spirit's expanded presence in the instigation of Christianity in the first century came the eventual impartation of miraculous ability separate and apart from Holy Spirit baptism. The broadened fulfillment of Joel's prophecy (subsequent to Acts 2) is seen in the references to Philip's **daughters** who prophesied (Acts 21:9) and in the occurrence of **visions** (Acts 9:10; 10:3,10; 16:9). However, these miraculous manifestations, though included in Joel's prophecy, were not instances of Holy Spirit baptism. The common link in the Holy Spirit's outpouring on Pentecost and the manifestations of the Spirit thereafter was the baptism of the Holy Spirit on **the apostles**—who were the keys to the further distribution of miraculous power in the early years of Christianity.

1 Corinthians 12:13

But what about Paul's statement to the Corinthians? He wrote: "For in one Spirit were we all baptized into one body...and were all made to drink of one Spirit" (1 Corinthians 12:13). Some have insisted that this verse teaches that the baptism of the Holy Spirit is imparted to **all Christians**. Careful analysis of the verse, however, demonstrates that Paul was not referring to the baptism of the Holy Spirit that was received only twice in the New Testament (if you omit Paul). If the Corinthians had been baptized in the Holy Spirit, Paul likely would have worded the verse: "We were all baptized in one Spirit into one body." This wording would have made it plain that their baptism was Holy Spirit baptism. However, Paul connected "baptized" with "into one body," and placed "in one Spirit" **before** both "baptized" and "into one body." Did he mean to say that their baptism entailed being indwelt with the Spirit, or having the Spirit overwhelm (i.e., immerse) them, or come upon them, i.e., that the Holy Spirit, **Himself**, was what the Corinthians had received or been baptized in?

The grammar of the passage provides a decisive and definitive answer. The word “Spirit” is in the instrumental case in Greek, indicating personal agency. The personal agent in the passage who did the baptizing is the Holy Spirit. His baptizing resulted in the placement of the individuals into the one body of Christ. The verb is aorist, showing that Paul was referring to a once-for-all act in the past. Wuest explained: “It is not the baptism **with** the Spirit or **of** the Spirit, in the sense that the Holy Spirit is the element which is applied to us. It is the baptism **by** the Spirit. This baptism does not bring the Spirit to us in the sense that God places the Spirit **upon** or **in** us. Rather, this baptism brings the believer into vital union with Jesus Christ” (1943b, p. 86, emp. added). The Corinthians were the beneficiaries—not of the Spirit—but of the Spirit’s guidance or assistance. They were baptized **by** the Spirit (cf. KJV, NKJV, NASV, RSV, NIV).

Further grammatical evidence in the context supports this conclusion. Earlier in the chapter, Paul said that no person could say that Jesus is Lord “but in the Holy Spirit” (vs. 3). A person could say Jesus is Lord without being **in** the Spirit or having the Holy Spirit **in** or **on** him. But a person could not say Jesus is Lord if the Holy Spirit had not revealed such information about Jesus—as He did by empowering the apostles to produce written revelation. A few verses later, Paul pinpointed several gifts that were given “through the Spirit,” “according to the same Spirit,” and “in the same Spirit” (vss. 8-9, ASV). All three phrases are equivalent, and refer to the Holy Spirit’s **action**, not the **state of being** in the Holy Spirit. Paul’s summary of the section verifies that this meaning is intended: “But one and the same Spirit **works** all these things, **distributing to** each one individually as He wills” (vs. 11).

In view of these contextual details, one is forced to conclude that in verse 13, Paul could be referring to no other baptism than the baptism enjoined by Christ in the Great Commission, i.e., the “one baptism” of Ephesians 4:5, the baptism which Paul, himself, administered to the Corinthians (Acts 18:8)—**water** baptism. The Holy Spirit was the agent through Whom Christ enjoined water baptism by means of the preached message. When a person complies with the instruction to be baptized in water, that person is baptized into the one body of Christ. Other verses in the New Testament confirm this understanding. Jesus announced: “[U]nless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God” (John 3:5). Jesus meant what Paul meant, that when one obeys the teaching of the Spirit to be baptized in water, he is granted entrance into the kingdom. Paul reiterated this same teaching on two other occasions. To the Ephesian church, he pointed out that Jesus gave His life for the church “that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word” (Ephesians 5:26). He meant that an individual is permitted to be a part of the cleansed church of Christ when he submits to water baptism in accordance with the Holy Spirit’s inspired Word. Likewise, Paul told young Titus that Jesus “saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit” (Titus 3:5). Again, he meant that one is saved (and hence added to the body) at the point of water immersion, in which spiritual renewal is extended by the Holy Spirit.

We are forced to conclude that 1 Corinthians 12:13 does not refer to Holy Spirit baptism (see also McGarvey, 1910, pp. 254-256, and Reese, 1976, p. 76). The two instances of Holy Spirit baptism previously discussed (i.e., in Acts 2 and 10) stand unmistakably in stark contrast with the baptism alluded to by Paul in 1 Corinthians 12:13. The Corinthian baptism placed the Corinthians into the body of Christ, i.e., at their conversion. But when the apostles were baptized in the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, they were **already** saved. When the household of Cornelius was baptized in the Holy Spirit, they were not yet saved and were inducted into the body of Christ only **after** Peter called for “water” (Acts 10:47-48).

Laying on of Hands

If Acts 2 and Acts 10 are the only instances of Holy Spirit baptism in the New Testament, how then do we account for the fact that many others in the New Testament performed miracles or spoke in tongues? If they were not recipients of Holy Spirit baptism, how did they get the ability? The New Testament dictates only one other way to receive miraculous capability: through the laying on of the apostles' hands. Only the apostles possessed the ability to transfer miraculous capability to others. This phenomenon is described succinctly by Luke:

Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit. Now when Simon saw that **through the laying on of the apostles' hands** the Holy Spirit was given, he offered them money, saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Spirit. But Peter said unto him, Thy silver perish with thee, because thou hast thought to obtain the gift of God with money. Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right before God" (Acts 8:17-21, emp. added).

This description establishes two important facts: (1) only the apostles had the ability to impart to others the ability to perform miracles; and (2) those other than the apostles who could perform miracles received their ability **indirectly** through the **apostles**—not **directly from God via Holy Spirit baptism**. This fascinating feature of the existence of the miraculous in the first century makes it possible to understand how other individuals received their supernatural powers. For example, Philip, who was not an apostle, possessed the ability to perform miracles (Acts 8:6,13). If he was not an apostle, and he did not receive direct ability from God via baptism of the Holy Spirit, where, then, did he derive his ability? Luke informs us that Philip previously received the laying on of the apostles' hands (Acts 6:5-6). Likewise, the first Christians in Ephesus were enabled to speak in tongues when the apostle Paul laid his hands on them (Acts 19:6). Even Timothy received his gift from the laying on of Paul's hands (2 Timothy 1:6).

Some have challenged the exclusivity of the role of the apostles in their unique ability to impart the miraculous element by calling attention to the admonition given by Paul to Timothy: "Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands **of the presbytery**" (1 Timothy 4:14, emp. added). Even though Paul plainly declared that the "gift of God" which Timothy possessed was conferred "through the laying on of my hands" (2 Timothy 1:6), how does one explain the fact that Paul also stated that Timothy's gift came through the presbytery (i.e., the eldership) as well? Once again, the grammar of the text provides the answer. In 2 Timothy 1:6, where Paul claimed sole credit for imparting the gift to Timothy, he employed the Greek preposition *dia* with the genitive, which means "through" or "by means of" (Machen, 1923, p. 41; Dana and Mantey, 1927, p. 101). However, in 1 Timothy 4:14, where Paul included the eldership in the action of impartation, he employed a completely different Greek preposition—*meta*. The root meaning of *meta* is "in the midst of" (Dana and Mantey, p. 107). It denotes the **attendant circumstances** of something that takes place—the **accompanying** phenomena (Arndt and Gingrich, 1957, pp. 510-511). It means "in association with" or "accompanied by" (Moule, 1959, p. 61; Thayer, 1901, p. 404; cf. Robertson, 1934, p. 611). In other words, Paul—as an apostle—imparted the miraculous gift to Timothy. It came from God through Paul. However, on that occasion, the local eldership of the church was present and participated with Paul in the event, lending their simultaneous support and accompanying commendation. After examining the grammatical data on the matter, Nicoll concluded: "[I]t was the imposition of hands by St. Paul that was the instrument used by God in the communication of the charisma to Timothy" (1900, 4:127; cf. Jamieson, et al., n.d., 2:414; Williams, 1960, p. 956). Consequently, 1 Timothy 4:14 provides no proof that miraculous capability could be received through other means in addition to apostolic imposition of hands and the two clear instances of Holy Spirit baptism.

CONCLUSION

In light of all the biblical data set forth in this study, certain conclusions are quite evident. Since there are no apostles living today, and since Holy Spirit baptism was unique to the apostles (Acts 2) and the first Gentile converts (Acts 10), there is no Holy Spirit baptism today. Likewise, there is no miraculous healing today. There are no tongue-speakers today. The miraculous element in the Christian religion was terminated by God near the close of the first century. Once the last apostle died, the means by which miraculous capability was made available was dissolved. With the completion of God's revelation to humanity, now available in the Bible, people living today have all that is needed to be complete and to enjoy the fullness of Christian existence (2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:3; Ephesians 4:14).

The alleged miracles & tongue-speaking of today simply do not measure up to the Bible's description of the miraculous. They are unverifiable, ambiguous, and counterfeit. Today's "divine healing" consists of vague, unseen, non-quantifiable aches and pains like arthritis and headaches. But in the New Testament, people were raised from the dead—even days after death (e.g., John 11:17). Severed body parts were instantly restored (e.g., Luke 22:50-51). People who had been **born** blind had their sight restored (e.g., John 9:1). Those lame **from birth** were empowered to walk (Acts 3:2). First-century miracles were not limited only to certain ailments and psychosomatic illnesses that could be cured through natural means, or by mental adjustments on the part of the infirm. Jesus healed "**all** kinds of sickness and **all** kinds of disease" (Matt. 4:23, emp. added). No disease or sickness was exempt in the New Testament (Acts 28:8-9). Where are these instances today? When has anyone restored a severed limb lost in an accident? When has a self-proclaimed "faith-healer" raised anyone from the dead? Where are the miracle workers who have healed the blind, the crippled, the paralyzed, and those whose infirmities have been documented as having been in existence for many years (John 5:3,5)? Where are the televangelists who will go to the children's hospitals & rectify birth defects and childhood diseases? Where are those who have ingested poison or been bitten by a venomous snake and remained unharmed (Mark 16:18; Acts 28:3-5)? An honest searcher for the truth is forced to conclude that the miraculous age has passed.

But human beings always are looking for something new, something exciting, and something flashy. They grasp for the attractive and the appealing, they want the easy way out & they want something that makes them **feel** religious and secure—without having to face up to personal responsibilities.

Hence, there will always be those who, instead of searching the Scriptures to find out whether these things are so (Acts 17:11), will simply disengage their minds, their spiritual sense, and their ability to assess “the words of truth and reason” (Acts 26:25).

Genuine Christianity today consists of simply taking the written Word of God, and studying it carefully in order to learn what God expects of us: simple meditation and reflection upon the Word of God—no brass bands or circus theatrics, no flash of light, or dream, or vision, no sudden rush attributable to the Holy Spirit. The pathway to heaven consists of honest, intensive investigation of written revelation, and a life of diligent self-discipline and self-denial that strives to incorporate spiritual attributes into one’s life—attributes like patience, compassion, kindness, humility, forgiveness, honesty, integrity, peace of soul, joy, and clean, moral living. There are no short cuts to spirituality. **The miraculous is no answer.** Even in the first century, miracles were not designed to develop these spiritual attributes.

Certainly, God loves us and has promised to care for us (e.g., Matthew 6:33). But His workings in the Universe and in our lives are undertaken today providentially through the natural laws that He set into motion. After the first century, He has not—and will not—violate His own purposes by interfering with these laws in order to perform a miracle. In the final analysis, we are under obligation to seek His assistance by listening to the instructions found in His written Word. Only words from God, then and now, will equip us and prepare us for eternity. As Peter said to Jesus, “Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the **words** of eternal life” (John 6:68, emp. added). Jesus said to the Father, “Sanctify them in the truth: thy **word** is truth” (John 17:17, emp. added). When Satan attempted to prod Jesus into performing a miracle, Jesus said to him, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every **word** that proceedeth out of the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4, emp. added).

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Does God Want Christians To Perform Miracles Today?

One of Satan's most insidious purposes, through the ages, has been to enter a wedge between God's people and God's infallible, inerrant Word. It all began in the Garden of Eden when "the father of lies" asked Eve, "Yea, hath God said ...?" and it continues today without abatement. Two distinct but related levels of this Satanic strategy can be detected in our day:

(1) Rationalistic doubts and denials of the supernatural acts of God as recorded in Scripture. This is being most keenly felt in evangelical circles today through various compromises with the theory of organic evolution, which attempts to reduce the great creative miracles of God to mere providential processes.

(2) The other strategy of the enemy is to encourage Christians to imagine present-day miracles where there are none, through the claims of self-appointed miracle workers.

The goal of the first strategy is to take away the Bible from us piece by piece, until we wonder what pieces of infallible Scripture are still left to us.

The goal of the second strategy is to take us away from the Bible by centering our attention on new claims of divine revelation by modern prophets, or on new and supernatural experiences and powers so that we have little time or interest in searching the Scriptures for God's truth and for God's revealed ways of perpetuating and promoting it.

I. The Pressure Is On

In every generation men have gravitated to religions that offer signs and wonders as their basic appeal. This has been a principal source of power for Roman Catholicism, which claims a continuing revelation accompanied by continuing signs. And what modern, fast-growing cult is devoid of prophets and miracle-workers? Old-line Pentecostalism, and now the "Neo-Pentecostal" movement, offer the miracle of tongues, the interpretation of tongues, and even faith healers that attract millions. In tune with the times, Protestant liberalism has abandoned its old rationalistic formulas in favor of a more vibrant existentialism called "neo-orthodoxy," which offers a direct "word" from God to sincere individual seekers the world over, whether they have actually heard of the historical Christ or not.

What may be considered a natural desire by men to see some token of God has surely been accelerated by the suffocating atmosphere of twentieth-century uniformitarianism. If Satan cannot take away the true God by the pressure of theoretical or practical atheism in the academic world, he will attempt to do so by pushing men to the invention of false gods that cannot really save or satisfy. That is surely the crisis of the present hour.

The prophet Isaiah felt such pressures in Judah 700 years before Christ. On the one hand, the deep skepticism of that age was represented by King Ahaz himself, who completely rejected God's offer of a supernatural sign (Isa. 7:12). On the other hand, superstitious men (possibly including King Ahaz) were encouraging one another: "Seek unto them that have familiar spirits, and unto wizards that peep, and that mutter ..." (Isa. 8:19). The true answer to such pressures was not that God *never* performs miracles, but that He does so on *His* terms only, and in accordance with *His* revealed program of history and redemption.

“To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them” (Isa. 8:20). Thus, Isaiah himself cried out to God for global and spectacular signs of His power as in the days of Moses at Mount Sinai (Isa. 64:1–3). And an even greater prophet, John the Baptist, sent two of his friends to Jesus to ask why the full glory of the Kingdom Age was not yet being manifested (Matt. 11:2–6). Our Lord was continually teaching His disciples to pray for stupendous miracles when He taught them to pray: “Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, in earth as it is in heaven.” Their minds fascinated by this prospect, the disciples came to Jesus and pointedly asked Him, after His resurrection, “Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?” His answer was not that there would never be such a literal kingdom and that God would never reveal His great power and glory to men. His answer to them was, in effect, “Not yet” (Acts 1:7).

II. God’s Plan And Purpose For Miracles

People often ask why it is, if God is still alive and powerful, He does not perform through men of faith today the same kinds of signs and wonders He performed when Christ and the apostles were here. The answer is that God has a plan in His dealings with men, and that plan does not happen to include a constant repetition of the same kinds of miracles in every time and place. If this were His plan, then miracles would lose their *unique sign value* because they would be taken for granted. God has wisely protected the significance of miracles in history by the rarity of their occurrence, even in Bible times. Enoch’s translation was the only miracle in over 1,600 years between Adam and the Flood. For centuries Israel suffered in Egypt with no special voice from heaven. Only rarely did a miracle occur during the centuries from Joshua to David. And God protected the absolute uniqueness of His Son’s miraculous ministry by withholding all miracles for centuries beforehand—even from John the Baptist, the forerunner himself (John 11:41).

Why did Christ perform miracles during His public ministry? Was it to prove that God existed? Was it primarily to help people who were sick, crippled, or in special physical need? No, the purpose was to identify Himself as Israel’s true Messiah and to confirm the new revelation He was bringing to the nation (John 20:30–31; Acts 2:22). Thus, the healing of the paralytic man was not for the primary purpose of helping him, or to prove that God exists, but “that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins” (Matt. 9:6; cf. Deut. 18:22). When John the Baptist momentarily questioned His messianic identity, Jesus pointed to the people He had just healed as a fulfillment of the messianic promise of Isaiah 35:5–6 (cf. Matt. 11:4). Israel was thus historically conditioned to expect signs as the proper credentials of their Messiah and His apostles (John 4:48, 1 Cor. 1:22, 2 Cor. 12:12, Rom. 15:19, Heb. 2:3–4). The great tragedy, of course, was that Israel willfully rejected the signs God did give them (Matt. 12:38–42, 1 Cor. 14:21–22).

If supernatural signs were thus intended to serve as confirmations of God’s special messengers and their message, it seems obvious that such signs would no longer be needed after these messengers had brought their message. In fact, a sign without a message is worse than useless, as Paul and Barnabas discovered to their horror at Lystra (Acts 14:8–18). Thus, the superstructure of the true Church is built upon a *foundation* which consists exclusively of Christ and His apostles (Eph 2:20, 1 Cor. 3:10–11, Rev. 21:14).

Since the foundation of a building only needs to be laid *once*, we may be sure that God has not given any new revelation to His people since the apostles died. The fact that only His apostles belonged in the foundation is seen clearly in our Lord's high priestly prayer, when He prayed for those who would believe on Him "through their word," namely, the word of the apostles to whom "all the truth" would be given by the Holy Spirit (John 17:20; 16:13). To invent a message as from God when God has not spoken is dangerous indeed, for God is infinitely jealous of the boundary lines of His revelation to men (cf. Deut. 4:2, 12:32, 18:20; Prov. 30:5–6; Jer. 23:30–32; Gal. 1:8; Rev. 22:18–19). New Testament history indicates that the various sign gifts were no longer in use after the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. For someone now, in this superstructure phase of Church history, to claim a new revelation from God would be a *colossal step backward and downward to the foundation phase*. Instantly, *all of our Bibles would be incomplete!* None of us could teach or preach authoritatively and effectively again, until, like Apollos, we could find someone to expound to us "the way of God more perfectly" (Acts 18:26).

III. Christ's Miracles Were Unique

If God is indeed giving to certain men the power to perform healing miracles today, why are there so *few* of them, and why are their powers so *limited*, and why are the results so *doubtful*? By contrast, the miracles of Christ and His apostles were fantastically abundant, utterly spectacular, and totally undeniable. Let us consider each of these in more detail. First, our Lord's miracles were *abundant*. The Gospel narratives make it quite clear that Christ healed vast numbers of people in many parts of the Holy Land and over a period of several years (cf. Matt. 14:14, Luke 6:19). With regard to the apostles, see Acts 5:12–16, 19:11–12. But church history since the days of the apostles, even in times of great revival and reformation, has not been characterized by physical miracles including healings (see Appendix). Second, our Lord's healing works were *spectacular* in nature. **Consider the healing of the man born blind (John 9:32); the replacement and healing of a man's amputated ear (Luke 22:50); and the immediate and complete resuscitation to mortal life of a man who was not only dead but who had been decomposing in a tomb for more than half a week (John 11).** By contrast, modern so-called faith healers concentrate on those types of physical ailments that are functional rather than organic, and which can more easily be explained as psychotherapeutic rather than genuinely supernatural.

In the third place, our Lord's miracles were *undeniable*. Note, for example, the testimonies of such unregenerate men as Nicodemus (John 3:2) and the chief priests (John 11:47, Acts 4:16). In stark contrast to the present situation, *no one* who saw the Lord Jesus Christ at work ever questioned the completely supernatural character of His healing miracles. The debate was centered entirely on the issue of whether God or Satan was the source of His power (Matt. 12:24). **The question we must ask, in the light of this fact, is not whether God still has the *power* to perform those kinds of miracles today, but whether it is His *plan*.** For we may be perfectly sure that if it *were* His plan to do now exactly what He did through certain men nineteen centuries ago, there would be *no* modern day deniers of the reality of miracles, even as there were none in Jesus' day!

IV. Is God Healing Sick People Today?

It is my firm conviction that God is healing some sick Christians today (and I have seen this happen twice in my own family), but in a very different way than He did when Christ was here, and for a very different purpose. It is true that God occasionally raises up some desperately sick Christians to a continued life of worship and service; but He never does so through a faith healer, and He never does so in such a spectacular way that godless men are absolutely *forced* to admit that a genuine miracle occurred.

God's basic provision and pattern for the healing of Christians is outlined in James 5:13–16. Note carefully, in the first place, that the sick Christian asks for "the elders of the church" to come *to him*. He does not request to be carried to a miracle healer! Second, God does not promise immediate and spectacular healing, nor does He exclude recuperation processes or the help of doctors and medicines. It is a "family affair," and is not for "show." In other words, it is not intended to serve as a sign to Israel or the unbelieving Gentile world that God is real. Its purpose is to encourage Christians to keep on trusting and serving the gracious Lord who renews their strength according to His will and purpose. In the third place, the healing is not automatically guaranteed each time! Otherwise, no Christians of the Early Church would ever have died! We must therefore assume that "the prayer of faith" which was essential to the healing of sick Christians (James 5:15) was not always granted by the sovereign Lord, even as other gifts were provided only according to the will of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:11).

V. Paul Himself Lived To See The Passing Of Miracles

If faith healers are a vital part of God's program for the Church today, why did the Apostle Paul experience the end of such powers during his own lifetime? While at Ephesus, he healed many people by miraculous means (Acts 19:11–12); but God chose not to answer his prayers for his own bodily healing (2 Cor. 12:7–10). The reason for this is exceedingly important: "My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness." What, then, shall we think of a modern faith healer who states or implies that certain saints of God must continue to be cripples because they have *insufficient faith* or because they have not come to *the right man*? Is this the reason why great Christians such as John Calvin, David Brainerd, Frances Havergal, Robert Murray McCheyne, Charles Haddon Spurgeon, and Fanny Crosby, among others, suffered many years of ill health or died young? If God's power is made perfect in weakness, is robust physical health necessarily a measure of one's spiritual well-being?

Paul's last recorded miracles were performed on the island of Malta, one of which was a remarkable fulfillment of our Lord's promise to the apostles that they would not be hurt by deadly serpents (Acts 28:1–10; Mark 16:18). But after Paul arrived in Rome, his miracle-working powers were evidently withdrawn by the Lord. In a letter to the Philippian Church, he explained how Epaphroditus, their messenger to him, had almost died from a sickness, and the clear implication is that Paul was unable to help him (Phil. 2:25–30). After a time, Paul was released from prison, visited the Aegean area again, and was brought back to Rome for execution. In his final letters to Timothy he explained that he had left Trophimus at Miletus *sick* (2 Tim. 4:20). In fact, he knew of no faith healer who could help Timothy either, so he recommended to him:

“Drink no longer water [which was often dangerously polluted], but use a little wine for thy stomach’s sake and thine often infirmities” (1 Tim. 5:23).

Thus, step by step, God was removing the scaffolding of miracles from the Early Church *as the New Testament Scriptures were being completed and the apostles and prophets were dying off*. The Holy Spirit was now focusing the eyes of Christians exclusively upon the written Word, apart from which there is no salvation or spiritual maturity (2 Tim. 3:15–17). God’s plan for this age, said Paul, is for men to walk by faith rather than by sight (2 Cor. 5:7), just as our Lord reminded Thomas, the sign seeker, “blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed” (John 20:29).

VI. Christ Clearly Implied That Physical Miracles Would Be Supplanted By Even Greater Works During the Church Age

The very night of His betrayal, the Lord Jesus told His disciples: “He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father” (John 14:12). What did He mean by these words? The works that Jesus performed during His public ministry were fantastically great. Diseases were banished, demons were cast out, dead men arose, wine, bread, and fishes were created, and mighty storms were instantly calmed. But it must be recognized that each of these miracles was *intentionally superficial and temporary in quality!* In other words, no one was permanently helped by any of them, nor were men’s deepest needs met by such works of power! Creating food for one occasion did not automatically supply the need for later occasions. And with regard to bodily ailments, every diseased, crippled, leprous person Jesus ever healed finally died anyway—every one of them! And poor Lazarus! It is true that Jesus raised him from the dead, instantly and completely, with no convalescence needed. But later on he died again! Would you like to die twice? When Christ raises your dead body some day, would you want it to be raised to mortal life again? This was certainly no favor to Lazarus, nor was it intended to be! It was rather a mere temporary and limited sign of Christ’s power to do the greater work of resurrection to glory in the Day of the Lord (John 5:28–29).

In this light, our Lord’s words take on new meaning: “greater works than these shall ye do because I go unto the Father.” Can there be any greater works than the miracles of Jesus? Yes, there can be and there are. When our Lord returned to heaven, the Spirit of God came ten days later and baptized the disciples into the Body of Christ. Peter then arose, preached a sermon to a vast multitude of Jews, and three thousand men experienced the *spiritual miracle* of regeneration in one day! This was the “greater work” because it met *man’s basic need*, and met it *permanently*. Let it be remembered that our Lord’s purpose in coming to earth was not to preach the Christian Gospel but to make such preaching possible (1 Cor. 15:1–4). If He had not died as our substitute for sin, there could be no Gospel (John 12:20–24). But since His death, resurrection, and ascension, many pastors, evangelists, and missionaries *have won more men to saving faith than the Son of God did*, and physical miracles have not been the cause of their success.

For a few years, the apostles and prophets did both the lesser works (sign miracles) and the “greater works” (winning men to saving faith); but as the apostolic age reached its close the sign miracles phased out and *the “greater works” continue as God’s basic program for the Church age*,

until Jesus comes again. Then, at last, our need for complete and permanent physical transformation will be met, for “the Lord Jesus Christ ... shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself” (Phil. 3:21). And there will be no debate about the genuineness of that miracle, “For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God” (Rom. 8:19). God *does* care about our physical needs and sufferings; but He has a special plan and program for dealing with these needs; and continual, guaranteed healings through special men and gifts do not happen to be in that program for the Church in its superstructure stage of maturity.

No, *the Church doesn't need new revelation* from heaven today! We already have a completed Bible and the Holy Spirit of God to interpret and apply it! *The Church doesn't need more apostles* to guide her through the troubled waters of this Satan-dominated world. An apostle might fail us, as Peter did at Antioch. That is why the Holy Spirit wrote, through Peter himself, that “We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place” (2 Peter 1:19). *The Church doesn't need special powers*, like those which Christ promised to the apostles in Mark 16:17–18, namely, (1) to cast out demons, (2) to speak with new tongues, (3) to pick up serpents, (4) to drink deadly poisons, and (5) to heal the sick. *The Church doesn't need any holy places, healing centers, faith healers, or signs and wonders* to appeal to the five senses. WHAT THE CHURCH NEEDS IS A NEW CONFRONTATION WITH THE WHOLE COUNSEL OF GOD, PROCLAIMED IN THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT WITH AUTHORITY AND LOVE, BY MEN WHO KNOW THEIR GOD AND WHO HONOR HIS ONLY WRITTEN REVELATION. Then, and then only, may we expect our deepest needs to be supplied, and God's purpose for His Church to be accomplished in our day.

APPENDIX: THE TESTIMONY OF EARLY CHURCH FATHERS CONCERNING THE CESSATION OF MIRACLES AFTER THE APOSTOLIC PERIOD

(Quoting B. B. Warfield, *Miracles: Yesterday and Today*. Grand Rapids; Eerdmans, reprinted 1965)

With regard to Justin Martyr and Irenaeus of the *second* century, A.D., Dr. Warfield stated: “The writings of the so-called Apostolic Fathers contain no clear and certain allusion to miracle-working or to the exercise of the charismatic gifts, contemporaneous with themselves” (p. 10). And after discussing the writings of *third* century A.D. writers such as Tertullian, Minucius Felix, Origen, and Cyprian, he concluded: “And so we pass on to the fourth century in an ever-increasing stream, but without a single writer having claimed himself to have wrought a miracle of any kind or having ascribed miracle-working to any known name in the church, and without a single instance having been recorded in detail” (p. 12).

Beginning in the *fourth* century, however, Christian leaders apparently became so desperate for miracles to match the “miracles” they heard about from heretical and heathen sources, that they began to see “ecclesiastical miracles” everywhere. This trend increased into the Middle Ages, when nearly every “saint” in the Roman Catholic Church had to be supplied with a full display of miraculous powers! At the same time (and this point is exceedingly important for our discussion), they as much admitted that these miracles were on a much lower level than the great miracles of Christ and the apostles!

For example, *Augustine* (died A.D. 430), who in later life felt obliged to testify of many miraculous works going on in his day (though perplexed that no one was taking notice of them!— p. 45), stated in earlier days that none were occurring! “Why do not these things take place now?”, he asked about A.D. 392. His answer: “Because they would not move unless they were wonderful, and if they were customary they would not be wonderful ... God has dealt wisely with us, therefore, in sending his miracles once for all to convince the world, depending afterward on the authority of the multitudes thus convinced” (p. 41).

Chrysostom (fourth century), the most eloquent preacher of his day, stated: “Argue not because miracles do not happen now, that they did not happen then ... In those times they were profitable, and now they are not ... Of miraculous powers, not even a vestige is left” (pp. 46–47).

Isodore of Pelusium (fourth century) speculated: “Perhaps miracles would take place now, too, if the lives of the teachers rivalled the bearing of the Apostles” (p. 47).

Gregory the Great (sixth century), commenting on Mark 16:17, asked: “Is it so, my brethren, that because ye do not see these signs, ye do not believe? On the contrary, they were necessary in the beginning of the church; for, that faith might grow, it required miracles to cherish it; just as when we plant shrubs, we water them until we see them to thrive in the ground, and as soon as they are well rooted we cease our irrigation” (p. 47).

Isodor of Seville (seventh century), in similar vein: “The reason why the church does not now do the miracles it did under the Apostles is, because miracles were necessary then to convince the world of the truth of Christianity; but now it becomes it, being so convinced, to shine forth in good works ... Whoever seeks to perform miracles now as a believer, seeks after vainglory and human applause” (p. 47).

Bernard of Clairvaux (thirteenth century) asks concerning Mark 16:17, “For who is there that seems to have those signs of the faith, without which no one, according to this Scripture, shall be saved?” and answers by saying that the greatest miracles are those of the regenerated life (p. 48).

In struggling to explain this strange paradox in the thinking of early Christian theologians, namely, the absence and at the same time the presence of miracles, Dr. Warfield concludes: “The miracles of the first three centuries, if accepted at all, must be accepted on the general assertion that such things occurred—a general assertion which itself is wholly lacking until the middle of the second century and which, when it does appear, concerns chiefly prophecy and healings, including especially exorcisms, which we can scarcely be wrong in supposing are precisely the classes of marvels with respect to which excitement most easily blinds the judgment and insufficiently grounded rumors most readily grow up” (p. 12). And speaking of theologians of later centuries, he concludes: “No doubt we must recognize that these Fathers realized that the ecclesiastical miracles were of a lower order than those of Scripture. It looks very much as if, when they were not inflamed by enthusiasm, *they did not really think them to be miracles at all*” (p. 48).

Thus, church history confirms the clear inferences of Scripture that sign miracles of all types ceased with the death of the apostles.⁴

⁴ Whitcomb, J. C. (1973). [*Does God Want Christians to Perform Miracles Today?*](#) (pp. 3–15). Winona Lake, IN; Indianapolis, IN: Whitcomb Ministries, Inc.

In saying these things, let me remind you that during the miraculous period of church history(33 A.D.-100 A.D.), many people did receive the recovery of their health by miraculous healing(James 5:14,15). Jesus, the apostles, and some Christians (with charismatic gifts) healed the sick by supernatural power. However, this was a temporary phenomenon to help prove the authenticity of the Christian religion and help establish this religion in an unbelieving and persecuting world.

The New Testament reveals that miracles ceased at the close of the first century, at the death of the apostles who conferred miraculous gifts by the laying on of their hands. (Acts 8:18; I Corinthians 13:8).

The New Testament reveals that miracles ceased at the close of the first century, and church history recognizes that they were not practiced in the early second century. All of the miraculous gifts that once existed in every congregation of the Churches of Christ passed away and ceased forever when the New Testament was completed because their purpose had been fulfilled. They are no longer needed. Believe the miracles that are recorded in the Bible, but don't believe the pseudo-miracles you see on television.

Finally, although the day of miracles is over, the day of God's providential activity is still here and available to Christians. Christians should distinguish between God's miraculous working and his providential working. If we do not know the difference, we often make the mistake of calling something a miracle. when, in fact, it was God's providence. God's healing activity has been incorporated into the natural laws. God does not have to work miracles to help us. God's providence is his watch-care over the universe and his superintendence of the natural laws. The Bible says, "In God we live, move and have our being." God can answer our prayers without working miracles.

God made the natural laws, and he can use them in any way he pleases. By the goodness of God, many people often come near to death but recover without asking for God's help. The natural laws, doctors, and medicine often save lives. If God does intervene and help us in answer to prayer, we can personally believe that he intervened, but we cannot prove it. Any providential help we receive from God is done behind the scenes. When God does something providentially in answer to prayer, there is no visible evidence to allow one to know that God worked supernaturally in our behalf. We can only believe that God answered our prayer, or aided the surgeon, but we cannot know for sure or prove that God intervened. That is the difference between miracles and providence. God has always been and is still providentially active, whenever he sees fit.

It is God's will that we pray for others who are sick and pray when we are sick, but it is also God's will that we use the very best medical care within our means to bring about the cure of the sick. Most of God's healing today is through his natural laws. Paul instructed Timothy to use a little wine [medicinally] for his stomach's sake and frequent infirmities (I Timothy 5:23). I think that statement teaches much on the subject of praying for the sick. The truth is quite evident that God expects Christians to use the very best medical knowledge and care within their means to get well, as well as offering special prayers for the sick's recovery. Before we ask God to heal us, let us visit the doctor first, and do all we can to bring about our recovery by the known laws of healing that God has provided. And let us always remember, "It is appointed to man once to die," and when that time comes no power in heaven or earth will save us from the common end of man.

- Lonnie Branam

Those “Testimonies” Regarding Miracles

By **Wayne Jackson**

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They flow from my computer and across my desk. I am speaking of those “testimonies”; testimonies that detail the most incredible “supernatural experiences” imaginable. These experiences supposedly have happened to the correspondents personally or, more often than not, to someone they know, or about whom they have heard.

One gentleman tells of the time when his father accidentally cut off a finger. According to the “testimony,” he simply stuck it back on, wrapped it up, and it was miraculously “healed” in only a few weeks. That was hardly the manner of healing in the case of Malchus’ ear (Luke 22:51).

Another story concerns a family member who ran out of automobile fuel. He simply prayed, poured water into the gas tank, and drove on! One cannot but wonder how many miles per gallon “miracle-water” produces.

This morning another kindly soul tells me of an experience wherein he became “spiritually intoxicated,” and saw clouds floating around inside a church auditorium. He interpreted this as a reception of “Holy Spirit baptism.”

Of course one can pick up a supermarket tabloid and read almost any week of some person who was captured by aliens and spent a weekend on Mars. Then there are those who die and travel down that long, dark corridor toward the bright light, or they float above the surgical table, only to return to their normal environments and “thrill” us with the fascinating details of their out-of-body adventure. The catalog of “experiences,” religious or otherwise, virtually is endless.

Just how does one evaluate these phenomena?

We are reticent to wound the feelings of sincere people; at times, however, the teacher of truth must run that risk and be blunt. The honest Bible student should consider several possibilities, based upon scriptural data.

Dishonesty

Some “experiential” claims are born of absolute dishonesty. Whatever the ultimate motive may be — whether publicity, the solicitation of a following, the acquisition of money, etc. — some people are duplicitous. Consider the following Bible case.

A courageous man of God went to the city of Bethel and rebuked a corrupt king, Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, who led Israel into sin with his idolatry (see 1 Kings 13:1ff; cf. 14:16). After the completion of his sacred mission, and en route toward home, an old prophet approached the man of God. The elderly gentleman told of an “experience” with an angel that involved an invitation to the man of God to accompany him back to his house in Bethel for refreshment.

The fact is, however, the alleged angel’s message was directly contrary to a revelation from the Lord, and scripture explicitly declares that the older gentleman “lied” to the man of God (v. 18). As a result of believing that experience-oriented lie, the man of God lost his life. Some religious leaders are liars — and that is one of the more complimentary things that may be said of them.

Delusional Experiences

Eliphaz, one of Job’s erstwhile friends, in attempting to buttress his argument that the patriarch’s suffering was the result of egregious, personal sin, told of a horrifying “experience,” mystical in nature (see Job 4). In the dead of night, Eliphaz claims to have heard a “whisper,” and saw a “spirit” pass before his face. Such struck terror in his heart; he exclaimed that his whole frame shook and the hair of his body stood at attention! The “spirit” allegedly spoke, providing a message, the essence of which cast Job into a shadow of disrepute.

The motive behind Eliphaz’s story is not revealed in the sacred record. Was he, like the old prophet mentioned above, merely lying? One need not assume that necessarily.

Was he delusional? Was he so anxious to conjure up evidence supporting his theological position that he forced himself to believe the event actually happened? This, without doubt, is a common occurrence.

There are folks — honest, genuinely devout people — who are members of sects that are super-emotionally charged. Their services commonly are a “baptism” in adrenalin. They are urged by spellbinding leaders to “expect a miracle.” They feel that somehow they are not “spiritual” if something supernatural does not happen in their lives. Hence, they “seek,” and they “find” — though not in the **biblical** sense!

The important point to remember is this: No “experience” can be a substitute for the truths that are revealed through the biblical documents. Experience is to be measured by, and controlled by, the plain testimony of scripture. Scripture must not be forced into the mold of subjective sensations.

There are two ideological extremes that must be avoided. One is “empiricism,” a philosophical concept that suggests there is no reality apart from one’s personal experience. For example, the skeptic would contend that since no miracles are obvious today, the possibility of a miracle is nonexistent. That is not a logical conclusion.

On the other hand, the knowledgeable Christian does not argue for the validity of those miracles recorded in the Bible on the basis of what **we** experience today; nor does he contend against the possibility of modern miracles simply because he has not experienced them personally.

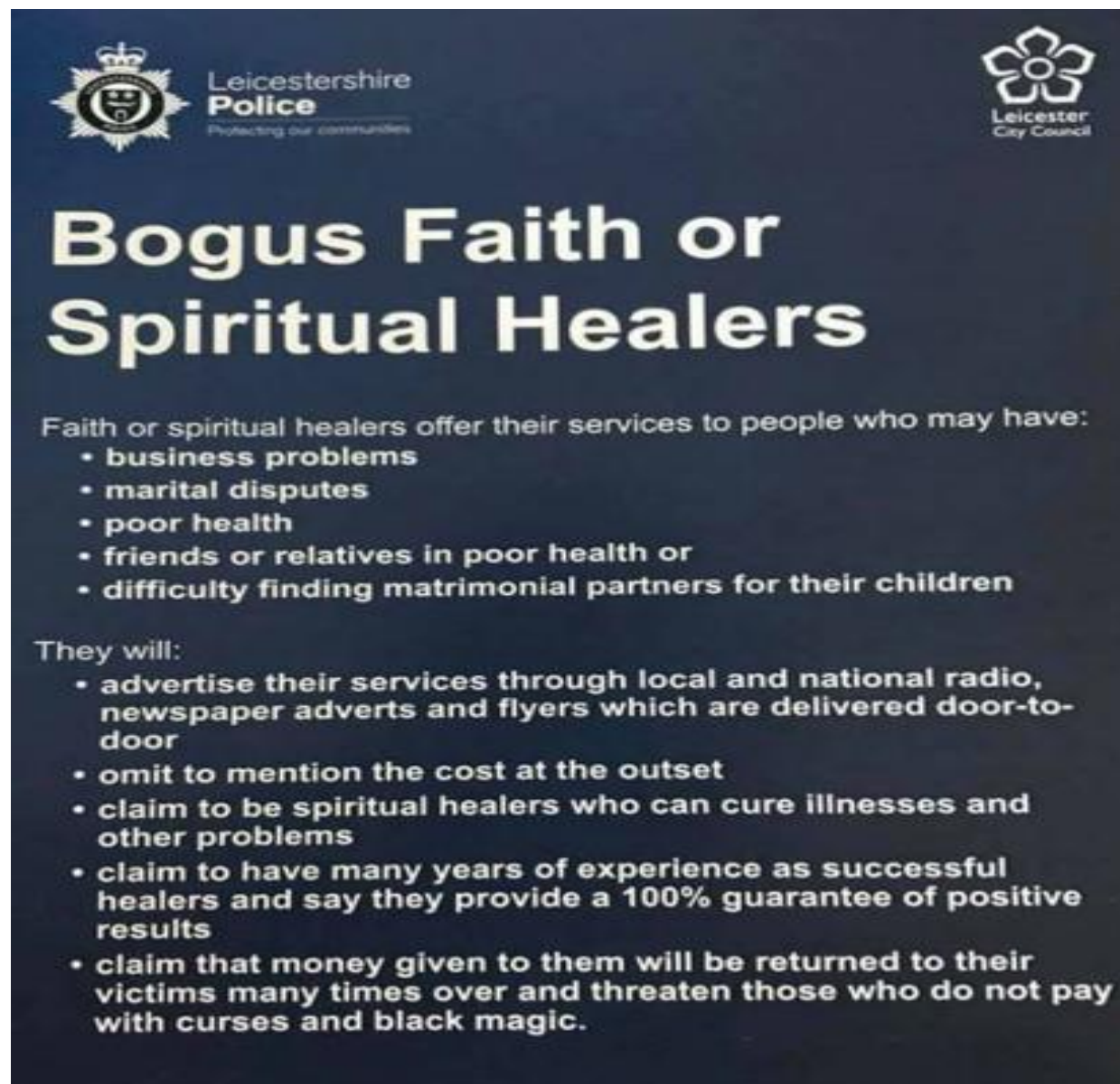
Rather, the genuineness of miracles, such as those performed by Christ and his apostles, are established on the ground of the credibility of the ancient witnesses (who were willing to forfeit their lives for what they saw and heard), along with the integrity of the documents that record those testimonies. On this web site there are various articles that argue this case.


This point is crucial; one may not set aside the plain Bible teaching regarding the cessation of miracles, just because he believes he knows of a modern “miraculous” experience. Using strong hyperbolic language, Paul contended that the message of the gospel may not be altered — if even an angel should declare it otherwise (Galatians 1:8).


One may not take a modern “experience,” therefore, and argue for its supernatural nature if, in fact, biblical argumentation clearly establishes the reality that supernatural phenomena served a specific and limited role in the divine scheme of redemption, and that miraculous experiences, therefore, are no longer operative today.

In reality, this is precisely the case. For further consideration, we invite our readers to carefully study the article on [What Does the Bible Say About Miracles?](#).

Do not confuse experiential “mirages,” with genuine “miracles.”



 **Leicestershire Police**
Protecting our communities

 **Leicester City Council**

Bogus Faith or Spiritual Healers

Faith or spiritual healers offer their services to people who may have:

- **business problems**
- **marital disputes**
- **poor health**
- **friends or relatives in poor health or**
- **difficulty finding matrimonial partners for their children**

They will:

- **advertise their services through local and national radio, newspaper adverts and flyers which are delivered door-to-door**
- **omit to mention the cost at the outset**
- **claim to be spiritual healers who can cure illnesses and other problems**
- **claim to have many years of experience as successful healers and say they provide a 100% guarantee of positive results**
- **claim that money given to them will be returned to their victims many times over and threaten those who do not pay with curses and black magic.**

Feigned Miracles and Gullible People

By **Wayne Jackson**



There **are** hucksters in religion, and multitudes fall for them. Let me give you a couple of recent examples.

“**Raised from the Dead!**”

As I took the envelope from my mailbox, I saw the large letters across the top: **Raised From The Dead!** Instinctively, I knew two things:

1. This was a money-raising scam.
2. There would be no **proof** for any alleged “resurrection.”

The letter—authored by Paul Eshleman, director of the JESUS Film Project—was sent under the auspices of Campus Crusade for Christ International out of San Clemente, California.

In the left margin of the first page were photos of Billy Graham, Bill Bright, and well-known artist, Joni Eareckson Tada (a quadriplegic who paints beautiful pictures with a mouth-held brush).

With these dignitaries endorsing the letter, I was even more anxious to examine the evidence. Here is the story.

A sixteen-year-old girl in a remote region of India was about to be buried; suddenly, she sat up. According to the report, the young lady testified that she had been dead, but the Lord “sent her back” to tell her neighbors about “the real God.”

When I read this “testimony,” the first thing that came to my mind was the biblical narrative regarding the rich man who died, and then remembered that his brothers back on earth were in danger of entering eternity lost. He therefore sought permission to leave the Hadean realm, returning to his kinsmen on earth with a message of warning.

The text in Luke 16 unequivocally affirms that he was denied the privilege. Abraham informed him if one **refuses to be convinced by the Scriptures**, he would not be led to believe **even if a messenger returned from the dead** (Luke 16:27ff).

But according to this promotional letter, the resurrected girl in India lived for seven days more (before she died again). During this time she told her story repeatedly; supposedly, hundreds “became Christians” as a result.

I guess “father Abraham” really didn’t know what he was talking about after all!

Amazingly, the letter goes on to make the following admission:

A miracle? **I can’t prove it to you.** There’s no death certificate. No doctor’s report. I can tell you that people in rural India do know death when they see it (emphasis added).

So now we get an appendix to the story—one, incidentally, which is ruptured! **Don’t ask for evidence. There is none.** There is no proof that the girl actually was dead. In fact, there is no documentation of any sort that this incident happened at all.

Eventually, Mr. Eshleman came to the main point. He wanted me to send \$50 to help with the JESUS Film program. One hundred dollars would be even better.

There's Gold in Them Thar Teeth

Then there's the matter of miraculous gold teeth.

Several large Pentecostal groups have claimed that God visited their services and blessed certain of their members with gold teeth.

More than three hundred of these accounts have been circulating among the Charismatics (those who claim miraculous gifts).

For example, Pastors Joel and Linda Budd of Tulsa, Oklahoma are affiliated with the Open Bible Fellowship in that city. According to a report in the June (1999) issue of *Charisma* magazine, Linda Budd's eighty-year-old mother was twice visited recently by the Lord. She received five gold crowns on one occasion, and two others at a different time—actually while she slept one night.

Here is a case that would be so easy to check. Surely there are dental records for this elderly matron. These could be produced to demonstrate that:

1. prior to a certain date, she had no gold crowns
2. following that date, there were several gold teeth—with absolutely no crown-work having been done by any dentist

Do you suppose the Budds would supply the name of “mom's” dentist? Do you really think they would encourage an investigation of this matter? After all, the Bible does say:

“Beloved, do not believe every spirit [i.e., teacher], but **test** the spirits, whether they are from God: because many false prophets have gone out into the world” (1 John 4:1, NASB).

This is not a joking matter. It's serious business to make claims asserting direct intervention by God.

Yes, there's “one born every minute.” And they're not all down at the carnival, buying a ticket to see the “two-headed woman who walks, and talks, and has skin like a reptile!”

Miraculous Versus Divine Healing

I believe in modern divine healing, but I do not believe in modern miraculous healing. Without a doubt, the opening sentence to this paragraph and to this article will cause some to question either the sanity or the integrity of the writer thereof. Perhaps the more charitable readers will assume that the writer was distracted when he wrote that sentence, or they may decide his computer made a mistake. However, lest some conclude that I really did not intend to say what I just said, I will say it again — I believe in modern divine healing, but I do not believe in modern miraculous healing.

“But,” you ask, “how could a person believe in the one without believing in the other?” Others may ask, “Isn’t all divine healing miraculous in nature?” In my judgment, the more thoughtful might respond by asking, “What is the difference between divine healing and miraculous healing?” In reply, we shall first make some comments regarding:

Miraculous Healing

A miracle cannot be explained by the ordinary workings of natural law. In order for a miracle to occur there has to be an alteration, suspension, or superseding of natural law. For example, by simply appealing to natural law and the processes thereof there is no way to explain how Jesus walked on water (Matt. 14:25), the raising of Lazarus from the dead (John 11:43, 44), the sun standing still for a whole day (Josh. 10:12, 13), raging fire having “no power” over the bodies of three Jewish captives (Dan. 3:27, 28), the waters of a sea dividing and forming a “wall” on the right hand and the left with the dry land in the middle (Exod. 14:21, 22), feeding 5,000 men on five barley loaves and two small fish (John 6: 9-11), etc.

Miracles of healing which occurred during some of the times alluded to in the Scriptures, are just as impossible to explain simply by appealing to the processes of natural law. For example, how do you take natural law and explain Naaman's leprosy being completely cured by his dipping seven times in the Jordan River (2 Kings 5:14)? In like manner, please explain how a severed ear, by a simple touch (involving no stitches), could be "healed" (Luke 22:50, 51). By the same token, please explain the healing of a "withered" hand (Matt. 12:10-13), fever going away by the mere touch of a hand (Matt. 8:15), and how Jesus could heal the paralyzed without so much as entering the house (Matt. 8:5-13), or village wherein lay the afflicted (John 4:46-54). Explain how Peter, with neither bandage nor medication, could heal an "over forty" year old man of lameness, and who had been thus afflicted "from his mother's womb" (Acts 3:1-8; 4:22). And while you are at it, please appeal to natural law and explain how washing in a pool (after having one's eyes anointed with clay mixed with saliva) can result in a grown man (blind from birth!) being able to see (John 9:1-11). But not only were miracles of healing unexplainable by the usual processes of natural law, they were also instantaneous and complete. When Jesus met blind Bartimaeus, and said to him "your faith has made you well," he "immediately . . . received his sight" (Mark 10:46-54). When Peter said to the lame man "in the name of Jesus Christ . . . rise up and walk," and then took "him by the right hand and lifted him up," his feet and ankle bones "immediately . . . received strength" (Acts 3:6, 7; cf. Mark 1:42; Matt. 8:13; 20:34; John 5:8, 9, etc.).

Also, it should be pointed out that Bible miracles were recognized as being just that — miracles! The Egyptians of Moses' day did not deny the genuineness of the ten plagues which God brought upon them. Even the enemies of Jesus Christ asked, "What shall we do? For this man works many signs" (John 11:47).

The enemies of Jesus Christ rejected his authority, accused him of blasphemy, and resisted much of his teaching, but not once do we read of anyone denying the fact of his miracles! Yes, on occasion they accused him of performing his mighty works through “Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons” (Matt. 12:22-24), but the fact remains that they admitted the miraculous or supernatural nature of his works.

Yes, miracles were performed by Jesus and certain other selected servants. And, yes, there were miracles of healing (Acts 23:8), and even the raising of the dead in response to prayer (Acts 9:40, 41). We do not deny a single Bible miracle. We believe they all occurred. Nor do we question the power of God. In fact, God is “Almighty” (Gen. 17:1). I believe God has the power to hatch grown elephants from eggs laid by sparrows, but I deny that he produces elephants in such a manner! God, who is all powerful, is also a God “who cannot lie” (Tit. 1:2). Hence, because of the integrity of his very nature “He cannot deny Himself” (2 Tim. 2:13). He will not circumvent his own law (Isa. 55:11).

The Purpose and Duration of Miracles

Regarding purpose, we point out that whether they were Old Testament or New Testament miracles, they were designed to produce faith (Exod. 4:1-8; John 20:30, 31). Through the miracles the Messiah performed Nicodemus concluded that he was “a teacher come from God” (John 3:2).

As to duration, it should be observed that miracles (of healing, prophecy, tongues, etc.) belonged to that time period while the Bible was yet incomplete. They were designed to authenticate the message of inspired men (Mark 16:17-20; Heb. 2:2-4). In other words, the age of miracles coincided with the age of inspired men. Hence, in New Testament times miracles were performed by Jesus, by his apostles, and by the 70 whom the Lord personally sent out (John 20:30, 31; Matt. 10:1; Luke 10: 17-19).

After the church was established miracles were performed by the apostles (Acts 5:12-16), and by those upon whom the apostles laid hands (Acts 6:5-8; Acts 8:5, 6; Acts 19:6). Moreover, Jesus promised the apostles that the Holy Spirit would reveal “all truth” to them (John 16:13), and the apostle Paul taught the cessation of the miraculous upon the completion of divine revelation (1 Cor. 13). Though the lack of space forbids our enlarging at this time upon these vital facts, we do affirm that miracles, having accomplished their purpose of confirming the revelation of God, have ceased.

Divine Healing

God created us in his “own image” (Gen. 1:27). We are “fearfully and wonderfully made” (Ps. 139:14). The human body, organizationally speaking, consists of cells, tissues, organs, and systems (groups of organs designed to carry on special bodily functions peculiar to those systems). Reportedly, the adult human body contains an estimated “60,000 billion cells,” with the shape of the cells being “related to their function,” and in the nucleus of each cell are DNA molecules that carry “the genetic information necessary for the replication of each cell.” And each cell “has been engineered to make a specific part of the body”—all of which manifest indisputable evidence of divine design. And, because of divine design, the human body is amazingly adaptable to the multitudinous situations and environments to which it is subjected, and is similarly responsive to the millions of disease-producing organisms to which it’s exposed. To a great degree, the body is a self-healing organism. Scratch the paint on your new car and time and rust will make it get much worse. Scratch a finger and in a few days (because the body functions according to divine design), it will be completely well. In the course of a life time on many occasions we all get sick and then get well — often without seeing a doctor or taking medication. In view of who made us, of how we are made, and the healing we often experience from our infirmities, could we not call this “divine healing”?

Prayer and Providence

A study of the Scriptures reveal that God is a God of providence. He provides in abundance. And our God both hears and answers prayer (1 John 3:22; 5:14). With faith in God's ability "to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think" (Eph. 3:20), we seek his help in all areas of our lives, and, yes, we also beseech him in times of sickness (2 Cor. 12:7, 8; 3 John 2). And the same God who responded to Hezekiah's prayer, adding health to his body and years to his life (2 Kings 20:1-7), is able to do the same for us. The power of God that works through natural law in causing seed to germinate and eventually yield a rich harvest, is equally as able to work through penicillin to destroy infection. If God can work through his people to save the lost (Rom. 1:14-16; Phil. 2:13), he can also work through physicians (Matt. 9:12), "medicine" (Prov. 17:22; Jer. 30:13), and surgery (Mark 9:43-45) to heal the sick. When divinely authorized means are used and divine laws are honored, in keeping with the body's divine design, and healing occurs, can we not call it "divine healing"? And if God, through prayer and natural remedy (2 Kings 20:7) affected a cure in Hezekiah's case, he can do the same today. After all, God is the one who so richly provided in nature those remedies that promote physical healing. And through his providence, the usage of these remedies, and the "effectual, fervent prayer" of the righteous (Jas. 5:16), those afflicted with life-threatening illnesses, over a period of time, are often made well. Miraculous healing? Absolutely Not! Divine Healing? – *Christian Courier Magazine*

<http://www.churchofchristatmemorial.com/sermons/2020/12/27/evidence-for-jesus>



