

# Spiritual Gifts, Part 7

## Miracles–Healings

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In 1 Corinthians 12:28 Paul lists healings and the working of miracles as gifts of the Spirit. We have placed these gifts together because the working of miracles includes healing the sick and because of the supernatural nature of these sign gifts. Miraculous powers (lit. “workings of miracles” in Greek) is listed separately because there are miracles that go beyond healing the sick (e.g., parting the Red Sea; causing Elymas the sorcerer to become blind, etc.). “The word translated ‘miracles’ is the ordinary one for ‘power’....The present context suggests that it covers a broad range of supernatural events that ordinary parlance would call miraculous.”<sup>1</sup>

Among professing Christians today there are two different opinions regarding the miraculous gifts. Pentecostals and Charismatics believe that miraculous gifts such as the gift of healing are normative after the death of the apostles and are still in use today, while the historic Protestant position is that the miraculous signs ceased when the revelatory-foundational period of the early church was completed. Once the Spirit-inspired teachings concerning the person and work of Christ were inscripturated, the sign gifts ceased because they were no longer needed. To determine if the miraculous signs are still normative, we must answer three questions: What is the purpose of the sign gifts? Did these gifts cease after the completion of the New Testament canon? Are the miracles that are supposedly occurring today the same as those that occurred in the days of Christ and the apostles?

The Bible teaches that the working of miracles served a distinct purpose which is to authenticate a divine message or messenger, to prove publicly that the person performing miracles was sent from God. The Scriptures support this assertion in many ways. First, there is the testimony of the apostles. Paul tells the Corinthians that the miracles performed proved his apostolic authority. “Truly the signs of an apostle were accomplished among you with all perseverance, in signs and wonders and mighty deeds” (1 Cor. 12:12). “*The signs of an apostle* were the insignia of the apostleship; those things which by divine appointment were made the evidence of a mission from God. When these were present an obligation rested on all who witnessed them to acknowledge the authority of those who bore the insignia....Miracles are called *signs* in reference to their design, which is to confirm the divine mission of those who perform them.”<sup>2</sup> Regarding the term signs, wonders and miracles Hughes writes,

It is best to take *signs*, *wonders*, and *miracles*, as belonging together rather than as indicating three different forms of manifestation. The three terms are found in combination again in Acts

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<sup>1</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 594-595.

<sup>2</sup> Charles Hodge, *I and II Corinthians*, 667-668.

2:22, where Peter draws his audience's attention to the "mighty works and wonders and signs" with which Jesus was attested by God, and in 2 Corinthians 12:12, where Paul speaks of the "signs and wonders and mighty works" which indicate he was a true apostle. "Signs and wonders" (or "wonders and signs") are mentioned together eleven times (Mt. 24:24; Mk. 13:22; Jn. 4:48; Acts 2:43; 4:30; 5:12; 6:8; 7:36; 14:3; 15:12; and Rom. 15:19), while Acts 8:13 speaks of "signs and great miracles" (cf. Ps. 78:43). Each term, however, has its own particular import and contributes a distinctive shade of meaning, so that the use of the terms in combination should not be dismissed as merely tautological. Thus a *sign*, which is the word consistently used in the Fourth Gospel for the miraculous works of Christ, indicates that the event is not an empty ostentation of power, but is *significant* in that, sign-wise, it points beyond itself to the reality of the mighty hand of God in operation. A *wonder* is an event which because of its superhuman character, excites awe and amazement on the part of the beholder. A *miracle* (or literally *power*) emphasizes the dynamic character of the event, with particular regard to its outcome or effect.<sup>3</sup>

If miraculous signs were common in Paul's day, his assertion that the miracles he performed proved his apostolic authority would have actually demonstrated nothing.

Second, a study of *all* the historical examples of the use of the sign gifts in the book of Acts (which covers almost the whole apostolic period of the early church's history) reveals that the use of the sign gifts was restricted to the extraordinary, temporary, foundation offices of apostle and evangelist (see the discussion of these offices above). In Acts 2:43 we are told that "many wonders and signs were done through the apostles." In Acts chapter 3, Peter and John heal a man who was lame from his mother's womb (vs. 6-9). In the next chapter the Sanhedrin admits "that a notable miracle has been done through them" (v. 16). Acts 5:12 reads, "And through the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were done among the people." Luke records that the people laid the sick out in the streets so that Peter's shadow might fall on some of them (v. 15). All the sick and demon-possessed people brought to the apostles were healed (v. 16). In Acts chapter 6 Luke says that "Stephen [the evangelist], full of faith and power, did great wonders and signs among the people" (v. 8). Another evangelist, Philip, was heeded by the people "hearing and seeing the miracles which he did" (Ac. 8:6; cf. vs. 13). When Peter was in Lydda Jesus used him to heal a man who had been bedridden eight years and was paralyzed (Ac. 9:33-34). Later, at Joppa, Peter was used to raise a Christian woman from the dead (Ac. 9:40). When Paul and Barnabas preached the gospel, the Lord "was bearing witness to the word of His grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by the hands" (Ac. 14:3; Barnabas is called an apostle in v. 14). At the first assembly of the apostolic church, "All the multitude kept silent and listened to Barnabas and Paul declaring how many miracles and wonders God had worked through them among the Gentiles" (Ac. 15:12). When a Christian boy fell out of a third story window during a church meeting and was killed, he was healed through Paul (Ac. 20:9-12). In Acts 19 we read how "Now God worked unusual miracles by the hands of Paul, so that even handkerchiefs or aprons were brought from his body to the sick, and the diseases left them and the evil spirits went out of them" (vs. 11-12).

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<sup>3</sup> Philip Edgecombe, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), p 80-81.

The author of Hebrews testified to the unique miraculous manifestation of the Spirit's power in the ministry of the apostles (and their close cohorts—the evangelists). “How 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 [the apostles] signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will” (Heb. 2:3-4)?

In the foundational period of the Christian church, when the New Testament was still being written and when Christian churches were being established for the *first* time throughout Judea and the Roman Empire, wonders and signs served two distinct yet related purposes. Our purpose (as noted) was to give legitimacy and authority to the apostles and their close associates, the evangelists. These men were telling the people about recent new redemptive events and were imparting unto them the inspired interpretation of those events. Another purpose of the signs was to prove the truth of the gospel message itself.

In the book of Acts almost every instance of miraculous signs was either accompanied by the preaching of the gospel or the preaching of the gospel is implied in the immediate context (e.g., Ac. 2:14-39; 3:11-26; 4:8-12; 5:12-16; 6:8-10; 8:5-7; 9:33-35, 40-42; 14:3; 19:11-20). After healing a lame man publicly (in Solomon's portico) which caused the people to marvel (Ac. 3:12). Peter said: “the faith which comes through Him has given him this perfect soundness in the presences of you all....Repent therefore and be converted” (Ac. 3:16, 19). When Peter and John were taken before the Sanhedrin because of a notable public miracle and the apostles' preaching, Peter declared: “Let it be known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by Him this man stands here before you whole” (Ac. 4:10). In other words the miracle proves the resurrection of Jesus for it is Christ Himself who is doing the signs by the hands of the apostles. Luke records that the people focused their attention (“heeded;” Greek—*proseichon*, literally “continued to the [the mind] to”) on the gospel because of the signs Philip did. “Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ to them. And the multitudes with one accord heeded the things spoken by Philip, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did” (Ac. 8:5-6). After Peter healed a paralyzed man in Lydda, “all who dwelt at Lydda and Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord” (Ac. 9:35). “The true sense...is that the healing of Eneas was the occasion of a general conversion to the new religion in that part of the country. ‘They saw the miracle and turned to God.’”<sup>4</sup> “So many saw the man, recognized the miracle in its true significance, and in faith turned to the Lord, that Luke could write ‘all.’”<sup>5</sup> Similarly, in Joppa, Peter was used by Jesus to raise Tabitha from the dead. “And it became known throughout all Joppa, and many believed on the Lord” (Ac.9:42). Once again the gospel is attested as true by the miracle. “Not Peter but the Lord received the praise, for the people in Joppa put their faith in Jesus.”<sup>6</sup> We see the divine witness to the word at Iconium: “Therefore they [Paul and Barnabas] stayed there a long time, speaking boldly in the Lord, who was bearing witness to the word of His grace,

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<sup>4</sup> J. A. Alexander, *Acts*, 386.

<sup>5</sup> R. C. H. Lenski, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 383.

<sup>6</sup> Simon J. Kistemaker, *Acts*, 363.

granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands” (Ac. 14:3). After documenting the amazing miracles that God worked through Paul and the terrible failure of the unbelieving Jews to work miracles, Luke writes, “So the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed” (Ac. 19:20). The signs and wonders that Christ worked through the apostles and evangelists pointed men and women to the truth of the gospel—the reality of the living, victorious Messiah. As a result multitudes of Jews and Gentiles were transformed by the living and powerful Word of God.

That the sign gifts were used for a distinct purpose (i.e., to authenticate a divine messenger and the message he speaks from God) is strongly supported by the Old Testament and the ministry of Christ. After God told Moses that he was to speak to the people of Israel as a messenger from Himself (Ex. 3:15 ff.), Moses wanted to know what to do if the people do not believe him or obey his instructions. (Moses was probably wondering, “Why should they believe me, I’m a stranger and an old sheep herder?”) Jehovah responds by giving Moses the ability to perform signs in front of the people (Ex. 4:2-9). If the people do not believe the first sign (the rod becoming a serpent, Ex. 4:3-4) then Moses has two additional signs. Apparently God followed His own principle of establishing the truth of something by “two or three witnesses” (Dt. 17:6; 19:5; Mt. 18:6). Moses was to perform miracles so “that they may believe that the Lord God of their fathers...has appeared to you” (Ex. 4:5). Moses was given sign gifts to attest his mission and message.

Another great messenger of God was Elijah the Tishbite. Like Moses, God revealed to the people the authentic nature of Elijah’s ministry and message by giving him the ability to work miracles. During a famine, God sent Elijah to live with a widow in Zarephath (1 Kgs. 17). After the widow’s son died, Elijah prayed to God, and God revived her son. What was the widow’s response? “Now by this [miracle] I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in your mouth is the truth” (v. 24). In other words, “Because you performed miracles, I know that you are a true prophet, a messenger from God; and, I know that the words you speak come directly from God.”

The purpose of performing miracles is abundantly demonstrated in the ministry of our Lord. When Jesus was asked at the Feast of Dedication if He was the Christ, He said, “I told you, and you do not believe. The *works* that I do in My Father’s name, they bear witness of Me” (Jn. 10:25). Nicodemus told Christ, “Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him” (Jn. 3:2). The man born blind chided the Pharisees for not knowing that Jesus was sent from God: “You do not know where He is from; yet He has opened my eyes!...If this Man were not from God, He could do nothing” (Jn. 9:30, 33; cf. Mt. 9:6; 14:33). The ultimate sign that our Lord accomplished was His own resurrection from the dead (see Mt. 12:38-40). When Peter preached the gospel on the day of Pentecost he began by reminding the people of Jerusalem that Jesus had already proved His authenticity as Messiah by the miracles He performed. “Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know” (Ac. 2:22). “The word *attested* describes Jesus

as a person who is sent by God and who speaks on Gods behalf.”<sup>7</sup> The word “attested” (*apodeiknumi*) in this context conveys the idea of proof or verification (cf. Ac. 25:7). “God testified his approbation of his doctrine by the power he gave him to work miracles.”<sup>8</sup>

A study of the whole Bible reveals a discernible pattern regarding God’s use of the sign gifts. Miracles do not appear in Scripture arbitrarily. There are periods where miracles are not occurring at all. Why? As noted, the answer is found in the purpose of the miracles. They serve to authenticate a true messenger of God and the new message from God that he brings. Thus, one should not be surprised to discover that miracles are clustered around major events in Israel’s salvation history. There are three major periods of signs within the Bible.

The first period occurs during the exodus from Egypt and the conquest of Canaan. The signs authenticated Moses and Joshua before the pagan world and God’s people. This was a period of great revelatory activity (e.g., the five books of Moses) and was the foundational period of the nation of Israel. The exodus from Egypt and the conquest of Canaan typify Christ’s perfect redemption of the elect and the conquest of the world through the gospel and the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit.

The second period encompassed the ministries of Elijah and Elisha. Elijah’s ministry marks the beginning of the great prophetic period. Great revelatory activity will occur during this time. There is not only the Spirit-inspired exposition of the law in the prophetic covenant lawsuit preaching, but also there is much new prophetic information given concerning the person, work and kingdom of the coming Messiah. Previously, we have noted that God’s word specifically says that the signs that Moses and Elijah performed authenticated them as messengers or spokesmen sent from God (Ex. 4:2-9; 1 Kgs. 17:24).

The third great period of miracles and revelatory activity is the ministry of Jesus and the apostles. The apostles under divine inspiration explained the person and work of Christ. The Messiah is the finality and focus of all revelation. “God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things” (Heb. 1:1-2). Unlike the Old Testament prophets who through divine inspiration gave information regarding the Messiah who was to come, the apostles and new covenant prophets looked *back* to the Messiah’s perfect and complete redemption. Once the Spirit-inspired interpretation of the personal work of Jesus was completed and the new covenant ordinances for the worship and government of the church were inscripturated, the necessity of further divine revelation and the authenticating sign miracles ceased.

This analysis of the biblical pattern of the appearance of miraculous signs raises an important question. If the miraculous sign gifts are connected in Scripture to new important redemptive historical events and new revelatory activity; if the perfect work of Christ has brought redemptive history to an end; if the divinely inspired interpretation of what Jesus did and what the church must do has already been completed by the apostles and new covenant prophets,

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<sup>7</sup> Simon J. Kistemaker, *Acts*, 93.

<sup>8</sup> Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 6:21.

then what purpose would miraculous signs serve today? Obviously, if the miraculous sign gifts were in operation today, they would have to have a *completely different purpose* than that which we have identified as the central purpose throughout the Bible.

This observation brings us to a brief analysis of what are considered sign gifts by those within the Charismatic movement. A comparison of the so-called miracles within Charismatic churches and what occurred in the Bible will prove that modern Charismatic “miracles” have nothing in common with the miracles in Scripture. There are three areas that need to be considered: (1) What is the purpose of the Charismatic “miracles”? (2) Are Charismatic miracles conducted in the same circumstances as the miracles in the New Testament? (3) Are Charismatic faith healers performing the same type of miracles found in the New Testament? (4) Are Charismatic faith healers performing the same type of miracles found in the New Testament?

An examination of Charismatic “miracles” reveals that modern “faith healers” do not perform miracles to authenticate new events in redemptive history or new revelations from God. Rather, modern “miracles” have been incorporated into Christian worship services as a healing ministry directed to believers. The so-called healings are not done to authenticate new revelation or to call attention to the gospel. But rather are done as a show, as exciting entertainment for people who already believe. They are incorporated into the service to make it more exciting, to draw attention to the celebrity “faith healer” and help raise money for the faith healer’s organization. When we contrast the modern “healing” crusade with what occurred in the New Testament we find nothing in common between the Charismatic movement and what occurred in the first century. Did the apostles conduct healing services for believers? No. Most healings performed by Christ and the apostles occurred in public places, in front of unbelievers. Some healings were conducted privately in homes and then were made known to unbelievers. They did not hold healing services; they healed people right out in the open in front their enemies (e.g., Lk. 5:20-26; Ac. 3:4-10). The *only* recorded instance of a miraculous healing taking place during a church service is in Acts 20:7-20. Eutychus dozed off during Paul’s sermon and fell three stories to his death. Paul healed him *in the street* where he lay dead, then brought him back to the service. Clearly, the healing was not part of the service nor was a healing time planned. The apostle simply dealt with an emergency situation and then resumed his message. The healing of Eutychus was incidental to the worship service. There is no biblical precedent whatsoever for the modern Charismatic healing services that are conducted today. The biblical pattern is set forth in James 5:14: “Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord.” Note the elders are to go to the sick person’s house or hospital bed and pray for him to be healed. Does God still heal sick believers today? Yes. Absolutely! However, He does so through prayer not through miracle workers such as the apostles who were giving forth new direct revelations from God and thus needed divine authentication. Cessationists do not teach that God no longer heals, but merely that the authenticating sign gifts have ceased, having served their purpose. There are no longer any *real* faith healers.

What accounts for the radical difference between the New Testament historical accounts and the Charismatic movement? For Christ and the apostles, miraculous signs were given primarily for unbelievers to authenticate the new gospel message, to point people to Jesus Christ. For modern faith healers, miracles are used to impress believers in order to gain popularity and raise money.<sup>9</sup> But the Bible makes it clear that signs are for unbelievers; Christians do not need to be convinced that Jesus is the Christ—they already believe.

When we further examine the differences between the miraculous healings done by Christ, the apostles and evangelists and modern faith healers note that modern faith healers perform their show in a friendly, controlled environment. The modern healing service is full of people who are dedicated to the ministry of the faith healer. They already believe that he can and will perform miracles. Further, the “healer” is surrounded by a dedicated staff, by ushers who are devotees of the “healer” that pick people who are allowed to go to the front of the church or auditorium for their “healing.” Contrast this friendly controlled environment with Christ and the apostles who worked miracles out in the public square in front of strangers, unbelievers and even their enemies. Have you ever seen a modern faith healer go into a major hospital and heal the sick? Have you ever seen one heal someone on the steps of city hall, in a shopping mall, or at a public park? No, of course not! One reason why is that they cannot really do miraculous signs. The other is that there is no money to be collected in such an environment. Unlike modern faith healers, Jesus and the apostles never ever used dramatic healings as a springboard to take offerings or raise money. MacArthur writes, “The people who claim to have the gift of healing never seem to get out of their tents, their tabernacles, or their TV studios. They always seem to have to exercise their gift in a controlled environment, staged their way, run according to their schedule. Why don’t we hear more of the gift of healing being used right in the hospital hallways? Why aren’t healers using their gift in places like India and Bangladesh? Why aren’t they right out in the street where masses of people are racked by disease? It isn’t happening. Why? Because those who claim the gift of healing don’t really have it.”<sup>10</sup>

When one compares the typical modern Charismatic healing service with what occurred in the New Testament one finds two very different activities with different results. First, (as noted) Charismatic “healings” are not directed to unbelievers in public places but are directed to believers in worship services. Second, most Charismatic healing services focus on activities that

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<sup>9</sup> Quentin J. Schultze informs us how “divine healings” can be very effective tools for popularity and fund raising. He writes, “Pat Robertson’s ‘700 Club’ broadcasts were not particularly popular until the show’s format was organized around the healing power of God. In fact, audience research showed the program’s producers that viewers wanted stories about God’s miracles in today’s world. Said Robertson in an interview, ‘I’ve just come from a meeting where I learned that our audience has increased by 30 percent this last year [1982]. When we started talking about the miracle power of God our mail audience increased by 37 percent, our female audience went up by 37 percent and total households watching us increased by 50 percent. Now we are talking to Jewish people, to Catholic people, to non-Christians, to Protestant people, evangelicals, Pentecostals. And we are talking about things that they are interested in. As a result, our support base has gone up dramatically. In fact, our 1982 income was up 43 percent.’ In other words, once Robertson’s ‘700 Club’ focused specifically on stories about individuals supposedly healed by God, ratings increased dramatically and the program began competing successfully with other cable channels for viewers.” (*Televangelism and American Culture* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991], p 136-137.)

<sup>10</sup> John MacArthur, *The Charismatics*, 134.

cannot be found in the Bible. Almost all modern faith healers operate on the basis of what is called the “word of knowledge.” The “faith healer” will stand on the stage and say, “There is someone in the balcony who suffers from low back pain. Whoever you are, God is healing you right now.” Or, “Come on down; God is going to heal you right now.” If the faith healer uses the second option, he will lay his hand or hands on the “sick” person which leads to the person being “slain in the Spirit” (i.e., The person appears to lose consciousness; then falls backwards; then [usually] is caught by ushers and lays on the floor for a while as if dead.) When the person gets off the floor, the “miracle worker” will tell him that he is healed and send him back to his seat. “Faith healers” on TV use the “word of knowledge” to “heal” people thousands of miles away. They can even “heal” people who watch on time delay or see a rerun. All of this type of activity makes for great ratings and bolsters fund-raising activities.

There is a major problem with the use of the “word of knowledge” technique by modern faith healers: there is not a shred of biblical evidence that Christ or the apostles ever used such a method for healing. Jesus and the apostles never stood before a crowd and called out healings. They did, however, personally go to people who were sick, dead or demon-possessed and heal with a word or touch (e.g., Mt. 8:6-7; Ac. 9:32-35). There were occasions when Jesus healed people at a distance (e.g., the Roman centurion’s servant, Mt. 8:13). However, the healing was done at a specific request. It had nothing to do with the “word of knowledge” as practiced today.

If the modern Charismatic version of the “word of knowledge” is not in the Bible then why is it so popular? Why is it the most universal method used by faith healers today? The answer is simple. In a large church or auditorium anyone can say, “Someone in the balcony has back pain,” and be correct. Why? Because back pain, hemorrhoids, intestinal problems, etc. are common. The “word of knowledge” technique makes people think that the so-called healer has supernatural abilities when he really does not. Similar fraudulent techniques have been used by “psychics,” “mediums” and “spiritualists” for decades. The sham artists who use such techniques are experts at picking common, general categories so that someone in the crowd will stand up and say “Yes, you must be talking about me.” If the Lord God (who is omniscient, who can give a prophet exact information regarding future events hundreds of years before they happen) is giving these “healers” information regarding someone in the audience with a disease, why is the information so vague? When Jehovah revealed events to the prophets He was very detailed and specific so that everyone, even God’s enemies, would have to recognize and acknowledge that God had really spoken. Why doesn’t God give the “faith healers” the sick person’s name or specific, exact details? Why would God reveal information in such a non-provable manner, in a manner used by fraudulent psychics and mediums? The answer is obvious. These so-called modern faith healers are charlatans. Interestingly, when two popular Charismatic faith healers *did* give specific names, addresses, and exact medical problems they were both exposed as frauds (You may remember their smiling, lying faces on the TV program *Hard Copy*). These men would take information on cards when people came to their “healing crusade” and then their wives and/or secretaries would relay the information to them during the service over a radio receiver.

This author used to be a Charismatic and had attended over a hundred healing services. Not once did I witness a “miracle” that could be proved one way or another. Everything from the word of knowledge technique to the actual “healings” themselves could be *easily duplicated by a crafty unbeliever*. Such methods may be entertaining, however, they are unscriptural and authenticate nothing.

Note also that the practice of “slaying people with the Spirit” that plays such a prominent role in Charismatic healing crusades cannot be found anywhere in the entire Bible. There are examples of people in God’s word who lay prostrate *on their faces* before God in prayer and worship (e.g., 2 Chron. 29:29-30; Neh. 8:6; Ps. 145:14; etc.). Note, however, that such people are in *control* of their faculties and are voluntarily assuming a position of humility and awe before God. Note also, they are lying on their faces not on their backs. The practice of (pretending) to lose consciousness and falling backwards as a spiritual experience is *not in the Bible*. It is a twentieth century invention. What purpose does pretending to pass out, fall backwards and lay on the floor serve? Does it lead to edification of the body? Does it further personal sanctification? Does it fulfill Paul’s requirement of doing things in the worship service “decently and in order” (1 Cor. 14:40)? No. It does none of these things. It is simply a crass form of showmanship. If the “healers” were really performing genuine, obvious, objective, verifiable miracles would such man-made gimmicks be necessary? Of course not!

Third, anyone willing to objectively compare what Jesus and the apostles did with what has been occurring since the rise of Pentecostalism in the twentieth century will note a wide disparity between the miracles in the Bible and modern “healings.” Jesus and the apostles healed instantaneously (Mt. 8:13; Mk. 5:29; Ac. 9:32-35). They were able to heal *everyone* who believed (Lk. 4:40; Ac. 5:12-16; 28:9). Even if modern faith healers were performing real miracles, they at best only heal a tiny fraction of the sick *believers* who come to their crusades. Jesus and the apostles healed *totally* not partially (Jn. 9:7; Ac. 9:34). It is sad to watch people at these healing crusades being told “they are healed—don’t doubt it,” when they are still limping or struggling to walk across the stage. When Peter and John healed a man who never walked his entire life the man could leap and walk normally (Ac. 3:7-11). Jesus and the apostles were able to heal serious organic diseases, crippled bodies and birth defects (Lk. 6:6, 17; Jn. 9:7; Ac. 3:6-8; 5:16; 8:7). They cast out demons (Lk. 13:32; 10:17; Ac. 10:38) and raised the dead (Lk. 7:11-16; Mk. 5:22-24, 35-43; Jn. 11:43-44; Ac. 9:26-42; 20:9-12).

If miraculous healings were still occurring today, it would be very easy to prove. Anyone could take a camcorder to the healing crusade and film the miracles for all to see. But why is this not happening? Because the supposed healings that take place today prove nothing. The typical Charismatic healing deals with back pain, hemorrhoids, leg lengthening (not by two feet but half an inch), headaches, etc. The Charismatic may object that unbelievers and skeptics don’t recognize the miracles at healing crusades because they do not believe. “After all,” we are told, “we should not expect the church’s enemies, who have an axe to grind, to recognize the miracles among us.” This objection does appear to make sense. But, when we examine the genuine,

amazing miracles done by Jesus and the apostles we find that everyone from believers, to pagans, to the enemies of the church could not deny the reality of the miracles they performed.

Let us revisit some of the miracles that our Lord and the apostles performed. Christ restored a man's hand that was lifeless and withered; the "hand was restored as whole as the other" right in front of Christ's enemies (Lk. 6:10). They could not deny the miracles. In John chapter 9 our Lord healed a man *born* blind (vs. 6-7). When the Pharisees enquired about this miracle, they pressured the healed man to deny what occurred (vs. 15-29). He would not and was excommunicated (v. 34). On another occasion, Jesus restored a man's ear that had been cut off, right in front of His enemies (Lk. 22:51-52). Christ even publicly healed a man who couldn't walk for *thirty-eight* years, who lay daily by the pool of Bethesda (Jn. 5:2-15). Peter healed a man "lame from his mother's womb" who begged daily at the temple. Afterwards, the people "knew that it was he who sat begging alms at the Beautiful Gate of the temple; and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him" (Ac. 3:10). The miracle was so public and obvious that even the enemies of the church could not deny it. The Sanhedrin said, "What shall we do to these men? For, indeed, that a notable miracle has been done through them is evident to all who dwell in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it" (Ac. 4:16). Note that Christ and the apostles publicly and repeatedly healed people that *everyone* in the community knew were suffering from incurable maladies. This fact is far different than the typical modern faith healer who proclaims an unprovable "healing" in a room full of total strangers.

Having noted the nature of the miracles that Jesus and the apostles performed, we must ask the following questions: Are modern faith healers restoring amputated limbs? Of course not! Can you go to a healing crusade and observe a withered hand restored right in front of your eyes? No, it's not happening. If Charismatics were healing crippled legs, withered hands, cut-off ears, blind eyes, deaf ears, palsy, hemorrhages, etc., like Christ and the apostles, they would be on the nightly news, *60 Minutes* and *20/20*. Sadly, the only Charismatic faith healers who make the news are there because of fraud, adultery, theft, prostitution, and the like. Why don't modern faith healers do what Christ and the apostles did and perform a *public* healing on someone that everyone knows is crippled? The answer is simple: they can't.

There is another blatant discrepancy between what occurred in the first century and the modern Charismatic movement. One of the miraculous signs performed in the New Testament period was raising people from the dead. There are many examples. Jesus raised the widow's son who was dead and already in a casket; afterward, the account of what Jesus did "went throughout all Judea and all the surrounding region" (Lk. 7:11-17). He brought to life a synagogue ruler's daughter (Mk. 5:35-43). Lazarus had been dead for four days and was starting to rot when Jesus "cried with a loud voice, 'Lazarus come forth!'" Lazarus rose from the dead in front of many Jews. Paul raised the young man Eutychus who had fallen out of a window and died (Ac. 20:9-12). He probably had a cracked skull, broken bones and terminal internal injuries, yet he was completely healed in an instant! The apostle Peter raised the godly widow Dorcas from the dead (Ac. 9:36-42).

Are modern faith healers raising the dead to life? Have they ever stopped at the scene of a fatal car accident and restored shattered bodies to life, as Paul did with Eutychus? Have they ever walked up to a coffin at a funeral and simply spoken the word of life to the dead? “It is interesting to note that those claiming the gift of healing today do not spend much time in funeral parlors, with funeral processions, or in cemeteries. The reason is obvious.”<sup>11</sup> Once again, we must point out that modern faith “healers” do not raise the dead because they cannot raise the dead. If they could raise the dead like Christ and the apostles, then they could prove it by doing it in front of a large group of witnesses. Thus, we have not only established that the main purpose of the sign gifts is totally lacking among modern faith healers but also that there is no empirical objective evidence for the reality of their “miraculous signs.”

Once again we (cessationists) must emphasize that we believe that God has the power to heal the sick and still does. However, we emphatically reject what are regarded as sign gifts today among Charismatic s because: (1) the modern “miracles” have been separated from their central purpose in Scripture which is to authenticate a divine messenger who has new revelations from God. (2) The Charismatic movement with rare exceptions holds a heretical doctrine of salvation (i.e., Arminianism or semi-pelagianism). Remember, the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Truth. Does the Spirit of Truth *authenticate* heretics and antinomians? As Jesus said, “You shall know them by their fruits” (Mt. 7:16). The fruits include both doctrine and ethics. (3) An objective empirical analysis of the “miracles” that are supposedly occurring at Charismatic healing services and crusades reveals that they are completely different than what is recorded in the New Testament. The modern miracles are done in a corner (i.e., only in front of Christians at revival services), totally unprovable (indeed every effort by the media or scientists to verify the miracles of prominent healers has shown that miracles are not really occurring), brought about by unscriptural means (e.g., the “word of knowledge” and being “slain in the Spirit”) and fraudulent. Real miracles are objective, provable events. They are so undeniable that even the scribes and Pharisees who were the chief enemies of Jesus and the apostles could not deny them. Therefore, we challenge all Charismatic believers to do their “miracles” out in the open before their enemies and non-Charismatic Christians to prove their reality.

The best way to understand the modern Charismatic movement and their use of the sign gifts is to look back at church history. B. B. Warfield did an intensive study of miracles and concluded that miracles did, in fact, cease after the death of the apostles.<sup>12</sup> He noted that as heresy and superstition increased in the Papal church, so did the account of “miracles.” These miracles were obviously fraudulent, because they were associated with gross heresy, idolatry and superstition (e.g., being sprinkled with Mary’s breast milk, or touching a piece of the “cross,” or placing the eucharist on a person’s forehead). The Reformation with its solid biblical theology, discarded all such nonsense and pointed people back to the pure, infallible, sufficient Word of God. Sadly, the Charismatic movement is turning from the purity of Reformation doctrine back toward the subjectivism, mysticism and superstition of Rome. Why would God withhold the

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 145.

<sup>12</sup> Benjamin B. Warfield, *Counterfeit Miracles* (New York: Scribners, 1918).

miraculous sign gifts from the church for over 18 centuries and then restore them among people with a heretical understanding of salvation and a false doctrine of sanctification (i.e., the second blessing teaching)? Why didn't God restore the sign gifts to men like Luther, Calvin or Knox who were used by God to bring about a great revival of biblical Christianity? Does it make sense that God would ignore the Protestant Reformers yet give miraculous gifts to heretics like Charles F. Parham, Agnes Ozman and W. J. Seymour? The historical evidence is clear: the sign gifts ceased with the death of the apostles; what occurred among the Romanists and modern Charismatics is delusional, fraudulent and unscriptural.

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