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Combating Charismatic Theology

Arming you with the tools to unmask the dangerous deception of experience-driven theology.

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by

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We could have seminars like this everyday for a year and still not cover it all--we would still have more to talk about. So this one session cannot possibly begin to cover the subject in any kind of thorough detail. I wish I had time even to give you a broad overview of the groups and individuals throughout church history who have claimed to exercise miraculous gifts, that in and of itself would be instructive because for the most part what you discover is they're all kooks, and cranks, and spiritual eccentrics. It is a simple fact of church history that the mainstream of those who have been theological orthodox have not believed in or claimed that the apostolic miracles gifts have continued to operate, without interruption, from the beginning of the Early Church, and on the contrary, most of the orthodox writers, who have addressed the question clearly believed and said so plainly, as a matter of fact, that the operation of the miraculous gifts ceased before the death of the last apostle--that was the majority mainstream view. Now you can, by selectively quoting, show that there have been exceptions to that rule, and examples throughout Church history of people who did believe that miraculous gifts were occurring here and there, but this is what church history itself suggests: in nearly 1900 years of Church history there is simply are no reliable records, and very few spurious claims even, that would suggest that authentic healings, or miracles, or reliable prophetic utterances, were in operation at any time until the dawn of the 20th century. The fact is that history teaches that the miracle gifts ceased in the first century, and no credible theologian or movement claimed otherwise until the Charismatic movement began on literally the first day of the 20th century.

Now there were isolated, as I have said, isolated reports of miracles and prophecies and you can read all about those if you examine some of the recent Charismatic literature. Obviously, Catholic superstition had all kinds of fantastic tales about miracles related to relics, and the veneration of saints and things like that, but apostolic quality miracles simply did not exist on any wide scale and nobody ever claimed that they did until the 20th century. And in that regard, Charismatic theology

is new and novel in Church history--that's a simple statement of fact, and if we had time we could look in-depth at church history and I could confirm all those things for you, and I encourage you to investigate that yourself objectively, and not fall for the selective quoting that you sometimes see in some of the recent Charismatic literature--they will say, "Well here, Augustine believed in... somebody was healing somebody and Origin said people were giving prophecies," and you could selectively quote examples, but for the most part, all the church leaders who addressed the issue believed that those apostolic quality gifts had ceased and that any miracles they claimed were exceptions to the rule.

Now our time is limited, so what I really want to do in this hour is simply give you an overview of the Biblical and theological reasons why we here at Grace Community Church believe the miraculous gifts we read about in the New Testament pertain uniquely to the apostolic era and are not in operation today. In other words, I am basically going to give you a brief defense of Cessationism.

Too often the debate about the Charismatic movement focuses on personalities and secondary issues, and I want to try to bring your thinking back this afternoon to some foundational issues; some basic questions:

1. Does God expect every Christian to be a miracle worker?

2. Does He want us all to speak in tongues and prophesy?

3. What was the role of the Charismatic gifts in the early Church?

4. Are the modern phenomena that Charismatics refer to as "tongues and healings"--are these the same kind of gifts that operated in the apostolic era?

And when we sort all of those questions out, the secondary issues, all the personality debates and all that stuff, naturally kind of falls into place.

So I will state for you up front that I am not a Charismatic. That's no secret--I think most of you have figured that out. I was converted to Christ in 1971, more than 30 years ago from a liberal religious background--I grew up in a Methodist church and I began my Christian life very sympathetic to the Charismatic movement, and very open to the idea that tongues was something I should seek. I was open to whatever God wanted to teach me and I knew the only infallible truth I could learn was from Scripture, so I decided to let Scripture guide me on this and every matter. Someone encouraged me to do that thankfully, early in my Christian life, and it is a rule of thumb that I have always tried to adhere to.

In those years, early after my conversion, I lived in Tulsa, Oklahoma--that's where I went to high school and grew up. Tulsa's nickname is the "Oil capital of the world"--my former pastor, Warren Wiersbe, used to refer to it as "The Oral capital of the world," because that's where Oral Roberts is--and it is, virtually, the Charismatic capital of the world. I lived about two miles from Oral Roberts University, and my best friend throughout my high school years was a Charismatic whose father conducted healing campaigns in the Philippines and all over Asia. This was the environment I grew up in and, so again, I was very open to the Charismatic movement, especially when I first became a Christian.

When I became a Christian I was a student in a public school near my home and several of my friends were also converted about the same time. There was kind of a miniature revival in my high school that year. Most of my friends, who became Christians, did move into the Charismatic movement and they began to urge me to speak in tongues--to seek the gift of tongues. My friend whose father was a Charismatic evangelist had been urging me to speak in tongues since I was in junior high school--he never bothered to "share the gospel with me," but he tried for years to get me to speak in tongues. And all my friends were saying that, "Speaking in tongues is the only Biblical evidence of the fullness of the Spirit," and at one point I was virtually persuaded that this was true, and I was seeking the gift of tongues. But, even as a new Christian, I began to have serious questions about the legitimacy of the Charismatic movement.

The more I studied Scripture, the more I could see that the modern manifestations of Charismatic gifts have very little in common with the gift of tongues and healings described in Scripture. Many of my Christian friends who professed to be "Spirit-filled" lived lives that if anything, reflected the opposite of the "fruit of the Spirit." They were concerned about the "gifts of the Spirit," but very little concern about the "fruit of the Spirit." They could speak in tongues at will, but in most cases, their lives, just frankly, didn't give any evidence of being under the control of the Holy Spirit. My closest friend, the one whose father was a Charismatic faith healer, ultimately apostatized completely--turned against Christ, after his father died of a lingering cancer because he couldn't reconcile the fact that his father had claimed to heal so many people, and yet he died of a very slow and painful kind of cancer. And all of this caused me to reexamine Charismatic claims more closely in light of Scripture.

As I said, I began this research sympathetic to Charismatic claims, but after a few months of careful study I came away with the firm conviction that many aspects of the modern Charismatic movement seriously conflict with Biblical Christianity. I couldn't reconcile at all with Scripture.

Now I am the first to acknowledge that my position is not very popular these days. I will also admit that many non-Charismatics have not always argued their case with kindness or objectivity. The debates over this issue have way too often generated more heat than light, and this issue itself has divided more churches and more brothers and sisters in Christ than perhaps any other theological issue in the 20th century. My own bookshelf contains more books dealing with charismatic gifts than any other single subject. But over the past decade or so, it seems to me that dialogue, and debate, and discussion about these issues have pretty much lapsed into silence.

There are still some debates about certain aspects of the Charismatic movement these days, but they tend to crop up periodically and usually they have to do with specific localized phenomena.

Have you noticed these days that Charismatic phenomena are named after whatever city they crop up in? A few years ago it was "The Kansas City Prophets," and then after that it was the "The Toronto Blessing," and then there was "The Pensacola Revival," and I figure it is time for another big movement to come along. I hope it is in Santa Clarita, California so I can see it up close. But almost no one anymore is seriously discussing or debating the original issue--are the New Testament charismatic gifts still operating in the church today? That is the central decisive question.

If the miraculous gifts described in the New Testament were intended for the whole Church Age then we need to join and support the Charismatic movement. **If those gifts pertained to the apostolic era only, then the Charismatic movement cannot be a true movement of the Holy**

Spirit and we need to expose the movement as unbiblical. It won't do to allow this issue just to lapse into silence for the sake of peace or whatever.

Now, I'll tell you plainly at the outset, I have already said this, that **I believe that the Charismatic movement is an aberration, and what passes for Charismatic gifts today I believe have nothing to do with the supernatural gifts of healings, tongues, and prophesy that operated in the early apostolic era. I also want to say plainly, to balance that, that I regard Charismatics who have believed the gospel, with authentic faith, as my dear brothers and sisters in Christ.** I have to this day many close friends who are Charismatics and their belief in the Charismatic gifts does not nullify our love for one another. Our doctrinal differences are no impediment to our fellowship at the most important level and I look forward to sharing purer fellowship in heaven when all of us will be in perfect agreement about everything. But in the mean time **I am convinced that Charismatic practices are a hindrance and not a help to a Christian's growth and maturity, and I think it is crucial that we deal with these things frankly.**

The debate over the Charismatic movement has lapsed into near silence over the last decade, as I said, and it is not because Charismatics won the debate with persuasive Biblical arguments, but it is because non-Charismatics have been intimidated into thinking it is unkind or unspiritual to criticize the Charismatic movement. Many non-Charismatics have simply given up dealing with the issue at all because Charismatics are growing less and less tolerant of criticism and more and more aggressive of their condemnation of the critics. This began to happen in a big way during the "Toronto Blessing." There is a website that I have linked to in my bookmarks, some of you have seen it on the web, it is called the "Toronto Blessing Page." I have nicknamed it the "Toronto Cursing Page" because it is filled with this fellow's curses--there is no other way to say it--against anyone who would question the legitimacy of this phenomena. Some Charismatics even claim that criticizing the Charismatic movement is tantamount to speaking against the Holy Spirit--the unpardonable sin.

I was in New Zealand when the "Toronto Blessing" arrived there and a Christian periodical there published a letter from a reader who simply reminded his brethren that we are commanded by Scripture to "examine all things carefully and compare things with Scripture to see if they are of God or not." He was making the point that the effects of the phenomena are not the crucial issue. What we need to do is to compare this with Scripture and ask, "Does it have any Biblical basis?" And the following week several other readers responded with letters accusing that man of opposing the work of God and blaspheming the Holy Spirit. One reader in particular wrote to say, "That any one who would declare the 'Toronto Blessing' movement unbiblical was guilty of an unpardonable sin against the Holy Spirit." That is the kind of atmosphere that there is out there today, and as a result of it Charismatics are often free to advocate whatever they like, to make whatever prophecies they wish; to advance whatever claim they want to make and without fear of criticism, because non-Charismatics have given up the fight. They have swallowed the idea that it is uncharitable to criticize; it is uncharitable to question; it is not brotherly somehow.

So, modern Charismatic phenomena have begun to become more and more outlandish all the time. We have gone from healings and tongues to prophecies and holy laughter, to drunkenness in the Spirit, and now, watch Benny Hinn, if you want to see the worst kinds of nonsense. It is really hard to imagine what will be next, but you can guarantee it's going to become more and more outlandish, because it has to be in order to capture the attention of the people who are intoxicated by these things. Meanwhile the Biblical command to "examine all things critically and hold fast to that which is good" is largely forgotten. Those of us who hold the view that the Charismatic

movement is steering the Church in an unbiblical direction are being pushed further and further towards the fringe of evangelicalism.

Thirty years ago, non-Charismatic evangelicalism was mainstream and the Charismatic movement was regarded as novel and unusual, but today the tables are turned so that Charismatics wield the most influence and those of us who are critical of Charismatic doctrine and practice are sometimes regarded as the cranks and the crackpots. All of that represents a major change and direction for the Church. Since the close of the apostolic era there has never before been a time in the 2,000 year history of Christianity when the majority of the Church was open to prophets and miracle workers. In 2,000 years, virtually every prophet has been overwhelmingly rejected by mainstream Christianity and every bit of extrabiblical revelation--all these prophecies that are touted, and all that stuff has been discredited and disapproved or declared heretical--until our generation, and now that is no longer the case.

It may well be that for the first time in the history of the Church, a majority of professing Christians are unsure about whether the apostolic miracles and gifts were really unique to the apostolic age. For the first time ever, multitudes believe that the “signs of the apostles” (2 Corinthians 12:12) are actually meant for every believer. There are many Charismatics today who will tell you that if you are not seeing miracles and obtaining messages directly from God or speaking in tongues or any of those things--then if your ministry, in other words, is built on the authority of Scripture alone, apart from any kind of miraculous signs and wonders--according to them, your ministry is lame--you have cut the power out from under your testimony. You can’t possibly be the sort of witness God intended you to be, because you are not displaying the power of God along with the preaching of the gospel. That’s a very common view, and I am convinced that this is not a positive change for the Church. I want to spend the remainder of the hour showing you why, from Scripture.

Let me sum up all those introductory remarks by saying this:

The past decade or so has seen three dangerous trends relative to the Charismatic movement:

1. Charismatic practices are more and more excessive and outrageous--they get more bizarre all the time.

After the “Toronto Blessing” I kept hearing reports of “holy vomiting”--seriously, where they would bring a bucket to the front of the church (this was huge in some parts of the world) and people would come up and vomit in the bucket, “Vomiting in the Spirit” supposedly purging themselves of demonic influences or whatever--it doesn’t get much worse than that--I think. But that’s the number one trend: Charismatic practices are more and more excessive and outlandish.

2. Non-Charismatics, as I have said, are more and more reluctant to speak critically of such practices.

It amazes me that the more outlandish the practices become, the more of a following they garner. The “Toronto Blessing” awoke me to this because suddenly, people who I have known for years, who had resisted Charismatic influences, suddenly were jumping on the bandwagon. I thought, if you rejected tongues and healings, and words of prophecies, and things like that, which seemed to me to be much tamer, why then would you go for these bizarre phenomena that throw the whole church into an uproar? It seems to me to be a clear violation of everything 1 Corinthians 14 teaches about order in the church, and yet all these people who had heretofore successfully resisted

Charismatic practices were beginning to jump on the bandwagon. The weirder it became, the more they jumped on!

3. Trend number three, Charismatics are more and more intolerant of criticism about their movement.

In other words, the purveyors of Charismatic fads are more and more insistent that we should buy their claims, without question, and that we should jump on their bandwagons without stopping to examine anything, and meanwhile people who do ask questions and raise concerns are more and more likely to be labeled as “divisive, unbelieving, rationalist, skeptics, or opposers” of the Holy Spirit. And in all of this, the Church, as a whole, is being disobedient to the Apostle Paul’s commandment in 1 Thessalonians 5:21, “Examine all things; hold fast to that which is good.” “Examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good.” The next verse says, “Abstain from every form of evil.” And the immediate context speaks about prophetic utterances. So it is explicitly commanding us to test people who claim to speak for God.

Now, what is the measure by which we test someone who claims to speak for God? Isaiah 8:20, a verse some of you have memorized, “To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.” Ultimately the Word of God is the only and ultimate test of truthfulness. Every prophet, every teacher, and every movement that claims to be from God must be tested according to God’s Word. 2 Timothy 2:13 says, “God cannot deny Himself” and therefore every true prophecy that comes from God will be in accord with what He has said in His Word. And every movement that is truly blessed by God will also be in harmony with His Word. It’s a simple test and if the Charismatic movement is true then its leaders should have no fear of being held accountable to the Scriptures. Even the Apostles, who had complete authority to speak for God in the early Church, were not reluctant to have their doctrines tested by Scriptures.

Luke wrote about this--remember the believers in Berea, Acts 17:11, “These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily, to see whether these things were true.” Now, what were these people examining? It was apostolic doctrine. In the early church the Apostles had the same authority as the Word of God--what they spoke was authoritative. Acts 16:4, speaks of apostolic decrees that were binding on all the churches. In 1 Thessalonians 2:7 Paul reminds the Thessalonians that he had ministered to them tenderly, like a mother cares for a baby. But in verse six, he says, that if he had chosen to do so, he could have wielded apostolic authority over them. Apostolic authority was never to be challenged in the church. Before the New Testament was written, the teaching authority of the Apostles was the rule by which the church lived, according to Acts 2:42. So in essence, the teaching of the Apostles carried an authority that is equal to Scripture, and yet in those days before the New Testament was written, when the Apostles’ teachings held supreme authority and was not to be challenged; Luke commended the Bereans for examining apostolic doctrines in the light of the Old Testament.

You see the apostles had nothing to fear from that--their teaching was from God--the same as the Scriptures, so God cannot deny Himself. They didn’t have anything to fear with the Bereans comparing their teachings to Scripture. There couldn’t be any discrepancies between the Old Testament and apostolic teaching, and in fact, that harmony with the Scriptures was one of the supreme proofs of the truthfulness of apostolic doctrine. The New Testament saints who heard the Apostles teach were encouraged and even commanded to compare everything they heard to

Scripture--to corroborate their authenticity. That's why Paul himself told the Thessalonians to "test all things"--he wanted them to be like the Bereans.

Now listen, if anyone ever cautions you against examining something in light of Scripture; if anyone ever suggests that you are in danger of sinning against the Holy Spirit for putting a doctrine or a practice to the Biblical test--that person is in opposition to the Word of God and you have grounds to reject that person's teaching on that basis alone. We need to examine everything according to Scripture.

Now, some of you, I realize, may be committed Charismatics. You may have come to this conference with the settled conviction that the Charismatic movement represents a mighty work of God in the Church in the 20th century. Others may hold different opinions with regard to the Charismatic movement, but regardless of your personal convictions on this matter, I hope that we can agree about a few things as brothers in Christ. Ok?

1. Can we agree that it is not a sin to examine Charismatic claims by comparing them with Scripture? Can we agree on that?

2. In fact, can we agree that we are commanded to examine those claims by comparing them with Scripture?

3. And if we can agree on that, can we also agree that if we compare any doctrine or practice with the Bible and find it in conflict with Scripture, we are obligated by our duty to God and to His Word to reject that doctrine or practice.

Can we agree on those things? We ought to be able to, when we examine and evaluate spiritual truth we must never allow personal feelings, individual experiences, inner voices in our heads, the sentiments of other people, public opinion, or any other influence to carry more weight of truth than the Word of God itself. None of those other things are legitimate tests. God's Word is the highest court of appeal for all questions of spiritual truth. Frankly there is nowhere else for us to turn if we want to evaluate any movement or practice. Scripture must be the final judge of this and all spiritual truth claims.

Now, we have before us a movement that is built on the claim, "That God is routinely doing miraculous things and revealing new truth to the Church."

Those claims, that God is routinely doing miracles and He is still revealing new truth, those claims constitute the whole gist of the Charismatic movement--everything else is just "window dressing." Those notions, those two ideas:

1. That God is routinely doing miracles.
2. That God is still revealing new truth.

Those notions, as I will show, are a serious and significant departure from historic Biblical Christianity. Their claims must not be accepted without a great deal of careful, Biblical examination and scriptural discernment. Christians all over the globe are, at this moment, claiming, "God has spoken to them with some kind of fresh or new words of prophesy." It is our Biblical duty to search the Scriptures to see whether these things are true.

Now, what I have just given you are the two basic presuppositions that underlie all Charismatic doctrine,

1. The assumption that God is routinely doing miracles.
2. The notion that God is still revealing truth beyond what we have in Scripture.

Those two ideas are affirmed either explicitly or implicitly by all Charismatics. They believe all the miracles and the Charismatic gifts listed in the New Testament should be normative in some way or other throughout the Church Age. They believe the gifts of prophecy, tongues, and healings, as well as the other miraculous phenomena listed in the New Testament--never ceased--those things never died out, they have operated throughout church history, even though in some eras they maybe haven't been as noticeable as others. That's the Charismatic view.

The opposite view is called Cessationism. The Cessationist believes that certain gifts were operative in the apostolic era only and that those gifts gradually ceased before the end of the first century. And with very few exceptions, all the leading theologians from Augustine to Anselm, to Aquinas through the Protestant Reformation, right up until the past generation--all of them have been Cessationists. As I said earlier, with a few isolated exceptions, where they believed certain gifts may be observed here and there, but in the sense that they might have believed that all the apostolic gifts were perfectly normative throughout all the church history--you will not find a single significant theologian, who was in the orthodox mainstream who believed that.

Nonetheless, Cessationism has fallen into disfavor in popular evangelical opinion these days. Even many non-Charismatics say they reject the notion that apostolic gifts have ceased. I have seen this more and more over the past 15 years or so. Non-Charismatics even say, "I am not a Charismatic, but I am not a Cessationist either. I just don't see anywhere in Scripture that the apostolic gifts have ceased. So they reject Cessationism because they don't see any Biblical proof texts to that effect. They seem to think that if there is not one passage in Scripture that says, "The Charismatic gifts will cease," at a given date or whatever, then we are obligated to believe that all the gifts are still operative.

To me, that whole argument seems no different than the argument of the Jehovah Witness, who claims, that if you can't cite a single proof text or exegetical argument to prove the doctrine of the Trinity, then he is entitled to reject the deity of Christ and Trinitarianism, because there is no single proof text, there is no single passage from which you can exegete the doctrine of the Trinity--and there isn't--if you think otherwise I challenge you to do so. You cannot find any comprehensive doctrine of the Trinity stated in any single passage in the New Testament. If you are going to prove the Trinity, and it is easy to do, you have to take the accumulated teaching of all of Scripture. There is no proof text; there is no single passage, from which you can exegetically prove the doctrine, but you do it, and that doctrine and other doctrines are the fruit of comparing Scripture with Scripture, and understanding everything the Bible teaches about the Godhead--that leads you to the doctrine of the Trinity.

In a similar way, the church's historic Cessationist stance resulted not from a single proof text, or exegetical argument--it's a theological conclusion that's drawn from a number of Biblical, historical and doctrinal arguments. Cessationism is the position every rational Bible-believing Christian is ultimately driven to by the facts of history and Scripture. Now that may sound like an overstatement to you when I first say it but I think that I can prove it to you. Every rational

Christian is going to be driven to some degree of Cessationism, and I am going to show you that even most Charismatics hold to some degree of Cessationism in their belief system. No one but the rankest Charismatic crackpot would ever claim to be a complete non-Cessationist.

Now I realize that most Charismatics and non-Charismatics will tell you they are non-Cessationist, but when you examine their belief system you will discover that they are not.

First, lets look at their claims at why they reject Cessationism.

Their favorite Charismatic proof text given for arguing in favor of the view that all the spiritual gifts are perpetually given to the churches, is Hebrews 13:8, “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and today, and forever.” Almost invariably, that’s the first proof text you will have pulled out on you to show that you can’t believe in Cessationism: “Jesus is the same yesterday, and today, and forever.” Charismatics often quote that verse as proof that God is doing all the same things today that He did in the apostolic era, but that verse teaches nothing whatsoever about the Charismatic gifts. It has nothing whatsoever to do with the question of whether the Charismatic gifts have ceased; it’s a statement about the unchanging character of Christ. In fact, that verse is one of the great proof texts of the deity of Christ, because it shows that He is immutable, and He is unchanging in His character and His attributes. But it does not teach that all of God’s dealings with His people are always the same in every era. It doesn’t teach that.

We know, for example, that some important things have changed from the Old Testament era to the New, in fact, the whole point of the Book of Hebrews, the very Book that contains this verse, is that the ceremonial law of the Old Testament is no longer binding on believers in the New Testament era. The priesthood, the Tabernacle, the whole sacrificial system, are no longer part of God’s relationship with His people. Why? Because, and listen carefully, those things all pointed to something better, and now that the better thing has come the inferior things are done away with. That’s the very same point that the Apostle Paul makes in 1 Corinthians 14, where he deals with the gift of tongues. It is, as a matter of fact, the principle that makes some degree of Cessationism a necessity for anyone who takes the Bible seriously, including Charismatics. Why?

Well, there is ample proof in Scripture to demonstrate that although God Himself is unchanging, as this verse says, He does not necessarily manifest His power or reveal Himself in the same way in every age. So Hebrews 13:8 cannot be used to prove that the same apostolic gifts operate in every age. In fact, the question must be asked, **“If the immutability of God means He can never alter any gifts or offices in the Church then why don’t we have apostles today who teach with full apostolic authority?”** Why not? Where’s your proof text to show that the apostolic office is closed?

Now, I will grant you that there have been a few Charismatic leaders who have claimed apostolic authority for themselves, but that is not the most common view among Charismatics. Larry Lea, for example used to call himself “The Apostle of Prayer,” until Diane Sawyer did him in. An other, more extreme Charismatics, from time to time, claimed that the apostolic office is still open, and some of them have pretended to be apostles. Some of the more outrageous ones have tried to assert apostolic authority over their people, but evangelical Charismatics, for the most part--the vast majority of Charismatics do not believe that there are apostles today who have the same kind of authority as the apostles in the early church. They don’t believe there are men who can teach infallibly, with the same authority as Peter, James, and John in the New Testament. I have read and researched a number of Charismatic books and only a few fringe groups and extremists claim true

apostolic authority for their leaders--it is a very unusual view. Some will use the term Apostle but then they qualify it by insisting that the apostleship they recognize today is a lesser kind of apostleship than the infallible authority that belong to the Apostles in the first century.

Now, think through the implications of that position:

By arguing for a lesser form of Apostleship, they are actually conceding that the New Testament gift of apostle has ceased--they have, in effect, embraced a kind of Cessationism. In fact, let me say this plainly: every true evangelical holds to some form of Cessationism. I mean, we all believe that the Canon of Scripture is closed. Right? We don't believe that we should be seeking to add new inspired material to the New Testament--do we? "We hold to the faith that was once delivered to the saints," (Jude 1:3), "...once for all delivered." Delivered in the person of Christ and through the teachings of His apostles and "inscripturated" in the New Testament and the Canon for that is closed.

We believe, Scripture as we have it, is complete. And those who do not believe Scripture is complete are not truly evangelicals--they are cultists and false leaders who would add to the Word of God. That's a cultish view. But notice this, if you acknowledge that the Canon is closed and the gift of Apostleship has ceased, then you have already conceded the very heart of the Cessationist argument--that is a kind of Cessationism. That's not all though, many Charismatics go even further than that.

They will freely admit that all the Charismatic gifts that are in operation today are of a lesser quality than the gifts we read about in the New Testament. For example, Wayne Grudem wrote a book titled, *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today*. Crossway published this book in 1988, and in his book, which was written to defend the practice of seeking personal prophecies directly from God, Grudem writes this, "No responsible Charismatic holds to the view that prophecy today is infallible, or that it's inerrant revelation direct from God." He says, not one responsible Charismatic would hold that view. He says, "Charismatics are arguing for (and these are his exact words) *a lesser kind of prophecy*." Which he says is not on the same level as the inspired prophecies of Old Testament prophets or the New Testament Apostles, and which, according to Grudem, the New Testament gift of prophecy may even be fallible. Grudem writes this, "There is almost uniform testimony from all sections of the Charismatic movement that today's prophecy is impure and will contain elements which are not to be obeyed or trusted."

Another leading Charismatic theologian of recent years is Jack Deere, former professor at Dallas Theological Seminary, who admits in his book, *Surprised by the Power of the Holy Spirit*, published by Zondervan in 1993, he says, that he, "Has not seen anyone today performing miracles or possessing gifts on the same level as those manifest in the apostolic era. Deere argues throughout his book, that modern Charismatics don't even claim to have apostolic quality gifts or miracle abilities. **One of his main lines of defense against his critics is that what he claims as Charismatic gifts are actually lesser gifts than those that were available to the apostles and to the Christians in the apostolic era. Therefore, he suggests, Charismatics today should not be held to apostolic standards!**

Now again, consider the implications of that claim. Deere and Grudem have, in effect, conceded the entire Cessationist argument. I would say, that whether they will admit it or not, they themselves are Cessationists of sorts. They believe that the true apostolic gifts and miracles have ceased, and they are admitting that what they are claiming today is not the same as the gifts described in the

New Testament. That's Cessationism. In other words, modern Charismatics, at least the mainstream, in Grudem's words, "the reliable ones, the legitimate ones," have virtually adopted a Cessationist position. And when pressed on the issue they are forced to admit that the gifts they practice today are lesser gifts than the gifts of the apostolic era.

Contemporary tongue speakers do not speak in any kind of understandable or translatable dialects. Not one single tongue speaker has ever gone to a foreign mission field and miraculously been able to preach the gospel in the tongue of the people there. **They weren't able to speak to people as they did at Pentecost and have those people hear the message in their own language. It's not the same gift. Charismatics, who go to the mission field today, have to go to language school like everybody else!** There is not one modern worker of "signs and wonders" who can really duplicate apostolic power--that's a simple fact. And even the most vocal advocate to the gift of prophesy admits that no modern prophet can legitimately claim to have infallible authority.

They bend over backwards to escape the criticisms against them by admitting "up front" that their prophecies are not infallible--that they have a pretty low, frankly, a shockingly low accuracy rate. You could probably get better advice from the horoscope column, not that I'm suggesting that.

Above all, despite all the fanciful and unsubstantiated legends that have been circulated, despite the vast numbers of Charismatics who claim the ability to do even greater works than Jesus Himself, there is not one single, credible, verifiable case of a Charismatic miracle worker who could raise the dead. The simple fact is that the gifts that operate in the Charismatic movement today are not the same gifts described in the New Testament, and even most Charismatics are ultimately forced to admit that.

There is a very helpful book, *Satisfied by the Promise of the Spirit*, by Thomas Edgar. He writes this, "The Charismatic movement gained credence and initial acceptance by claiming their gifts were the same as those in Acts. For most people that is why they are credible today." That is, because most people believe the Charismatic movement offers the promise of the same gifts described in the New Testament. "Yet," he says, "Now, when challenged by the obvious fact that their gifts don't meet Biblical standards, one of their primary defenses is to claim that their gifts are not the same as those gifts in the New Testament. Faced with the facts, they have had to revoke the very foundation of their original reason for existence." That's a pretty devastating admission, really. But many Charismatics have had to come to grips with it and have admitted it.

Unfortunately, the popular appeal of the Charismatic movement is now so widespread that most Christians no longer trouble themselves about whether these things are Biblical or not. Not much soul searching going on among evangelicals any more to compare the miracles that are claimed today with the miracles in the New Testament to see whether they are the same thing.

The question of whether Apostolic gifts were intended to operate throughout the Church Age is increasingly ignored as the Church of our generation becomes more, and more, open to increasingly bizarre phenomena and less and less open to serious theological dialogue. It is a dangerous trend.

The truth is that even in Scripture there are very few miracles comparatively. There is ample evidence that miracles were extraordinarily rare events, always associated with people who spoke inspired and infallible utterances. And it is obvious, that the miracles of Scriptures were, in the New Testament era, in the Apostolic Age, were declining in frequency even before the apostolic era drew to a close.

You see the evidence of this in Scripture itself: The miracles at the beginning of the Book of Acts aren't there by the end of the Book of Acts. You can see the Cessation begin in Scripture itself. You want a Biblical argument for Cessationism? Read the history of the Book of Acts.

I want you to see what Scripture teaches about the uniqueness of miracles and the uniqueness of the apostolic era, so let's look at that.

What is a miracle?

We tend to label things "miracles" when they really are not. Here is a Christian who has a financial need and he prays that the Lord will meet it. On the same day he receives a check of some money, a gift in the amount he needed--the exact amount. Did God answer his prayers? Absolutely! Was it a miracle? No, it was not. It was an act of providence. In this case God worked through normal means, orchestrating events through divine providence. So this is an important distinction to make. God normally answers our prayers through providence, not by giving us miracles.

A couple of years ago I was visiting India. I think of this because my friend Benji is here, who was there. He's a doctor and he actually looked at me. While I was in India I awoke one morning with a severely swollen knee. I had surgery on this knee back in the 1980's after an athletic injury, and there is almost no cartilage in my knee. And my schedule in India that year required a whole lot of walking and so that injured knee was a serious disability at the time and I was very concerned about it. So that particular day I noticed that the more I walked on it the more it became aggravated, swollen and sore. But if I rested it, it would immediately swell up and then when I went to move it, it would stiffen, and I felt like I was beginning to lose the use of my knee. It was the worse pain I have ever felt since my knee surgery itself, and it seemed to get so bad that I was afraid it would put an end to my ministry in India and I would have to come back home and get it fixed. So I prayed that the Lord would heal my knee, and the next morning when I got up my knee was almost completely back to normal. In fact, the swelling was gone; the pain was nearly gone; I could walk normally, and it was so normal that I got up, took a shower, and got dressed before I even remembered that my knee had been so badly swollen the day before. The Lord had answered my prayer and I didn't even notice until I thought about it, and I thought, "Wow! My knee is back to normal!"

Now, did God heal my knee? Yes. Was that a miraculous healing? No. God may have providentially intervened to assure that the normal healing process went as quickly as possible or even sped it up some, but that's not the same as a miracle. A miracle would be if God put the cartilage back in that knee--that would be a miracle. The kind of healing I received was again, an act of providence--a special act of providence. It was a work of God in answer to my prayer--I'm convinced. But, it was not a miracle! Those are important distinctions and I stress it because people cheapen the Biblical concept of miracles by referring to every answer to prayer as a miracle. It doesn't diminish the power or the reality of God's work one bit to acknowledge that He doesn't normally, ordinarily work through miracles--He works by providence.

Let me give you some definitions and then we will look into what Scripture has to say about miracles.

First, let me define what I mean by "providence."

Providence is God's faithful, moment-by-moment control over everything He has made to ensure

that everything He has created achieves the end He has chosen. I'll read that again, Providence is God's faithful, moment-by-moment control over everything He has made to ensure that it achieves the end He has chosen. Several important elements to that:

It is God's moment-by-moment control over everything. We are dealing with God's sovereignty here. God didn't create the universe and wind it up like a clock and then abandon it to let it run on its own, and then He just kind of intervenes in it from time to time--that's not how it works. Some people envision God as standing far off from His creation, intervening only occasionally and when He does it is always miraculous. But Scripture teaches that God exercises ongoing control of every detail of everything that happens (Ephesians 1:11). "He works all things after the council of His own will," Romans 8:28, "We know that God causes all things to work together for good..." We claim those promises, but have you ever thought about the implications of it? If God causes all things to work together for good that means very clearly He is in control of all things! Proverbs 16:33 says, "The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the LORD." In other words, when you cast lots it may appear to bring forth random results, but in fact, God controls every roll of the dice and every flip of the coin--He providentially controls those things. Again, I don't advise that any more than your horoscope to try to make decisions, that's not how Scripture teaches us to make decisions, but it does very clearly say that God is in control of those things.

Scripture speaks of Christ "Upholding all things by the Word of His power" (Hebrews 1:3). And we are told that, "He is before all things and by Him all things consist." Consistently, Scripture teaches us that God is in control of every atom and every quark in the universe. There is not one sub-atomic particle in the universe that is outside the sovereign control of God. Christ is active in all His creation. He is active in every detail of it. He's active at every moment. He doesn't stand back and let things happen until He decides to intervene. He governs the universe moment-by-moment through providence, so that everything that happens, every detail of our life occurs either through the direct agency of divine providence or by God's express permission. He is in control of everything. Even the bad things that happen to us are circumscribed by a loving providence and God promises to use them all for our ultimate good. He promises that there won't be anything so bad happen to us that we're not able to bear it. There won't any temptation overtake us that we can't resist. God circumscribes all of those things and controls our lives through His loving providence. Satan could not lift a finger against Job until God gave him express approval, and God ultimately used Satan's evil doing to bring about a greater good for Job, just as He's promised, "All things work together for good."

When Jesus said, "No sparrow would fall to the ground apart from the Father;" When He said, "All the hairs on our head are numbered," He was saying, "God governs those things by His providence." By the way, that wasn't a point about God's omniscience. It isn't that God knows how many hairs you got--it is that He numbers the hairs on your head. It isn't that He knows when the sparrow falls--it's that he determines these things. He's in control. God governs these things by His loving providence. There is no detail in the universe that is not under the control of God's loving providence.

Now, let me state my point clearly because this is key to understanding the issue with regard to miracles.

Answers to our prayers usually come by means of providence, through acts of providence, not by miracles.

We sometimes say that we are praying that God would do a miracle to answer our prayers about some financial need or a health need or whatever, but when we pray for such things we are not praying for miracles in the Biblical sense. In the vast majority of our prayers we are actually asking God to act through providence to grant what we are requesting. And those acts of providence, even extraordinary acts of providence are not miracles, they are not the same as miracles.

And here is my main point, listen carefully, **to say something is not a miracle is not to deny that God did it!** This is the difficulty I have in dialogue I have sometimes with Charismatics, that if you say, “Well, I don’t think that God did a miracle there.” [They say,] “Well, then you are saying that God didn’t do it?” “No!, God does everything--He governs everything.” God doesn’t just sit back and wait until He wants to act and then do it through a miracle.” God constantly intervenes in our lives through providence. To say that He works through providence is not to say that He’s inactive. But it is just the opposite: He’s active in every aspect of our lives and not just the events that appear dramatic or spectacular. You honor God most when you see that, when you see God working in your life in every detail of it, even the small things. You don’t give God extra glory when you try to make a miracle out of something. I have been accused by Charismatics of “robbing God of glory” for denying that every answer to prayer is a miracle. My reply is that, “the Charismatic view robs God of glory by assuming He’s inactive unless He intervenes in a miraculous way.”

Now, what is a miracle? Another definition: In a Biblical sense “a miracle is an extraordinary work of God that involves His immediate and unmistakable intervention in the physical realm in a way that contravenes natural processes.”

Let me make one more distinction: There are two kinds of miracles noted in Scripture.

1. Some are remarkable works of God apart from any human agency.

For example, when Christ was crucified there was darkness over all the earth for three hours--that fits our definition of a miracle. It was an extraordinary work of God; it overrode the natural order of things--it was a miracle. Other examples where God unilaterally intervened or where miraculous events happened apart from any human agency would include the destruction of Sodom, when brimstone and fire rained down from heaven--I believe that was a miracle. The flood in Noah’s time, when it rained forty days and forty nights and flooded the entire earth. I don’t think we need to seek a natural explanation for that--it was a miracle. Those were undeniably miraculous events, they were not acts of providence because they overturned the natural order of things. And in all the examples I just cited, God did the miracle apart from any prophet or worker of miracles--He did it unilaterally without a human agent.

2. The other kind of miracle involves a human agent, who from the human perspective is the instrument through which the miracle comes.

The human agent usually predicts the miracle or calls it down from heaven or performs some act that unleashes the miracle, like when Moses smote the rock to bring forth water, or when Elijah called down fire from heaven. Moses parted the Red Sea, Elijah raised the widow’s son from the dead--these are Biblical miracles that are described using a human agent. Peter walked on water, although it turned out to be a pretty short walk. Peter and John instantly healed the lame man at the temple gate. All of those were clearly miraculous events where god intervened and overturned the normal course of nature, but He did so using some form of human agency. Those things cannot be regarded as acts of providence because they can’t be explained by any natural processes. They are

miracles in the purest sense of the word. They also, in those cases I just named, involved human agents: miracle-workers, and that sets them apart from those unilateral acts of God, such as miraculous works of judgment.

By the way, I would classify all the earthly miracles of Christ as miracles done through human agency because He was, after all, fully human. He made clear in many places that he was doing the Father's works. He was not unilaterally performing miracles by an independent use of His own divine attributes, but as God manifest in the flesh, He was the supreme worker of miracles, as a human agent. And His miracles have never been surpassed nor will they be.

Now, just as an aside, that brings to mind John 14:12, where Jesus said, "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 to my Father." So Jesus said, 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 to my Father." Now, what did He mean by that? Did you ever think about that?

He can't possibly mean that they were going to do more spectacular miracles, because in point of fact, they did not do more spectacular miracles. To my knowledge no one has ever raised a man from the dead who lay in the grave four days and began to decompose. Jesus is the only one who ever did that--there is no miracle that really superceded that. But, the disciples' works were greater in scope and effect. They took the gospel to the ends of the earth, according to Acts 13:47. This verse [John 14:12] doesn't suggest that the apostles were going to do miracles that outshone the miracles of Christ. The "greater works" they did were "evangelistic works"--not more astonishing miracles, that's not what Jesus meant, that's not what he promised.

Now, let me review. We have noted that there are three ways in which God may intervene in human affairs to answer prayer, to change our circumstances, and to otherwise manifest His control over creation.

1. First and most common are special acts of providence.

2. Second and least common are unilateral miracles, mighty works of God alone.

Notice, by the way, these are usually acts of judgment, like the flood, the confusion of the languages at Babel, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, the death of Herod--those were all unilateral acts of God--miracles that God sent, but they were all works of judgment.

The third, and this is the disputed category--this is the only disputed category,

3. The miracles that are done through some kind of human agency.

This third category, miracles done using human agencies is the most relevant to our study of the Charismatic movement.

There is little debate about the other two. Every Christian would acknowledge that God regularly intervenes in our lives and affairs through special acts of providence. Unilateral miracles and works of God are extremely rare even on the pages of Scripture and they are always extraordinary, in that when they do occur no one would ever dispute them because they are so spectacular, they are so astonishing that no one would ever say, "Well, somebody just faked that!" You wouldn't say that if you were drowning in the flood, "This is somebody's trickery!" This is obviously a work of God.

Miracles like that are not even under debate between Charismatics and non-Charismatics anyway, because no Charismatic has ever yet been able, or to claim even, to be able to produce miracles of that nature--that's not part of the debate. So don't let someone intimidate you into backing off your questions about the Charismatic movement because they accuse you then of questioning all the miracles in Scripture--that's not the point.

This third category: miracles in which God employs a human agent--these are the focus of the debate generated by the Charismatic movement.

Charismatics today, often suggest that we should be actively seeking miracles like this. Charismatic leaders claim to be able to work miracles of various kinds: healings, slaying people in the Spirit, and all that kind of thing. More than that, most Charismatics believe and claim that miracles like these should be commonplace in the church today because they believe if miracles like that are not commonplace in your experience, something is wrong, something is deficient in your spiritual life. Some Charismatics even claim that "signs and wonders" are such an essential part of evangelizing the world, that if you are not doing "signs and wonders" you are not really giving the whole gospel. Charismatics sometimes accuse non-Charismatics of believing that God is no longer active in His church, but that utterly misses the point--God is active whether He works through providence or miracles. In fact, faith, so called faith that has to be constantly bolstered by spectacular "signs and wonders" is not real faith at all. The faith that rests in the knowledge that God is working through providence is actually a greater faith than the attitude that demands proof through "signs and wonders." To demand "signs and wonders" is to walk by sight rather than by faith, and Jesus condemned people who demand "signs and wonders" before they would believe--listen to Mark 8:11-12, "The Pharisees came forth, and began to question with Him, seeking of Him a sign from heaven, tempting Him. And He sighed deeply in His spirit, and saith, 'Why doth this generation seek after a sign? verily I say unto you, There shall no sign be given unto this generation.'" True faith doesn't demand miraculous "signs and wonders." To the eyes of faith the glories of God are revealed in the simplest act of providence, just as clearly as it is in the most dramatic miracle.

True believers can see the hand of God in everyday events. They don't need miracles to bolster their confidence that God is working all things together for their good. But a hardened heart of unbelief won't notice the hand of God in providence, and for that reason God has sometimes employed miracles for this purpose: to startle sinners, and to demand their attention when He is about to do a new work or when He is about to reveal something very important. And that brings us to a vital question.

What is the Purpose of Miracles?

Why does God do miracles? It should be self-evident both from Scripture and from our daily experience that God's normal means of bringing about His will in our lives is through acts of providence. Miracles are extraordinary, uncommon, and unusual, by definition. Miracles have never been commonplace, even on the pages of Scripture they occur rarely, and when they occur it is for a special reason. Miracles in Scripture are never done merely to satisfy curiosity or to appease skeptics. They are never used for self-gratification or egocentric reasons. You will never find a Biblical miracle-worker prancing around on the stage the way Benny Hinn does, showing off his power--they didn't do that. Miracles in Scripture are never just for show.

But when God is found in Scripture doing miracles, **using human agent to perform miracles it is always with a specific purpose and Scripture is clear about what that purpose is: it is to**

authenticate the authority of those who speak for God. Here is an important principle: **miracles in Scripture are always related to the giving of new revelation.** B. B. Warfield wrote, “Miracles do not appear on the pages of Scripture vagrantly, here and there, and elsewhere indifferently, without assignable reasons, they belong to revelation periods, and appear only when God is speaking to His people through a credited messenger declaring His gracious purposes.

You see the purpose of the miracles is to verify the messengers. I want you to notice something significant: **Most Biblically significant miracles happened in three brief periods of Bible history.** If you drew a timeline representing about 4,000 years of Bible history--we could draw it along the length of this long wall, and then tick off every miracle that is recorded in Scripture, you would find the miracles clustered in three main groups:

1. There was one era of miracles that covered the lifespan of Moses and Joshua.
2. There was a second that spanned the ministries of Elijah and Elisha.
3. The third, the greatest era of miracles that occurred during the time of Christ and the Apostles.

And aside from that there were odd miracles here and there. Samson, for example, had miraculous abilities to perform superhuman feats of strength, although he did no miracles, such as acts of healings. His miracles had a unique character to them. But aside from Samson, I can't think of any other figure in the Bible, outside those three eras, who could do miracles on a regular basis.

All three of those miracle working periods were about a century long or less. So in 4,000 years of history you've got just 300 years maximum, where miracles were common place. No similar outpouring of miracles ever occurred in any other era, and in fact, even during those three miracles periods, miracles were not performed by everyone. The miracles that happened mostly involved men who were extraordinary messengers from God, like Moses and Joshua, Elijah and Elisha, Jesus and the Apostles, and in rare cases miracles were also done by individuals who were closely associated with those men.

And of all of those eras, the apostolic era was especially and utterly unique, and the miracles done in that era had a unique relationship to the apostles. Let me show you this:

First, notice that throughout the Old Testament, miracles are spoken of as “signs and wonders.” That's how they are identified: “signs,” “wonders,” Deuteronomy 6:22, “The LORD showed signs and wonders, great and sore, upon Egypt, upon Pharaoh, and upon all his household, before our eyes.” The word “miracle” appears only five times in the Old Testament; the expression “signs and wonders” appears at least 15 times, and it is clear that the terms are synonymous. And the expression “signs and wonders” gives us a clue as to the purpose of the miracles. Deuteronomy 29:2-3 says, “Moses called unto all Israel, and said unto them, Ye have seen all that the LORD did before your eyes in the land of Egypt unto Pharaoh, and unto all his servants, and unto all his land; The great temptations which thine eyes have seen, **the signs, and those great miracles.**” The fact that Scripture refers to these miracles as “signs and wonders” is significant.

All true miracles are “signs.” They point to something and what is it that they point too? Let's see what Scripture has to say about this.

Who was the first person in Scripture with the ability to work miracles? It was Moses. In fact,

according to Scripture, Moses remained the greatest worker of miracles the world has ever seen until the close of the Old Testament era. Although a few other miracle-workers came on the scene, according to Deuteronomy 34:10-11, “There arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face, in all the signs and the wonders, which the LORD sent him to do in the land of Egypt to Pharaoh, and to all his servants, and to all his land.” So, Moses’ miracles were never surpassed until the time of Christ; never duplicated until the time of Christ.

Now, why did God give Moses the ability to work such miracles? Scripture says, as plainly as possible, that the reason was to validate Moses’ claim that he spoke for God. If you have your Bibles turn to Exodus four. Exodus four, and remember that when God called Moses, Moses had all kinds of excuses why he shouldn’t answer the “call”--he wasn’t eloquent, he was slow of speech, Aaron would do a better job, and all that stuff. And one of Moses main concerns was that if he appeared to the children of Israel, claiming that the Lord had sent him--they wouldn’t believe him. Now look at verse [one], “And Moses answered and said, But, behold, they will not believe me, nor hearken unto my voice: for they will say, The LORD hath not appeared unto thee.” Notice God’s reply, verse two, “And the LORD said unto him, ‘What is that in thine hand?’ And he said, ‘A rod.’ And he said, ‘Cast it on the ground.’ And he cast it on the ground, and it became a serpent; and Moses fled from before it.” He was shocked by this, he didn’t expect it. “And the LORD said unto Moses, ‘Put forth thine hand, and take it by the tail.’ And he put forth his hand, and caught it, and it became a rod in his hand.” By the way they always taught me not to pick up a snake by the tail. But did you ever notice these guys on TV, like the “Crocodile Hunter” they always grab the snakes by the tail. Moses did that and it became a rod again in his hands. That’s a miracle.

That is the first miracle you find in Scripture where God used a human agent. And notice that God gives Moses an explicit reason for the miracle, verse five, “That they may believe that the LORD God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath appeared unto thee.” The miracles had this purpose: they were to authenticate Moses’ claim that he spoke for God. These were the credentials that proved his message was the true revelation from God, and infallible revelation from God, they were the proof, testimony from God Himself, that Moses was speaking infallible, undeniable, authoritative truth.

The miracles also drew attention to Moses’ message in a way that no one could ignore. When a guy comes and does miracles like this you are going to pay attention to what he has to say.

Moses’ unique role as a prophet is the reason for his ability to work such great “signs and wonders.” He wrote the first five books of Scripture. He was the first human instrument God used to record inspired Scripture, and so his miracle abilities were profound, unprecedented, and unparalleled by any other Old Testament prophet. Do not miss the connection between Moses’ role as a prophet and the first man who wrote any Scripture down, and his ability to work miracles. The two are inexplicably linked. The miracles were the proof that what he said came from God. Scripture repeatedly connects the prophetic ability to work great signs and wonders with the office and the function of a prophet.

Psalm 74:9 says, “We see not our signs: there is no more any prophet: neither is there among us any that knoweth how long.” Now, think about that verse. In Hebrew parallelism it is thoughts and not the words that rhyme, and here the psalmist, Asaph, makes a parallel thought with the phrases, “we see not our signs” and “there’s no more any prophet.” He connected the two as equivalence: “nobody is doing ‘signs and wonders’ ‘nobody is giving us authoritative prophecies.” The two things were equivalent. The lack of miracle-workers was owing to the dearth of prophets, because

in the Old Testament, the miracle-worker and the prophet were one and the same.

When Elijah had his standoff with the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel the test was to see not only whose god was the true one, but to do a test of the prophet's authority. Just before he prayed down fire from heaven Elijah uttered this prayer, 1 Kings 18:36, he said, "LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, let it be known this day that thou art God in Israel, and that I am thy servant, and that I have done all these things according to thy word." Do this miracle Lord to prove my authority as your prophet. That was his prayer.

In the New Testament miracles serve a very similar purpose: they authenticate the message of the prophet, and this is clear throughout the New Testament. Jesus Himself pointed to His miracles as proof of prophetic authority, listen to John 5:36, He said, "The works which the Father hath given me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me." These miracles are proof that the God sent me, that's what He said. And hear what He said in John 10:36-38, "Say ye of him, whom the Father hath sanctified, and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest; because I said, I am the Son of God?" He said, "If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not. But if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works: that ye may know, and believe, that the Father is in me, and I in him." He said, look, you can deny me and deny my authority all you want, but when you see these miracles--how can you deny that? They are the proof that I am from God.

Listen to the testimony of Nicodemus, John 3:2, "He came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that you do, unless he comes from God." And here is John 7:31, telling us, that, "many of the people believed on Him, and said, When Christ comes, will He do more miracles than this man hath done?" Those miracles were proof of His authority as the true Messiah. Why did John record so many of Jesus' miracles in his gospel? He tells us why in John 20:30-31, he says, "Many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: but these are written, so that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God." John recorded these miracles for us so that we would believe. They were the proof that authenticated the reality of Christ as Messiah and His authority as the spokesman for God. And again and again, we see that miracles are given to corroborate the authority of someone who speaks for God.

The miracles in the Book of Acts were done for the same reason--they were the proof that the apostolic message was true. Notice that these miracles were chiefly associated with the Apostles themselves, Acts 2:43, "And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles." Acts 5:12, "by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people." In fact, New Testament miracles were referred to as the "signs of the apostle." When the Apostle Paul wanted to defend his own apostleship in 2 Corinthians, he pointed people to the signs and wonders he had done among them, 2 Corinthians 12:12, "Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds." Those "signs, and wonders, and deeds," were the signs of the apostles. This wasn't something that every single person in the church had access too. These were uniquely signs of apostolic authority, Hebrews 2:1-4, again expressly states that the New Testament miracles came with the express purpose of corroborating the apostolic witness. I won't read that passage, but you can look it up, Hebrews 2:1-4, a key verse:

["Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip. For if the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward; How shall we escape, if we

neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him; God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will?"']

It says expressly that the reason for the miracles were to affirm the apostolic authority. The Gospel was first proclaimed to the world by Jesus' apostles and other eyewitnesses who received it from Him. The outpouring of miracles that came with the introduction of the gospel were God's own testimony that the gospel was true.

Now, there were certainly occasions when people besides the apostles performed miracles, **but these were always people who were associated with the ministry of the apostles**, and miracle ability was conferred on them by the apostles. That is why in Acts 8, Simon the Sorcerer offered Peter money for the ability to work miracles. I wish we had time to look at that passage because it sheds light on this whole issue. Simon, trying to buy the gift of miracles, believed that he had to get it from an apostle, because that was true, for the only miracles that were done like that were done in the association with the apostles, and that is why all the miracles in Acts attest to the authority of the apostles, whether the miracles were actually done by an apostle or by somebody else.

Walter Chantry has written about this, the whole Simon episode, he said, "Simon recognized at once that the mighty signs of others attested to the authority of the apostles, and he sought to buy his way into that elite band. All who did miracles by the power of God did so by the laying on of the apostles' hands, and other miracle-workers like Philip could not transmit the gifts.

In fact, if you search your New Testament you will discover that from the Day of Pentecost to the end of the New Testament era, no miracle ever occurred in the entire New Testament record, except in the presence of an Apostle or one directly commissioned by an Apostle--ever.

So miracles in the New Testament as well as miracles in the Old Testament always served this important purpose--they validated the message of men who were the instruments of new revelation from God, and most often they were associated by the men who were the instruments by which Scripture was being written.

Let me quickly, in closing, say that this whole issue is very, very important, and I fear that the Cessationist's stance is being given up too quickly by people who have not thought it through carefully. They don't recognize that a degree of Cessationism is absolutely vital unless you want to leave the Canon of Scripture open, or allow for modern day Apostles. And if you are not willing to go that far, then you need to have a better reason for rejecting Cessationism than the mere fact that there is not a single explicit proof text to settle the question.

But instead, the burden of proof ought to be on those Charismatics who want to prove that the signs and miracles that they claim today are the gifts in the New Testament, because as long as they acknowledge that these are not gifts of apostolic quality, it seems to me that they have in effect, already conceded the main argument against those modern gifts.

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