

The Christian Reader

"Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand" (Eph 3:4)

 May 2007

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Online Edition

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Published monthly and sent free of charge to those who are interested in Bible Study.

This publication is made possible by the effort of God's elect, with the purpose being to encourage a better understanding of the Scriptures, "which are able to make you wise unto salvation."

The Purpose of Miracles

By Roger Scully

Without a doubt the purpose of John's gospel record is to set forth, among other things, the deity of Jesus of Nazareth. The book begins with the words, "In the beginning was the Word, the Word was with God, the Word was God; the same was in beginning with God" (1.1, 2); and it ends with the words, "This is the disciple which testifieth of these things...And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written. Amen" (21.24, 25). In the previous chapter John wrote, "And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God..." (20.30, 31). So it should follow, then, that if John was writing with his main purpose being to set forth the deity of Jesus, that he would have recorded many proofs in his record. And, so he does: In 2.1-11 Jesus turns water into wine, "this the beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee." In 4.47-54 Jesus healed the son of a "certain nobleman" simply by speaking the word, "this is again the second miracle that Jesus did." 5.5-9, records the healing of the man at the "pool." In 6.9-14 we read of the feeding of the five thousand, "when they had seen the miracle." The next "sign" of Jesus is recorded in 9.1-7, where Jesus heals the blind man who was blind "from his birth," "that the works of God should made manifest in him." In 11.38-44 the infamous account of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead is recorded, "that they may believe that thou has sent me." Finally, in 20.11-16 Jesus was raised from the dead, which is described by Paul in Romans 1.4, as the ultimate proof of His deity. The Hebrew writer describes these things as "God also bearing witness" (2.4). It remains, then, that our Lord's life was continually attended by events, which were entirely outside the realm of the ordinary course of nature. Consider: He was born of a virgin, having His birth announced by angels; then He arose form the dead the third day, eating and drinking. Finally, He ascended into heaven out of the sight

of the apostles. And it is these miracles, which were to give clarity to the fact that Jesus was the Christ, that have caused many problems in the realm of religion. Not because God has not clearly spoken, but because many “wrest the Scriptures unto their own destruction” (2 Pet 3.16).

Miracles are often viewed as acts to help the needy. While on the one hand, miracles did help those in need; this was not the purpose of miracles (cf. Jn 9.2, 3). Others think that the purpose of miracles was to show how religious a person was; yet this is wrong also. Many sectarian preachers claim that miracles will cause people to be financially stable; be perfectly healthy; and help them put away bad habits. Yet, they all fail to understand the true purpose of miracles as described in Scripture. In fact, this understanding is in direct contrast to the term *semeion*, which means a sign or mark by which a person is distinguished from others and is known—an unusual occurrence which transcends the common course of nature—the wonders by which God authenticates the men sent by Him, or by which men prove that the cause they are pleading is God’s. The purpose of miracles was to prove the deity of the Christ, and later the authority of the apostles and authenticity of the message proclaimed.

Note that in Matthew 14.33 the disciples said, “Of a truth thou art the Son of God.” What is interesting, however, is the manner in which they came to this understanding, after having witnessed Jesus walking on water (v.25). In John chapter four, verse 29, the Samaritan woman asked, “Is not this the Christ?” How did she come to such a conclusion? Because in verses 16-19 Jesus was able to reveal to her matters of her personal life, which He could not have known being a mortal man. As pertaining to the preaching of Peter and John, we are told, “they could say nothing against it,” because they beheld “the man which was healed standing with them” (Ac 4.14). Philip’s message was confirmed in Samaria because the people saw “the miracles which he did.” Peter, John nor Philip were able to turn to the New Testament as we can to prove that which we teach, hence it was necessary that proof be given by some other means, the means being miracles.

The Miracles Of Prophecy: Show The Truthfulness Of God And His Word.

In Acts 28.23 we read of Paul expounding and testifying “the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the Law of Moses and out of the prophets.” Why was he using the prophets? Because he was able to show the record of what had been prophesied, then he was able to show their fulfillment, hence he was able to “persuade them concerning Jesus.” You see: the Bible contains more than 600 historical prophecies, none ever having been shown incorrect. The Bible was penned by more than 30 writers, perhaps even 40, from a variety of backgrounds covering a period of 1600 years. It is written in three different languages, covering seven different empires, without one contradiction. Let us now note some of these prophecies in particular.

The first to which attention is herein called is the prophecy of Isaiah 44:28, “That saith of Cyrus, He is my shepherd, and shall perform all my pleasure; even saying to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built; and to the temple, Thy foundation shall be laid.” This prophecy was spoken as pertaining to Judah’s restoration from Babylonian captivity, even before the Jews had been taken captive. Some 230 years later we read of Cyrus decreeing that the house of the Lord at Jerusalem, which is in Judah, should be rebuilt, and that the Jews should return to their beloved city.

Another name specifically called in Scripture is that of Josiah. After the kingdom of Israel had been divided into the Northern and Southern tribes, the Northern tribes, led by Jeroboam, began to worship calves in Dan and in Bethel, calling them the gods, which had led them forth from Egypt. In chapter 13 God sends a prophet out of Judah, simply identified as “a man of God,” to cry out against the altar. His words are recorded in verse 2, “thus saith the Lord; Behold a child shall be born unto the house of David, Josiah by name; and upon thee shall he offer the priests of the high places that burn incense upon thee” (“thee” being the altar). In 2 Kings 21.24 we read of Josiah being made king, and in 23.16 we read of him burning the bones of the priests on the altar. The significance of this is

that there are 277 years in-between the prophecy of the man of God and the actual events taking place.

Next, under the heading prophecy, attention is called to Genesis fifteen, verse 13, wherein God spake to Abram concerning his seed being in a strange land (Egypt) and being servants “400 years.” In Exodus 1:8-11 we read of these events transpiring, 210 years after they were spoken.

These events serve a purpose, do they not? Indeed, they do. They serve the purpose of revealing God’s eternity and confirming His word as true. Only deity could tell of future events, and be so precise in doing it.

The Miracles Of Jesus: Show He Is The Christ, The Son Of God

“Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you” (Ac 2.22). The life of Jesus was completely saturated with the miraculous, and for good reason. The greater the thing to be told the greater the proof must be. The news of Jesus being the Christ is the greatest thing to ever be told; hence the proof was necessarily powerful. The beginnings of Jesus’ life were that which involved the miraculous, for he was born of a virgin, as has been prophetically spoken (Isa 7.14; Matt 1.16-23). Throughout his life he would walk on water, calm the seas by saying “peace, be still.” He would heal the blind, make the lame to walk, and even raise the dead. Though there are many signs, which accompanied the life of Messiah, that to which particular attention is here called is that of his resurrection from the dead.

Despite the fact that Jesus had performed many miracles in the sight of many people, some still requested a sign. In Matthew 12.38 the Pharisees said to Jesus, “Master, we would see a sign from thee,” to which Jesus responded by saying, “there shall be no sign given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonah” (v.39). In other words, the ultimate proof, the ultimate sign confirming Jesus to be the Son of God, would be His resurrection from the dead, “for as Jonah was three days and three nights in the whale’s belly; so shall the son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth” (v.40). Had Jesus died and

not been resurrected, then he would have simply been another man who bewitched the people. But, because he was resurrected, there is then the great proof that he was no mortal man, but the Son of God. Paul wrote in Romans 1.4, “And declared to be the Son of God with power...by the resurrection from the dead.”

The Miracles Of The Apostles: To Confirm The Message

“And these signs shall follow them that believe...” (Mrk 16.17). It is not here our purpose to discuss the limited sense of Jesus’ statement, for that is discussed in other essays in this volume, but suffice it to say that this term does have a limited meaning and spake of the apostles and those on whom they would lay their hands (cf. Ac 8.18), for the purpose of confirming their message.

It was necessary for the New Testament preachers to have some means of confirmation, for it was not possible for them to turn to book, chapter and verse to prove that which they taught. Hence, God allowed them the ability to perform miracles, which was confirmation of the truthfulness of their message.

In Acts 2 the message was confirmed by the apostles’ ability to speak in other languages (v.12). In Acts 4 it was confirmed by the healing of the lame man at gate Beautiful (vs.15, 21). In Acts 8 it was confirmed by Philip, on whom the apostles had laid their hands, by his ability to heal many that were “taken with palsies and that were lame” (vs.6, 7).

Conclusion Of The Matter

Without doubt there are many other things, which could be discussed as pertaining to the purpose of miracles, such as the edifying of the saints, etc. However, suffice it to say that the purpose of miracles was to confirm God and His word, hence the miraculous acted as a seal of approval. This writer is certain that you will be richly blessed by a study of the following essays, and that the writers of this work have thoroughly explained the subjects undertaken by them.

Impartation and Reception of Miraculous Gifts

By Adam Comeaux

Amidst descriptions of judgment and devastation, Joel prophesies concerning God's Spirit being poured out upon mankind, giving supernatural powers to both male and female (Joel 2:28-32). The fulfillment of such can be seen in various passages provided in the New Testament. There are instances such as Peter curing a man who was lame since birth (Acts 3:1-8) and the daughters of Philip having the ability to prophesy (Acts 21:8-9). Based on Peter's sermon, his ability to heal the lame man was not his at all, but the ability of the power of God (cf. Acts 3:10-26). It is evident that prophecy was fulfilled, but what of the details concerning the impartation and reception of these abilities? To answer this question is the primary goal of this essay.

The work of Jesus the Christ was filled with manifesting His miraculous power over all things. The masses would follow and beseech His healing strength in amazement. In preparing for His death, Jesus comforted his disciples by ensuring them of another Comforter (John 14:16-18). This Comforter, the Holy Ghost, would be their Guide (John 14:26), and He would testify of Jesus the Christ (John 15:26). He would not come until Jesus' departure (John 16:7). After Jesus' death and resurrection, He said "I will send the promise of my father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high" (Luke 24:49). Luke records the same conversation in the first chapter of the book of Acts, wherein he includes the departure of Jesus and the adding of Matthias to the eleven apostles. Then Luke records, in the second chapter of Acts, the fulfillment of Jesus' promise to send the Comforter. The event is described as being on the day of Pentecost with all the apostles together. The house was filled with a sound that was likened to a mighty rushing wind. Then cloven tongues of fire sat upon each of them and they were filled with the Holy Ghost (Acts 2:1-4).

As a result, they were able to speak in various languages (Acts 2:4-11). This leads to Peter explaining that it was the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy (Joel 2:28-32; Acts 2:16-21) – the beginning of the use of spiritual gifts in the Christian dispensation.

We know evidence shows there was miraculous ability among those who were not apostles, but Luke records that the Holy Ghost was poured out on the apostles alone. How, then, did the gifts of the Spirit come upon others? In the eighth chapter of the book of Acts, Philip goes to Samaria preaching Christ and performing miracles (Acts 8:5-7). Those who heard and believed were baptized, both men and women. Even one named Simon, a sorcerer who had fooled the Samaritans into thinking he was something great, believed and was baptized (Acts 8:9-13). Simon continued by Philip's side in wonder and amazement concerning Philip's spiritual gifts. According to verse sixteen, spiritual gifts had not been imparted to any of the Samaritans, though they had been baptized. When the apostles heard of the conversions, Peter and John went to Samaria, laying hands on the saved in order for them to receive spiritual gifts (Acts 8:14-18). Through this, we must conclude that the Holy Spirit, who had been poured out on the apostles, enabled the apostles to impart spiritual gifts to others, but gift-recipients could not forward them further. Remember, Philip was not an apostle. While he could perform miracles, he could not impart miraculous ability; that is why the apostles came to Samaria. Verse 18 becomes key: "When Simon saw that through the laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given..." By whose hands were the Spirit's gifts given? – *The apostles'*.

There is another instance in which the Holy Spirit was poured out like He was on Pentecost (cf. Acts 2). In this second unique instance, an angel told a Gentile named Cornelius to send for the apostle Peter who would tell him what he needed to do to inherit eternal life (Acts 10:1-6). While praying, Peter fell into a trance and received a peculiar vision in which he was told to go to Cornelius' men. Upon arrival to the house of Cornelius, Peter understood his vision: the gospel was for Jew and Gentile alike (Acts 10:28,34-43); Jews and Gentiles would be

welcomed into Christ's kingdom (cf. Galatians 3:27-29; Ephesians 2:11-16). While Peter was preaching, the Holy Spirit fell upon those Gentiles as the Spirit had on the apostles in Acts 2. Note, as of yet, Cornelius' household had not been baptized, and neither Peter nor any other apostle had laid hands on them. It was after people heard Cornelius' household speaking with tongues they concluded the event's meaning: "Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life" (Acts 11:18; cf. 10:46). Peter responded with some questions: (1) "Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as he did unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; what was I, that I could withstand God" (Acts 11:17)? (2) "Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we" (Acts 10:47)?

Peter's second question implied something about Cornelius and the Gentiles – that they might face some ruthless criticism as to their divinely prepared right to spiritual citizenship. Jewish Christians had no qualms with Jewish apostles and Christians manifesting divine approval, but many of them became bigots when God expressed equal opportunity to the Gentiles. When Peter went to Cornelius, some Jews harassed him, saying, "Thou wentest in to men uncircumcised, and didst eat with them" (Acts 11:3). In Acts 15, some Jewish Christians dogmatically condemned attempting to convert Gentiles to Christ without binding circumcision (v1). This infuriated Paul and Barnabas, so they sought resolution with others on the matter and visited the apostles and elders in the church at Jerusalem (v4). Interestingly, the majority of statements by Peter, Paul, Barnabas and James in Acts 15 do not deal specifically with the doctrine of circumcision but the prophecies and proofs of Gentiles' citizenship in the church of Christ (vv7-9,13-19). The problem of the accusers may have, as least in their minds, been partly doctrinal (cf. v5), but the glaring issue was instead discrimination. Peter rebuked them, saying, "God...knoweth the hearts" of the Gentiles and "put no difference between [Jews] and [Gentiles], purifying their hearts by faith" (v9). For the Jewish Christians to bind Moses' command of circumcision upon the Gentiles was to

not only place an unbearable yoke upon Gentiles, but also upon Jewish Christians themselves (v10).

What took place at Cornelius' house was exclusive from all other instances of salvation and spiritual gift-possession. The Spirit was poured out on Cornelius (Acts 10,11) in order that Peter might understand Gentiles were being accepted into the body of Christ. In this one instance, the reception of the Spirit did not indicate personal salvation but announced to others the Gentiles' newly-given opportunity. Cornelius' household would later be baptized for salvation, the remission of sins (Acts 10:47,48; cf. Acts 2:38; Mark 16:16). This is the only other instance mentioned wherein the Holy Spirit was poured out, evidently to enable the performance of spiritual gifts. It is not the proof-text to suggest that unsaved people can work divine manifestations. It is not the text from which to assume spiritual gifts exist today. It is not the text to presume miraculous abilities should accompany one's salvation. The events of Acts 2 and Acts 10,11 are unmatched – the days when Jews and then Gentiles could embark into the faith. Peter realized that day of Gentile acceptance its monumental significance, commenting, "Then remembered I the word of the Lord, how that he said, 'John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost'" (Acts 11:16).

Having noted the purpose of Cornelius' household receiving gifts, let's remember only the apostles received the Holy Spirit in a way that enabled them to perform miracles and impart spiritual gifts. It was only through the laying on of the apostle's hands that spiritual gifts were imparted to others. Now, what of Peter's sermon in the second chapter of Acts on that day of Pentecost? After explaining this was all fulfillment of prophecy, he grammatically defines calling on the name of the Lord as repenting and being baptized for the remission of sins (Acts 2:21; 37-39). He also explains they will "receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." It is interesting to note that the gift is promised to those who would repent and be baptized. It is also interesting to note that those in Samaria were baptized, but did not receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:16-17), and the gift is referenced to performing miraculous acts such as speaking in tongues

(Acts 10:45-47; 11:17). While there may be different views of the gift of the Holy Ghost mentioned in the second chapter of Acts and verse thirty-eight, we must take all things into consideration in order to draw the proper conclusion. If baptism does not impart spiritual gifts (Acts 8:16), those who obeyed the gospel on the day of Pentecost could not have received spiritual gifts through baptism. If the ability to do miraculous acts has reference to the gift of the Holy Ghost (Acts 10:44-47), then Peter must have made reference of spiritual gifts in the thirty-eight verse of chapter eight. If this is the case, then Peter was referencing the fact that the apostles were going to lay their hands on those who rendered obedience in order that they might receive some spiritual gift. Might I add, this does not necessarily mean all received spiritual gifts, not improbable, but not necessarily.

As Jesus promised, the apostles received power from on high. This enables the apostles to empower others with any of the various spiritual gifts. It was done by the laying on of the apostle's hands, with the exception of the household of Cornelius. This is the conclusion we derive from the Bible and all it says concerning the impartation and receiving of spiritual gifts.

Speaking in Tongues

By Cade Somers

No other gifts of the Spirit are more assumed to exist today than the gift of speaking in tongues. This was only one of nine gifts demonstrated in the first century church (word of wisdom, word of knowledge, faith, gifts of healing, working of miracles, prophecy, discerning of spirits, tongues and interpretation of tongues). If one believes he can speak in tongues as the spiritual gift-given Christians of the first century did, he should be able to support that belief with Scripture. Paul wrote, "[W]hatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him" (Col. 3:17). If the claim were true, the manner of one's speaking in tongues would be identical to that described in the New Testament.

Truthfully, no one can reasonably conclude he possesses the same ability as was once exhibited by first-century Christians. The most likely reason why speaking in tongues is the crutch to the modern Charismatic claims is that it is the easiest to fake. It's difficult to fake raising a body from the dead and even more difficult to cause others to believe by it. It's also difficult to fake making a real leper appear instantaneously cured; however, uttering sounds and syllables that have no meaning in one's native language is easy to do. This is how one may appear to be speaking in tongues when, in reality, he is merely issuing nonsensical gabble. Once all the evidence is weighed, the only appeal someone has to support modern-day tongues-speaking is one which contradicts the Bible. Take caution you do not presumably change God's Word by holding to unscriptural notions (Ga. 1:8,9; De. 4:2; Re. 22:18,19).

Definition of Tongues

The word *tongues* comes from *glossa*. Acts 2 serves as the ideal text to prove the nature of this word. It was the day of Pentecost (Ac. 2:1). The apostles were present (Ac. 1:26). They were filled with the Holy Spirit (Ac. 2:4), something uniquely so-called Holy Spirit baptism (Ac. 1:5; 11:16; cf. Joe2.28,29) here and in Acts 10,11. Being filled with the Holy Spirit, the apostles "began to speak with other tongues" (Ac. 2:4). These were not incomprehensible, for "the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language" (Ac. 2:6). The apostles were speaking to an audience of local and foreign Jews (Ac. 2:5) in the audience's own languages. There were Parthians, Medes, Elamites, Mesopotamians, Judeans, Cappadocians, Pontusians, Asians, Phrygians, Pamphylia, Egyptians, Libyans, Cyrenes, Romans, Cretes and Arabians (Ac. 2:9-11). "They were all amazed and marveled, saying one to another, 'Behold, are not all these which speak Galileans?'" (Ac. 2:7). Thus, when the apostles spoke in tongues, they spoke real languages others could understand. The miraculous nature of it was seen in their never having previously studied or learned the languages they spoke. God provided them the ability and knowledge instantly.

Unknown Tongues

Some attest God permits them to speak in tongues not known to mankind. The proof-text used is 1 Corinthians 14:2,4: “[H]e that speaketh in an *unknown* tongue speaketh not unto men, but unto God: for no man understandeth him; howbeit in the spirit he speaketh mysteries. He that speaketh in an *unknown* tongue edifieth himself...” First, *unknown* has been supplied by the translators; it is unnecessarily inserted into the text. The unknown tongue under investigation is not a non-earthly language; it is simply a language which the Corinthian church members did not speak, for the broader context bears out the writer is discussing matters relevant to the Corinthian church’s assembling (cf. 1 Co. 11:18; 14:23,26,34). *No man understandeth him*; that is to say, no individual in the church at Corinth.

The Purpose of Speaking in Tongues

Paul said, “tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not” (1 Co. 14:22). God intended this gift to have primary usage toward foreign, unsaved people. He clearly made known that if the tongue, or language, was employed in the context of the church, it must have been done with an interpreter present who would translate the speaker’s message. Interpretation of tongues was the corresponding spiritual gift to speaking in tongues (1 Co. 12:10). Without an interpreter, speaking in tongues in the worship assembly would impart no knowledge to the church, and it wouldn’t be done to the edifying of the brethren, as required (1 Co. 14:12,13,26). The church cannot be edified by something which it cannot understand. Paul said he’d rather speak five words understandably to his audience than ten thousand non-interpretable words in a different language (1 Co. 14:19). Therefore, speaking in tongues (1) proved to the foreigner that the speaker had a supernatural ability and, thus, (2) received a supernatural message (cf. Ac. 2:7). This gift tremendously blessed the early church, providing for what began as a seemingly centralized religion a greater ability to

spread to places of the gentile world where people had yet to respond to the gospel (cf. Ac. 1:8; 2; 8:4).

There were other spiritual gifts which were purposed more specifically for the church. Comparatively, speaking in tongues was aimed more for non-Christians; prophecy was for Christians. For one, the benefit was to lead a stranger to Christ through proving the speaker was inspired of God; for the other, to guide the disciples in attaining and maintaining the unity of the Spirit (Ep. 4:3), which is the unity of the faith (Ep. 4:13). Paul wrote, “prophesying serveth not for them that believe not, but for them which believe” (1 Co. 14:22). Prophecy was a spiritual gift which could be used in the speaker’s native language for the purpose of revealing divine knowledge to the church. Paul’s argument in 1 Corinthians 14 is hardly one promoting the use of the gift of tongues when the church assembles; instead, his argument obviously demonstrates his staunch disapproval of its use in the Christian assembly. The rare first-century exception would have been only if there was an interpreter present (1 Co. 14:27,28). Paul encouraged them to only pray that which could be prayed with understanding and sing with that which could be sung with understanding (1 Co. 14:15).

To further prove gifts of the Spirit do not exist today, one should consider God’s plan for them with regard to their longevity. The gifts had a beginning; therefore, it’s implicit, the gifts likely would have an end. In the same general context is this relevant statement of Paul:

“Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away. When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I

know even as also I am known” (1 Co. 13:8-12).

The “love chapter” of the Bible (1 Co. 13) is often viewed as having a sub-theme of spiritual gifts, but it should be the converse. Spiritual gifts was the theme in chapter twelve of 1 Corinthians. It was also the theme in chapter fourteen. So, why would Paul erratically begin writing about love in between? Dedicated Bible students understand Paul’s points of love to fit within God’s thoughts regarding spiritual gifts. Possessing spiritual gifts without love is useless (1 Co. 13:1). In this explanation, Paul noted that love would be lasting while gifts were fleeting. The church, therefore, needed to focus less on the demonstration of gifts and more on the demonstration of love. This fact is supported by the sinful activities of the Corinthians’ worship. There was a problem with gift-given Christians leading acts of worship in the assembly to their own glory – to display what they could do instead of to edify their brethren. Sometimes, many were presenting their gifts before the congregation at the same time (cf. 1 Co. 14:26ff). The scene is one of disorder, confusion and chaos – not at all what God wants in assemblies aimed toward worshipping Him. If they loved God and the church, they would not have been seeking to do things according to their own selfish pleasures. Love, Paul taught, would be eternal, while spiritual gifts would no longer be necessary. But, at what time would they become unnecessary? The answer: “when that which is perfect is come” (1 Co. 13:10). The word “perfect” (*teleios*, neuter) is contrasted with “in part” (1 Co. 13:9,10). The subject is divine knowledge. No longer would divine knowledge be “in part,” but it would be made perfect, or complete. From the beginning, God spoke through the prophets (He. 1:1) what Scripture calls a “mystery” that was being revealed (cf. Ro. 16:25; 1 Co. 2:7; Ep. 1:9; 3:3).

God determined for spiritual gifts to cease (1 Co. 13:8). To suggest that speaking in tongues is a legitimate and divine gift manifested today is to suggest, from above, that the word of God is incomplete. So long as apostles and early church leaders were being supernaturally revealed the yet undisclosed will of God, the need existed to make it

known and proven by the gifts. Peter likely wrote his epistles in the mid-60s A.D. This would place them toward the end of the chronological timeline of books recorded by divine inspiration. In his second epistle, Peter wrote, "According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue" (2 Pe. 1:3). By this, we know the apostles had been given "all things" and by Peter's time "all things" were seeing their complete revelation. It is absurd to assume there is anything left necessary for man's knowledge of God and salvation that is unaddressed in written Inspiration from Genesis to Revelation.

The Impartation of the Gifts of Tongues

God made known His method of imparting spiritual gifts from one to another. A sorcerer named Simon, of Samaria, obeyed the gospel (Ac. 8:9-13). After the apostles arrived to the city, Simon witnessed them laying hands on their brethren, imparting spiritual gifts to them (Ac. 8:18). He wanted to have that same ability, so he offered the apostles money. He wasn't asking to possess a spiritual gift; he was asking to possess the ability to impart spiritual gifts to others. Peter denied his request, reproving Simon for his ignorant and sinful demand (Ac. 8:20-22). God did not offer this important responsibility at wholesale cost to anyone. It was one which He gave only the apostles. No one may produce Scripture that contradicts this evidence. In fact, Philip, who was not an apostle, had some miraculous ability (Ac. 8:6), but apparently, because he lacked apostleship, it was necessary for apostles to come to impart the gifts (Ac. 8:14). From all of this, one may mathematically determine an estimate of what year spiritual gifts and the spiritual gift-given ceased from the Earth. John was the last living apostle. While the year of his death is uncertain, it is supposed that he died at the close of the first century or the beginning of the second century. If John had laid hands on some in the end of his life, and those were less than forty years of age, then the last of spiritual gift recipients could have potentially lived just up to the mid-to-late second century. It borders

insanity to assume individuals after (to be safe) the mid-third century would have possessed any supernatural ability, because such would imply someone was alive at more than one hundred fifty years of age.

Praying in Tongues

Despite being well-informed, some religious people will not sever themselves from the conviction that being a spiritual person requires being able to exercise supernatural gifts. Some go so far as to suggest one is not saved unless he or she manifests such a gift. Here's the problem: all people in the first century church did not receive spiritual gifts; there were saved, non-gift-given Christians. The initial Samaritans baptized into Christ did not immediately receive spiritual gifts (Ac. 8:12,16,17), yet they were saved. Paul baptized a group of men at Ephesus, upon whom he then laid hands to impart spiritual gifts unto them (Ac. 19:6). Yet, some, who know better, still allege they can speak in tongues, but they say they must do so privately, only to God in prayer.

People who attempt to justify praying in tongues do so often using 1 Corinthians 14:2,4,13-15 – the same text used for speaking in “unknown” tongues. The defense says, “So long as I am speaking to God in tongues, I have no need for an interpreter, and He understands what I'm saying, even when I do not.” Logic alone defeats this argument.

First, is one's prayer life really spiritually deeper and more connected because he can't interpret his own distorted blathering but God can? What edification is that for oneself? For the same reason tongue-speaking should not have been done without one to interpret for others, tongue-speaking should not have been done without one to interpret for self. If one speaks in tongues and there is no interpreter, Paul said let him “pray that he may interpret” (1 Co. 14:13). Instead, I believe that I should pray with understanding (1 Co. 14:15) and in areas wherein I might struggle to word thoughts appropriately, the Spirit intercedes for me and those with whom I am praying (Ro. 8:26,27).

Second, if one understands the words which he prays but others cannot, one's understanding is unfruitful to those who hear without comprehension (1 Co. 14:14). In other words, it is of no benefit to others if one understands what he says in a tongue but he cannot convey it to others. Read 1 Corinthians 14 again. The tenor of the chapter is not one of general approval, but disapproval, of speaking or praying in tongues in the context of the assembly.

Third, it must be proven by the modern-day self-pronounced tongues-speakers that what "words" they speak are (1) indeed known world languages and not phony gibber-jabber and (2) words of a language the person had neither heard before nor ever been taught.

Tongues of Angels

"If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am become sounding brass, or a clanging cymbal" (1 Co. 13:1 ASV). There are numerous reasons why the "tongues of angels" are not to be misconstrued as some sort of superior spiritual language to human languages. (1) The tongues of men are placed as equal to the tongues of angels in the text, as indicated by the word "and" (*kai*). (2) We've proven the Corinthian church had some Christians with the ability to speak in tongues. This text emphasizes that spiritual work (ie. speaking in tongues, prophesying, giving to poor) was useless without love. The implication is not that the language itself was impossible for anyone to comprehend but that without employing gifts in love, the spiritual receptivity of others would be extremely poor. People see right through pride and disinterest! As the tongues of men and angels should be treated equally, the latter should be viewed as a language likewise someone could understand, but unless it was employed with love, spiritual receptivity with it would also be poor. (3) There is no Bible example of an angel speaking to men in unintelligible languages, but there are several examples of angels speaking to men in understandable languages. (4) Paul was writing in hyperbole (exaggeration): "Even if men were on the angelic level, communicating without love would be meaningless" (comp. Ga. 1:8). The fact his words were hyperbolic is further viewed in his expression, "I am

become sounding brass, or a clanging cymbal.” If Paul was not a literal noisy brass or cymbal, then its possible angelic tongue-speaking is also an element of figurative language, for the only “tongues” Paul aims to discuss in detail are those of people “in the world” (1 Co. 14:10) – the same tongues ever discussed elsewhere in Scripture.

The Conclusion

The “tongues” discussed in the Bible are actual world languages. The gift of tongues was supernaturally given for early church expansion and guidance when the Word of God had not been entirely revealed and recorded. The gift of tongues and all other spiritual gifts have ceased. Inspiration said they would. The apostles died long ago; therefore, no one today has had apostles’ hands laid on them to receive any gifts. Not all Christians had the gifts in the first century; many were saved without them. The gifts themselves did not certify one’s salvation; in fact, many were sinfully abusing the gifts, and unresolved sin results in condemnation (Ja. 1:15).

Today, those who suggest spiritual gifts exist consistently must teach God’s Will is not yet completely revealed – that the present Bible is not everything necessary for our spiritual guidance. Since gifts do not exist today, those who pretentiously stand before audiences of people, passing off syllables and sounds as real words in another language should rethink their ignorant actions. Paul said if others can’t understand the language one speaks, it is as “speak[ing] into the air” (1 Co. 14:9). He says that if unbelievers were in the midst of the assembly and they heard the bunk, they’d say the church is “mad” (*mainomai*) – that the people speaking were raving as maniacs (1 Co. 14:23; Strong’s Dictionary: *mainomai*).

Don’t determine your beliefs on what others say or your religious authority teaches. Ensure your beliefs derive from a practical interpretation of the Bible. There are many good-intentioned religious people in the world who are yet destitute of the Truth (cf. 1 Ti. 6:5). Just because we do not believe the gift of tongues exists today does not suggest we do not believe they once existed. Because we do not believe in some extraordinary outburst at one’s moment of

salvation (ie. speaking in tongues, holy barks, slain in the Spirit, etc.) does not imply we do not feel inward emotions or express outward joy at that moment. Let's do our best to start pointing ourselves and others to walking by faith and not by sight or feeling (cf. 2 Co. 5:7). Let's teach and practice the Truth about the spiritual gifts of the past.

Miracles Have Ceased

By Jacob Campbell

Miracles, signs, and wonders played an irreplaceable role in the unfolding of the eternal purpose of God. They were instrumental in building a case for the deity of Jesus Christ (Jn. 3:2; 20:30-31); they were essential to both the revelation and confirmation of the will of God (1 Cor. 2:10-16; Mark. 16:20; Acts 4:29-31); they were necessary to the protection and growth of the infant church (Acts 12:6-11; 13:6-12; 16:16-18); and they substantiated the early church's claim that Christianity had once and for all replaced Judaism as the world's only divinely-approved religious system (Heb. 2:1-4).

We deny neither the fact that men performed miracles in the past nor that miracles have played a significant role in the shaping of history. Claiming that God worked wonders by the hands of men in times past and claiming that he continues to do so today, however, are two entirely different claims. Many contend that if we accept the miraculous of the Bible, we must also believe that the miraculous occurs today. The Scriptures actually affirm quite the opposite--that miracles, signs, and wonders were intended to last for a limited duration, and, when their purpose was complete they were to pass away.

To demonstrate that miraculous gifts were to be only a temporary phenomena in the church, let us consider their purpose, the means by which they were imparted to men, two vital New Testament passages on the subject, and a few general observations about the claims of modern-day "miracle workers."

THE PURPOSE OF MIRACLES IN THE EARLY CHURCH

Without completely rehearsing what other articles in this paper have already noted, let us simply give the sum of what has been said relative to the purpose of miraculous gifts and show its significance to the duration aspect of the miraculous age.

The first-century church needed miraculous gifts for reasons which no longer apply. First, the gospel preached by the apostolic church was a new message. It was thus necessary that there be some sign from God that the preachers of this message were, in fact, speaking on His behalf. Miraculous gifts served as a divine stamp of approval of the message preached by those who possessed the gifts. This basic fact is established in a number of New Testament passages (Mark 16:20; Acts 4:29-30; Heb. 2:3-4).

Second, the early church could not function without the aid of miraculous gifts. Not even the apostles were able to teach from memory all that needed to be taught; they had to receive guidance from the Holy Spirit himself (Jn. 14:26; 16:13). How, then, were new converts, many of them Gentiles who had little or no prior understanding of God or his will, going to grow in the knowledge of God's word and adequately teach it to one another and to others? How were assemblies, in which preaching and teaching was conducted, to function? The answer is with the aid of miraculous gifts. Prophecy and miraculous knowledge were necessary for both the edification of the church and the instruction of the unbeliever (1 Cor. 14:1ff).

Today, the gospel is 2000 years old. It is not a new message, and there is no doubting its legitimacy. It *was* confirmed, and it *remains* confirmed.

Today, the church is capable of preaching and teaching the once-for-all sealed gospel of Christ without the aid of spiritual gifts. What the early church lacked we have. What was yet being revealed has forever been revealed. We fail to recognize the place of miraculous gifts in God's plan for the church, and we fail to appreciate the all-sufficient confirmed New Testament if we claim a continuance of miracles, signs, and wonders today. Miraculous gifts served their purpose. We live as recipients

of the blessings attached to that purpose, but without the gifts themselves being a present reality.

THE IMPARTATION OF MIRACULOUS GIFTS

Again, a comprehensive treatment of this subject is not necessary--it has been so treated already. Let us simply make the connection between what has been written on the impartation of gifts and the cessation of those gifts.

If it was the case that first-century followers of Christ received the power to perform miracles by one of only two means, and both of those means are not available to men today, then it follows that twenty-first century followers of Christ have no means by which to receive power to perform those same miraculous gifts.

The first means, Holy Spirit baptism, was a rare occurrence--it was limited to the apostles and the household of Cornelius (Acts 1:2-5; 1:26-2:4; 10:44-47; 11:15-17; cf. Eph. 4:4). The second means, by the hands of an apostle (Acts 8:14-18; Rom. 1:11), is obviously obsolete in that the apostles are no longer with us. If the means of impartation of gifts are absent, so too are the gifts themselves.

1 CORINTHIANS 13:8-13

That spiritual gifts were always intended to be a temporary phenomena in the church is clearly established in this passage. The carnal and divisive spirit of certain members of the church at Corinth manifested itself in the way spiritual gifts were viewed and exercised. A Christian's worth was attached to the particular gift they possessed; bragging rights belonged to those with the "better" or more impressive gifts. Showmanship flourished, and love failed. Thus, the Corinthians overlooked the very purpose of the gifts, and they failed to exercise them in the proper manner.

In response, Paul attempted to redirect their focus toward what really mattered: building up the church in a spirit of love. Where love was absent and the church was not edified, what good purpose did the gifts serve? So, to illustrate the superiority of love and edification, Paul took three of the nine gifts mentioned in 12:8-10. Prophecies were to be done away, tongues were to cease, and

(supernatural) knowledge was to vanish (13:8). Love, however, would yet remain when these were gone.

Without knowing anything else, one could still conclude from what has been noted that the miraculous gifts, including tongues, healing, and prophecy, which were possessed by the early church, were not designed to abide for all time. The text goes on, however, and establishes the time frame for the duration of miracles. The Corinthians were not only told that gifts would cease, they were told in general terms *when* they would cease.

While knowledge came piece by piece, or part by part, in the first century via inspiration of the Spirit (13:9), Paul said there was to come a time when that form of revelation would be gone. Specifically, “when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away” (13:10). There really can be no excuse for misunderstanding what “that which is perfect (complete)” refers to in this text. It is quite obviously the antithesis of “that which is in part,” which, according to 13:9, is miraculous knowledge and prophecy. So, the spiritual gifts which were possessed by the Corinthians and other Christians in the first century would last only until that piece-by-piece, gradual and partial revelation of the gospel was replaced by a completed, final revelation of the gospel. That final and complete will and revelation of God is comprised in the book we call the Bible. To argue for a continuation of miraculous gifts today is to argue that we are still living in the age of in-part knowledge and that the twenty-seven books of the New Testament do not contain the whole of God’s revelation and will for man.

EPHESIANS 4:7-16

When Jesus ascended he sent his Spirit to empower men to work miracles (Jn. 16:7; Eph. 4:7-11). Paul again notes that these miracles were designed for the edification and unity of the church (Eph. 4:1-6, 12-16). Notice, however, that they would be necessary only for a limited time, until the church reached a state of maturity. They were given “for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of

the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" (4:12-13). Again, without any further delineation of the text, it is observed that these gifts were not intended to last for the duration of the church's life; the very word "till" (4:13) implies as much. But, again, Paul goes on and gives the duration for miracles. They were to be possessed by members of the body of Christ until (1) the unity or oneness of the faith and knowledge of God, and (2) the church became, in some respect, full-grown.

That oneness of the faith (the gospel) and knowledge of God corresponds to the oneness or completeness of knowledge discussed in 1 Corinthians 13. It is set in contrast to the incomplete, partial knowledge which characterized revelation in the first century. That these gifts would edify the body until the unity of the faith and the knowledge of God, then, is the same as saying that they would edify the body until the faith, the gospel of Christ, was revealed in full to man.

It is also stated that these gifts would last until the church reached full-grown status. Paul used a similar analogy when writing to the Corinthians (13:10-11). The church, then, was viewed as an infant as long as it relied on spiritual gifts to teach and edify. When the need for miraculous knowledge and utterance was replaced by the complete and finalized New Testament of Christ, however, the church became a full-grown man, able to stand on his own.

What a shame it is for some to attempt to revert back to the infant stages of the church. Paul looked with anticipation for the day when miraculous gifts would no longer be needed for the well-being of the church. We are privilege today to have at our fingertips the final and completed revelation of God toward man, not having to settle for knowledge that is only revealed piece by piece over time, as our early brothers and sisters were compelled to do.

MODERN-DAY "MIRACLES"

Another evidence that miracles have ceased is based simply on observation. Men have not witnessed miracles

being performed for almost 2000 years. The so-called miracles performed today do not match those of the early church in number, kind, scope, efficacy, time, or a number of other aspects. The early church raised the dead (Acts 9:40); walked on water (Matt. 14:29); spoke in and understood legitimate, understandable languages having never learned them (Acts 2:4-12; 1 Cor. 14); healed the sick (1 Cor. 12:9); were unharmed by poison or venomous snakes (Mark 16:18); struck men blind (Acts 13:11); and discerned the hearts of men (Acts 5:2-3). Modern miracle-workers do not even attempt or claim power to perform some of these, let alone perform them. It is typical for claims to be made for healing the sick and speaking in tongues, both of which can be easily forged to convince the unlearned and unsuspecting of their genuineness. Where are the resurrected bodies? Where are the ones drinking cyanide and coming away unscathed? Where are the ones bitten by cobras who suffer no harm? (We hear about the ones who become extremely sick or die, but where are the bitten but unharmed ones?) Where are the Charismatics who will venture into a foreign land with no translator, and having never studied the native language?

The healing experienced at the hand of first-century Christians was complete and instantaneous. Furthermore, the sicknesses were legitimate and observable, and the healings open to public scrutiny. One will not find these conditions among modern "healing" sessions.

Why is there an absence of miracles today? Is it because God is limited in his power? Is it that there is a lack of true faith among God's people? Neither. The miraculous age came to a close long ago; this is not a reflection of God's power or his people's faith, but of the nature and design of miraculous gifts.

One final observation. Many will not be convinced that the miraculous age has ceased, regardless of what evidence may be offered in this or other writings. Suppose, then, that we are living in an age in which miracles are a present reality. Whose "miracles" are we to believe? After all, it is not as if just one religious body or movement claims to possess miraculous gifts. Mormons, Assemblies of God, Churches of God, Catholics, and people of many

other faiths claim to work miracles. They are “performed” in essentially the same manner. There is little to distinguish their “miracles” one from the other. It must be the case that no more than one of these different faiths is capable of performing true miracles, as the Holy Spirit obviously could not be confirming (by miracles) varying and conflicting faiths. The Holy Spirit could not be substantiating the claims of both the Mormons and the Assemblies of God. The Spirit could not be endorsing the worship patterns or terms of salvation for both Catholics and Churches of God. These and other groups alike claim direct guidance and miraculous endowment by the Holy Spirit; why, then, are they alienated in their beliefs and practices? Professed miracle workers and their followers find themselves in a difficult position. This could be avoided if honest and informed hearts would confess that the power to raise the dead, heal the sick, and speak in tongues is not in our possession today.

General observation suggests that true miracles--those about which we read in the New Testament--are not being performed today, anywhere by anyone. More importantly, the matter is settled in Scripture. The miraculous age lasted until the church could stand on its own without the aid of those gifts, that is, until the will of God was revealed in full (by the end of the first century). The means of imparting spiritual gifts are not available to men today. We are privileged to live in the age of the completed gospel. Thanks and praise to God for his power to build up and sustain the early church with miraculous gifts, and for his power to build up and sustain the church today by the gospel faith, once for all delivered to his saints.