

Whatever Happened to Miracles and Spiritual Gifts?

By Al Felder

“⁹But there was a certain man, called Simon, which before time in the same city used sorcery, and bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out that himself was some great one: ¹⁰To whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is the great power of God.”
(Acts: 8:9, 10)

Many people have a childlike fascination with the miraculous spiritual gifts mentioned in the Bible. The topic seems to create a certain craze or hysteria among some people. In fact, there are people today who believe that God still gives these gifts to man, and that unless a church possesses all of these gifts – it is not a fully functioning church.

The fact of the matter is, many people will believe that almost anything is a miracle. There are many wealthy men today who have made a living preying upon such people. They are like Simon the sorcerer who we read about in the Bible. In reality, God was never with Simon and he never wrought a real miracle. When the Apostles came to Samaria, Simon realized the real thing when he saw it. He offered them money so that he too would have the abilities that they possessed. Yes, Simon was like men today who make their living fooling people all because some people will call almost anything a miracle. With this in mind it is our goal to find out what constitutes a miracle according to God’s word, and ask, “Whatever happened to miracles and spiritual gifts?”

The word miracle means the thing done was supernatural, or contrary to the laws known to govern the universe. That which God does through means of natural law is not miraculous. For example, in the beginning God formed man from the dust of the ground, but today He allows the natural laws which He has set in place to take care of this process.

One thing that we must understand is that it is not a matter of whether or not God still has the power to perform miracles today. He has all power, the same as ever, but he uses His power in wisdom. God does not do everything He can do at all times. It’s not a question of ability; rather, the issue is what He has willed to do. God honors the laws of the universe that He has put into place. He does not use His power like a child playing with toys. For Him to needlessly perform miracles would teach man to distrust the laws governing the universe, and bring untold harm. Therefore, it is important for us to understand when and why God chose to use miraculous works and give some men the ability to perform miracles.

The Patriarchal age was ushered in by the miracles of creation. Likewise the Old Covenant was ushered in by the miracles of Sinai, but when the entire Old Testament was revealed and Malachi had written that last word – there was a four hundred year period in which miracles ceased before the coming of Christ. During this four hundred year period there were no inspired men, and no one wrought any miracles among the people. God had said all

He wanted to say under that covenant, and His word being revealed and confirmed was to be the peoples guide. There was no further need for miracles at this time.

Following this, the Christian age was ushered in by miraculous power. During Christ's time here on earth He performed miracles. These miracles served the purpose of showing people that He was the Son of God.

"²And, behold, they brought to him a man sick of the palsy, lying on a bed: and Jesus seeing their faith said unto the sick of the palsy; Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee. ³And, behold, certain of the scribes said within themselves, This man blasphemeth. ⁴And Jesus knowing their thoughts said, Wherefore think ye evil in your hearts? ⁵For whether is easier, to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and walk? ⁶But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (then saith he to the sick of the palsy,) Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house." (Matthew 9:2-6)

Jesus did not go around performing miraculous acts without an intended purpose. The miracles He performed were for the purpose of proving unto people that He was the Son of God.

Then, after Jesus was resurrected from the dead, the Apostles were given miraculous abilities that enabled them to reveal and confirm the Gospel for the benefit of all mankind. Their work was in our behalf, as well as those of their own generation. *"For I think God hath set forth us the apostles last, as it were appointed to death: for we are made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men."* (1 Corinthians 4:9) This office was not continued after the death of the last Apostle. This was a special office. *"Beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection."* (Acts 1:22) In order to be an Apostles, a man had to be a witness of the resurrection of Christ.

The Apostles had the responsibility of revealing and confirming the last will and testament of Jesus. No one else has ever had this task. In order to keep them from making mistakes they were given the Spirit. *"Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth."* (John 16:13) They needed a power that we do not need today. Without the miraculous power given by the Spirit they could not have wrought a single miracle to prove their message was true. *"And they went forth, and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following."* (Mark 16:20) *"³How 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; ³God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will?"* (Hebrews 2:3, 4) They had no New Testament from which to learn and teach the Gospel, they were the ones whom God was going to use to write it.

It was also for this reason that God gave miraculous spiritual gifts to other men as well. *"And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healing, helps, governments, diversities of tongues."* (1

Corinthians 12:28) One thing that must be realized is that only the Apostles had the ability to bestow these gifts to other men. *“And when Simon saw that through the laying on of the apostles hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money.”* (Acts 8:18) When the last Apostle died, and all the men died upon whom they had laid their hands, there were no more men who possessed miraculous spiritual gifts. By 96 AD the New Testament was completed and confirmed. From that day to this day, there has been no need for the miraculous power exercised in the first century. We are now in the same condition as the Jews when the Old Testament was completed. The New Testament being completed, signs and miracles are no longer needed and in divine wisdom they have been taken away.

The scriptures confirm that this was God’s plan.

“¹¹And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; ¹²For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: ¹³Till 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 fullness of Christ.” (Ephesians 4:11-13)

The Apostles were to continue in the church just as long as the other miraculously qualified men mentioned in this passage. How long were they to continue in the church? Paul tells us exactly in the passage of scripture, “Till we all come in the unity of the faith.” In other words, they were not to continue forever.

In the Greek language the definite article is used with the word “faith.” This emphasizes the uniqueness of the faith being discussed. It is a signal that “faith” in this context is being used in the objective sense rather than the subjective sense. It does not refer to one’s personal trust in and obedience to the Gospel of Christ; for they had already attained that sense of the word “faith.” Nor does it refer to a spirit of oneness and harmony in the church because at this time they were all one, there were no denominations. “Faith” in this context refers to the completed word of God. It would be through this completed word that the Ephesians (and all Christians) would have the means of attaining complete knowledge of Christ and becoming full-grown.

We find this same idea taught in other New Testament passages as well. *“Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I would not have you ignorant.”* (1 Corinthians 12:1) There were some things that the members of the first century church needed to understand about the abilities they had been given. Paul goes on to list a total of nine spiritual gifts including prophecy, tongues, and supernatural knowledge. *“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.”* (1 Corinthians 13:8) Paul states that all of these gifts were to cease one day. It was never God’s purpose to have these abilities continue in the church.

Paul further explained why these gifts would no longer be needed. *“For we know in part, and we prophecy in part.”* (1 Corinthians 13:9) Each inspired man only knew a part of the

truth. The New Testament scriptures were not revealed through one man. Instead, several men were given bits and pieces of the New Testament until finally the complete and perfect revelation of God had come. *“But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.”* (1 Corinthians 13:10) When all of the parts were finally revealed, there was no further need for that which was in part.

When the building is completed the carpenter takes down the ladders and scaffolding to let the house stand on its own. These things were needed during the creative state of the building, but once all the pieces were put into place – these things no longer served a purpose. Likewise, everything was originated in miraculous power; and is perpetuated by divine law. God made Adam and Eve by miraculous power, then He gave them the laws of reproduction and said multiply.

There are some today who would reject this line of reasoning from the scriptures by stating that God does not change. *“I change not.”* (Malachi 3:6) *“Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and forever.”* (Hebrews 13:8) These passages do not teach that God continues to do all things the way that He always has. God created Adam from the dust of the ground, but He has set in place the laws of reproduction to take care of this process since that time. Verses such as the ones stated refer to God’s moral nature. It does not change.

Still, there are those who misapply certain promises given in the scriptures.

“¹⁴Afterward he appeared unto the eleven as they sat at meat, and upbraided them with their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they believed not them which had seen him after he was risen. ¹⁵And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. ¹⁶He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned. ¹⁷And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; ¹⁸They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.” (Mark 16:14-18)

A false interpretation of this passage leads people to believe that the miraculous abilities mentioned by Christ are for anyone who believe on Him. The phrase “them that believe” is plural and does not refer to the singular noun “creature.” Instead, it refers to the eleven whom Jesus had reprimanded for their unbelief. This promise given at this time was for the Apostles and the Apostles only. It was not a general promise given to all believers; rather, it was Jesus’ promise to the Apostles that they would have these abilities to confirm the word which they spoke.

Now that we have God’s completed word, these miraculous spiritual gifts are not needed today. *“³⁰And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: ³¹But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.”* (John 20:30, 31) Today, we do not have signs and wonders that are performed for the purpose of causing us to believe in Christ. We have God’s completed word through which we are to believe.

In closing, there is no other message or doctrine that is pleasing to God other than what He has revealed in His word. *“But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed.”* (Galatians 1:8) Neither men nor angels can say anything other than what God has already said. There is no further revelation given today for God’s word is complete. *“Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.”* (Jude 3) There are no prophets today, and all religious messages that are different from the Gospel of Christ are false.