

The Mystery of the Holy Spirit

Healings and Tongues

Lecture 11

Coogee, a beachside suburb in Sydney, drew international attention in January 2003 when someone thought they saw the Virgin Mary in the alignment of a fence post. Hundreds of people made a pilgrimage to Coogee to see this “miraculous phenomenon”.

Many people scoffed at the Jesus in the rails episode at Coogee – in fact it ended up being destroyed by vandals. But there is no denying the craving for miracles that now marks our society – people are even finding Jesus in toast!

It should not surprise us, then, that the fastest growing churches are the ones that are offering miracles. The Roman Catholic Church offers miracles – through relics, through prayers to people like Mary MacKillop, and even by touching the coffin of a deceased saint (as people did during World Youth Day in Sydney).

Pentecostal, Charismatic and Third Wave churches also offer miracles – through faith healers and through word of faith declarations. It is taught in these churches that miracles should be the normal Christian experience, because the kingdom of God has come to earth – a kingdom in which there is no disease or sorrow or death.

Until recently, theological scholarship rebuffed the claims of both Catholicism and Pentecostalism. But now a new form of reformed theology – called New Calvinism or Reformed Charismaticism – has emerged. It claims to be reformed in doctrine and charismatic in practice.

Is God doing something different in our age? Are miraculous wonders – like healing and tongues – something every Christian should expect as a normal experience?

Revision of Spiritual Gifts

Before we address this topic, we should revise what we learned last time about spiritual gifts generally. It is clear that God has given spiritual gifts to believers through the indwelling Holy Spirit. These gifts are given for the purpose of edifying the church so that God is glorified.

There are three points in summary that I want to add to what we’ve already covered.

1. **Gifts are given to every believer, regardless of maturity or spirituality.**¹ We are born again with our spiritual giftedness. Therefore, if you are believer, you do not have to wonder whether or not you have special enablement from God – you do.
2. **Spiritual gifts are first of all functions, not offices.** It is not true that a person with the gift of teaching is automatically entitled to a leadership role in the church as a teacher. Nor is it true that a person with the gift of evangelism is entitled to be the head of the church’s evangelism ministries. The possession of a gift does not imply leadership authority over or within the church. It is a function, not an office. On the other side of this issue, it is also

¹ John MacArthur, **MacArthur Study Bible**.

wrong to think that only someone with the gift of teaching can teach in Sunday School, or only someone with the gift of evangelism can witness. Evangelism and discipleship (teaching) are required of all believers regardless of giftedness. This is true of all the gifts.

3. **Every spiritual gift is multi-faceted in application.** The gift of teaching can be exercised effectively as a Sunday School teacher, or as an internet blogger, or as a person people seek out for counsel, or as a choir director, or as a prayer partner . . . the list is endless. The same can be said of every gift. The gift of mercy may be used to feed the hungry, or listen to the hurting, or witness to the unsaved, or visit the shut-in. Never think that you can't exercise your spiritual gift unless or until you have a specific role in the church. In fact, the opposite is the right path. Serve in the small things and then your gift will be evident and your opportunities will grow (see Luke 16.10).

The important focus is not on what my spiritual gift is, but on serving Christ humbly, faithfully and routinely in the local church. As we serve, the Holy Spirit will edify the church through us.

Miracles and Healings

Does God do miracles today? Does God heal today? The answer is yes . . . even from a cessationist point of view. God is free to do whatever He likes whenever He likes. But does God gift miracle workers and healers today? That answer is no – because the apostolic age in which the New Testament was being written has ceased.

This is the heart of the cessationist/continuationist debate. If the signs and wonders described in the New Testament were always attached to apostles, and if there are no apostles today, then signs and wonders cannot be normative today.

On half of this issue continuationists are actually cessationists. There are no serious evangelical scholars who claim apostleship is for today. Everyone agrees that the gift of apostleship has ceased.

The disagreement, then, is a matter of hermeneutics and logic. Cessationists follow the logic out to its end and rule out miracle workers and faith healers. Their position is supported by a grammatical historical interpretation of Scripture, and by the history of the early church.

Continuationists appreciate Scripture and logic, but they also listen to personal experience. Millions of people are speaking in tongues, and claiming healings and miracles – and those churches that embrace these practices are the biggest. They conclude that God must be in it because it is working.

Let's start our discussion on the point of agreement. Apostleship has ceased. But were miracles and healings reserved for the apostolic age?

Apostles

Only a few men in the New Testament were designated by Christ to be apostles. The word "apostle" when spoken in the Hebrew language means "proxy". In other words, the apostles were the authoritative "proxies" of Jesus Christ during the transitional period between the Old and New Testaments.

There were unique characteristics that separated the few apostles from the many disciples. John MacArthur enumerates these²:

1. Their teaching was the foundation of the Church.

Ephesians 2:20 (NKJV)

²⁰having been built on the **foundation of the apostles** and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief *cornerstone*,

This foundation was laid by the apostle's credible witness to the resurrected Christ. Paul makes the point in Ephesians that this foundation was large enough to include believers from all Gentile nations.

Ephesians 3:5 (NKJV)

⁵which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has **now been revealed** by the Spirit **to His holy apostles** and prophets:

A foundation can only be laid once – which it was by the apostles. From there the church has continued to build through the centuries under the general contractorship of Christ, the oversight of Christ's appointed evangelists (missionaries) and pastors, and the work of God's people in the church.

There are no apostles today because there is no foundation to be laid.

2. They were eyewitnesses of the resurrection.

There is no doubt about the original eleven (twelve minus Judas) plus Matthias (who was appointed according to this criterion in Acts 1.21-26 (especially v 22) having been eyewitnesses. Paul, too, meets this criterion because of his encounter with the resurrected Christ on the road to Damascus (Acts 9.1-9; 1 Cor 15.7-8). As Paul himself later claimed with the Corinthian church:

1 Corinthians 9:1 (NKJV)

¹Am I not an apostle? Am I not free? **Have I not seen Jesus Christ** our Lord? Are you not my work in the Lord?

3. They were personally chosen by Jesus Christ (Mt 10.1-4; Acts 1.26; Acts 9.15).

Jesus chose the original twelve, then controlled the throwing of the lots so that Matthias was chosen to replace Judas. Jesus also intercepted Saul and appointed him to be the apostle to the Gentiles known by his Greek name, Paul.

4. They were authenticated by miraculous signs.

Armed with the message of Christ – the New Testament – the apostles were proved credible by the miraculous signs of Christ. Like their Lord, the apostles were able to heal in ways that are not duplicated today:

² John MacArthur, **Charismatic Chaos**, pp. 123-125.

With a word, touch or even a shadow or handkerchief.

Acts 9:34 (NKJV)

³⁴ And **Peter said** to him, “Aeneas, **Jesus the Christ heals you**. Arise and make your bed.” Then he arose immediately.

Acts 28:8 (NKJV)

⁸ And it happened that the father of Publius lay sick of a fever and dysentery. **Paul** went in to him and prayed, and he **laid his hands on him and healed him**.

Acts 5:14-15 (NKJV)

¹⁴ And believers were increasingly added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women, ¹⁵ so that they brought the sick out into the streets and laid *them* on beds and couches, that at least **the shadow of Peter passing by might fall on some of them**.

Acts 19:11-12 (NKJV)

¹¹ Now God worked unusual miracles by the hands of **Paul**, ¹² so that **even handkerchiefs or aprons were brought from his body to the sick**, and the diseases left them and the evil spirits went out of them.

Instantly.

Acts 3:6-8 (NKJV)

⁶ Then Peter said, “Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk.” ⁷ And he took him by the right hand and lifted *him* up, and **immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength**. ⁸ So he, leaping up, stood and walked and entered the temple with them—walking, leaping, and praising God.

Totally.

There are no partial healings in the New Testament. As with Jesus, when the apostles brought healing to a person, that person was made whole.

Acts 9:34 (KJV)

³⁴ And Peter said unto him, Aeneas, Jesus Christ maketh thee **whole**: arise, and make thy bed. And he arose immediately.

Organic diseases.

All of the healings in the New Testament were of organic maladies – problems that were verifiable like blindness, paralysis or infectious disease. Most purported healings today are not organic, but rather psychosomatic or functional. In fact, there are no verifiable cases today in which a blind man has received sight, a paralytic has walked or a dead person has been raised.

The ultimate disease: death.

Acts 9:36-42 (NKJV)

³⁶ At Joppa there was a certain disciple named Tabitha, which is translated Dorcas. This woman was full of good works and charitable deeds which she did. ³⁷ But it happened in those days that **she became sick and died**. . . . ⁴⁰ But Peter put them all out, and knelt down and prayed. And turning to the body he said, “Tabitha, arise.” And she opened her eyes, and . . . **Peter . . . presented her alive**. ⁴² And it became known throughout all Joppa, and many believed on the Lord.

Acts 20:9-12 (NKJV)

⁹ And in a window sat a certain young man named Eutychus, who was sinking into a deep sleep. He was overcome by sleep; and as Paul continued speaking, **he fell** down from the third story and was **taken up dead**. ¹⁰ But **Paul** went down, fell on him, and embracing *him* said, "Do not trouble yourselves, for his life is in him." . . . ¹² And **they brought the young man in alive**. . .

According to God's Plan

2 Corinthians 12:12 (NKJV)

¹² Truly the signs of an **apostle** were accomplished among you with all perseverance, in **signs and wonders and mighty deeds**.

Hebrews 2:3-4 (NKJV)

³ how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was **confirmed to us by those who heard Him**, ⁴ **God also bearing witness** both with **signs and wonders**, with various **miracles**, and **gifts of the Holy Spirit**, according to His own will?

5. They had absolute authority.

Jude 17 (NKJV)

¹⁷ But you, beloved, remember the words which were spoken before by the **apostles** of our Lord Jesus Christ:

1 Timothy 6:20 (NKJV)

²⁰ O Timothy! **Guard what was committed to your trust**, avoiding the profane *and* idle babblings and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge—

2 Timothy 1:14 (NKJV)

¹⁴ That **good thing which was committed to you**, keep by the Holy Spirit who dwells in us.

Titus 1:5 (NKJV)

⁵ For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and **appoint elders** in every city as **I commanded you**—

Notice that not only did Paul command Titus and Timothy with authority, but he also charged them to appoint elders and deacons – not apostles. There was no succession to apostleship.

We also must note that Paul never commanded Titus and Timothy to seek new revelations in prophecy or the phenomenon of tongues. If these were the normal experience of Christians, it would seem that Paul would mention them. That he doesn't indicates that these were not the normal experience of Christians.

Instead of revelations and tongues, Paul orders the non-miraculous activities of preaching and evangelism.

2 Timothy 4:1-2 (NKJV)

¹ **I charge you** therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: ² **Preach the word!** Be ready in season *and* out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching.

2 Timothy 4:5 (NKJV)

⁵ But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an **evangelist**, fulfill your ministry.

6. Their place of honour is eternal.

Revelation 21:14 (NKJV)

¹⁴ Now the wall of the city [the New Jerusalem] had **twelve foundations**, and on them were the names of the **twelve apostles** of the Lamb.

From this overview of the apostolic office, it is clear that miracles and healings were signs authenticating their ministry and message. In other words, apostleship and miracles went together.

Now we must explore whether or not miracles are ever separated from the apostles in the New Testament. We will discover that they are not.

Miracles

To begin our individual assessment of the phenomenal gifts, we must define miracles.

Miracles can be defined as “a less common activity of God in which He arouses people’s awe and wonder and bears witness to Himself.”³

There are two reasons to believe that the ministry of miracle workers and faith healers ceased with the apostolic age.

1. The specific record of the exercise of these gifts is always associated with the apostles, and it quickly declined after Pentecost.

Miracles

There are two non-healing miracles recorded in Acts. One involves the apostle Peter, the other the apostle Paul.

Acts 12:5, 7 (NKJV)

⁵ **Peter** was therefore kept **in prison**, but **constant prayer** was offered to God for him by the church. ⁷ Now behold, an **angel of the Lord** stood by *him*, and a light shone in the prison; and he struck Peter on the side and raised him up, saying, “Arise quickly!” And **his chains fell off his hands**.

Acts 28:3 (NKJV)

³ But when **Paul** had gathered a bundle of sticks and laid *them* on the fire, **a viper** came out because of the heat, and **fastened on his hand**. ⁵ But he shook off the creature into the fire and **suffered no harm**.

Healings

The incidences of healing are not as frequent as might be supposed. There is clearly a geographic pattern to the phenomenon – following the predicted expanse of the church according to Acts 1.8.

³ Wayne Grudem, **Systematic Theology**, p. 1027.

Acts 1:8 (NKJV)

⁸ **But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”**

Are the apostles attached to these incidences of healing?

Lame Beggar in Jerusalem

Acts 3:6-8 (NKJV)

⁶ Then **Peter** said, “Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk.” ⁷ And he took him by the right hand and lifted *him* up, and **immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength**. ⁸ So he, leaping up, stood and walked and entered the temple with them—walking, leaping, and **praising God**.

Note that the ultimate result of this healing was that God was praised. An additional outcome was that Peter’s message was verified.

Acts 4:14, 22 (NKJV)

¹⁴ And seeing the man who had been **healed** standing with them, they could say nothing against it. ²² For the man was over forty years old on whom this **miracle of healing** had been performed.

Multitudes from Judea

A fourth outcome was that people were saved.

Acts 5:14-16 (NKJV)

¹⁴ And **believers were increasingly added** to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women, ¹⁵ so that they brought the sick out into the streets and laid *them* on beds and couches, that at least the shadow of **Peter** passing by might fall on some of them. ¹⁶ Also a multitude gathered from the surrounding cities to Jerusalem, bringing sick people and those who were tormented by unclean spirits, and **they were all healed**.

The gospel has now spread from Jerusalem to Judea . . . and it is the apostle Peter who is unlocking the way with the figurative keys to the kingdom given to him by Jesus (Matt 16.19).

Many in Samaria

Acts 8:5, 7, 14 (NKJV)

⁵ Then **Philip** went down to the city of **Samaria** and preached Christ to them. ⁷ For unclean spirits, crying with a loud voice, came out of many who were possessed; and **many** who were paralyzed and lame **were healed**. ¹⁴ Now when the **apostles** who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent **Peter and John** to them,

Coastal Judea

Acts 9:32-35 (NKJV)

³² Now it came to pass, as **Peter** went through **all parts of the country**, that he also came down to the saints who dwelt in Lydda. ³³ There he found a certain man named Aeneas, who had been bedridden eight years and was paralyzed. ³⁴ And Peter said to him, “Aeneas, **Jesus the Christ heals you**. Arise and make your bed.” Then he arose immediately. ³⁵ So **all** who dwelt at Lydda and Sharon saw him and **turned to the Lord**.

Gentiles in Asia Minor

Acts 14:8-10 (NKJV)

⁸ And in **Lystra** a certain man without strength in his feet was sitting, a cripple from his mother's womb, who had never walked. ⁹ This man heard **Paul** speaking. Paul, observing him intently and seeing that he had faith to be **healed**, ¹⁰ said with a loud voice, "Stand up straight on your feet!" And he leaped and walked.

Gentiles in Malta (enroute to Rome)

Acts 28:8-9 (NKJV)

⁸ And it happened that the father of Publius lay sick of a fever and dysentery. **Paul** went in to him and prayed, and he laid his hands on him and **healed** him. ⁹ So when this was done, the rest of those on the island who had diseases also came and were healed.

There are no incidents of healing recorded in the epistles. This makes sense in light of Hebrews 2.3b-4.

Hebrews 2:3-4 (NKJV)

³ . . . [that] which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and **was confirmed** to us **by those who heard Him**, ⁴ God also bearing witness both **with signs and wonders**, with various **miracles**, and gifts of the Holy Spirit . . .

It is no coincidence that the miracles recorded in Acts follow the progression of the gospel according to Acts 1.8. . . and that miracles are not repeated once the gospel had progressed. Most of the recorded conversions in Acts, in fact, were not accompanied by miracles, healings or tongues. After the first verifying occurrence in a certain locality, there seem to be no additional miracles. Logically, this is because no further validation (or 'confirmation' Heb 2.3) was necessary.

It is also significant that every miracle and every healing was attached to an apostle. This is a clear indication that such phenomenon was meant as a sign verifying the messenger and the message during the transition from the Old Testament to the New Testament.

There is only one other place where miracles are mentioned in the New Testament. That is in 1 Corinthians – one of the first epistles Paul wrote. The reason Paul wrote about miracles and healings was that the Corinthians had an unhealthy fascination with such phenomenon. Paul commands them to focus on faith, hope and love instead.

1 Corinthians 12:29-30 (NKJV)

²⁹ Are all **apostles**? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all **workers of miracles**? ³⁰ Do all have **gifts of healings**? Do all **speak with tongues**? Do all interpret? ³¹ But earnestly desire the best gifts. And yet I show you a more excellent way.

Paul makes no mention of miracles or healings in any of his other letters. If these phenomena were normal, wouldn't it seem that Paul would say more about it? But the only thing he says is actually playing down, not promoting the practices.

There is one other place where healing is mentioned in the New Testament.

2. One of the earliest epistles speaks of healing – but not at the hands of faith healers.

Scholars agree that James is one of the earliest epistles. Isn't it curious, then, that James does not suggest that the sick call for a faith healer to work a miracle? Rather James suggests calling the elders (pastors) to pray.

James 5:14 (NKJV)

¹⁴Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the **elders** of the church, and let them **pray** over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord.

Beyond these two biblical observations, we must add that the practice of miracle working and faith healing today – carried out in vast arenas by wealthy celebrity practitioners – is at odds with the examples in the Bible. Jesus Himself did not heal everyone. His healing ministry was clearly secondary to His saving and His teaching ministry.

The apostle John records the purpose for the limited miracles Jesus performed:

John 20:30-31 (NKJV)

³⁰And truly Jesus did many other **signs** in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; ³¹but these are written **that you may believe** that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.

Belief resulting in salvation is the greatest of miracles . . . and the greatest of healings. The good news is that God is still performing this miracle today.