

Believe It!  
*What About The Sign Gifts?*

Early on in my Christian experience I'm very new to the faith and I'm reading through the Bible trying to figure things out. At first I thought Christians basically all believed the same things. Then I began to find out that that wasn't even close to true.

At first I was attending a church that was a lot like this one. But it was right at the time when a seismic doctrinal shift was taking place in our country.

In the early 70's American Christianity was going through drastic changes. Before 1960 there was no such thing as the Charismatic movement like there is today. The only churches that practiced speaking in tongues and healing, and receiving messages from God were old line Pentecostals. When you heard the term "holy-roller" that's who they were talking about.

Then Father Dennis Bennett, Rector of St. Marks Episcopal church in Van Nuys, California, got up in front of his congregation and announced that he had been baptized in the Spirit and that he could speak in tongues. Dennis Bennett wrote a watershed book titled *The Holy Spirit And You* and the modern Charismatic movement was born.

All of this excitement was appealing to me. I was told I could be baptized by the Spirit could have a "quick fix" and have an experience with God that would bring me very close to Him almost instantly. That sounded good.

I was told that God had a special prayer language for me and I could have ecstatic experiences, they called speaking in tongues, in which I could experience intimacy with God in way unlike any other. Again, that sounded appealing.

I was told that God's purpose was that everybody be healed and if we really had faith I wouldn't be sick. Once again, who wouldn't want that?

There was just one problem with all this charismatic teaching. It didn't line up with what I was reading in the Bible. There was no question the Bible talked about tongues, healing, and miracles. But the Bible's also a book which has to be read in context and interpreted using basic, standard rules of interpretation.

When I applied those rules of interpretation to what people were telling me and what I was seeing, I had a very different understanding.

We're in a series we're calling *Believe It!* This is a very straightforward journey through the beliefs of historic biblical Christianity. We're using the FCC statement of faith as our outline as we study theology systematically.

Two weeks ago we looked at the question "Who is the Holy Spirit?" We saw that: The Holy Spirit is the third person of the trinity, He permanently lives in believers, and the Holy Spirit is the key to living for God.

That basically covered the first part of our statement on the Holy Spirit. But since there are so many confusing teachings on the gifts of the Spirit we included this to specifically address the sign gifts:

The Holy Spirit sovereignly gives every believer at least one spiritual gift for service to the Body of Christ.

1. The "sign gifts"; miracles, tongues, and healing, and gifts involving direct revelation from God; prophecy, wisdom, and knowledge, were temporary gifts designed to confirm the message of the Apostles and to lay the foundation of the first century church

2. Tongues were always actual languages in use and were a sign to unbelievers. Tongues were not given as a "prayer language" nor to be the sign of the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

3. Healing is not guaranteed for this life. God sovereignly can and does still heal and perform miracles, however, these gifts are not in operation today.

Let me clarify at the onset here that we're not in a campaign against people we have theological disagreements with. We try not to focus our messages on what we don't believe, but on what we do believe.

We definitely don't want to give the impression that we're just against Christians we disagree with.

But we do, on the other hand, have clear commands from God to get our doctrine correct.

*Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.* (II Timothy 2:15)

The words "rightly dividing" are *orthotomeo* in Greek. Literally that means "to cut it straight."

The first Christian missionary, the Apostle Paul, went to the city of Thessalonica to preach and got thrown out. Next he went to Berea and taught about Jesus in the synagogue. Here's what it says, *These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they*

*received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so. (Acts 17:11)*

The Bible claims to be the living Word of God. Obviously God wants us to be wise and careful as we read it and understand it. He wants us to search the Scriptures.

*The Bible says, If you instruct the brethren in these things, you will be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished in the words of faith and of the good doctrine which you have carefully followed. (I Timothy 4:6)*

The only way we can follow good doctrine, or good teaching, is if we carefully study what it says. That's what we're doing in this series.

We can't live by the Bible unless we know what the Bible says in its context.

So let's take a look at these areas of the sign gifts.

### *I. The Sign Gifts Were Temporary And Purposeful*

Let me start off by reinforcing that the God of the Bible is a miracle working God.

## **Isaiah 45 page 713**

### **Read verses 5-8 18-19**

The Bible is crystal clear. God is the creator of all things. From the stars in the heavens to you and me, everything and everyone owes their existence to God.

So we have the miracle of creation.

Then the Bible goes on to describe other miracles. The 10 plagues on Egypt, the splitting of the Red Sea, the miracles of the prophets. When you get to the New Testament you have the miracle of the virgin birth of Jesus, the healings that Jesus performed. You even have the miracle of Jesus' resurrection. The Bible goes on to tell us that God worked miracles through the hands of His apostles.

If we didn't believe that God still worked miracles we wouldn't pray for healing, we wouldn't pray for people to be delivered from painful situations. And if we didn't believe that God worked miracles we wouldn't pray for people's salvation. There is no greater miracle than someone passing from death to life.

So the question isn't "can God do the miraculous" it's what miracles is He choosing to do and when is He choosing to do them?

You can go stand before any body of water from your kiddie pool in your back yard to the Atlantic Ocean. You can lift up your staff. You can say, *Do not be afraid. Stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD, which He will accomplish for you today.* You can do all that as a person of great faith but the water's not going to part.

You can go out every morning and look in your front yard for bread (except the Sabbath) but it's not going to be there. It was for Israel in the wilderness, but it's not going to be there for you.

**Turn to Mark 16 page 1002      Read verses 17-18**

There's been resurgence in snake handling churches in Appalachia in the past few years. You might have seen the news reports that Mack Wolford, who was a well-known snake-handling preacher died this past June from a rattlesnake bite.

Over 20 years ago, Wolford's father died the same way. In fact over the years more than 100 people have died because of snake handling in church services.

Wait a minute. It says right here in Mark 16 that one of the sign gifts was to be able to handle deadly serpents. So we brought a rattler to church this morning. (Could you guys bring that box out).

This morning I want to reiterate that God is a miracle working God. But that doesn't mean He's splitting seas and making bread appear on the lawn. Not because He can't do those things. He's the Almighty. He can do as He wishes. But every miracle in the Bible was specific to the situation. They were tailored to meet specific needs in specific situations.

This is why it's so important to rightly divide the word of truth. As you read the Bible and just kind of put things out on a timeline you'll see that there were very small segments of time that were punctuated by miracles. Each time those miracles were designed to show something specific to the people involved.

Even the miracles of Jesus had a specific purpose. The Jewish Rabbis pointed to Isaiah 35 as the identifying miracles of Messiah.

*Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped.*

*Then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the dumb sing.*

*For waters shall burst forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert.* (Isaiah 35:5, 6)

Jesus had compassion of people's suffering but He didn't do miracles simply to relieve suffering. If that were true He would have healed everybody. His miracles were specific to the time to show who He really was.

In Matthew 11 John the Baptist started having some doubts about Jesus so he sent some of his followers to ask Jesus, “Are you the One?” “Are you Israel’s Messiah?”

Jesus answer was, *Go and tell John the things which you hear and see: “The blind see and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them.”* (Matthew 11:4, 5)

After Jesus’ resurrection and ascension it was Jesus apostles who performed miracles.

*Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles.* (Acts 2:43)

In Acts 3 the Apostle Peter healed a lame man. In Acts 5 Ananias and Sapphira fell dead at the feet of the Apostles.

*And through the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were done among the people.* (Acts 5:12)

Why were the miracles focused on the Apostles?

There were thousands of other people who believed in Jesus.

Here’s why. God was building His church. There was no New Testament written yet and God used miracles to authenticate the message of the Apostles just like He used miracles to authenticate the person of Christ.

In Ephesians 2 the Bible explains: *Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone.* (Ephesians 2:19, 20)

When we built this building we had some difficult ground to work with so we had to be very careful how we laid the foundation. The strength of the whole structure was dependent on the foundation. But once we laid the foundation we started building on it. We didn’t put down the foundation over and over again.

The Apostles and New Testament prophets were foundational to the church. But once that foundation was laid there was no more need for Apostles and prophets.

## **Now turn to II Corinthians chapter 12**

Second Corinthians was written by an Apostle; the Apostle Paul. He started the church in Corinth but over time other people came in and told the Corinthians that Paul was an

imposter. You couldn't believe Him.

Now remember, God used miracles to authenticate the message of the Apostles. So what does Paul point to?

### **Read verse 12**

Those 3 words, signs, wonders, and mighty deeds are the three words that are consistently used in the New Testament for miracles.

Paul said, "All you had to do was look at the miracles I performed and you could see I am an Apostle."

Everybody wasn't running around in the early church working miracles. They were signs. They were to substantiate the message of the Apostles. The Apostles were the foundation.

*I. The Sign Gifts Were Temporary And Purposeful*

*II. Speaking In Tongues Was A Sign To Unbelievers*

As a new Christian I read about tongues in the Bible. I hung out with people who claimed to speak in tongues. I saw and heard them, and something was coming out of their mouth that wasn't English. Those are all facts.

But as I read the Bible something didn't line up.

First, the word translated tongues, *glossa* in Greek means language. It's never used for ecstatic speech. Remember in Mark 16 Jesus said *they will speak with new tongues*. That means they will speak with new languages.

### **Turn to Acts 2 page 1070**

Acts 2 takes place in Jerusalem at the feast of Pentecost. This was one of three Jewish holy days that all Jewish males were required to attend. The Jews at this time were scattered all over the Roman world so they spoke Aramaic and Greek to get along but each still had his native language he grew up with.

### **Read verses 1-8 & 11**

Here the Bible clearly defines tongues. The Galilean disciples spoke in languages which they had not previously learned. That's the gift of tongues.

Now listen to this: *Tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe but to unbelievers.* (I Corinthians 14:22)

The Bible says tongues were a sign, not of some special relationship with God, but a

miraculous sign to unbelievers.

What's especially interesting is that the people who claim they're speaking in tongues today don't speak any known languages. We've had thousands of hours of tongue speaking recorded and examined by hundreds of different language experts. There isn't anyone speaking languages.

Not only that but the syllables that are coming out of their mouths are common to their native language. People who speak Spanish speak in different tongues than people speak English.

That wouldn't happen if the tongues people are speaking today were the miraculous Biblical gift of tongues.

There's one more verse that becomes crucial to this discussion.

### **Turn to I Corinthians 12 page 1127 Read verses 12-14**

God gives spiritual gifts, like helps, encouragement, giving, administration, teaching to the church because the church is the Body of Christ and it's made up of different parts and we all play a different role.

But notice, we're all baptized by the Spirit into the Body of Christ. And this is where correct theology becomes crucial.

Charismatic theology says if you're going to be all that God wants you to be you need to have an experience with God they call baptism with the Holy Spirit. And the speaking in tongues comes along with that.

When I read the Bible I see something very different. I see the Bible teaching that a believer in Jesus Christ already has what they need to live for God. It's not a matter of getting something else it's a matter of using what you have.

It's a matter of letting the One who is in you, the Holy Spirit, have control. And then the speech that comes out of your mouth won't be ecstatic utterings that no one can understand including you.

What comes out of your mouth will be what Ephesians 4 is describing: *Be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.* (Ephesians 4: 19, 20)

*I. The Sign Gifts Were Temporary And Purposeful*

*II. Speaking In Tongues Was A Sign To Unbelievers*

### *III. The Gift Of Healing Gave A Foretaste Of Eternity*

God is a God of life, and health, and wellness. When God created this world there was no sin therefore there was no aging, no sorrow, no disease, and no death. That fits perfectly with what we know about God's character.

In the future God will make all things new. The Bible says, *He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away. Then He who sat on the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new."* (Revelation 20:3-5)

In that day everything will be as it should. But we don't live in that day yet. We live in between those 2 times, the time of creation, and the time of re-creation.

Today we have what seems like a never ending stream of people claiming the gift of healing. The gift of healing is one of the sign gifts.

After Jesus articulated those sign gifts to the disciples in Mark 16 we're told this: *And they went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the word through the accompanying signs.* (Mark 16:20)

Healing by the Apostles was a sign to confirm the message that they preached before the New Testament was written. As the scriptures were penned down the gift of healing began to fade.

The Apostle Paul had the gift of healing. But later he wrote to the Philippians about his close friend Epaphroditus. He said, *for the work of Christ he came close to death, not regarding his life, to supply what was lacking in your service toward me.* (Colossians 2:25) Why didn't Paul heal him?

In II Timothy Paul writes, *Erastus stayed in Corinth, but Trophimus I have left in Miletus sick.* (II Timothy 4:20) If the gift of healing was still in operation why didn't Paul heal Trophimus? Why did he leave him sick?

In I Timothy Paul writes this to Timothy, *No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for your stomach's sake and your frequent infirmities.* (I Timothy 5:23) Why didn't Paul heal his friend. Why did he tell him to use what was accepted medical practice and why was Timothy sick so much?

It's all so different when you compare the New Testament situation with what supposed healers tell us today.

God gifted certain individuals to heal as the gospel was going out to new areas, not to keep Christians healthy.



No one had healing meetings, no one charged money, no one berated people for not having enough faith.

Can and does God heal? Absolutely. It's why we pray for those who are sick. But that's a far cry from saying someone has the gift of healing.

Does God guarantee healing in this life? If He did no one would die. Does God use our weaknesses and infirmities for His glory? Some of the greatest hymns and songs of praise that we sing were written in the crucible of suffering.

Does the death of Christ guarantee physical healing? Yes it does. It guarantees that in the resurrection we'll never be sick again. That's our hope.

Right now the Bible says this, *We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has?* (Romans 8:22-24)

Because of the cross believers have a hope.

It's the scriptural hope and promise of being freed from these mortal bodies and being given glorified bodies that are eternally well and whole and free from disease just like God intended.

What did God do through the gift of healing? He gave people a foretaste of eternity. He allowed people to see a preview of that future day when all things would be made new.

Do you have that hope this morning? Do you believe that you'll have a new body? Do you believe that sickness, sorrow, and death will one day be a dim memory of the past?

It all comes down to one thing. It all comes down to the cross. It all comes down to Jesus Christ.