
The Supernatural Sign Gifts of the Acts Period



Are You Going
in the Right
Direction?

By Paul M. Sadler

**THE SUPERNATURAL
SIGN GIFTS
OF THE
ACTS PERIOD**

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Exploring the Unsearchable Riches of Christ

The Triumph of His Grace

Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians

The Historical Beginning of the Church

The Institution of Marriage

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Dedication

This timely work is dedicated to those who are diligently searching for the truth.

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CONTENTS

Introduction	9
<i>Chapter 1</i>	
Religious Spin Doctors	11
<i>Chapter 2</i>	
An Unbreakable Chain	19
<i>Chapter 3</i>	
“Wonders Never Cease!”	25
<i>Chapter 4</i>	
Miraculous Manifestations	33
<i>Chapter 5</i>	
A Trumpet with an Uncertain Sound	43
<i>Chapter 6</i>	
Three Crowning Graces	53
Scripture Index	61

INTRODUCTION

“For if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle?”

We are living in an era when many are declaring “back to Pentecost” with its signs, miracles, and wonders. Sadly, this unsound teaching is sweeping through the Church at an alarming rate. So much so that *speaking in tongues* has become the standard of true spirituality, even among those who once withstood Pentecostalism. Thankfully, Paul’s gospel is the answer to this confusion.

While other defenders of the faith have ably treated this subject, we hope, with God’s help, to contribute something to the discussion. Most commentators base their defense that the supernatural sign gifts are no longer in operation on the conclusion that these gifts are absent today among the members of the Body of Christ. This is true, of course, but the Church’s failure to adequately address this issue dispensationally is due to its inconsistency in rightly dividing the Word of truth. On the one hand, they teach their hearers to follow in the footsteps of Christ who taught, “and these signs shall follow them that believe,” while on the other hand, they declare these gifts have ceased, without a shred of evidence.

The solution to the problem lies in Paul’s apostleship and message. Paul received a new revelation from the Lord of glory, which clearly outlines the cessation of these miraculous manifestations of the Acts period. This process covered a period of approximately five years. Thus, by the end of the apostle’s life, the sign gifts that once so characterized his early ministry were but a passing memory. As we shall see, they were replaced with something infinitely better!

—Pastor Paul M. Sadler

Milwaukee, Wisconsin
January 7, 2001

Chapter 1

Religious Spin Doctors

A good compass can keep you from going in the wrong direction. It's a simple little gadget that always points to magnetic north. People who get lost in the mountains normally walk in circles until exhaustion leaves them delirious. Of course, the danger quickly shifts from being lost to dying from hypothermia. If they had taken a compass along, it would have enabled them to walk in a straight line until they spotted some type of landmark.

Things aren't much different in the spiritual realm. Many dear saints find themselves wandering around in a maze of confusion when it comes to the subject of the supernatural sign gifts. What they need is a compass, which according to the Scriptures is *right division*. It will always point the believer to the Lord's will in whatever dispensation he is living.

As we strive to present our bodies "a living sacrifice, holy" and acceptable unto God, our spiritual experiences are going to be many and varied. However, our walk should never run contrary to the revealed will of God. Thus, to maintain our spiritual bearings, we must *consistently* rightly divide the Word of truth. Once again, may we bring before you the timeless saying, "While all of the Word of God is for us, *it is not all written to us*, nor is it all about us." One might well be Scripturally correct but dispensationally far afield. A dear friend recently sent us a newspaper clipping which shows the peril of this type of inconsistency.

The following are some of the remarkable claims that were made in regard to a well-known faith healer: “Minister, healer, and one who sees through God. Many call her a miracle worker...She has a gift of prayer and healing. God reveals to her your past and future by using her gift from God. Her religion is holiness, known to some as Pentecostalism. She anoints her hands with oil and asks God to give her a message...[Furthermore], she has traveled all over the world preaching, praying and healing, and also gives prophecy readings....”

Sadly, there are some troubling trends that are taking place in the Christian community today. Many sincere believers, though misguided, are being swept into an emotional frenzy thinking that God is pouring out His Spirit. Consequently, those of the Charismatic persuasion claim that God has brought us full circle; therefore, they cry, “Back to the day of Pentecost!” This explains why we are hearing more and more about signs, miracles, and wonders. While many Charismatics know and love the Lord, they generally fail to make the proper dispensational distinctions.

In these last days, the “laying on of hands” is sweeping across Christendom like the black plague of Europe. Televangelists are flooding the airwaves boasting that hundreds have been healed of every type of infirmity known to man. Contrary to a clear line of *dispensational* teaching, they boldly assert that legs have been lengthened, spinal injuries reversed, and cancerous tumors miraculously removed. Ironically, some of these same individuals are actively involved in building hospitals. Pastor J. C. O’Hair placed his finger on the heart of the matter when he stated: “Let them say what they will, but the death rate is still one apiece.”

THE DANGER OF PLACING OUR FAITH IN EXPERIENCE

The “moving of the Spirit” almost seems bizarre at times when we hear about puppies being raised from the dead, washing machines miraculously repaired (the Maytag repairman won’t be happy to hear this), and gas tanks somehow being supernaturally filled. As absurd as the foregoing may seem, our Charismatic friends often ask searching questions that have thrown many into a spiritual tailspin. For example: “Have you received the second work of grace?” “Do you speak in tongues?” “Have you been slain in the Spirit?” Each of these questions strongly implies that only those who have followed in their form of doctrine are truly spiritually minded. Thus, their rule for measuring spirituality is *experience*.

Peter teaches us a lesson in regard to experience that we would do well to heed.

“Moreover I will endeavor that ye may be able after my decease to have these things always in remembrance.

“For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty.

“For He received from God the Father honor and glory, when there came such a voice to Him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.

“And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with Him in the holy mount.

“We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts” (II Pet. 1:15-19).

In other words, Peter had been through the mother of all *experiences* when he and the other apostles beheld the transfiguration. They were literally given a

preview of the coming glory the Lord will have in the kingdom. Nevertheless, fearing lest his hearers might begin to follow experience, he wisely instructs them that they have a more sure word of prophecy that they would do well to observe.

You see, the prophets of old had long ago prophesied about the glories of the kingdom. Consequently, Peter wanted their faith to rest upon the sure foundation of the Word of God, and not on *his* experiences, or anyone else's for that matter. Experience is sometimes an uncertain guide which has led many astray.

Since it is contrary to God's nature to lie, if we have placed our faith in His Word, we can be assured that what has been written will always come to pass at its appointed time. In time past, God revealed to the prophet Daniel that there would be three great Gentile *world* kingdoms that would succeed one another—Babylon, Media-Persia, and the Greek Empire. As we know, secular history bears out the accuracy of this prediction. So then, shall we place our confidence in the fallible word and experiences of men or in the infallible Word of God, which is the anchor of our souls?

The Apostle Paul warned us that in the last days *deceivers* would come among us, deceiving and being deceived. "Now as Jannes and Jambres withstood Moses, so do these also resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, reprobate concerning the faith" (II Tim. 3:8). Jannes and Jambres were the magicians who opposed Aaron and Moses. When Aaron supernaturally turned his rod into a serpent, Pharaoh summoned his miracle workers, who turned their rods into serpents to the amazement of everyone present. But the folly of these Egyptian evildoers was soon exposed. And the apostle makes it quite clear that the present-day deceivers shall also be laid bare.

The defense against this form of deception is a knowledge of St. Paul's distinctive apostleship and message. In fact, in this same context, Paul instructs Timothy: "But thou hast fully known my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, charity, patience" (II Tim. 3:10). In short, if we follow what Paul taught on these matters and observe his manner of life, it will be a deterrent to being drawn into Satan's web of trickery.

THE SIGN GIFTS OF THE ACTS PERIOD

"Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I would not have you ignorant....Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit" (I Cor. 12:1,4).

It is important to differentiate between the *temporary* sign gifts of the Acts period and those that are classified as the *permanent* spiritual gifts. Here it should be remembered that there are times when we must also rightly divide Paul's epistles. While the apostle addresses both groups of gifts in his epistles, only the permanent spiritual gifts remain in operation today. These gifts include ministry, teaching, counseling, helps, governments, administrations, etc.

The temporary supernatural sign gifts, such as wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, miracles, prophesying, discerning of spirits, tongues, and the interpretation of tongues *ceased* with the close of the transition period. Thus, when Paul states to the Corinthians: "Now concerning spiritual [Gr. *pneumatika, spirituals*] gifts, brethren, I would not have you ignorant," he primarily has in mind correcting the *misunderstandings* and *abuses* of the miraculous sign gifts.

For example, a number of the Corinthians were clamoring to exercise their use of *tongues* all at the same time without an interpreter being present. There was

so much confusion over the practice that Paul concluded that the unlearned and unbelievers among them would think they had gone off the deep end (I Cor. 14:23). In order to resolve the problem, the apostle instructs them in the following manner: Only two or three should exercise the gift of tongues during the course of any given gathering. In addition, so that everything might be done in an orderly fashion, only *one* was to speak at a time and only if there was an interpreter. If an interpreter wasn't present they were to be *silent* (I Cor. 14:27,28).

According to Paul's gospel, there was a twofold *purpose* for the sign gifts during the early part of this dispensation. First and foremost, they were a *sign* to Israel that God was doing something new and different among the Gentiles (Rom. 11:11; 15:20 cf. I Cor. 14:21,22). God always spoke to His chosen nation in signs and wonders. Moreover, she came to expect them from the hand of God (Judges 6:12-18 cf. Isa. 8:18). Secondly, these miraculous manifestations drew attention to this new creation called the Church, the Body of Christ. These supernatural gifts gave almost instant *credibility* to Paul's apostleship and the other members of the Body of Christ who performed these wonderful works (Acts 19:11-20; 28:1-10; I Cor. 14:25). Of course, once this twofold purpose was accomplished, by the grace of God, these miraculous manifestations gave way to three crowning graces. More will be said about this later.

During the Acts period, the sign gifts were normally dispensed *collectively* by the Spirit of God (Acts 2:1-7; 4:28-35; 10:44-46). These gifts were not prayed down, nor were they based upon one's spirituality. Rather, they were *freely* given to *all* believers in accordance with the sovereign will of God (I Cor. 12:4,7,11). Therefore, they were empowered to perform these wonders simply because it was the *operation of God* at that time.

The possession of these gifts had nothing to do with the measure of their faith or performance. Surely, the Corinthians were far from being spiritually minded; in fact, many of them were living in *carnality*. Nevertheless, they were given these miraculous manifestations and in some cases possessed more than one sign gift (I Cor. 12:31 cf. 14:23,24,26).

Chapter 2

An Unbreakable Chain

“For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; to another faith by the same Spirit.”

—I Cor. 12:8,9

Paul’s reference here to wisdom, knowledge, and faith is in the context of the *sign gifts*. In other words, he is speaking of the *supernatural* gift of wisdom, the *supernatural* gift of knowledge, and the *supernatural* gift of faith, etc. Interestingly, these miraculous manifestations were inseparably linked *together*, as we shall see later.

Those who are supposedly endowed with power from on high today want to pick and choose which gifts are the most convenient, that they might more easily deceive their audiences. However, when these gifts were practiced, they were practiced as a *unit*. Perhaps a few illustrations from the Scriptures will help to demonstrate our point.

Wisdom: In the days of King Solomon, Solomon sought the face of the Lord for *divine wisdom* so he could more effectively lead the nation Israel. As we know, God honored His request and Solomon came to be known as the wisest man who ever lived.

During his reign, you will recall the story of the two women who dwelt in the same house. Both had been blessed with newborns, but the one mother accidentally smothered her child during the night. In the morning,

when the handmaid saw what she had done, she secretly switched her dead child with the living one. Of course, when the other mother awoke she immediately knew that the dead infant wasn't her child.

As the two women came before King Solomon to resolve the dispute, they both presented convincing arguments. But how would Solomon resolve this delicate matter? The King merely instructed his chief captain to divide the child in two parts and give half to one woman and the remaining half to the other. Of course, the *true* mother pleaded with Solomon to spare her son and give him to the other woman. At that point, Solomon knew this was the real mother. "And all Israel heard of the judgment which the king had judged; and they feared the king: for they saw that the *wisdom of God was in him*, to do judgment" (I Kings 3:16-28). This same wisdom was given in the form of a *gift* to the early members of the Body of Christ.

Knowledge: The gift of knowledge enabled the recipient to *know* the will of God. It also gave him the *authority* to act upon it to the glory of God. Perhaps the best example of this gift is found in Peter's encounter with Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5). In accordance with the Great Commission, the kingdom saints were to sell all their possessions and share everything in common. Ananias and Sapphira had sold a piece of property, but they kept back part of the capital gains. By laying a large portion of their wealth at the apostles' feet, it appeared that they had given their all to the Lord.

Little did they realize that the Holy Spirit had *supernaturally* revealed their unseemly plot to Peter. Thus, Peter inquired of Ananias, "Why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land? While it remained, was it not

thine own? And after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? Why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? Thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God. And Ananias hearing these words fell down, and gave up the ghost: and great fear came on all them that heard these things. And the young men arose, wound him up, and carried him out, and buried him.”

About three hours later, Sapphira came in totally *unaware* of what had happened to her husband. Apparently, she had been out shopping, spending some of the proceeds that she and her husband had *conspired* to withhold from the church. Undoubtedly, she inquired if anyone had seen her husband. Peter intervened and said: Before I answer that question, “Tell me whether ye sold the land for so much? And she said, Yea, for so much.” Sapphira plainly put the noose around her own neck by lying to the Holy Spirit.

“Then Peter said unto her, How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord? Behold, the feet of them which have buried thy husband are at the door, and shall carry thee out. Then fell she down straightway at his feet, and yielded up the ghost: and the young men came in, and found her dead, and, carrying her forth, buried her by her husband” (Acts 5:1-11).

Not only had Peter exposed the sin of Ananias and Sapphira, he also *knew* that it was the will of God to pronounce judgment upon these co-conspirators. This is a clear indication that judgment will be swift and sure in the coming kingdom!

“For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; to another faith by the same Spirit” (I Cor. 12:8,9).

Having touched upon the gifts of wisdom and knowledge, we now come to the gift of *faith*. Clearly this has

nothing to do with the regeneration of the soul as some teach. The Corinthians had been saved for many years prior to the time Paul penned this letter, which is supported by the fact that the apostle calls them *saints* in I Corinthians 1:2. The supernatural gift of faith, which many of these Corinthians possessed, was the ability to perform the *impossible* as a result of their deep and abiding faith in God.

Near the end of our Lord's pilgrimage here upon the earth, as He and His disciples journeyed from Bethany to Jerusalem the Lord became hungry. It was soon thereafter that they came upon a fig tree that had leaves but was *barren*. Consequently, our Lord *cursed* the tree and said: "Let no fruit grow on thee henceforward for ever. And presently the fig tree withered away. And when the disciples saw it, they marvelled, saying, How soon is the fig tree withered away!" Not only did the leaves wither away, but the entire tree from its roots (Matt. 21:18-20; Mk. 11:20-24).

Of course, the fig tree *represented* the nation Israel who, like Adam, sought to cover herself with the fig leaves of *religion*. However, she was *spiritually barren*. Her leaders, again and again, failed to heed the cries of John the Baptist to bring forth *fruit* fit for repentance. Thus, the kingdom was taken from them and given to the "little flock" who would bear fruit (Matt. 21:43).

"Jesus answered and said unto them, Verily I say unto you, If ye have *faith*, and doubt not, ye shall not only do this which is done to the fig tree, but also if ye shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; it shall be done. And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive" (Matt 21:21,22).

If the disciples thought the withering of the fig tree was remarkable, this was merely a precursor of the

miraculous manifestations that will be performed leading up to and during the millennium. The gift of faith will allow them to *demonstrate* their unshakeable confidence in a sovereign God who does “according to His will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay His hand, or say unto Him, What doest Thou?” (Dan. 4:35).



There are those who believe the Lord was merely speaking figuratively when He stated: “if ye shall say unto this mountain, be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; it shall be done.” In other words, those who possessed this gift would simply be empowered to perform incredible acts. While this is plausible, we have always been of the number who believe the Lord was speaking *literally*. We doubt there are many who would question that the judgment of the fig tree was literal; therefore, we can safely assume that the *prayer of faith* could move mountains off their foundations and in some cases even cause them to disappear (Rev. 5:8 cf. 6:9,10,14; Rev. 8:3-8 cf. 16:17-20).

Another instance of the use of this gift is Stephen. As we know, he was chosen by the kingdom Church to be one of the first deacons. He was said to be a man “full of *faith* and power, [who] did great wonders and miracles among the people” (Acts 6:8). When Stephen ran up against the intelligentsia of his day regarding the teachings of the Messiah, “they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake.”

This is a good example to show that some believers possessed more than one gift. In the case of Stephen, the gift of faith enabled him to *trust* God in spite of the fact he was staring death in the face. He proclaimed

the Word of God with such *boldness* that those with whom he was disputing were unable to answer his argument, even though they had attended the Ivy League schools of their day. Stephen spoke with eloquence and persuasiveness, because he also had the gift of wisdom, which left his adversaries speechless.

These *same* gifts were bestowed upon the members of the Body of Christ in accordance with our dispensation. They were a demonstration that God was making known His secret purpose among the *Gentiles*.

Chapter 3

“Wonders Never Cease!”

“To another the gifts [or acts] of healing by the same Spirit.”

—1 Cor. 12:9

Today, many so-called faith healers claim to have power to heal the sick. But most of the time, their healing practices are far from convincing. Normally they involve people being healed of migraine headaches, blurred vision, back pain, etc.—things that would be difficult to substantiate at best. These types of healings do, however, provide a convenient means through which to *deceive*.

Some years ago, my father was traveling home from Pittsburgh and decided to stop at a roadside restaurant to pick up a cup of coffee. As he was waiting for the waitress to fill his order, he overheard two men talking to a friend sitting in the booth behind him. They were sharing how they had just come from a church in downtown Pittsburgh where a well-known faith healer was holding services. Apparently these gentlemen were approached on the street to appear on stage. Prior to their introduction, they were instructed to simply say that they had been healed of a particular ailment. My dad recounted that they were laughing about it as he went out the door, stating: “It was the easiest fifty dollars they had ever made!”

But what about those healing services where someone has been legitimately healed—surely *this* lends credibility to the practice of faith healing. While we do

not dispute that this can and does happen at times, we must ascertain whether the healing was the result of God working through *someone* who has the gift of healing or if it was merely a *ploy* of Satan. As we have seen, the sign gifts of the Acts period have *ceased*—more will be said about this later. Therefore, either the healing was some type of elaborate *deception* or *Satan* performed it.

Remember, if Satan can inflict illness, such as he did in the case of Job, surely he can also remove it if he so desires. Job's journal of affliction records for us Satan's petition: "Put forth Thine hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse Thee to Thy face. And the LORD said unto Satan, Behold, he is in thine hand; but save his life. So went Satan forth from the presence of the LORD, and smote Job with sore boils from the sole of his foot unto his crown" (Job 2:5-7).

But what does the Devil possibly hope to accomplish by using this kind of unseemly scheme? Simple! If he can cause unsuspecting souls to follow *experience*, rather than the living Word of God, he has won a major victory. If you have ever spoken to those who regularly attend healing services, the tenor of their conversation usually revolves around those who were supposedly healed, what they were healed of, and the *emotional high* they experienced. Nevertheless, the Word of God must never be measured by experience, which often casts a long shadow.

The healing program that God employed in time past was characterized by individuals being made *completely whole*. The beggar who had been lame from his birth didn't go limping off the stage at Pentecost when Peter miraculously healed him. Nor did he need therapy sessions three weeks after he was healed like many today.

“Then Peter said, silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk. And he took him by the right hand, and lifted him up: and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength. And he *leaping up* stood, and walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking, and *leaping*, and praising God” (Acts 3:6-8).

To further illustrate the extraordinary workings of God in those days, at Ephesus they brought handkerchiefs and aprons from Paul’s presence and the sick were healed of all manner of diseases. On another occasion Paul healed Publius’ father who was near death, which naturally drew others to the apostle to be healed of their infirmities (Acts 19:11,12; 28:7-9). In regard to the prophetic program, these acts of healing were a *foretaste* of a future time of blessing in the kingdom, when sickness and disease will be the exception rather than the rule (Isa. 35:1-10). On the other hand, Paul’s healing ministry among the Gentiles was a *sign* to Israel that God was setting her aside in *unbelief* (Rom. 11:25,30-32).

Although the sign gift of healing has served its purpose, God can and does heal today according to His will. He is *still* the Great Physician. Let’s not limit God through unsound theology. During Paul’s *latter* ministry, not long after the abolition of the sign gifts, we know that Epaphroditus was *healed*, undoubtedly in response to the prayers of the saints at Philippi (Phil. 2:25-30). We’re sure most pastors could probably cite cases where *God* has *intervened* and healed someone of a terminal illness in answer to the fervent prayers of the saints. It’s simply unexplainable! Even the attending physician is often at a loss for words when he compares the x-rays.

But most times God’s response to our maladies is the same that the apostle received:

“For this thing [Paul’s thorn in the flesh, probably ophthalmia] I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And He said unto me, *My grace is sufficient for thee*: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me” (II Cor. 12:8,9).

MIRACLES

“To another the working of miracles” (I Cor. 12:10).

It was during our Lord’s post-resurrection ministry that He chose to dispense the *final* installment of the Great Commission to His disciples. It included a number of startling statements: “And these signs shall follow them that believe...they shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them.”

These two facets of the commission have so troubled commentators that they argue the closing verses of Mark’s gospel were fraudulently inserted into the text; therefore, there is reason to question their genuineness. However, any evidence to support such a claim is nonexistent.

Although it is true the Sinaiticus and Vaticanus manuscripts do not contain the last twelve verses of the gospel according to Mark, it is generally accepted that these manuscripts have been proven to be *corrupt*. Attempting to surgically remove these passages to merely get around a controversial section doesn’t resolve the problem, because the sign gifts are clearly taught in the other Gospels (Matt. 10:6-10 cf. Luke 10:19).

We firmly believe that these parting instructions were included in the *original* biblical text. The problem is not textual; rather, it is a failure on the part of these same commentators to *rightly divide* the Word of truth.

A short time ago, a story aired on one of the national newsmagazines which had to do with the “religious practices” of a Full-Gospel church down south. This particular assembly believed that they could handle snakes based on Mark’s gospel. Of course, when the interviewer questioned the wisdom of such a practice, the pastor opened his Bible and pointed to the text in Mark and said: “But that’s what God’s Word says, right here, and I believe it.”

The media was conducting the interview because one of the members of the small congregation had been *bitten* by a rattlesnake and *died*. Another member had also been bitten and was at home experiencing cold sweats from a high fever, but he was expected to live. The interviewer was quick to point out that the Bible says, “No hurt will come to them?” To which the pastor replied: “Apparently, they didn’t have enough faith.”

Beloved, the sign gifts of the Acts period were *not* dependent upon one’s spirituality or lack thereof; they were performed in *fulfillment* of God’s plans and purposes at the time. This is a good example that it is possible to be Scripturally correct, but *dead* wrong (literally, in this case) dispensationally.

After dealing with two sensitive issues in his assembly, a pastor down south gives this humorous account of his refusal to handle snakes, not on the basis of Mark 16, but Genesis 3:14,15.

“I almost resigned a few weeks later when I stood up from my desk to leave my study, and between me and the door lay a snake—a copperhead. Let me explain that we are situated right in the middle of town. The church has a very nice modern office, fully carpeted, computer, the works. What was a snake doing in my office?”

“As I climbed on top of my desk, I reflected on the Scriptures and quickly realized they gave me a lot clearer direction on how to deal with a snake than with fleas and lice. I would take dominion over him. No non-essential doctrine this time; this fellow had to go. I am aware that the King James Version of the Bible says we can take up serpents, but my NIV says the two oldest manuscripts leave that out [See page 28]. I decided to take the scholarly position and go with the NIV. I do know that both versions say the offspring of the woman would crush the serpent’s head, which is what I did.



“Not intending in any way to take away from the prophetic significance of those verses, I obeyed them to the letter. Standing on top of the desk, I picked up a large Concordance and threw it down on top of the snake. That dazed him long enough for me to jump down and catch him under the leg of the chair. Then, standing on top of the chair, I continued to crush his head with repeated blows of the Concordance. When the job was thoroughly done, I cast him into outer darkness beside the building.

“I’m hoping for no more pests any time soon, but as I sit here looking at the broken back on my Concordance, I wonder if I have been rightly dividing the Word of truth.”¹

There is good reason to believe that those who performed the working of miracles didn’t specifically conduct snake-handling services. If those who were carrying out the Great Commission accidentally stepped on a poisonous snake, they were given the following promise: “Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents

and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall by any means hurt you” (Luke 10:19).



Let's suppose that a little one came face to face with a deadly cobra; those who possessed the gift of miracles could handle it without any harm coming to them, even if they were unexpectedly bitten. In short, the working of miracles was never meant to be a staged event. This could be said of *all* the sign gifts for that matter.

At Melita, Paul didn't hold up the poisonous reptile that came out of the fire before those present and say, "Oops! he bit me, but I have the gift of miracles so no harm will come to me." Paul was just as *surprised* as those who were with him that day when the venomous snake latched onto his hand.

"And when the barbarians saw the venomous beast hang on his hand, they said among themselves, No doubt this man is a murderer, whom, though he hath escaped the sea, yet vengeance suffereth not to live. And he shook off the beast into the fire, and felt no harm. Howbeit they looked when he should have swollen, or fallen down dead suddenly: but after they had looked a great while, and saw no harm come to him, they changed their minds, and said that he was a god" (Acts 28:4-6).

This miraculous manifestation, along with other signs Paul performed, gave *credibility* to his apostleship that he was indeed sent from God. The *signs of an apostle* confirmed that he was the divine, authoritative spokesman of God (II Cor. 12:11,12). We should add that the working of miracles sometimes entailed the pronouncement of *judgment*. This came through loud and clear to Bar-jesus, who sought to turn Sergius Paulus away from the faith. Paul exposed this enemy of righteousness for who he was and caused *blindness* to come upon him for a season (Acts 13:6-11).

The phrase “and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them” is also to be understood in the context of *every day* ministry. This, too, fell under the working of miracles, but it did not mean those who were given this gift purposely drank poison to test the Lord. It was not uncommon for believers to find themselves in life threatening situations in the early Church. They consistently lived in the face of real and present danger. The threats that were made against them weren’t idle tales; actual attempts to kill them were quite common (Acts 4:21; 5:40; 12:1-4; 23:12-22). So it is not beyond reason to conclude that *poisonings* were in the realm of possibility.



“For I [Nehemiah] was the king’s cupbearer. And it came to pass in the month Nisan, in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes the king, that wine was before him: and I took up the wine, and gave it unto the king” (Neh. 1:11-2:1).

We note that even ancient kings took precautionary measures when it came to poisonings. It was a rather convenient way to dispose of an enemy. Thus, the cupbearer was more than someone who merely brought the king his chalice of wine. He first drank from the cup to insure that no one had poisoned the drink. The concept was, let death come to the cupbearer, but long live the king.

Whether those who carried forth the gospel were purposely poisoned to *silence* them, or if they drank something *accidentally* that was obviously deadly, no harm would come to them. This particular sign gift allowed those who possessed it to walk away from potentially life threatening situations to the glory of God.

ENDNOTE

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Chapter 4

Miraculous Manifestations

“To another the working of miracles; to another prophecy.”

—I Cor. 12:10

Among the supernatural sign gifts of the Acts period, the *gift of prophecy* was perhaps the most prominent. While we have a tendency to associate the prophet with his role as a foreteller, that is, one that makes predictions about the future, his primary role was that of a *forthteller*.

With the invention of the printing press, the Scriptures were made available to all that desired to have a copy. However, this was not the case in biblical times. Often, only a book of the Old Testament or a portion thereof was to be found in the synagogues. Furthermore, the so-called New Testament was still being written and compiled in Paul's day; therefore, God used the prophets as His divine *spokesmen* until the written revelation was completed.

Since the prophets were the mouthpiece of God, the work of *inspiration* permeated their very thought process. Thus, it can be safely said that those who possessed the “gift of prophecy” communicated the mind and will of God with *accuracy*. Of course, the unveiling of the Mystery gave repeated opportunities to further *enlighten* the saints in regard to the Pauline revelation. Little wonder the apostle labored to show the Corinthians, who gloried in tongues, the profitability of this gift.

“He that prophesieth speaketh unto men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort. He that speaketh in an unknown tongue edifieth himself; but he that prophesieth edifieth the church” (I Cor. 14:3,4).

Those who were endowed with more than one supernatural sign gift were encouraged by the apostle to “covet earnestly the best gifts.” In other words, they were to exercise the gift that would prove to be the most beneficial to their particular calling.

For example, those having a burden for lost souls that were blessed with the *gifts* of prophecy and tongues would be best served to use the “gift of tongues” as they evangelized those of other languages. But it was far more profitable for those who had these gifts and labored in the local assembly to use the “gift of prophecy” among the saints (I Cor. 14:22). Paul knew the *oral* instruction of God’s Word would build up the assembly in the *newly* revealed doctrines of grace. It would not only challenge them to take a stand but also comfort them when confronted with persecution.

NEW MILLENNIUM PROPHETS

We are now seeing that the new millennium has provided a convenient platform for self-appointed *prophets of doom*. The range of their prophecies include the collapse of world financial markets, famine, the identity of the Anti-Christ, nuclear holocaust, the day of Christ’s return, the end of the world, etc. Since they claim to speak authoritatively in the name of God, many poor souls have found themselves paying homage to these unscrupulous prognosticators. But the true Berean need not be troubled: first, on the basis of a biblical *principle*, and secondly, on the grounds of a clear-cut *dispensational* truth.

“But the prophet, which shall presume to speak a word in My name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or that shall speak in the name of other gods, even that prophet shall die” (Deut. 18:20).

“Then said I [Jeremiah], Ah, Lord GOD! behold, the prophets say unto them, Ye shall not see the sword, neither shall ye have famine; but I will give you assured peace in this place. Then the LORD said unto me, The prophets prophesy lies in My name.

“Therefore thus saith the LORD concerning the prophets that prophesy in My name, and I sent them not, yet they say, Sword and famine shall not be in this land; By sword and famine shall those prophets be consumed” (Jer. 14:13-15).

The *principle* is this: If a prophet spoke a word contrary to the known will of God or what he spoke did not come to pass, he was to be put to *death*. Of course, the purpose of this test was to put deceivers out of the land. The predictions of a true prophet of God were *one hundred percent* accurate *one hundred percent* of the time—no exceptions! Some years ago a national newspaper estimated that sixty percent of Jean Dixon’s predictions came true. Of course, the editor felt this was a remarkable average. By human standards it may be, but according to God’s standard she would have been stoned to death as a false prophetess.

The prophets of old spoke with pinpoint *accuracy*. David, for example, 750 years before the coming of Christ, predicted His death by crucifixion. Interestingly, this form of capital punishment was unknown in the camp of Israel in those days. It is believed to have been an innovation of the Assyrians; however, there is little doubt that the Romans *perfected* it.

Prophecy: “For dogs [uncircumcised Gentiles] have compassed me: the assembly of the wicked [the Jewish leaders] have enclosed me: they pierced my hands and

my feet [crucifixion]. I may tell all my bones: they look and stare upon me. They [Roman soldiers] part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture” (Psa. 22:16-18).

Fulfillment: “Then the soldiers of the governor [uncircumcised Gentiles] took Jesus into the common hall, and gathered unto Him the whole band of soldiers.... And when they had platted a crown of thorns, they put it upon His head, and a reed in His right hand: and they bowed the knee before Him, and *mocked* Him, saying, Hail, King of the Jews! And they spit upon Him, and took the reed, and smote Him on the head” (Matt. 27:27-30).

“Likewise also the chief priests *mocking* Him, with the scribes and elders [Jewish leaders], said, He saved others; Himself He cannot save. If He be the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the Cross, and we will believe Him” (Matt. 27:41,42).

“And when they had *crucified* Him, they [Roman soldiers] parted His garments, casting *lots* upon them, what every man should take” (Mark 15:24).

With the completion of the written revelation of God the office of the prophet was *withdrawn*. Consequently, if we desire to know the will of God today or what the future holds, we must consult the Scriptures—they alone are the *final* authority.

Dispensationally, with the insertion of the parenthetical period of Grace, the predictions of the prophetic program came to an abrupt *halt*. Of course, prophetic teachers would have us believe that the predictions of the prophets are still being fulfilled as we speak. Surely, they say, we are living in the days of “wars and rumors of wars.” They boldly declare that Israel has taken possession of the Promised Land—a land flowing with milk

and honey. These self-ordained prophets even seem to know the identity of the Anti-Christ. The old-timers used to have a saying when things weren't exactly in line with the truth: "There's something rotten in Denmark!"

Brethren, we might liken the events of prophecy to 250 links in a long steel chain. Once God initiates the prophetic chain of events every prophecy related to the "end times" will be fulfilled *sequentially*, simply because they are *inseparably linked*. Furthermore, these links are *forged* together by the prophetic timetable of signs, times, and seasons according to the word of the prophet.

Today God is not dealing with the nations, *any nation!* Rather, he is saving individuals out of the nations (Rom. 10:12; 11:32). While Israel became a nation in 1948 and inhabits a small *fraction* of the land promised to Abraham, this is *not* in fulfillment of prophecy. She is there in her own strength, because the United Nations in cooperation with the United States made it possible. We do concur that God is *preserving* His people today, but this is a far cry from saying the promises given to the patriarchs and prophets are being fulfilled.

In the coming day of the Lord, Israel will again hold a position of *supremacy* over the nations (Isa. 60:10-12; 61:6). In fact, the Gentiles will humbly *submit* themselves to God's people. "Thus saith the LORD of hosts; In those days it shall come to pass, that ten men shall take hold out of all languages of the nations, even shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, we will go with you: for we have heard that God is with you" (Zech. 8:23).

According to prophecy, Israel won't inherit the Promised Land in its entirety until she is *regathered* at the beginning of the Millennium. Incidentally, few seem to understand that this will be a *massive* piece of real

estate. The northern border will extend to Syria, the southern to the Nile River in Egypt. The western border runs along the Mediterranean Sea, while the eastern allotment extends all the way to the River Euphrates (northeast) including mammoth tracts east of the river Jordan (Gen. 15:18 cf. Num. 34:1-12). If the Arab leaders of the region read this they're going to have a cardiac arrest!

ORDER IN THE COURT

“Let the prophets speak two or three, and let the other judge. If any thing be revealed to another that sitteth by, let the first hold his peace. For ye may all prophesy one by one, that all may learn, and all may be comforted. And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets. For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints” (I Cor. 14:29-33).

There is an interesting statement made here by Paul that is frequently ignored. Namely, “the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets.” Those who are supposedly “slain in the Spirit” today often appear as though they have lost contact with reality. It’s downright scary when they collapse to the floor while gyrating in an uncontrolled frenzy.

Clearly God is not the author of *confusion*. Thus, we are to understand that the supernatural sign gifts of the Acts period were performed in a *decent* and *orderly* fashion. At least this was God’s original plan. When a prophet received a revelation from the Lord, the gift of prophecy was *subject* to the prophet’s normal train of thought. In short, if someone was giving instruction, he was to sit quietly and wait his turn before sharing what God had revealed to him. The Spirit of God never caused the prophet to act irrationally, even though he may have had something essential to add. This rule of

thumb also applied to the other miraculous gifts of the period (I Cor. 14:23).

Moreover God incorporated *checks and balances* into the process to insure the integrity of the sign gifts. In regard to the prophets, if one of their number was sharing with the church what God had imparted, the other prophets were to *judge*; that is, if the message was truly of God. This is also an indication that the prophets had the “gift of discerning of spirits,” enabling them to weed out the false prophets that came among the saints to deceive.

DISCERNING OF SPIRITS

“To another discerning of spirits” (I Cor. 12:10).

The *primary* function of this gift was to ascertain whether or not someone was *demon possessed*. In time past, those who were possessed with devils frequently hampered the proclamation of the kingdom hope. Moreover the battle intensified during the time Christ conducted His earthly ministry to Israel. Even during the transition from God’s earthly to His heavenly program, demon possession was commonplace.

It has been said, “The preaching of Christ is the whip that flogs the devil. It is a thunderbolt, the sound of which makes all hell shake.” Thus as the gospel of grace spread into Europe, Satan pulled out all the stops, as it were, to *hinder* its advance. Although the stronghold of the kingdom gospel was always more prominent in the *east*, Satan apparently sensed that the gospel of the grace of God would hold a greater realm of influence in the *west*. As we know, Paul and Silas barely had time to introduce themselves before the archenemy of God launched his first attack. The record states:

“And it came to pass, as we went to prayer, a certain damsel possessed with a spirit of divination met us, which brought her masters much gain by soothsaying. The same followed Paul and us, and cried, saying, These men are the servants of the most high God, which show unto us the way of salvation. And this did she many days.

“But Paul, being grieved, turned and said to the spirit, I command thee in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her. And he came out the same hour” (Acts 16:16-18).

Evil spirits normally employ one of two methods to hinder the proclamation of the gospel—alliance or antagonism. Here they chose to antagonize. This particular evil spirit sought to *mock* the apostle. “These men are the servants of the most high God, which show unto us the way of salvation.” Paul knew this wasn’t a form of free advertisement, but a sinister plot to ridicule the Cross. Unwilling to allow this type of attack to continue, the apostle commanded the evil spirit to come out of her in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

While many flippantly claim they can exorcise demons today, they fail to understand that at least *three* supernatural sign gifts were required before this could be accomplished. Paul called upon the “gift of discerning of spirits” to peer into the damsel’s heart to determine if her state of mind was being controlled by an evil spirit or some sort of malady. He then had to ascertain through the “gift of knowledge” whether or not it was God’s will for this demon to be expelled at that time and place. Finally, the apostle used the “gift of exorcism (miracles)” to drive out this emissary of Satan (Acts 19:11,12). Interestingly, he did so in the *power* and *authority* of the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul understood that the battle is the Lord’s!

Today, the battleground has shifted from the earthly realm to the heavenly. Consequently, demon possession

is uncommon, if not rare. Since the Holy Spirit indwells the believer, it is *impossible* for him to be possessed; however, the battle may become so intense that he may be *troubled* at times by the powers of darkness. Although many allege to be an authority on multiple personalities, the truth is only God knows if the neurotic conduct of someone is due to physical abnormalities, emotional problems, or demon possession. Thus, with the *cessation* of the sign gifts the primary weapon of our warfare against this type of attack today is *prayer* (Rom. 8:26,27; Eph. 6:10-18).

Chapter 5

A Trumpet with an Uncertain Sound

“To another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues.”

—I Cor. 12:10

The *gift of tongues* was the supernatural imparting of languages, which gave the recipient the ability to fluently speak languages he had never learned. There has been an ongoing debate since the turn of the last century as to whether or not God is bestowing this gift today. With the rally cry, “Back to Pentecost!” being sounded throughout Christendom, the Charismatic assemblies are convinced He is. The evangelicals are just as adamant that this is simply not the case, even though their defense of the *Great Commission* flatly contradicts their position.

The gift of tongues is perhaps the most abused, misused, and misunderstood of all the sign gifts, both past and present—mainly because it’s no longer in operation today! Our Charismatic friends, for the most part, believe that “tongues” are a heavenly language only understood by God. They base this conclusion upon two passages of Scripture:

“Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal” (I Cor. 13:1).

“For he 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” (I Cor. 14:2).

But do these references support their position? They claim that the “tongues of angels” is clearly a reference to a heavenly language. But this raises two questions: What language do angels speak? And, what is the language of heaven? According to the Scriptures, it is not some heavenly gibberish that’s unintelligible. The primary language of heaven appears to be *Hebrew*. When our Lord spoke from *glory* to the chief of sinners, Paul recounted:

“And when we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice speaking unto me, and saying in the *Hebrew tongue*, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. And I said, Who art thou, Lord? And He said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest” (Acts 26:14,15).

Although the angels are without number, it is noteworthy that each one has been given either a Hebrew or Greek name—sometimes they have both. For example: “And they had a king over them, which is the angel of the bottomless pit, whose name in the Hebrew tongue is Abaddon, but in the Greek tongue hath his name Apollyon” (Rev. 9:11). As the ministers of God they are undoubtedly fluent in *all* languages. Of course, the angels always spoke in the tongue of the one they were ministering to. When Gabriel was dispatched from heaven and appeared to Daniel he would have addressed him in Hebrew, the mother tongue (dialect) of the chosen nation (Dan. 9:21-27 cf. Acts 21:40; 22:1-3).

So then, Paul’s reference to the “tongues of angels” in I Corinthians 13:1 has nothing whatsoever to do with a heavenly language—such an idea is foreign to the Word of God. Perhaps a closer examination of this passage will be helpful. “Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.” If we consult the original language, we find that the verbs “speak”

and “have” in this passage are in the *subjunctive mood*. In other words, the apostle is using a supposition or stating a hypothetical case. He’s simply saying: *If I speak all known languages with the persuasiveness of men and the eloquence of angels, and have not love, I am merely a noisy instrument that men will avoid.*

In regard to I Corinthians 14:2, Paul writes: “For he 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.” The phrase “unknown tongue” here is often appealed to by our Charismatic friends to support their view that this gift was a heavenly language. However, the Greek word *glossa* translated “tongue” is consistently a reference to *known languages* in the New Testament. Here’s a case in point:

“For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue [Gr. *glossa*] shall confess to God” (Rom. 14:11).

We doubt anyone would draw the conclusion that some unknown heavenly language is being spoken here. Furthermore, the italicized word *unknown* that is supplied by the translators oftentimes clouds the sense in I Corinthians 14:2. The addition of the term is indeed helpful if it is understood in its proper context. The “tongue” wasn’t *unknown* because it was a heavenly communication that only God could understand. Rather, it was *unknown* because the *hearer* had no knowledge of the language being spoken. This is the apostle’s whole argument as he builds a case against the Corinthians who were *misusing* the gift. What profit was there if they impressed their audience by speaking in an unknown language, if no one understood what they were saying?

Once again, “For he 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” (I Cor. 14:2). There is a passage found in the Old Testament that may help clarify the apostle’s point: “The LORD shall bring a nation against thee from far, from the end of the earth, as swift as the eagle flieth; a nation whose *tongue* thou shalt not *understand*” (Deut. 28:49). The nation that would take Israel *captive* was Babylon. They spoke to the Israelites in an unknown tongue, which only added insult to injury and brought *confusion* into the camp.

Thus, those who used the gift of tongues in the assembly without an interpreter weren’t speaking unto men, but God. Why? Because no one but God understood them—howbeit in the spirit they spoke mysteries. This went far beyond the preaching of the Word; it also applied to praying and singing in the church. “For if I pray in an unknown tongue, **my** spirit prayeth, but my understanding is unfruitful. What is it then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also: I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also” (I Cor. 14:14,15). In the spirit, they may have lifted up one of the most spiritual prayers that ever entered glory, but if it was spoken in an unknown language, what profit was it to those present? It was unfruitful!

Since God is not the author of confusion, Paul shows the Corinthians the importance of everything being done in an orderly fashion. Hence, “But if there be no interpreter, let him keep *silence* in the church; and let him speak to *himself*, and to *God*” (I Cor. 14:28). More will be said about the role of the interpreter in a moment.

If we continue with the apostle’s argument (vs. 7,8), it becomes even clearer that he has *earthly* languages

in mind, not some type of obscure heavenly tongue. He illustrates this point by showing that even things without life, such as musical instruments, have their own distinct sounds. Otherwise there is *confusion*. For example, “if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle?”

He then couples this with an interesting statement in verse 10: “There are, it may be, so many kinds of voices in the world [Gr. *kosmos* i.e. earth, world system], and none of them is without signification.” In short, there are many kinds of voices or sounds of languages here upon the *earth*, and each one is significant in its own right. Paul adds: “Therefore if I know not the **meaning** of the voice, I shall be unto him that speaketh a barbarian, and he that speaketh shall be a barbarian unto me” (vs. 11).

So then, these were languages that were *commonly known* to the human family. Paul was merely attempting to correct the abuses of the gift of tongues. You see, the Corinthians enjoyed the *attention* this gift brought; it made them look spiritual. But the apostle unmasked their vain ways when he said, “He that speaketh in an unknown tongue edifieth himself” (vs. 4). Simply put, their words were *meaningless* to the hearer.

THE PURPOSE OF TONGUES

Those who have taken the time to learn more than one language will tell you it was a painstaking task that took years to accomplish. So it is really quite amazing that the gift of tongues miraculously enabled the early members of the Body to Christ to speak in languages of which they had no prior knowledge. This particular supernatural manifestation during the Acts period had a twofold purpose.

First, tongues served as a *sign*. “In the law it is written, with men of other tongues and other lips will I speak unto this people; and yet for all that will they not hear me, saith the Lord. Wherefore tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe *not*” (I Cor. 14:21,22). Here again the apostle travels back through time to the days of the Babylonian Captivity. When the Chaldeans spoke harshly to Israel in an *unknown tongue*, it was a sign to the chosen nation of her *unbelief*. Tongues, then, were meant to be a sign to the *unbeliever*!

Since the Jews required a sign, the Gentiles were blessed with the gift of tongues as a *sign* to Israel that she was out of the will of God (I Cor. 1:22 cf. Rom. 11:11,32). Thus, it was a valuable *evangelistic* tool to reach the *individual* Jews with the gospel of Grace after Israel was set aside nationally. Historically, Israel was *scattered* throughout the known world following the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities. Only a minority of Hebrews had migrated back to Palestine before the days of John the Baptist. The vast majority still lived *outside* the land and would have naturally adopted the languages of the nations.

As the gospel of Grace spread throughout the Gentile world, the *diversity of tongues* gave the members of the Body of Christ the opportunity to announce to the dispersion that Israel had fallen. It also greatly *accelerated* the evangelistic campaign among the Jews and Gentiles, giving the Church, which is His Body, worldwide recognition practically overnight. In fact, those who preached the gospel at this time were said to have “turned the world upside down;” actually, they had turned it right side up (Acts 17:6). Unlike today, this shows the profound *influence* the early Church had upon the affairs of men.

Second, the gift of tongues was used as a *teaching* tool. “Now, brethren, if I come unto you speaking with tongues, what shall I profit you, except I shall speak to you either by revelation, or by knowledge, or by prophesying, or by doctrine?” (I Cor. 14:6).

In biblical times, most local assemblies were established in cities that had seaports or were located on trade routes, as was the case at Corinth. Those who were interested in the things of the Lord would have naturally sought out the saints at Corinth when they were passing through. With growing numbers present at the assembly, some of the Corinthians saw an opportunity to make a favorable impression upon the brethren by showing off their ability to speak in other tongues. While this was an awe-inspiring demonstration of their intellectualism, or so they thought, the apostle quickly exposed the *folly* of such a practice.

“If therefore the whole church be come together into one place, and all speak with tongues [that is, all those who have the gift], and there come in those that are unlearned, or unbelievers, will they not say that ye are mad?” (I Cor. 14:23).

Imagine sitting there watching this theatrical performance as an *unbeliever*. You are unable to understand a word that is being spoken, and to further complicate the matter two or three are trying to speak at the same time. You would probably walk out thinking to yourself that these people have some form of *dementia*. They may have all their marbles, but they’re surely not all in line. Thus, Paul sets down four commands of Christ to correct the misuse of tongues in the assembly.

1. “If any man speak in an unknown tongue, let it be by two, or at the most by three, and that by course” (vs. 27). The latter part of this passage is a clear indication that the gift of tongues could be kept under control.

Like prophecy, it was subject to the spirit of the one who possessed the gift. All things were to be done decently and in order. Although it was permissible for two or three to use the gift, only *one* was allowed to speak at a time. Of course, this should have been obvious, but common sense went out the window when the Corinthians began to think too highly of themselves. Sadly, they had an insatiable appetite for the praise of men. But “pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a *fall*” (Prov. 16:18).

2. “And let one interpret. But if there be no interpreter, let him keep silence in the church; and let him speak to himself, and to God” (vs. 27,28). The *interpretation of tongues* was also one of the supernatural sign gifts of the Acts period. Translators will tell you that it is impossible to translate from one language to another word for word. In fact, they sometimes pour over a text for days searching for a word that’s close to the term they are translating. Normally it takes years for someone to master two languages. In addition, the translator must have a working knowledge of the various *definitions* of each word to convey the proper sense in another language. The *interpretation of tongues* provided this understanding instantaneously to those blessed with this gift.

If those who spoke in tongues received further enlightenment from the Spirit on a particular doctrine, they were not permitted to use the gift of tongues unless an interpreter was *present*. They were commanded to be *silent*. The interpreter was God’s connection between language barriers. If these gifts were practiced according to His will, they produced unity in the assembly and provided the means for all to be *edified*. Sadly, if there is one thing that characterizes the modern day tongues movement, it’s confusion!

3. “For greater is he that prophesieth than he that speaketh with tongues, except he interpret, that the church may receive edifying” (vs. 5). As mentioned earlier, the gift of tongues was never intended to stir the assembly into an emotional state. Rather it was an important teaching tool to impart a fuller understanding of the Mystery to those who spoke another tongue. This insured that they, too, could be *built up* in the faith along with the other members of the assembly as the Scriptures were being taught. With no room left for boasting, everyone could give God the glory for the “great things He hath done.”

4. “Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak” (vs. 34). While most understand the principle that the woman is not to teach, nor usurp authority over the man, Paul also makes it crystal clear in the context of I Corinthians 14 that she was not to prophesy or speak in tongues in the church. Even though these were supernatural gifts of the Spirit, the women were only permitted to exercise these gifts *outside* the local assembly (Acts 21:8,9). It has been said that if you were to remove the women from the present-day tongues’ movement it would collapse. Apparently, that’s how prominent of a role they play. But what saith the Scriptures?

Some have been troubled by Paul’s statement: “Wherefore, brethren, covet to prophesy, and forbid not to speak with tongues” (I Cor. 14:39). Beloved, it is important to remember that at the time of this writing these gifts were still being used by God to establish the Body of Christ. They were manifestations of the wonderful workings of God. Therefore, Paul instructed the Corinthians, “*forbid not to speak with tongues,*” that is, use them for God’s honor and glory. Having said this, we must also bear in mind that the sign gifts were soon to become a

passing memory. But until that time, the apostle tirelessly contended for their proper use.

But how do we account for the present-day “tongues” phenomenon? As we know, there are those who adamantly defend their tongues experience, which we do not question for a moment. First and foremost, Satan has always sought to counterfeit the things of God. Tongues provide a convenient method to draw his subjects into following experience rather than the written revelation of God.

Second, some have sought to imitate the gift. Since tongues is a measure of spirituality in many assemblies today, these tortured souls are pressured into speaking in tongues to be accepted among their peers. In fact, a recent investigative report produced an astounding number of testimonials as to the scope of this deception.

Finally, some are caught up in the emotionalism of the moment. These services are electrically charged with praise, loud music, shouting, swaying back and forth with hands raised, people rolling in the aisle, speaking in tongues, etc. So it is not unreasonable to conclude that some are swept along by emotionalism, speaking a language or a medley of languages they learned years earlier.

Chapter 6

Three Crowning Graces

“But covet earnestly the best gifts: and yet show I unto you a more excellent way.”

—I Cor. 12:31

Confusion is perhaps Satan’s most effective weapon of warfare against the Body of Christ. He uses this weapon so effectively that most are totally unaware of its destructive force. This is certainly the case today with the confusion that surrounds the supernatural sign gifts of the Acts period. Once again, the solution to this and a host of other tactical errors the Church has made is a proper understanding of the Word, rightly divided. This rule of thumb must also be applied to Paul’s epistles, especially in regard to the apostle’s early and latter ministries.

As we have seen, there are essentially three reasons for the emergence of the miraculous sign gifts, each of which played a significant role at the beginning of the dispensation of Grace.

First, these miraculous manifestations were a sign to Israel that God was setting the chosen nation aside in unbelief in order to introduce a new program among the Gentiles. This was a sure indication that the blessing of God had been removed from the wayward nation and given to the Gentiles. Since this was accomplished by the close of the Acts period, the sign gifts gave way to the next phase of God’s plans and purposes for the Church.

Second, with the unveiling of the Mystery came the need for a new apostle. Paul, of course, was the one chosen by the Lord of glory to hold this apostolic office. In order to safeguard against impostors, strict guidelines were placed upon those who were called to be apostles. It was mandatory that the one who held this position be an eyewitness of the resurrected Christ.

In addition, the signs of an apostle had to accompany the ministry of those who claimed to be apostles. Paul's apostolic credentials were impeccable, insofar as he had seen the resurrected Christ on the road to Damascus and demonstrated *all* of the signs of an apostle (I Cor. 9:1 cf. II Cor. 12:12). Since Paul's apostleship was a well-established fact by the end of his early ministry, these gifts were *withdrawn*.

Third, these miraculous manifestations also served to draw the attention of the unsaved masses to Christ in a dramatic way. Consequently, multitudes were saved into the Body, thus giving credibility to the gospel of the grace of God. Once the Church came into full bloom, the sign gifts gradually faded from the scene.

But *what* exactly brought these miraculous demonstrations to a close, or are they still to be sought after today, as some teach? Of course, some will defend their tongues experience until the day they die. But, shall we place experience above the Scriptures? God forbid! It is always essential that our faith is resting on the firm foundation of the Word of God, rightly divided!

THE END OF AN ERA

“But whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away” (I Cor. 13:8).

Shall prophecies fail? By no means; the apostle is referring here to the *gift* of prophecy. Shall tongues cease? Obviously not, for even to this very day tongues or languages are being used as a means of communication. Paul is speaking about the gift of tongues, that is, the ability to supernaturally speak an unknown foreign language for the purpose of imparting the gospel (I Cor. 14:22). The gift of knowledge shall also vanish away, which, as we have seen, enabled the believer to know the mind and will of God in any given circumstance. This is how Peter knew that Ananias and Sapphira had lied to the Holy Spirit and kept back part of the price of the possession they sold. He had the gift of knowledge!

Have you ever paused to consider why the apostle selected these particular sign gifts from a long list of others that could have been chosen? We have found that they all bear a direct *connection* to the Word of God. Those, for example, who exercised the gift of prophecy, literally spoke the Word of God as they foretold future events. The prophet Agabus warned Paul not to go to Jerusalem, for in so doing he would be bound hand and foot with chains. As we know, his words were fulfilled to the letter (Acts 21:10-12).

Today if we desire enlightenment on “things to come” we must diligently search the Scriptures. So then, the gift of prophecy has given way to the *written* revelation. In like manner, if the believer is seeking the mind and will of God it is no longer conveyed through the supernatural gift of knowledge but through the written revelation. The gift of tongues was the vehicle through which prophecy and the knowledge of God were communicated in oral form. But it, too, became inoperative with the completion of the Scriptures.

Consequently, God speaks to us today through His written revelation. Even in Paul's day, the original manuscripts and copies thereof were already being circulated among the churches for the saints to read and study (Col. 4:16 cf. II Tim. 4:13). Through the centuries, thousands of translations have been produced in nearly every language. And with the invention of the printing press the Word of God is now available around the world.

THAT WHICH IS PERFECT

“But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away” (I Cor. 13:10).

Those of the Charismatic persuasion normally interpret the above passage accordingly: “When Christ, who is the perfect One, comes, then the supernatural gifts will be done away at which time faith, hope and love will abide throughout eternity.” In short, they teach the continuation of the sign gifts until the Rapture and therefore those who do not possess these gifts are looked down upon as living in carnality. Need we remind our Charismatic friends that the Corinthians were anything but spiritual minded, yet they exercised these gifts to the glory of God. You see, it was not a matter of one's spirituality; rather these gifts were given according to God's plans and purposes at that time.

The pressing question here is this, when were these gifts withdrawn? Paul is very clear that a change was indeed in the wind: “But covet earnestly the best gifts: *and yet show I unto you a more excellent way*” (I Cor. 12:31). The apostle instructs the Corinthians that, for the time then present, they should choose to exercise the most profitable gifts, such as prophecy. But they were to understand that these miraculous manifestations would soon give way to something far *superior*.

The time line for this change is given to us in I Corinthians 13:10. If we consult the Greek we find the construction of this verse is in the *neuter gender*, which indicates an inanimate object is in view, such as a book. The translators did a superb job of carrying this thought over into the English as well. This is important for the mere reason that if the person of Christ is the subject of this passage the construction would require the masculine gender. To be grammatically correct the verse would have to read, “But when He who is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.” However, since the noun “that” is in the neuter gender we believe that the passage should be interpreted in the following manner:

“But when that [the Word of God, in particular Paul’s epistles] which is perfect [Gr. *Teleiosis* ‘Completion—an end accomplished as the effect of a process.’] is come, then that [supernatural sign gifts] which is in part [the incomplete way] shall be done away.”

In other words, with the completion of Paul’s epistles the sign gifts vanished away. This interpretation is in keeping with the grammatical construction of the passage and even more importantly with the *context* and experience. The position is reinforced further when we remember that it was given to the Apostle Paul to fulfill or *complete* the Word of God insofar as extent (Col. 1:25). He completed the Scriptures in regard to the *Mystery*.

THE SUPPORTING CAST

“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” (I Cor. 13:11).

Interestingly, Paul uses two illustrations to confirm his argument. He begins by contrasting *childhood* with

adulthood—the immature with the mature. When our youngest, Timothy, was about three years old, he was cute as a button. Of course, that’s a papa speaking.

One day my wife was sewing across from his brother’s room when she heard a voice faintly say: “Do you need help?” Apparently Kevin, who was a teenager at the time, had gone downstairs but forgot to turn off his electronic baseball game. After about five minutes it repeatedly says, in intervals of fifteen seconds, “Do you need help?” Just then Timmy came scampering down the hallway when he heard this mysterious voice from his brother’s bedroom—“Do you need help?” He slowly pushed the door open and *softly* said, “He’ll be right back!!” Now a seasoned veteran in these things, Timothy obviously knows the difference between an electronic voice and the real thing.

In like fashion, the sign gifts were the *immature* way. When we became adults we put away all our childhood toys. Hence, our immaturity was gradually replaced with a fuller understanding of things once we became adults. Thus, the supernatural gifts were put aside with the maturing of the dispensation which came with the completion of Paul’s revelation.

“For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face” (I Cor. 13:12).

Here the apostle uses a mirror to further illustrate his argument. Unlike mirrors today, in biblical times they were often pieces of polished metal from which one could barely make out his image. Similarly, the sign gifts were like looking into an ancient mirror; they were an indication that everything had not yet come into focus. Therefore, with the advent of God’s written revelation further *clarity* was given so we could see, as it were, face to face. That is, God made it possible for us to see more clearly the whole counsel of His will.

THE PRINCIPLE OF REPLACEMENT

“And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity” (I Cor. 13:13).

Whenever God takes something away from His children, He always replaces it with something infinitely better. Thus, upon withdrawing the sign gifts, which were temporary in character, God has replaced them with three crowning *graces* that will abide throughout the remainder of the dispensation. As we have seen, some claim that these three *graces* won't be realized until eternity. We, however, beg to differ with them.

Paul says, now abideth faith. “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” The keystone in the arch of grace is *faith*. I have never seen or audibly spoken to the Lord face to face, although I do look forward to that day. Nevertheless, I have faith that He exists based upon the living Word of God. However, when I step into the glory of His presence my faith shall turn to *sight*.

If faith is the keystone, then *hope* is the bow in the arch that reaches from the beginning of our Christian experience to the end. Our hope is Christ, who will someday soon shuttle us to glory on the Rapture express. (As you can see, my years of traveling through major metropolitan cities are beginning to effect my thought process!)

Christ is our surety of the resurrection, translation, eternal life, reigning position, and heaven. Once we are called home to heaven our hope will become *reality*. We will no longer hope to behold heaven after we are there and gaze upon its beauty. As Paul says, “For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for?” (Rom. 8:24).

The final jewel in the crown of grace is *love*. Love is the bond that holds the arch of grace together. “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.” “But God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” Christ’s sacrificial death at Calvary is the greatest love story ever told. Do you know the love of God in Christ Jesus? If the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts as the Book of Romans teaches us, should we not love one another and bear one another’s burdens as members of the Body of Christ? This redeeming love will one day bring us to glory where we will abide *forever*.

The supernatural sign gifts of the Acts period have passed with the transition period, and NOW abides *faith, hope, and love*. The mark of a genuine assembly is not if they speak in tongues, but do they exhibit faith, hope, and love in accordance with Paul’s gospel. AMEN!!

FAITH
HOPE
& LOVE

Scripture Index

Reference	Page	Reference	Page
Genesis		Jeremiah	
3:14,15	29	14:13-15	35
15:18	38	Daniel	
Numbers		4:35	23
34:1-12	38	9:21-27	44
Deuteronomy		Zechariah	
18:20	35	8:23	37
28:49	46	Matthew	
Judges		10:6-10	28
6:12-18	16	21:18-20	22
I Kings		21:21,22	22
3:16-28	20	21:43	22
Nehemiah		27:27-30	36
1:11-2:1	32	27:41,42	36
Job		Mark	
2:5-7	26	11:20-24	22
Psalms		15:24	36
22:16-18	36	16	29
Proverbs		Luke	
16:18	50	10:19	28,31
Isaiah		Acts	
8:18	16	2:1-7	16
35:1-10	27	3:6-8	27
60:10-12	37	4:21	32
61:6	37	4:28-35	16
		5	20
		5:1-11	21
		5:40	32

Reference	Page
Acts (Cont'd)	
6:8	23
10:44-46	16
12:1-4	32
13:6-11	31
16:16-18	40
17:6	48
19:11,12	27,40
19:11-20	16
21:8,9	51
21:10-12	55
21:40	44
22:1-3	44
23:12-22	32
26:14,15	44
28:1-10	16
28:4-6	31
28:7-9	27
Romans	
8:24	59
8:26,27	41
10:12	37
11:11	16
11:11,32	48
11:25,30-32	27
11:32	37
14:11	45
15:20	16
I Corinthians	
1:2	22
1:22	48
9:1	54
12:1,4	15
12:4,7,11	16
12:8,9	19,21

Reference	Page
I Corinthians (Cont'd)	
12:9	25
12:10	28,33,
.....	39,43
12:31	17,53,56
13:1	43,44
13:8	54
13:10	56,57
13:11	57
13:12	58
13:13	59
14	51
14:2	43,45,46
14:3,4	34
14:4	47
14:5	51
14:6	49
14:7,8	46
14:10	47
14:11	47
14:14,15	46
14:21,22	16,48
14:22	34,55
14:23	16,39,49
14:23,24,26	17
14:25	16
14:27	49
14:27,28	16,50
14:28	46
14:29-33	38
14:34	51
14:39	51
II Corinthians	
12:8,9	28
12:11,12	31
12:12	54

Reference	Page
Ephesians	
6:10-18	41
Philippians	
2:25-30	27
Colossians	
1:25	57
4:16	56
II Timothy	
3:8	14
3:10	15
4:13	56
II Peter	
1:15-19	13
Revelation	
5:8	23
6:9,10,14	23
8:3-8	23
9:11	44
16:17-20	23