

## WHY I TEACH THAT SIGN GIFTS ARE NO LONGER NECESSARY FOR THE CHURCH TODAY

- A. Biblical history does not lead us to believe that God designs for periods of extraordinary miracles to continue without interruption. The Bible records certain isolated times characterized by unusual miraculous activity: the Exodus and early Conquest under Moses and Joshua, the ministries of Elijah and Elisha, and the ministries of Jesus and His Apostles. In the future there will be another period of miracles during the Great Tribulation. Note that many great Bible personalities performed no recorded miracles, e.g., Adam, Noah, Abraham, David, Solomon. The public record was that John the Baptist performed no miracle (John 10:41).
- B. The stated purpose for sign gifts in the ministries of Jesus and His Apostles was the authentication of the message and the messenger:

John 14:11 - "Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least **believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves.**"

John 20:30-31 - "Many other **signs** therefore Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written **that you may believe** that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name."

Acts 2:22 - "Men of Israel, listen to these words; Jesus the Nazarene, a man **attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs** which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know"

Acts 14:3 - "...they spent a long time there speaking boldly with reliance on the Lord, who was **bearing witness** to the word of His grace, **granting that signs and wonders be done by their hands.**"

II Corinthians 12:12 - "The **signs of a true apostle** were performed among you with all perseverance, by signs and wonders and miracles."

Hebrews 2:3-4 - "...how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard, **God also bearing witness** with them, both **by signs and wonders and by various miracles** and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will."

- C. Claims of contemporary sign gift advocates are inferior to biblical occurrences. Not only do unbelievers disbelieve claims of sign gifts today, so also do many godly and biblically committed Christians. Solid evidence for today's sign gift claims is sadly and obviously lacking. Compare the fact that even the enemies of the Gospel could not gainsay the reality of the miracles of Jesus and the Apostles: "Therefore the chief priests and the Pharisees convened a council, and were saying, `What are we doing? For this man is performing many signs.'" (John 11:47); "What shall we do with these men? For the fact that a noteworthy miracle has taken place through them is apparent to all who live in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it." (Acts 4:16). It is also significant that sign gifts were displayed in highly public locations (Acts 5:15 - "into the streets") and were performed wholesale with no disclaimers regarding the personal faith of the recipient (Acts 5:16 - "And also the people from the cities in the vicinity of Jerusalem were coming together, bringing people who were sick or afflicted with unclean spirits; and they were all being healed."). Contemporary sign gift practices are characteristically done in private or before sympathetic and unquestioning audiences. Today's alleged prophetic utterances (in the predictive sense) are frequently erroneous (In the Old Testament, prophetic error was evidence of a false prophet and was punishable by death. Cf. Deuteronomy 18:20-22).
- D. Most of today's impetus for sign gifts comes from misapplication and misinterpretation of I Corinthians 12 and 14. While sign gifts were still present at the time Paul wrote this, it is noteworthy that in this passage he deliberately downplays sign gifts and writes to correct abusive uses of sign gifts in the church. There is nothing in this passage to support contemporary notions of private prayer languages or tongues as angelic language incapable of linguistic analysis. All passages in Acts treat tongues as human languages and there is nothing in I Corinthians to justify redefinition of tongues.
- E. If sign gifts are truly operational in the Church today, there is no basis to exclude any of the gifts, such as prophetic utterance. Therefore, we would expect to receive new revelatory information from God through today's prophets. Is there sufficient evidence for us to admit this contemporary addition to New Testament revelation? I think not and am deeply concerned about the doctrinal dangers this represents to our charismatic friends.
- F. The question is not "What can God do?" but "What has God chosen to do?" God can perform a miracle whenever and wherever He pleases. I believe it is appropriate for Christians to pray for people to be healed and to ask God to perform other supernatural acts for the help of His people and the glorification of His name. But I do not believe that individuals today are gifted by God with the ability to perform miracles at will. I also believe it is important to pray in submission to God's will and to not be embittered when He does not grant our requests.

G. I respect Charismatic believers as beloved brothers and sisters in Christ and maintain our position on sign gifts with a gracious spirit. When asked to explain the origin of contemporary tongues speaking, my response is that it is probably learned behavior, mistakenly but sincerely practiced as a "divine" gift. When asked to explain "faith healing" ministries, my response is: 1) Some of it is consciously spurious. 2) Some of it is well-intentioned with apparent results which are psychosomatic. 3) Some of it results in genuine healing since God can answer prayer for healing in any circumstance he chooses. I regard this as God's merciful care for the affected individual rather than the exercise of the "gift of healing." 4) Some of it results in tragic guilt when a "faith healer" disclaims responsibility for non-healing and blames the affected individual or his family and friends for not having enough faith.

Timothy G. Walton  
Alderwood Community Church  
November 26, 2008