

THE SPIRITUAL GIFTS AND HOW GOD HEALS

The purpose of this study is to demonstrate from the Scriptures how God used His spirit in the 1st century for the benefit of the Christian congregation and how He authenticated His message to unbelievers by the use of ‘signs and wonders,’ including the expelling of demons and the instantaneous complete healing of individuals at the time. Furthermore, this study deals with the issue of how God heals today. Yet to understand these things it is necessary first of all to know:

- Who received God’s spirit in the past and who receives it today?
- Who do the Scriptures show as specifically having received the special empowering ‘gift of the spirit’ enabling their performance of the outwardly miraculous ‘signs and wonders?’
- Who specifically had authority to pass on this special empowering ‘gift of the spirit?’
- That once the Christian congregation was established the performance of ‘signs and wonders’ ceased at some time within either the first or early second centuries.
- That, therefore, the occurrences of instantaneous healings also ceased at that time.
- That the instances of modern-day Charismatic healing are not a reflection of the original biblical ‘signs and wonders’ healing events.
- That the termination of the ‘signs and wonders’ events does not mean that God has ceased to heal Christians in response to prayer.
- That such healing since the early centuries will not be instantaneous.
- That along with prayer, God expects people to use health correcting methods offered by various practitioners.

NOTE: The subjects of **speaking in tongues** and **interpretation of tongues** are examined in STUDIES 12, 13, and 14.

ONE RECEIVES HOLY SPIRIT THE MOMENT ONE BELIEVES IN CHRIST

- ❖ “Let anyone who thirsts come to me and drink. **Whoever believes in me**, as the scripture says, ‘Rivers of living water will flow from within him.’ He said this in reference to **the Spirit** that *those who came to believe in him* were to **receive**” (*John 7:37-39 NAB*)
- ❖ “In him you also, **when you heard the word of truth**, the gospel of your salvation, **and believed in him**, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit” (*Eph. 1:13*).

Notice that they had received holy spirit because of believing i.e. before getting baptized. So certainly all believers possess holy spirit: “*For in one Spirit we were **all** baptized into one body...and we were **all** given to drink one Spirit*” (*1 Cor. 12:13 NAB*).

THE GIFT OF THE SPIRIT WAS TRANSMITTED ONLY THROUGH THE APOSTLES

PRIMARY APOSTLES—THOSE DIRECTLY CHOSEN BY JESUS

- ❖ “So one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us...one of these men must become with us a witness to his resurrection” (*Acts 1:20*).

So an apostle in the primary sense was one who had been a witness to the resurrection of Jesus and who had been chosen by him. This was the case for **Matthias** as replacing Judas. The basis was stated by Paul:

❖ “Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?” (*1 Cor. 9:1*).

Evidently **Paul**, too, was an apostle in the primary sense (Acts 9:3-8). Others who were called apostles were such in the secondary sense of having been *sent forth* in a missionary capacity but did not have the credentials that the twelve/thirteen had. (*Did someone else drop out?*). Only these ones were ever able to transmit the miraculous gifts of the spirit:

❖ “The signs (marks) of a *true apostle* were performed among you with all perseverance, *by signs and wonders and miracles*” (*2 Cor. 12:12*).

Here Paul told the Corinthians that the instantaneous miracles he performed proved his apostolic authority and so showing his appointment by Jesus. Whenever Paul performed these “signs and wonders” there was an obligation on all who witnessed them to acknowledge the authority of Paul. The same situation was true for the other apostles and evangelists.

SIGNS AND WONDERS

The terms *signs*, *wonders*, and *miracles* belong together rather than as indicating three different forms of manifestation and are found combined again in Acts 2:22. Furthermore, the two word phrase “signs and wonders” (or reversed) is mentioned eleven times (Matt. 24:24; Mark. 13:22; John. 4:48; Acts 2:43; 4:30; 5:12; 6:8; 7:36; 14:3; 15:12; and Rom. 15:19), while Acts 8:13 speaks of “signs and great miracles”

LAYING ON OF HANDS BY PETER AND JOHN

❖ “Even Simon [*the magician*] himself believed and, after being **baptized**, became devoted to Philip; and when he saw *the signs and mighty deeds* that were occurring, he was astounded. Now when the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, *they sent them Peter and John [both apostles]*, who went down and prayed for them, **that they might receive the holy Spirit**, for it had not yet fallen upon any of them; they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord. Then *they laid their hands on them* and they received the holy Spirit” (*Acts 8:13-17 NAB*).

Philip was one of the seven chosen by the apostles, they having laid their hands upon him to impart the gifts of the spirit. Yet Philip, not being an apostle, is shown as not able to impart such gifts. These were imparted only when the two apostles arrived and laid their hands on the believing Samaritans. This is strong proof that the gifts could be imparted only through an apostle. The commentaries generally state that the receiving of the holy spirit by these Samaritans was the receiving of the gifts and in verse 20 Peter calls it “the gift of God.” So Simon’s main interest was “**the signs and mighty deeds** that were occurring.” He did not request that he receive only these gifts of the spirit but the very power to impart such to others and no doubt for money.

LAYING ON OF HANDS BY PAUL

❖ “On hearing this, they were **baptized** in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had *laid his hands on them*, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began to speak with [other] languages and to prophesy. Now there were about 12 men in all” (*Acts 19:5-7 HCSB*).

WHEN ANANIAS LAID HIS HANDS ON PAUL WAS IT TO IMPART THE SPIRIT TO HIM?

Jesus later gave Ananias [*also not an apostle*] authority to lay hands on Saul for the purpose of Paul’s regaining his sight:

- ❖ “Now there was a disciple at Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, ‘Ananias.’ And he said, ‘Here I am, Lord.’ And **the Lord said to him**, ‘Rise and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul, for behold, he is praying,¹² and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and **lay his hands on him** so that he **might regain his sight**’ ...¹⁷ So *Ananias* departed and entered the house. And **laying his hands on him** he said, ‘Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came has sent **me so that you may regain your sight** and be filled with the Holy Spirit.’¹⁸ And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he rose and **was baptized**;...” (*Acts 9:10-12, 17, 18 ESV*).

Please notice that Paul had already received the spirit as a believer (Eph. 1:13), and that he had been commissioned directly by Jesus. Notice also that this was a “*laying on of the hands*” *before Paul got baptized*. So the laying on of hands was so that Paul could recover his sight and then he could get baptized so that he might receive the spirit **in the special way to empower him for his mission**.

THE REASONS THE GIFT WAS TRANSMITTED THROUGH THE APOSTLES

1) They were **formal eyewitnesses** of the resurrected Christ.

- ❖ “Therefore of the men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us...one of these must become **a witness** with us **of his resurrection**” (*Acts 1:21*).
- ❖ “I am Jesus who you are persecuting ... for this purpose I have appeared to you, to appoint you a minister and **a witness** not only *to the things which you have seen*, but also to the things in which I will appear to you...” (*Acts 26:15-19*).
- ❖ “Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize...taking his stand on **visions he has seen**, inflated without cause by his fleshly mind” *including those today who claim to have seen Christ* (*Col. 2:18*).
- ❖ “...and **last** of all as one untimely born, *he appeared to me* also” (*1 Cor. 15:8*).

2) They learned the gospel directly from Christ not from Scripture or men.

- ❖ “Paul an Apostle, not sent from men or through the agency of man, **but through Jesus Christ** and God the Father...” (*Gal. 1:1*).
- ❖ “...for I neither received it (*the gospel*) from man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a **revelation of Jesus Christ**” (*Gal. 1:12*).

GIFTS, MINISTRIES, AND ACTIVITIES AS MANIFESTATIONS OF THE SPIRIT

- ❖ “Now there are different *gifts*, but the same Spirit. There are different *ministries*, but the same Lord. And there are different *activities*, but the same God is active in everyone and everything. A manifestation of the Spirit is given to each person to produce what is beneficial: to one is given a **message of wisdom** through the Spirit, to another, a **message of knowledge** by the same Spirit, to another, *faith* by the same Spirit, to another, **gifts of healing** by the one Spirit, to another, the **performing of miracles** (Lit. *powerful deeds*), to another, **prophecy**, to another, distinguishing between spirits, to another, different kinds of languages, to another, interpretation of languages. But one and the same Spirit is active in all these, distributing to each one as He wills...

²⁷ Now you are the body of Christ, and individual members of it. And God has placed these in the church: first **apostles**, second **prophets**, third **teachers**, next, **miracles**, then **gifts of healing**, **helping**, **managing**, various kinds of languages. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all

teachers? Do all do miracles? Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in languages? Do all interpret?” (1Cor. 12: 4-11, 27-30 HSCB).

Here Paul demonstrates not only the great diversity within the body – the congregation, but also the unity because these “manifestations” are of the one spirit. These “manifestations” fall generally into two classes – those that were verbal communication of wisdom or knowledge or prophecies etc. and those which involved action namely, *the gifts of healing, the performing of powerful deeds [miracles], helping, and managing*. So as the Expositor’s Bible Commentary (Vol. 10, p. 262) notes, **only the gifts of healing and the performing of powerful deeds** were outwardly demonstrable as supernatural:

The next two gifts—the outwardly demonstrable ones of healings and miracles—belong together and were particularly applicable to the ministry of Paul and the other apostles.

In the verbal communication classification it was not the wisdom or the knowledge or the prophecies which were supernaturally acquired but it was ‘the emboldened ability’ *to fully express these* which was supernaturally produced by the spirit i.e. the Christian was moved by the spirit to speak out such beneficial wisdom or knowledge etc. These gifts appear to be gifts from God so that the individual Christian could fully use his naturally acquired knowledge and talents when empowered by God’s spirit to deliver His message. Jesus had earlier said that “*the Advocate, the holy Spirit that the Father will send in my name – he will teach you everything and will remind you of all that I have told you*” (John 14:26 NAB).

GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT DETAILED IN ROMANS AND EPHESIANS

“According to the grace given to us, we have different gifts: If **prophecy**, use it according to the standard of faith; if **service**, in service; if **teaching**, in teaching; if **exhorting**, in exhortation; **giving**, with generosity; **leading**, with diligence; **showing mercy**, with cheerfulness” (Rom. 12:6-8).

All of these gifts are empowered by God’s spirit, but none of them are outwardly supernatural.

“Now grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of the Messiah’s gift. For it says: When He ascended on high, He took prisoners into captivity; He gave **gifts** to people. ...¹¹ And He personally gave some to be **apostles**, some **prophets**, some *evangelists*, some **pastors** and **teachers**, for the training of the saints in the work of ministry, to build up the body of Christ, until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of God’s Son, [growing] into a mature man with a stature measured by Christ’s fullness” (Eph. 4: 7, 8, 11-13).

This passage further demonstrates that such gifts are the normal skills and talents of caring Christians who are empowered by God’s spirit to use their talents for the benefit of others. It also shows that such gifts do not necessarily have to occur supernaturally. *All of these gifts clearly continue to today*. And concerning all of the gifts noted by Paul, theologian G.E. Ladd comments that:

A careful study of these gifts makes it clear that while some of them are truly charismatic, others are obviously natural gifts used by the Holy Spirit...Such functions as ministry, administration, ruling, helping, showing mercy, and giving employ the natural talents of men, while prophecy, miracles, healings and tongues are the supernatural endowments beyond the control; of the individual. *A Theology of the New Testament*, p. 535.

INSTANTANEOUS “HEALING” AND THE PERFORMING OF “POWERFUL DEEDS”

THE ONLY THREE MAJOR OCCASSIONS OF ‘SIGNS AND WONDERS’

Apart from the gift to expel demons, miraculous ‘signs’ were all performed in Old Testament times, and the Scriptures seem to indicate that there were just 3 major times of the performing of these “powerful works”:

When Israel was being freed from Egypt so that it might enter the Promised Land by conquering of Canaan. The miraculous signs authenticated Moses (Ex. 4:2-9) and Joshua as God's representatives at a time when the nation of Israel was being established and was to be founded on the five books of Moses (in process of writing).

When Elijah and Elisha needed to prove their credentials as God's representatives (1 Kings. 17:24).

When the work of Jesus and the apostles began so that Gospel being preached was confirmed as being from God.

Additionally there will be the performing of miraculous signs at the time of the future work of the two witnesses to authenticate them as being from God. And so miracles do not appear in the Scriptures arbitrarily but are clustered around significant events in the history of God's people. Hence, from the above pattern it is evident that the Scriptures connect the miraculous sign gifts to new important phases in God's plan at times of new revelation. Therefore at the end of each of these revelatory phases the miraculous sign gifts terminate because they have served their purpose.

'SIGNS' BY JESUS

In John's gospel account all of the miracles performed by Jesus are classified as 'signs,' and his ability to work miracles served the distinct purpose of authenticating Jesus as the divine messenger and so authenticating his message. In other words it was to prove that he was sent by God. In all cases the healings performed by Jesus were outwardly visible and brought an instant cure e.g.:

- ❖ “And behold, a leper came to him and knelt before him, saying, “Lord, if you will, you can make me clean.” And Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, “I will; be clean.” And **immediately** his leprosy was cleansed” (*Matt. 8:2, 3*).
- ❖ “And Jesus answered, “O faithless and twisted generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you? Bring him [*the boy*] here to me.” And Jesus rebuked the **demon, and it came out of him**, and the boy was **healed instantly**” (*Matt. 17:17-18*).

LIMITS ON JESUS' USAGE OF INSTANTANEOUS HEALING

Although Jesus performed instantaneous healings for a large number of people, it was not the prime aspect of his ministry. The gospel accounts are mostly taken up with recording Jesus' teaching work; and in fact, on one occasion in his home town of Nazareth he could not perform any miraculous healing because of the lack of faith of the people there (Mark.6:4-6).

'SIGNS' BY THE APOSTLES AND EVANGELISTS

Within the 1Corinthians passage concerning the many gifts, are “the gifts of healing” and “the performing of miracles (Lit. powerful deeds).” In view of the record in the Gospels and in Acts both were clearly supernatural. The “performing of powerful deeds” most probably refers to: **raising the dead, expulsion of demons, and the striking of opponents with blindness** (Acts 9:49; 13:8-12; 19:11, 12, 20):

- the gifts of healing,
- raising the dead,
- expulsion of demons,
- striking of Elymas the sorcerer with blindness.

THE INSTANCES OF THE PERFORMING OF 'SIGNS AND WONDERS'

1. Healing by Peter and John of a man who was lame from his mother's womb (Acts 3: 6-9).

2. The Sanhedrin admits “that a **notable sign** has been performed through them...” (Acts 4:16).
3. “...many **signs and wonders** were regularly done among the people by the hands of the apostles” (Acts 5:12).
4. The sick were laid out in the streets so that Peter’s shadow might fall on some of them (Acts 5:15).
5. Healing of all the sick and demon-possessed people brought to the apostles (Acts 5:16).
6. “Stephen [the evangelist], full of grace and power, was doing **great wonders and signs** among the people” (Acts 6:8).
7. “And the crowds with one accord paid attention to what was being said **by Philip** [the evangelist] when they heard him and saw **the signs** that he did. ...¹³Even Simon himself believed, and after being baptized he continued with Philip. And seeing **signs and great miracles** performed, he was amazed” (Acts. 8:6; 13).
8. In Lydda Peter was used to heal Aeneas who had been “bedridden for eight years, who was paralyzed” (Acts. 9:33-34).
9. At Joppa, Peter was used to raise Tabitha (Dorcas) from the dead (Acts. 9:40).
10. Paul and Barnabas were “speaking boldly in **the Lord**, who **was bearing witness to the word** of his grace, granting **signs and wonders** to be done by their hands” (Acts. 14:3).
11. In Jerusalem, “all the assembly fell silent, and they listened to Barnabas and Paul as they *related what signs and wonders* God had done through them among the Gentiles” (Acts. 15:12).
12. “And God was doing **extraordinary miracles** by the hands of Paul, so that even handkerchiefs or aprons that had touched his skin were carried away to the sick, and their **diseases left them** and the **evil spirits came out** of them” (Acts 19:11-12).
13. The young Christian boy Eutychus was raised from the dead through Paul after falling out of a third story window and being killed (Acts. 20:9-12).

THE SITUATION TODAY

Today there are generally two main opinions concerning the miraculous gifts of ‘healing’ and ‘powerful works’:

1. **Pentecostals and Charismatics** believe that these miraculous gifts continue to be operative right up to today.
2. The **Traditional view** is that “the ability to heal instantaneously” and “the performing of powerful deeds” ceased in the early days of Christianity after it was established and so the miracles had accomplished their purpose. This is not to say that that the traditional view denies that God heals sick believers today? Indeed it teaches that He does so, but through prayer and not through a channel as with the apostles.

So it is vital for Christians to be able to ascertain which view is correct. For this we must answer the following questions:

1. Who in the New Testament was granted these gifts of ‘healing’ and ‘powerful works’?
2. What was the pattern of the usage of these gifts?
3. What was the purpose of these gifts?
4. Did these gifts cease within the time of early Christianity?
5. Are the supposed “instant healings” and “powerful works” that are occurring today the same as those in the days of Christ and the apostles?

WHO SPECIFICALLY HAD BEEN GRANTED THESE GIFTS?

THE TWELVE

- ❖ “And he called the twelve together, and gave them **power** (Gk *dynamis*) and authority **over all demons** and to **cure diseases**” (Luke 9:1)

This gift enabled them to cast out demons and to heal sick people.

THE SEVENTY EVANGELISTS

- ❖ “Now after this the Lord appointed seventy others, and sent them in pairs ahead of Him to every city and place where He Himself was going to come ...⁸ “Whatever city you enter and they receive you, eat what is set before you; ⁹and **heal those in it who are sick**, and say to them, ‘The kingdom of God has come near to you’ ...¹⁷The seventy returned with joy, saying, “Lord, even **the demons are subject to us** in Your name”” (Luke 10:1, 9, 17 NASB).

As with the Twelve this gift enabled them to cast out demons and to heal sick people.

OTHER APPOINTED EVANGELISTS

Among the “seven men of good repute” appointed by the apostles to the duty of serving others were Stephen and Philip. These men were also evangelists; firstly Stephen’s witnessing was challenged:

- ❖ “And Stephen, full of grace and power, was doing **great wonders and signs** among the people. Then some of those who belonged to the synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called), and of the Cyrenians, and of the Alexandrians, and of those from Cilicia and Asia, rose up and **disputed with Stephen**. But they could not withstand the **wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking**” (Acts 6:8-10).

Then Philip:

- ❖ “And the crowds with one accord paid attention to what was being said by Philip when they heard him and saw **the signs** that he did. For **unclean spirits**, crying out with a loud voice, **came out** of many who had them, and many who were **paralyzed or lame were healed**” (Acts 8:6, 7).

The Scriptures never show these gifts being used by other Christians in the congregations. The gifts were always associated only with Christ, the Twelve and the appointed evangelists.

THE PATTERN OF THE POWERFUL WORKS AND HEALINGS

Jesus healed those will real visibly organic diseases with either a word or a touch. The healing was instantaneous and total. Everyone who requested healing or for whom it was requested was healed – none were ignored and no healings failed. Jesus also raised the dead. The apostles and other appointed evangelizers did all these things in exactly the same way their master had done them. Yet, most of this pattern is not what happens in Charismatic healing sessions.

THE PURPOSE OF THE ‘SIGNS AND WONDERS’ GIFTS FOR THE EARLY CHRISTIANS

The ability to perform the “signs and wonders” was given for two distinct yet related purposes: **To give legitimacy and authority to the Messengers – the apostles and their close associates, the evangelists.** So the instantaneous and total healing was for **the purpose of confirming** and authenticating to unbelievers that God was now using Christian ministers to deliver His message. So as an immediate result of the **inaugural act** of the outpouring of the spirit at Pentecost to establish the Christian congregation there were “*many wonders and signs being done through the apostles*” (Acts 2:43). The healings highlighted this unique situation in God’s plan in the outpouring of the spirit so that they amazed the crowds and so made the message believable. Later in Iconium Paul and Barnabas

were:

- ❖ “...speaking out courageously for **the Lord**, who **testified to the message** of his grace, granting miraculous **signs and wonders** to be performed through their hands” (*Acts 14:3*).

Also the writer of the letter to the Hebrews describes the purpose of the unique miraculous manifestation of the spirit in the ministry of the apostles and the evangelists:

- ❖ “After it [*salvation*] was 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 holy spirit...*” (*Heb. 2:3, 4*).

As with God’s granting Jesus the ability to heal miraculously as giving evidence that he was the Messiah so, too, the miraculous healing by the apostles gave evidence to the Jews and later to the Gentiles that their message came from God.

To prove the truth of the good news message itself.

Whenever the *signs and wonders* were performed they were either accompanied by the preaching of the good news or that preaching is implied in the immediate context (e.g., Ac. 2:14-39; 3:11-26; 4:8-12; 5:12-16; 6:8-10; 8:5-7; 9:33-35, 40-42; 14:3; 19:11-20). In fact, the result of the occurrence of the very first instant healing (Acts 3:1-10), shortly after Pentecost, was that Peter found an opportunity to launch into a conscience-disturbing sermon (Acts 3:11-26). The same pattern can be seen throughout the book of Acts whereby these “signs and wonders” pointed to the message these evangelizers were preaching. After the message had been committed to writing, the signs ceased as the means of confirmation and the Scriptures took their place.

A LIMITED TIME FOR THE INSTANTANEOUS MIRACULOUS EVENTS

However, after the Christian Congregation had been established, both Jewish and Gentile unbelievers could see that the message was from God even without the presence of miracles i.e. that God is “truly among you” (1Cor.14:25) by observing the faith of Christians and “the fruit of God’s spirit” in their lives and activities (Gal. 5:22-24). This may be the reason that we do not read so much of the miracles in the later stages of the New Testament. For instance:

- After Philip had baptized the Ethiopian eunuch Philip was miraculously transported to Azotus (Acts 8:39, 40), yet we don’t read of any later similar event happening to him again or to any of the apostles.
- Early in Paul’s ministry his curing of the sick was very much in evidence (Acts 19:12), yet later, he either does not seem to be able to offer such help to his fellow Christians or he did not want to abuse the purpose of the gift of healing:
- ❖ “**Epaphroditus**...was sick to the point of death, but God had mercy on him” (*Phil. 2:25, 27*).

Here this faithful brother was sick to the point of death; yet no one comes forth to cure him. Nevertheless, God didn’t let him die. Paul did not abuse the purpose of the gift of healing – it had not been granted so that all Christians might keep healthy, but as a sign to unbelievers.

- ❖ “[**Timothy**]...use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments” (*1Tim. 5:23*). Yet Paul didn’t advise Timothy to find someone with the gift of healing. Similarly when Paul says: “**Trophimus** I left sick in Miletus” (2 Tim. 4:20) he doesn’t suggest an instantaneous miraculous cure for him.

- Paul's own "thorn in the flesh" (2 Cor. 12:7-9) was never healed by himself or by some other Christian.

So the gift of healing was to be used only for its legitimate purpose when God revealed that it was needed for the furtherance of the declaring of the Good News.

TOO MANY MIRACLES — TOO LITTLE FAITH

If there was an unlimited number of healings it would be very restrictive of faith because everyone would be continually confronted with overwhelming evidence of God and have no need of faith. Yet faith is a prime requirement for the Christian so that he is truly using his free will. Furthermore, faith was often an important factor in the issue of healing. For example, the lame man who the apostle Paul healed "had the faith to be made well" (Acts 14:9). If good health now was a part of Christ's atoning sacrifice, then vast numbers of people would be flooding into churches to get saved with a completely wrong motive, rather than coming to God for His glory. It would certainly be contradictory that God has decreed that all Christians would eventually die, but strangely none can ever get sick!

PRECEDENTS FOR THE CESSATION OF SUPERNATURAL
GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT

SUPERNATURAL SKILLS

- ❖ "See the LORD has called by name Bezalel...and he has **filled him with the Spirit** of God, with skill, with intelligence, with knowledge, and with all craftsmanship ... And he has **inspired him to teach**, both him and Oholiab ... He has **filled them with skill** to do every sort of work done...by any sort of workman or skilled designer ... Bezalel and Oholiab and every craftsman **in whom the LORD had put skill and intelligence** to know how to do any work in the construction of the sanctuary..." (*Ex. 35:30-36:1*).

Yet these gifts of the spirit came to an end with the completion of the work because they had served their purpose:

SUPERNATURAL SPEAKING

- ❖ "Then the LORD...took some of the Spirit that was on him [*Moses*] and put it on the *seventy elders*. And as soon as the Spirit rested on them, they **prophesied**. But they did **not continue doing it**" (*Num. 11:25*).

Also, Josephus and other historians recognized that the gift of prophecy for the ancient prophets came to an end sometime after Malachi.

SUPERNATURAL PROVISIONS

- ❖ "And the day after the Passover, on that very day, they ate of the produce of the land, unleavened cakes and parched grain. And **the manna ceased** the day after they ate of the produce of the land. And there was no longer manna for the people of Israel, but they ate of the fruit of the land of Canaan that year" (*Josh. 5:11-12*).

In just the same way the miraculously produced manna ceased because it was no longer needed after Israel entered the Land of Canaan, so, too, the gift of miraculous signs was no longer needed once the Christian congregation was established and the writing of the message was completed.

THE SUPERNATURAL GIFTS CEASED SOON AFTER THE
FOUNDATION WAS LAID

- ❖ "God's household, having been built on the foundation of **the apostles and prophets**, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone" (*Eph. 2:19, 20*).

This foundation was *laid once*—there can be no more apostles in the primary sense. Along with the gift of apostleship went prophecy which is everything that we see recorded in the New Testament.

- ❖ “After it [*salvation*] was first spoken through the Lord, it was **confirmed** to us by those [*the apostles*] who heard, **God also bearing witness with them [*the apostles*]**, both by **signs** and wonders and by various **miracles** and *by gifts of holy spirit...*” (*Heb. 2:3, 4*).

Therefore, it is evident that the miraculous gifts of the spirit were temporary with God bearing witness *only whilst the apostles were alive* and salvation was “**confirmed to us by those [*the apostles*] who heard,**” especially by their writings. The purpose of the gifts was now complete; they **had served God’s purposes** to confirm to unbelievers that it is through Messiah Jesus and his Congregation that God now offers salvation, rather than national Israel. Once the last of the primary apostles had died, the miraculous gifts of the spirit could no longer be imparted by their laying on of hands.

FUTURE SUPERNATURAL WORKS THAT WILL NOT BE FROM GOD

- ❖ “Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. **On that day** many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not **prophecy** in your name, and **cast out demons** in your name, and do **many mighty works** in your name?' And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness’” (*Matt. 7:21-21*).
- ❖ “The coming of the lawless one is by **the activity of Satan** with all power and **false signs and wonders**, and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved” (*2 Thess. 2:9, 10*).

Because such powerful works of the future will originate with Satan one cannot now claim for certain that any powerful work one may experience is necessarily from God.

THE CHARISMATIC MOVEMENT

PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

Some believe in the modern-day phenomenon because they claim to have personally benefited from it, perhaps by being cured of some ailment. However, many of these “cures” are of such things as migraines, protracted pain, psychosomatic illness, etc, which are not on the same level as the healings of Jesus and the apostles. Nevertheless, the question is not, “ah, but such and such a faith-healer cured me.” The real question is: What does the Bible teach on this subject when all aspects of it are brought to bear on the issue?

DOES MODERN HEALING HAVE ANYTHING IN COMMON WITH BIBLICAL MIRACLES?

The three questions to be considered are:

1. What is the purpose of the Charismatic “miracles”?
2. Are Charismatic miracles performed in the same circumstances as the miracles in the New Testament?
3. Are Charismatics performing the same type of miracles found in the New Testament?

The purpose of Charismatic “miracles” is clearly quite different to that of biblical miracles, inasmuch as it is not done to authenticate new events in salvation history or new revelations from God so as to call attention to the Good News. Its purpose is to heal believers in a controlled environment so that it becomes a show – as entertainment **for other believers** thereby making the faith-healer a celebrity and often to raise money for the healer’s organization. Furthermore, the faith-healer has his devotees and a dedicated staff who cherry-pick particular people for a “healing.” Why are these healings not

performed regularly in all the general hospitals? Why are these healings not performed regularly in shopping malls, or public parks? The answer is obvious. These so-called modern-day faith healers are charlatans.

In contrast to this neither Jesus Christ nor his apostles conducted healing services for believers, but performed most of their healings in public places in front of strangers that were unbelievers. Even the healings that were performed in private homes were then made known to unbelievers or even enemies; yet they were able to heal *everyone* who believed (Luke. 4:40; Acts. 5:12-16; 28:9). Yet, the kinds of “miracles” performed at Charismatic meetings do not meet the biblical criteria of being able to heal with a word or a touch; neither are they instantaneous and total and nor do they guarantee success for every organically sick person. Furthermore, when does one ever hear that the faith-healer raised a dead person to life as did Jesus and a number of his apostles? So-called faith-healings are simply not of the same order as those performed by Jesus or his apostles. For instance, when does anyone having a withered hand or a cut-off ear, or leprosy get cured. Or when does anyone with crippled legs get them straightened at a Charismatic meeting. In other words when is there ever something that is testable as a cure – even the raising of someone from the dead as Jesus and the apostles Peter and Paul did. So it seems that because they do their work in a controlled environment they can “arrange” much in advance which often results in fraudulent or exaggerated testimonies

PRACTICAL DIFFICULTIES IN MODERN HEALING

If a Christian in the 21st century had the original “gift” of healing, so that he or she could heal anyone of any disease in just the same way that Jesus and his apostles did in the 1st century, they would be absolutely inundated by those who were suffering illnesses today because, with the kind of media and transportation that exists today, millions of people would get to know in a very short time and would be demanding cures at a rate that would completely exhaust the Christian with this gift. Nevertheless, as with the event concerning the ten lepers where only one showed gratitude (Lk.17:11-19), the majority of these people would not truly accept Christ. So it seems that God saw fit for this gift to lapse after its work was done for the purpose of focusing attention on Christianity. Even any claimed miraculous healings have been rare during most of Church history.

DIRECT MIRACULOUS PHYSICAL HEALING FROM GOD
IN HEBREW SCRIPTURE TIMES

GOD WOUNDS AND HEALS

❖ “See now that I, even I, am he, and there is no god beside me; I kill and I make alive; **I wound and I heal**; and there is none that can deliver out of my hand” (*Deut 32:39*).
This was the case with both Abimelech (Gen. 20:17, 18) and Miriam (Num. 12:10, 13).

GOD IS ISRAEL'S HEALER

❖ “There the LORD made for them a statute and a rule, and there he tested them, ²⁶saying, “If you will diligently listen to the voice of the LORD your God, and do that which is right in his eyes, and give ear to his commandments and keep all his statutes, **I will put none of the diseases on you** that I put on the Egyptians, for I am the LORD, **your healer**”” (*Ex. 15:25, 26*).

DAVID PRAYS FOR HEALING

❖ “How blessed is he who considers the helpless ... ³The LORD will **sustain him upon his sickbed; In his illness, You restore him to health**. As for me, I said, “O LORD, be gracious to me; **Heal my soul**, for I have sinned against You”” (*Ps. 41:1, 3, 4 NASB*).

❖ “Bless the LORD, O my soul, And forget none of His benefits; Who pardons all your iniquities, **Who heals all your diseases**; Who redeems your life from the pit, Who crowns you with lovingkindness and compassion” (*Ps. 103:2-4 NASB*).

In none of these statements is there a human “channel” for healing – God performed all such healing directly in response to prayer; yet this does **not mean that the healing was necessarily instantaneous.**

TODAY - DIRECT HEALING FROM GOD IS A LEGITIMATE PRAYERFUL REQUEST

In answer to prayer God heals where there is faith to manifest His own glory. But, He does not heal everybody and no longer heals through the apostolic gift of healing. That gift has ceased. In fact, God needs no human intermediary or channel to physically heal his faithful people (Ps.103:2-4; cf. Jas.5:13-16), but because God *does* answer our prayers (Matt.7:7-12) it is quite legitimate to make a request to God for him to heal us. However, because the aspect of instantaneous healing occurred only in the early days of Christianity one should not expect it to occur in that way but perhaps to be less tangibly obvious and gradual and requiring our patient persistence in faith and the application of godly wisdom. As with the patriarch Job Christians are tested sometimes with health conditions which cannot be cured without miraculous help from God and our patient endurance of the condition produces good qualities in us because:

- ❖ “...we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts...” (*Rom.5:3-5*).

If every Christian always received an instant cure they would not appropriate to themselves these various godly qualities.

DIRECT HEALING BY GOD OF PHYSICAL SICKNESS IN RESPONSE TO INTERCESSORY PRAYER OF CHRISTIANS

The Letter of James is a very early Christian writing from AD. 44-50 and reflects the early Jewish Christian practices:

- ❖ “Anyone who is having troubles should pray. Anyone who is happy should sing praises.¹⁴ Anyone who is **sick** should call the church’s elders. They should pray for and pour **oil** on the person in the name of the Lord.¹⁵ And **the prayer** that is said with faith **will make the sick person well; the Lord will heal that person.** And **if the person has sinned**, the sins will be forgiven.¹⁶ Confess your sins to each other and **pray for each other so God can heal you.** When a believing person prays, great things happen.¹⁷ Elijah was a human being just like us. He prayed that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years!¹⁸ Then Elijah prayed again, and the rain came down from the sky, and the land produced crops again. ¹⁹ My brothers and sisters, **if one of you wanders away from the truth, and someone helps that person come back,**²⁰ remember this: Anyone who brings a sinner back from the wrong way will save that sinner's soul from death and will cause many sins to be forgiven” (*James 5:13-20 NCV*).

In the *Comment* section in the *Word Biblical Commentary* Ralph P. Martin explains:

14. “Is there one of you weak?”... “He should summon the elders of the congregation to pray over him.”

This suggests that he or she is confined to the sickbed and is too ill to go to the elders. ...we must note that the elders as a group, not the individual who holds that office, are pictured as performing this ministry. There does not appear to be a specific reference to a particular elder who is looked upon **as the conduit** for divine healing. All this is to say that James is not describing for us the practice of “faith healing,”...

There have been two main possibilities offered for the purpose of anointing the sick with oil. The first is for **medicinal** or practical purposes. ... The other explanation of **anointing with oil sees it as symbolic.** ... As we shall see, v 15 shows that the uttering of a prayer for healing does **not automatically ensure that the**

sick will recover ...

There are two words, *ajleivfein* and *crivein*, both meaning “to anoint.” The latter would have been a better choice to show that the anointing of oil was for symbolic or religious reasons; but the choice of the former does not eliminate this understanding. First, **crivein** is never used in the NT for the physical act of anointing, as the action in James 5:14 requires, but it is **always used in a metaphorical sense** (Luke 4:18 = Isa 61:1; Acts 4:27; 10:38; 2 Cor 1:21; Heb 1:9 = Ps 45:7). *ajleivfein* thus may have been chosen over *crivein* because of standard usage yet still with the intention of conveying the thought that the anointing of oil was symbolic. Second, in the LXX *ajleivfein* as well as *crivein* can be used to depict the consecration of priests (Exod 40:15), which shows that the two verbs could be **synonymous in describing a symbolic action** in the OT. Thus, it seems possible to conclude that the anointing with oil in 5:14 *shows that the sick person has been set aside for special favor (and special use?) by God*. As will be seen in v 15, **this symbolic understanding of the anointing of the sick person with oil fits in with the rest of this paragraph**.

The illustrative value of the action is parallel with the “example” given in the *pedilavium* of John 13:1–15. It has been suggested (by Schoeps, *Theologie und Geschichte*, 348) that the anointing rite in James belonged to a phase of Jewish Christianity, from which it then passed into the practices of the Clementine literature ...

15 *“And the request based on faith will make the sick one well; and the Lord will raise him up.”*

The verb *swvzein* is often used in the NT to refer to the eschatological salvation of believers, suggesting to some scholars that James is referring to deliverance from **spiritual death**. This argument gains support if *ajsqenei`n* (v 14) means “to be **spiritually weak**” (as in Rom 14:2; 1 Cor 8:11–12), as may be the case with *kavmnein* (in v 15: see Heb 12:3). Moreover, *ija`sqai* (“to cure”) can conceivably be understood as referring to a restoration to spiritual wholeness. **Yet these are exceptional meanings attached to the vocabulary**, *ajsqenei`n* and *kavmnein* are **better understood to refer to cases of physical illness** ... *ija`sqai* most naturally refers to the curing of a person who is sick. In addition, *swv/zein* (Mark 5:23, 28, 34; 10:52; John 11:12) and *ejgeivrein* (Mark 1:31; 2:9–12; 9:27; Matt 9:5–7; Acts 3:7) can be **used to describe someone who is healed of a physical malady**.

“If he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.”

Though there is no strict equation of illness and sinfulness (a denial that goes back to the book of Job; cf. John 9:1–3; 11:4) **James leaves open the possibility that some sickness is connected with sin**. This use of the perfect participle (*pepoi`kwv*) suggests the power of past sins that affect the present situation of the sufferer. This consequence may be in the form of continuing guilt, or it may be **an illness that remains despite the prayer for healing**. If illness is related to sin, the asking of forgiveness of sin (as confessed both to God and to the injured party) will lead to healing.

16a *“Confess your sins to one another then, and pray for one another so that you may be healed.”*

The confession of sin was then evidentially necessary if healing was to occur. The present imperative form, *ejxomologeis`sqe*, suggests that **James is requiring that confession become a repeated action**. The practice of public confession was important to Judaism and the early church...

The word *ija`sqai* (“to heal”)—except when it is part of OT quotations (e.g., Isa 53:6; 1 Pet 2:24)—is **always used in the NT to refer to the healing of physical illness**. This comports with the interpretation of the setting of vv 14–16 above. The present verse **suggests a corporate setting for the prayer of healing**, which is different from the admonition to enlist only the prayers of the elders in v 14. Davids believes that “James ... consciously generalizes, making the specific case of 5:14–15 into a general principle of preventive medicine.” By saying that church members other than elders can take part in **a ministry of intercessory prayer** (which is effective; see 5:16b), the author is showing that the prayer, **not the person (i.e., not the elders), is the channel** through which God’s power to heal is conveyed. **This speaks against the view that 5:14 is referring to “healing” as a spiritual cavnisma**. Moreover, though the elders are still responsible for the prayer of intercession on behalf of the ill (5:14), the text here widens to make prayer and confession and so pastoral responsibility the “privilege and responsibility” of **all in the congregation**. The precise setting of this pastoral reminder will be evident from 5:19–20.

16b “The righteous person’s prayer is very powerful in its effectiveness.”

James ... is quick to point out that such power is not limited to a special class of elite “charismatics.” There is no select group of Christians (e.g., the elders or the teachers) who have a monopoly in the matter of effectual prayer.

SUMMARY COMMENT

In contrast to the teaching that the sickness spoken of by James was spiritual the commentary makes it clear that real physical illness is being spoken of. Also it was prayer on the part of the intercessors that was the effective factor in a cure rather than who it is that interceded and so no channel was required.

PRAY TO GOD - BUT ALSO USE MEDICINAL REMEDIES

GOD HEALED HEZEKIAH

❖ “In those days Hezekiah became sick and was **at the point of death**. And Isaiah the prophet the son of Amoz came to him, and said to him, “Thus says the LORD: Set your house in order, for you shall die, you shall not recover.” Then Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and **prayed to the LORD**, and said, “Please, O LORD, remember how I have walked before you in faithfulness and with a whole heart, and have done what is good in your sight.” And Hezekiah wept bitterly. Then the word of the LORD came to Isaiah: “Go and say to Hezekiah, Thus says the LORD, the God of David your father: I have heard your prayer; I have seen your tears. Behold, **I will add fifteen years to your life.**” ... ²¹ Now Isaiah had said, “Let them **take a cake of figs and apply it to the boil, that he may recover**”” (*Isaiah 38:1-5, 21*).

Evidently the remedy of the day was the application of “a cake of figs” to deal with the boil. It appears that in ancient times there was a real risk of death from any wound that became infected.

JESUS ALSO TAUGHT ABOUT THE NEED FOR PHYSICIANS

❖ “[Jesus] said, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick””
(*Matt. 9:12*).

POSSIBLY LUKE THE PHYSICIAN WAS INVOLVED

❖ “It happened that the father of Publius lay sick with fever and dysentery. And Paul visited him and prayed, and putting his hands on him **healed** (Gk *iaomai*) **him**. And when this had taken place, *the rest of the people* on the island who had diseases also came and **were cured** (Gk *therapeuo*). They also honored us greatly, and when we were about to sail, they put on board whatever we needed”
(*Acts 28:8-10*).

Because Luke uses the word *therapeuo* for the curing of “*the rest of the people,*” rather than *iaomai*, which concerned Paul’s healing of Publius, this could mean that Luke was administering medicine to them.

INSTANTANEOUS HEALING IN THE FUTURE

Just as the **inaugural act** of the outpouring of the spirit at Pentecost to establish the Christian congregation was accompanied by “*many wonders and signs being done through the apostles*” (Acts 2:43) it may be that there will again be instantaneous healings occurring as signs along with the other miraculous events predicted to occur during the Great Tribulation immediately prior to the return of Jesus (Acts 2:17-21; Joel 2:28-32).

CONCLUSION

So the purposes of the ‘signs and wonders.’ were served and the gifts faded. Just as the many miracles of the distant past through Moses, Elijah and Elisha all served their purpose and came to an

end so too with those of the first and second centuries. So any modern-day attempt to copy this miraculous phenomenon by the laying on of hands does not come from God. However, this does not mean that God does not answer the prayers of those seeking recovery from serious illnesses. However, there is great danger in praying for healing and then ignoring God's provision of people with knowledge and skill to heal. Yet, in no way does this indicate any lack of faith by a Christian in God's ability to heal, but rather it demonstrates that one is using godly wisdom just as Jesus recognized that it was common sense to go to a person of knowledge and healing skill if one is sick.

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