

The All-Sufficiency of the Scriptures and the Cessation of Miracles

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Introduction

Among other things that *love, grace, faith, elect, and miracle* have in common is that they are all words that have been “wordnapped,” redefined, and misused. *Miracle* is loosely used in reference to a spectacular catch in the end zone of a football game, a person who somehow escaped the wrath of a tornado, or to the providential answer to prayer. The religious shysters on TV greatly confuse gullible millions with their pseudo claims of miraculous powers.

What is the Bible definition of a “miracle”? The Greek word *dunamis* (ability, power – the origin of our word *dynamite*) is used in an obvious reference to actions and results beyond mere natural means, and is thus frequently translated “miracles” (e.g., Acts 8:13; 19:11; 1 Cor. 12, 10, 28–29; Gal. 3:5). Another Greek word, *semeion* (a sign, mark, or token) is often rendered *sign*, indicating supernatural phenomena that are demonstrations of Divine authority. However, this word is also rendered *miracles* in some passages (e.g., Luke 23:8; Acts 4:16, 22). Peter used both of these Greek words on Pentecost: Jesus was “...a man approved of God...by mighty works [*dunamesi*] and wonders and signs [*semeiois*] which God did...” (Acts 2:22).

In the Bible, therefore, a miracle is not merely something unusual or remarkable. It refers to the power God exercises and demonstrates, either immediately or through agents (human or otherwise), which transcends that which men alone can do. The Bible teaches that God no longer thus demonstrates His power. To say that He once did, but no longer does, pertains not to His power, but to His plan. It is not a question of what he **could/can** do, but of what He is doing. Upon what evidence can we positively affirm that miracles have ceased?

Explicit New Testament Teaching

In 1 Corinthians 12–14 we have the most concentrated inspired treatment of the subject of first century miraculous gifts. Paul lists the diverse gifts and appointments that God “set in the church” originally (12:8–11, 28–30). He then states that there is an entity that is superior to them (v. 31), and apart from which the miraculous gifts are vain. That superior element is Biblically- defined love, which Paul defines by personifying it (13:1–7).

Paul's discussion of the meaning of *love* then leads to a contrast between its duration and the duration of miraculous gifts (vv. 8-13). He uses three lines of argument to declare the cessation of the gifts:

1. He explicitly states that the gifts will end. The gifts (all of them represented by *prophecies, tongues, and knowledge*) would be "done away" ("fail," KJV), "cease," and be "done away" ("vanish away," KJV), respectively (v. 8). Paul used the same word (*katargeo*) twice (in reference to prophecies and knowledge), a word that means to render useless, unproductive, or of no effect. Of *tongues*, he used a word (*pauo*) that means to cause to cease or refrain, to stop, or to prohibit.
2. He explicitly states twice that the gifts were only "in part" (i.e., from a Greek word meaning imperfect, incomplete), this time using *know* and *prophecy* as representative of all of the gifts (vv. 9-10). This is in contrast to "that which is perfect" (i.e., brought to completion, entire, as opposed to partial or limited) and that was yet to come (i.e., it was still in the future at the time Paul wrote).
3. He employed an illustration of childhood behavior in contrast with adult behavior (v. 11). He identifies childhood behavior with the infancy of the church and its need for imperfect miraculous gifts. He then identifies adult behavior with the mature state of the church, signaled by the arrival of "that which is perfect," whereupon the infantile behavior would be discarded (same word as for "done away," v. 8). Paul then uses a figure of looking into a mirror to explain his illustration. *See in a mirror* is a figure for receiving revelation, which was not then complete, making the view in the "mirror" hazy (lit., an enigma). But when "that which is perfect" came the image would be clear; in the light of complete revelation they would no longer have incomplete prophecy and knowledge. They would thus be able to see clearly and to know God's will fully (v. 12). Some contend that *that which is perfect* refers either to the Lord's return or to Heaven, but they are wrong. Paul referred to the completed revelation of God's will through the apostles (John 16:13).

The Purposes of Miracles Have Ceased

God has used miraculous activity for three purposes, none of which any longer exist.

First, He has used miracles to establish and create.

1. He brought the material universe into existence by the mighty creation miracles, thereupon enacting His natural laws by which the physical universe has operated to this day. All living things since then have come about by procreation rather than by creation (with the notable exception of the Virgin Birth).
2. The Mosaic Age began amidst many mighty miracles, but after the completion of all of the Old Testament Scriptures, miraculous activity disappeared (perhaps partly explaining the 400-year intertestamental silence).
3. The Christian Age began with momentous miraculous activity: the Virgin Birth, Jesus' mighty signs, His resurrection, the wonders on Pentecost, and the impartation of powers to

the apostles. It is no mere coincidence that miraculous activity ceased soon after the completion of the New Testament revelation.

Unless God decides to establish or create something new, this purpose of miraculous activity no longer exists.

Second, God has used miracles to reveal His Divine Will and Truth.

1. Jesus promised the apostles that He would send upon them the Holy Spirit, Who would teach them all things and guide them into all of the Truth (John 14:26; 16:13).
2. Paul declared that God revealed the words he and the other apostles spoke and wrote (1 Cor. 2:10-13).
3. His words were the "commandment of the Lord" (1 Cor. 14:37), and he did not learn the message he preached from men, but "through revelation of Jesus Christ" (Gal. 1:11-12; cf. Eph. 3:3-5; 2 Pet. 1:21).
4. By the end of the first century "the faith [was] once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3; cf. 2 Pet. 1:3).

Therefore, this revelatory purpose of miraculous activity no longer exists.

Third, God used miracles to confirm the Truth and its proclaimers as it was revealed.

1. Jesus stated this as the great aim of His miraculous activity (John 20:30-31).
2. The Lord gave first century believers miraculous powers to confirm their preaching (Mark 16:17-20).
3. The Lord confirmed the "great salvation" the apostles preached by "signs and wonders, and by manifold powers, and by gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to his own will" (Heb. 2:4).

Since the revelation of God's will was complete by the end of the first century, and since the purpose of New Testament era miracles was to confirm the Word, with the completion of the revelation, the confirmatory purpose of the gifts no longer existed.

Even so, some allege that the Word still needs confirming. However, note the following:

1. The first century saints confirmed **their own words**, not those of Job, Abraham, or Moses.
2. Once confirmed (as it was at the time of its revelation) the New Testament needs no additional confirmation. Just as it was "once for all delivered" it was also once for all confirmed. John thus taught (John 20:30-31).
3. Confirmation and revelation are inseparable. If we have miraculous confirmation today, we should have new revelation. If we have no new revelation, there is no miraculous confirmation today.

Conclusion

New Testament miracles are like scaffolding on a building, necessary only during construction. When the building is finished, the builder removes the scaffolding, as indeed God

did the miraculous gifts when the revelation was completed. That revelation is all sufficient to save us (Rom. 1:16), to make us complete unto every good work (2 Tim. 3:16-16), and to take us home to glory at last (Acts 20:32). Neither sinner nor saint needs either (1) any miraculous direct operation of the Holy Spirit or (2) any non-miraculous direct operation of the Holy Spirit in order to be saved from the guilt of his sins or to be saved in Heaven at last. We have the Holy Spirit inspired, revealed, and confirmed message of Truth, the all-sufficient Scriptures.

[**Note:** I prepared and presented this material at the Northside Lectures, hosted by the Northside Church of Christ, Calhoun, GA, September 15, 2005. A longer version of material on this subject may be found earlier in this listing of articles under the title "On Miracles and Revelation".]

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