

Strange Things You Hear About The Church of Christ (#7 of 12)

"You Don't Believe In Miracles"

Text: Mark 16:15-20

Introduction:

As we continue our series, exploring many misconceptions and untruths about the church of Christ, we look to another common misconception: "You don't believe in miracles!" Of course nothing could be further from the truth. But the Bible teaching on miracles and what many believe and teach today in the religious world are in fact poles apart. Let's look to God's Word for His truth on this matter.

Discussion:

I. What Is A Miracle?

1. "Miracle" defined - "works of a supernatural origin and character, such as could not be produced by natural agents and means" (**Vines Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words**)
2. Some things are called "miracles" which are not -- conversion, birth, etc. -- for each of these has a "natural" explanation.
3. Note the variety of miracles performed in the first century church as given in 1 Corinthians 12:8-10: (adapted from the **Standard Bible Commentary** by McGarvey and Pendleton)
 - (1) "word of wisdom" - the ability to reveal divine truth (cf. 1 Corinthians 2:7 where the gospel is identified as the "wisdom of God")
 - (2) "word of knowledge" - the ability to know and thus teach the truth revealed and it's proper meaning
 - (3) "faith" - not the faith each of us must have which comes by hearing (Romans 10:17; Hebrews 11:6), but the faith which was accompanied by divine power (cf. Matthew 17:19-20; 1 Corinthians 13:2)
 - (4) "gifts of healing" - the power to supernaturally restore the sick (Acts 5:15-16; James 5:14-15)
 - (5) "working of miracles" - while some miracles were of healing, others were obviously far from such (ie. Elymas being struck blind - Acts 13:8-11). These would thus be separated from "gifts of healing". This could also possibly include the ability to "cast out devils" and to remain unharmed by serpents or poisons (Mark 16:17-18). Also classes in this ability might be the raising of the dead (cf. Acts

9:36-42)

- (6) "prophecy" - in the New Testament this is of a much narrower scope than in the Old Testament times. In the New Testament it seems that prophesy was given pertaining to things of a temporary or personal nature (cf. Agabus - Acts 11:28; 21:9-11)
 - (7) "discerning of spirits" - since there was a proliferation of false teachers, there existed the need for a discerning between the true and false teachings, this was the gift of "discerning of spirits"
 - (8) "diverse kinds of tongues" - this was not, contrary to popular belief, an ecstatic utterance understandable only to God, but was the miraculous ability to speak in other foreign languages. This can be easily seen in the usage of the term in Acts 2 as well as other passages.
 - (9) "interpretation of tongues" - this was the ability to translate by inspiration the message being given by the one speaking in tongues.
3. Points to Ponder:
- (1) Note the variety of gifts given in the first century; how many of these abilities are claimed today? Why?
 - (2) If miracles are occurring today, why do the many who claim them have diverse teachings, and yet claim to be "united"? Would not especially the gift of "discerning of spirits" prevent and prohibit this?

II. What Was The Purpose Of Miracles?

1. Notice the divinely stated purpose of miracles in the following passages:
 - (1) John 14:26; 16:13; Luke 12:11-12 -- to teach the word and bring all truth to remembrance to the inspired men of the first century
 - (2) Mark 16:14-20; Hebrews 2:1-4 -- to confirm that the word spoken by these men was indeed of divine origin, that is to produce belief
 - (3) Ephesians 4:11-14 -- to keep the first century church from being tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine until they came to the "unity of the faith."
2. The number of passages which give a divine purpose of miracles as that of benevolent purposes is ZERO.

3. Points to Ponder:

- (1) If the miracles which God enabled others to do were to confirm that these were sent by Him, to communicate accurately His will, and to build up and edify the church, how much of a percentage of error would be acceptable?
- (2) If miracles were for benevolent purposes, and were contingent on the individuals faith (as modern day "miracle workers" purport), how can we explain the events in the lives of Trophimus (2 Timothy 4:20), Timothy (1 Timothy 5:23), Epaphroditus (Philippians 2:25-27), and others?
- (3) What is the purpose of the "miracle workers" today?

III. How Did One Become Enabled With Miraculous Ability In The First Century Church?

1. It is plain that not all Christians had miraculous ability. (cf. 1 Corinthians 12; also, Acts 6:8 is the first incident of one other than an apostle performing a miracle)
2. Note in the following passages the means by which those involved gained the ability to perform miracles:
 - (1) Matthew 10:7-8 -- given directly by Christ
 - (2) Acts 2:1-11 (cf. Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4-8) -- by the baptism of the Holy Spirit
 - (3) Acts 8:17-18 (cf. Acts 6:1-8; 8:6; 19:1-6; 2 Timothy 1:6) -- by the laying on of the hands of an apostle
3. Points to Ponder:
 - (1) Is there any passage which states that one has miraculous ability by virtue of being a child of God?
 - (2) Can you give a passage which shows one receiving miraculous ability in a way other than those listed in #2 above?

IV. Do Miracles Occur Today? (Were they meant to continue?)

1. We have seen above that miraculous ability was gained by one of three means. Consider the following as relates to these three:
 - (1) In regard to Christ directly imparting such gifts as in Matthew 10:

- A. Does Christ speak directly to any today, or does He speak to us in another way? (cf. Hebrews 1:1-2; 2:1-4; Romans 10:13-17; 2 Corinthians 4:7)
 - B. May any of us expect to see Jesus in this life? (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:8)
 - C. If Christ does not deal directly with us, may we then expect Him to appear to us and impart some miraculous ability?
- (2) In regard to the baptism of the Holy Spirit as recorded in Acts 2 as a means of receiving miraculous ability:
- A. How many baptisms were in effect when Paul wrote Ephesians 4:1-4 (approximately. A.D. 62)?
 - B. Of the various baptisms in the Bible, the ones we must consider as to the which is the "one baptism" of Ephesians 4 are:
 - a. John's baptism - not in effect after death of Christ (cf. Acts 19:1-5).
 - b. Baptism of the Holy Spirit - performed only by Christ, never a command, but a promise (Matthew 3:7-12).
 - c. The baptism of the great commission (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16; etc.). This baptism was to be administered by men and to last to the end of the world.
 - C. From the above, what can we say as regards the "one baptism" of Ephesians 4 and Holy Spirit baptism? Can such occur today?
- (3) With regard to Acts 8 and the laying on of an apostles hands to impart miraculous ability:
- A. What are the qualifications of an apostle as recorded in Acts 1:15-22?
 - B. What man alive could qualify as an apostle?
- (4) Since God has given us only these means to receive spiritual gifts, and none of these is possible for us today, how can one claim the miraculous ability today?
2. Note in the following passages what God had to say about how long spiritual gifts were to last:

- (1) Ephesians 4:8-14 -- until the "unity of **the** faith"
 - (2) 1 Corinthians 13:8-10 -- until "that which is perfect is come"
3. It is clear in the contexts of the above passages that what is under consideration is revelation from God. Therefore since we do have this complete revelation (cf. James 1:25). There is no longer a need for the miraculous manifestations to perform the functions the Word now fulfills [remember the "Purpose of Miracles" on page 2].
3. Points to Ponder:
- (1) Since the Lord has made it plain that the means He set forth to receive miraculous ability no longer exist, how can we explain the professed ability of miracle working in our day and time?
 - (2) Since the Lord has made it plain that time for spiritual gifts has passed, how can we explain the professed ability of miracle working in our day and time?

V. Some Arguments Considered

1. "God doesn't change, thus He must still be capable of working miracles."
("You are limiting Him and denying His power")

Ability does not equal willingness. What of the creation? Does the fact that God no longer "speaks" things into existence mean He has lost His ability!?

2. "The Lord promised that all believers would have miraculous ability in Mark 16:15-20."

In context that promise was given to the disciples to whom He was speaking. Also, are those who make this argument willing to claim all the miracles He promised in this passage? (ie. taking up serpents")
The healing spoken of had a 100% success rate -- "they shall recover."

3. "Healing is part of the atonement in 1 Peter 2:24."

The first of verse 24 as well as verse 25 make it clear that Peter is speaking of **spiritual** healing.

4. "I have seen miracles performed ... I have 'experienced' it myself."

It is clear that we can be deceived or misled by many things (ie. feelings, emotions, lying wonders, etc.). Thus we must look to the Bible as the singular standard to see if these things are so or are deceptions (cf. Acts 17:11; Proverbs 16:25).

5. "James promised healing in James 5:15."

This passage, like Mark 16:16 does not allow for any failure whatsoever. In verse 14 it is said that this ability was to be found in the "elders," not just the ordinary individual. In the first century, who would be a more logical choice to have such miraculous abilities given them that the elders who were to oversee the flock?

Conclusion:

The working of miracles in its various forms was limited to the first century church. These miracles were performed, not for benevolent purposes, but to communicate and confirm the Word of God. It never was an ability possessed by all Christians, but was an ability given by God through one of three means,

1. directly from Christ,
2. by baptism of the Holy Spirit, or
3. the laying on of the apostles hands.

The Scriptures clearly teach that none of these means is available to any person today.

Further, God made it plain that miracles were to endure for a specific time - until the completion of that which was to be communicated and confirmed, the Word of God. Since the Word of God IS complete (Galatians 1:6-9; James 1:25; 2 Peter 1:3; etc.) and all the means for the communicating of miraculous ability has ceased, then the only logical conclusion is - miracles no longer occur. Those who claim such ability today do such without Biblical support and in contradiction to its teachings. Therefore they deny the truthfulness of God and His Word and must be marked and avoided (Romans 16:17).