Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

The Signs of an Apostle, Part 1
Scripture: 2 Corinthians 12:11-12
Code: 47-85

Well, this morning in our study of God's Word we would come back to 2 Corinthians chapter 12 again. This has been such a rich and rewarding study and we're going to find that the verses drawing our attention today are equally important for us. Second Corinthians, chapter 12, and we now find ourselves at verses 11 through 13, just three relatively brief verses.

These verses constitute the conclusion of Paul's defense. Now you remember, he's been defending himself, showing his superiority to the false teachers, starting in chapter 11 verse 22. And now he is going to bring that defense to a conclusion in verses 11 to 13. And so they're a kind of a summary in which he sums up all the various categories of his defense in conclusion. But in the middle of this brief summary there is verse 12 and it introduces to us a very interesting subject, the subject of signs, wonders and miracles. And because that is so important and because there's so much discussion about it today and so many who are claiming to be able to do signs and wonders and miracles, in the middle of discussing Paul's summary of his apostolic credentials, of necessity we're going to have to digress to address the issue of signs and wonders and miracles, and we're going to do that starting this morning. Normally we could go through these verses in a very brief few moments, but because of the necessary digression in verse 12, we're going to spend a couple of Sundays talking about the issue of signs, wonders and miracles.

Just a little bit of background as we approach the text. The Corinthian church, like a lot of other churches since, and even today, have been led astray by false teachers. Paul was the true teacher, he taught the truth. But Satan sent some of his counterfeit agents in to teach lies. And so the Corinthian church was in a state of confusion. As a result, Paul was forced to compare himself to the false apostles and show his superiority in order to draw the people back to him and away from the liars and back to the truth. As always, the battle was on, and that's always where the battle is fought. It is a battle between truth and error. It is a battle between God and Satan, between those who represent God and preach His Word, and those who represent Satan and preach lies. It is a battle between the servants of Christ and those disguised as servants of Christ, between the messengers of light and those disguised as messengers of light. And they had come into Corinth and they had come as messengers of light when in fact they were angels of darkness, demon-possessed to bring about damning lies and confusion. Paul of necessity then has to call the Corinthians back to himself, but they've discredited him so he has to reaffirm who he is so that he can call them back to the truth that

he proclaims.

Now starting at the beginning of chapter 10 and up until now, Paul has been directly confronting the false apostles. He started that in chapter 10 and he'll conclude it in our text. Starting particularly in chapter 11 verse 22, he has given his own credentials as a superior apostle. And as I said, in this two verses he sums that up. And basically there were three things that indicated his true apostleship. The first one he mentions here was the supernatural. He did the signs of a true apostle. The second was his perseverance during suffering, he mentions that in verse 12 when he says, "With all perseverance." And the third was his utter unselfishness. In verse 13 he says that he did nothing to become a burden to them.

When he wants to affirm the character of his true apostleship, he has them look on the supernatural power of God coming through him. He has them look at his perseverance in suffering. And he has them look at his utter unselfishness, because those are in contrast to the false apostles who are void of the power of God, who don't want to suffer anything but get rich at the expense of the people that they deceive, and who, thirdly, are self-centered and self-focused, seeking only personal gain. In distinction to them, Paul does show the power of God, willingly suffers and perseveres and is utterly unselfish, never being a burden to them in any sense at all.

As I said, in the middle of this is this most important discussion of signs and wonders and miracles and we're going to address that. So that's kind of the summation of where we're going in the text. Let's begin in verse 11 which sort of reframes things for us again.

"I have become foolish," Paul says, and I remind you he has said this repeatedly. This whole idea of having to defend himself is a kind of folly to him, it...only fools brag. Bragging was characteristic of fools. And he has been forced to have to...to speak about his superiority and he really doesn't like it, he would rather speak about his failures and his weaknesses and his suffering and all of that. He's comfortable doing that. He's comfortable talking about himself as a nothing and a nobody and a cracked pot, an earthen vessel, nothing more than that. He...he is a former blasphemer, a persecutor, and injurious, a killer of Christians. He is a...he is a chief of sinners and he is content to talk about that because then he can put the power of God on display. But he really does not like to talk about his superiority as an apostle and so there's a kind of foolishness in having to do it but he's been forced to it. Verse 11, "I have become foolish, you yourselves compelled me." In chapter 11 verse 1, verse 16, verse 17, verse 21, chapter 12 verse 6 and here again for about the fifth or sixth time he...it's the sixth time, I guess, he says it's foolish to do this but you have forced me to do it. I really don't have a choice. For the sake of preserving the gospel and the truth and honoring Christ, and keeping you away from destructive error, you have forced me into this, you have compelled me to do it.

The seriousness of what was at stake is indicated in chapter 11 verse 3, "I am afraid, lest as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your mind should be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ." I'm afraid Satan's going to deceive you like he did Eve, and lead you away from Christ into error. And that is what is at stake and that is why of necessity I've had to do this foolish boasting.

And then he indicts them a little in the middle of the verse. "I should," actually he says, "

In truth I should have been commended by you." You ought to be the one rising to my defense. It didn't happen. When he visited the church after he wrote the first epistle to them, a man stood up who had been influenced by the false teachers and blasted Paul to the face and nobody in the church came to his defense. And he went away broken hearted. The Corinthians had not commended him, they should have. But their silence in his defense has forced him to speak. What the Lord had done through him in Corinth was obvious to all of them. They were there because of him. They had heard the gospel through him. They had believed because of his instrumentality. They had formed a church. They had been taught the Word. They had leaders established. He had been there nearly two years. He was God's instrument in their salvation. You can read the story of how it happened in the eighteenth chapter of Acts. It is remarkable. It should have...it should have been the most immediate thing for them to do when the false teachers came to rise to Paul's defense and to stand against them on behalf of this good and godly man whose power and whose truth was very clearly manifest to them.

And I just remind you, it is our debt to defend good and godly men. It is our honor to do that. It is our duty to do that. And not to do that is to participate in the sin of those who discredit them. I really believe that. For us to sit silent when aspersions are cast unjustly upon good people, when their character and their service to God are undervalued or depreciated, for us to be silent is to become partakers of the guilt of those detractors. They should have rushed to defend Paul against the lies of the false apostles. Indeed his praise should have been in their lips, as Proverbs would put it. Why? Back to verse 11, "For in no respect," that is in no category, "was I inferior to the most eminent apostles, even though I am a nobody." I am a nobody on my own, and he can't resist saying that. It is his incessant humility. He is a nobody, and that is somewhat sarcastic because that's exactly what the false apostles said he was, a nobody. And he says I am a nobody, I am...I'm an earthen vessel, I'm a former blasphemer and persecutor. I am a nobody. Whatever I am I am by the grace of God which is in me, 1 Corinthians 15:9 and 10 says.

But as far as compared to them, I am not inferior to them in any category. But when he refers to the most eminent apostles, he's a little sarcastic. That is the extra-super apostles, that's what they had labeled themselves, these false apostles. They are also called that back in chapter 11 verse 5 where he says, "I consider myself not in the least inferior to the most eminent apostles." It's sarcasm. They

called themselves the extra-super apostles and they demeaned Paul as a nobody. But he says you know in no category do I come behind them, though myself I am nothing. You have forced me now to this comparison. You have forced me to it because you wouldn't come to my defense. You have forced me to this folly.

And in summary then, let me say this. I am an apostle by virtue, verse 12, of the signs of an apostle performed through me by God. I am an apostle by virtue of my perseverance through all the suffering that comes to the true preachers from the kingdom of darkness. I am an apostle based upon my selflessness. I never was a burden to you in anything. And he sums up his apostleship in those three categories.

This morning let's take a look at the first one and begin our look at this matter of signs and wonders and miracles. First of all, Paul says, "I am an apostle by virtue of the fact that I am supernatural in power...supernatural in power," verse 12. The signs of a true apostle were performed among you, and at the end of the verse, by signs and wonders and powers, literally, powers, mighty deeds, *dunamis*in the Greek, the word for power. He says..."Look, I'm going to talk about power." You say, "Wait a minute, I thought he didn't like to talk about miracles." No, he didn't like to talk about visions. He didn't like to talk about revelations. You remember back in chapter 12 verse 1 he said, "It's not profitable but I will go on to visions and revelations," and he told the time about going to heaven? But he said, "It's not profitable, it's not helpful, it's not useful and the reason is because it's not reproducible and it's not verifiable. I can't prove it ever happened because I can't reproduce it, there's no way to verify it. So it doesn't help to say you had a vision and a revelation from God as an evidence of your apostleship, as a credential of your apostleship, it's not helpful because I can only tell you it happened, you weren't there and I can't reproduce it. So it can't be verified.

But when it comes to miracles, that's different. Verse 12, "The signs of a true apostle were performed among you." Now we're talking about what was visible, what was repeatable, what did occur and was very clearly the power of God at work. They saw miracles. They saw things that caused them to be astonished and were signs pointing to Paul as a true apostle.

Now this is a very important verse. There are people going all across the country, all across the world claiming to do signs, wonders and miracles, are there not? They've been around for years and years. They set up tents in cities and they do their basic gimmick there. They have churches. They get today the big tent today is television. They set up their programs on television. They fill stadiums, bring in cameras and ply their craft and their art there. They claim to be the workers of signs and wonders and miracles. This is...this is everywhere today. And this is confusing to many people, not only Christian people but non-Christian people are equally confused by it. And while it may draw huge crowds because it plays on people's desperation and it plays on doubt looking for proof, and it plays

on people's fascination with the supernatural, and with the miraculous and the excitement and all that's there and the emotional highs, under close examination and comparison with the Word of God, we have to..we have to draw some...some pretty serious conclusions about its validity, and we're going to do that as we look together to the Word of God.

False teachers were agents of Satan. They claimed to be servants of Christ. Paul says, "You know the difference because you saw the signs of a true apostle coming through me...the signs of a true apostle were performed among you." Now God was authenticating His true apostles by certain signs.

What is a sign? It's a sign. It's a sign like the sign hanging around Paul's neck saying, "I am an apostle." It identifies...it was the benchmark of an apostle. It was the insignia of an apostle. It was the identification of an apostle. How do you know a man is an apostle? Because of the signs of a true apostle that are going on in that man's life. If you have a whole line of people and they all claim to be apostles, you look for the ones who bear the marks of an apostle, the sign of an apostle.

In other words, God signaled out who His apostles were with certain signs. This is a true apostle. Now signs here, the first use of signs in verse 12, could be, in a sense, comprehensive. We could take it in the broadest possible sense. How do you...how do you identify an apostle? Well an apostle had to have seen the risen Christ. Is that not true? Acts chapter 1 makes it very clear that someone who is going to be chosen to fill the position of Judas, who, of course, was a suicide...had committed suicide after his terrible betrayal of Christ, somebody was going to be permitted to take his place in the Twelve and it turned out to be Matthias, had to have been an eye witness of the resurrection, have to have had a direct call from the Lord Jesus Christ, be appointed by the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, which was done by a miraculous superintending of the casting of lots by which Matthias was selected by the Lord Himself.

The apostle Paul saw the Lord on the Damascus road and several other times and was personally called out of darkness into light and called to be an apostle by Christ Himself. So we could say one of the signs of an apostle was that he had seen the risen Christ and been directly and personally called by Christ to this office. There are a number of other remarkable characteristics and elements of apostleship. The apostles were also marked out, they had the benchmark, of a plenary knowledge. Plenary means a comprehensive or whole knowledge, complete knowledge. They had a plenary knowledge of the gospel derived by the direct revelation from Jesus Christ. The twelve apostles didn't read the gospel from anybody that had written it down, they got it directly from Jesus Christ. He explained to them why He came. He explained to them that He had to die. He explained to them that He would rise again. He explained to them that He would go to heaven. He explained to them that He would return and establish His Kingdom on the earth. Jesus explained it all to them with His own

lips during His time on earth, including His post-resurrection 40 days when He filled in all the remaining teaching about the Kingdom.

And so it was with the apostle Paul that he tells the Galatians he received his gospel from no man but from the Lord Jesus directly. Remember after his conversion he was taken out in the desert and he was given the message of Jesus Christ and the clarity of the gospel directly in a three-year period at that time from the Lord. It was characteristic of an apostle to have had a plenary complete knowledge of the gospel derived by immediate revelation from Jesus Christ, and that was true of the apostle Paul.

It was also characteristic of apostles that they were inspired to write down revelation. They were inspired by God to write down revelation and that inspiration was the Holy Spirit rendering that apostle infallible in the communication of that revelation. When John wrote his gospel and when he wrote his epistles and when he wrote Revelation, he wrote it infallibly. When Peter wrote his epistles, he wrote them infallibly. And even the associates of the apostles like Mark who wrote the gospel of Mark wrote it infallibly. When Matthew wrote Matthew it was infallible. When Luke, the associate of Paul, wrote his gospel it was infallibly superintended. So the writers were either apostles or those very intimately linked to the apostles and they were superintended by God as to infallibility when they received this revelation.

It is also true that there were external protections placed upon the life of the apostle during ministry. And Paul certainly could give testimony to that as the Lord protected him and looked over him and delivered him from many, many things that could have taken his life.

Another sign of an apostle was utter and absolute fidelity to the truth of God and conformity to the authenticated standard of truth. The apostles' doctrine would be the term used in the Acts for it. The apostles were true to that doctrine delivered to them.

Another mark of an apostle benchmark, authenticating insignia of an apostle was success in preaching the gospel. They were empowered to successfully preach the gospel. So we could say that when you look at the life of Paul you would see all of that. Someone who had seen the risen Christ, someone who had been directly called into this apostleship by Christ, one who had directly received his revelation of the knowledge of the gospel from Jesus Himself, one who had been protected to become supernaturally infallible as it were when he was the instrument of writing Scripture, one who had been protected from death and delivered from all kinds of difficulty in the ongoing care of his ministry, one who was faithful to the truth as it was laid down, the standard of faith through the apostles and one who was successful in his preaching ministry, and certainly in Paul's case to the founding of many, many churches. That's the big picture.

But what Paul really wants us to focus on is narrowing that down. Back to verse 12, "The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with all perseverance." I went...I persevered in all of my ministry, but particularly by signs and wonders and miracles. What he really wants you to look at is the signs and wonders and powers, the word being *dunamis*again as credentials. He's referring specifically to the supernatural deeds done through him.

How could they question this? Because he says, "They were performed," in verse 12, "among you." You were there. You saw them. Now what was this miracle power that the apostles had?

Well all you have to do is go back to chapter 10 of Matthew and it tells you right there. When Jesus called the apostles, the twelve and then later Paul, He gave them authority over unclean spirits to cast them out. He gave them miracle power, supernatural power over Satan's kingdom of demons. And they could cast demons out. They had power over the kingdom of darkness. Secondly, to heal every kind of disease and every kind of sickness. Bottom line, healing power with no limitations...none. They could heal every kind of disease and every kind of sickness and their healing was always the same...immediate, complete, instantaneous healing. So they had power over the kingdom of darkness and they could cast demons out, they could cast them out of anybody. In fact, every demon casting that occurred in the New Testament record of the gospels by the apostles, demons were cast out of non-believers...non-believers. There wasn't some Christian formula going on or some Christian exorcism. They were just commanded to come out of unbelievers because the apostles had power over demons. And, of course, they had power over sickness as well.

Now the apostle Paul also had this same power and he demonstrated it in Corinth. If you go back to Acts 18 where it tells about the founding of the Corinthian church, none of the miracles are recorded there. It doesn't tell us about any of the miracles because the main emphasis, of course, of the text was to discuss the founding of the church and the preaching of the truth to which the miracles pointed. But the miracles are not discussed there. But here in verse 12 it tells us that he did them and not just one miracle, but the signs of a true apostle were performed among you by signs and wonders and miracles...in plural. Paul must have done a number of miracles on the...during the time of the founding of the church at Corinth.

If you get in to the book of Acts you can read about miracles that Paul did. For example, in chapter 13 the...the blinding of Elymas the sorcerer. In chapter 14 of Acts, the healing of the cripple. He cast out demons and healed the sick in chapter 19, chapter 20 of the book of Acts, and that...that...that book is basically the record of Paul's ministry, the latter part of that book. In chapter 20 the resurrection of Eutychus who fell out of the window and died. In chapter 28 he ripped a snake off his hand and the poison was neutralized. In chapter 28, the healing of the father of Publius, as well. So

you have in the book of Acts an indication of the miracles of the apostle Paul that indicated he was an apostle.

Now let me just give you one little note here and there's many nuances in this verse that I want you to see. Notice he never claims that the power was his. He says the signs of a true apostle were performed, that's passive. They were performed. He doesn't say "I performed them among you," "They were performed." It's not just a reflection of his modesty, it amounts to a renunciation of any claim that he was a miracle worker. The apostles never made claims to be miracle workers. They realized that these things were not within the range of human capability. They were simply channels through which God performed these things. These things were performed among you. He doesn't say, "I performed them." "They were performed, this by the mighty power of God through me."

When a man claims to be a miracle worker, when he claims to have some great power to work miracles, he is in contra-distinction to the apostles who never claimed such power but only claimed to be channels through which God did mighty things.

Now look at the three terms used at the end of the verse, signs, wonders and miracles. They all refer to the same thing, miracles. Signs refers basically to the purpose...to the purpose. This is not for spectacle, miracles were not just for spectacle, they weren't entertainment for the crowds. I'll go further than that, all the healings and all the casting out of demons were not just to deliver the demons and make the people feel better. The end of those miracles was not the healing. That was not the purpose. The purpose was a sign, the miracle was just a sign pointing to something else. And what was it pointing to? It was pointing to the true apostle, signs of a true apostle. Why did God want to point to the true apostle? So that people would listen to the message they preached.

You would think today with the modern miracle worker, quote/unquote, that the healing was the end of everything. The healing is the culmination, isn't it? The people come up there and supposedly are healed, and you never hear a message about anything. The healing is an end in itself supposedly to demonstrate the great power of this wonder worker. But the healing was never ever the purpose, the purpose was as a sign pointing to something else. And the something else was a true apostle. Let me tell you something. If anybody and everybody can do these miracles, then these can't be the signs of a true apostle, right? There are only thirteen of them. If anybody and everybody can do these things, then they are meaningless as a sign of a true apostle. It is their very uniqueness, it is their very rarity that makes them so much the mark of an apostle.

Secondly, the word wonders simply describes the effect of them. The effect was to create amazement and astonishment and shock. I mean, it was so obvious that they were supernatural that it was just astonishing. So you have an astonishment, an amazement that shocked people, looking at this sign they've just seen pointing to this man. And then they're called powers which expresses

basically the supernatural source...the source of the miracle. So when the apostles did a miracle, the source was evident, it was God. The sign was evident, the purpose was evident to point to the apostle as the spokesman for God. Because of the tremendous astonishment and amazement arousing people, they were drawn to the speaker for the purpose of hearing what he said.

The purpose of the miracles then was a sign to point to the authentication of the preacher. Let me put it to you very simply. If God today ever gave anybody the ability to do miracles, to heal and cast out demons, He would give it to somebody who was speaking heretofore unrevealed new revelation cause that's the pattern. Once the revelation is given, you don't need to authenticate anybody else because the revelation is there. If I want to authenticate a preacher today I don't look for miracles, I see if he's consistent with Scripture, right? The purpose of miracles was to authenticate the apostles in a time when there was not yet the writing of the New Testament. To authenticate them not as miracle workers but as apostles who preached the true gospel and wrote the true Word of God.

You know, you started with the person of Christ, this explosion of miracles. Jesus came and how do you know He's the Messiah? You've got a lot of messiahs, a lot of people claiming to be messiahs, that was part of Jewish history. You can read about them, throwing themselves off the corner of the temple only to splat on the pavement 400 feet below. You've got a lot of would-be messiahs, false messiahs all over the place. How do you know Jesus is the Messiah? Well He authenticates His messiahship by demonstrating His power over the kingdom of darkness by casting out demons, and His power over this fallen world so He's dealt with the supernatural world and the natural world, showing His power over the natural world by miracles of walking on water, miracles of feeding the multitudes of people and also miracles of healing. And He basically banished illness in Palestine during the lifetime of His ministry. He...He...He just healed everybody in Palestine. And the conclusion was this points to Him, this is a sign that He's God. Supernatural power, creating astonishment is a sign pointing to Him as the Messiah.

Following Him came the apostles. What was their task? The world had rejected Jesus Christ, they crucified Christ. Here come the preachers of Jesus who are going to preach the true gospel and they're going to write the true Word of God and God authenticates them with miracle power.

Look at the book of Acts for a minute, just to show you how consistently this was in the purpose of God. Acts 2:43, "Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe, the church has just been born, many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles." Why? Because they're calling attention to the true preachers. It never ceases to amaze me today that the people who claim to have miracle power always have bad theology. And you keep asking yourself, "Why would God authenticate error?" He wouldn't. If God was going to authenticate anybody today, He'd authenticate somebody who preached the truth. But He doesn't need to do because you can tell whether somebody is

preaching the truth or not because here it is. He certainly wouldn't be authenticating bad theology with miracle power. It was the apostles who did it, chapter 2 verse 43.

Over in chapter 4 verse 30 of the book of Acts these are the apostles again and it says, "While...verse 30...while Thou dost extend Thy hand to heal and signs and wonders take place through the name of Thy holy servant Jesus. And when they had prayed, the place where they had gathered was shaken," and so forth. That was the apostles' prayer meeting. And again referring to the apostles as the agents by which these amazing things are happening. Chapter 5 verse 12, "And at the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were taking place among the people." Chapter 8 again we find Philip in chapter 8, "And Simon believed and after being baptized continued on with Philip as he observed signs and great miracles taking place he was constantly amazed." Signs and wonders and miracles again. In chapter 14 and verse 3, "They spent a long time there in Iconium speaking boldly with reliance on the Lord who was bearing witness...here it is, the key statement...He was bearing witness to the Word of His grace granting signs and wonders be done by their hands." That is by the hands of the apostles. He was bearing witness to the Word of His grace. He was showing these were the authenticated preachers and teachers and writers.

So Romans 15, I need to throw that in, Romans 15:17 to 19. Paul says, "In Christ Jesus I have found reason for boasting in things pertaining to God. I will not presume to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me, resulting in the obedience of the Gentiles by word and deed in the power of signs and wonders." And again he's authenticated as an apostle through signs and wonders. It isn't that the signs and wonders are supposed to entertain you or even heal you, or even deliver you from demons as an end, but the purpose of them is so that you know that this worker speaks for God and you can hear the saving gospel and the word of His grace, that's the point.

One other Scripture along this line is Hebrews 2...Hebrews 2. "How shall we escape...verse 3...if we neglect so great salvation." He's writing to people who has yet not embraced salvation. They know the gospel, they understand it. But they just won't embrace it. "After it was first spoken through the Lord." Alright, the gospel was first spoken through Jesus. Is that not true? Jesus spoke it. He's the one that talked about His death and burial and resurrection, ascension and all of that. He's the one that spoke it. "And it was confirmed to us by those who heard." Who was that? That was the apostles, they heard Jesus and then they preached it. "And it was confirmed to us, God bearing witness with them." How did He do it? How did God bear witness to the true apostles' message of the gospel? "Both by signs and wonders and various miracles."

Beloved, you need to understand the Bible is very consistent about this. Signs and wonders and miracles, all referring to the miracles as to their nature, as to their impact and as to their purpose, always were through the apostles the signs of a true apostle to authenticate the true preachers of the

gospel and the true writers of Scripture. And once Scripture was written and once the apostles pass off the scene, that part of redemptive history is over with. It's over with.

Some people would have us believe, however, that somehow miracles are just normal daily fare...a miracle a day keeps the devil away mentality. That miracles are just daily fare, you just have miracles going on all the time and you should just be basking in signs and wonders and miracles all around you at all times. In fact, some people believe this so strongly that they can take the most ordinary thing and somehow craft a miracle out of it in their own imagination. But this is to fail to understand.

Listen very carefully. Miracles are rare in redemptive history. They are rare in redemptive history, extremely rare in redemptive history. They're extraordinary, unusual events not normal at all. Let me get into that a little bit by helping you to understand the definition of a miracle. A miracle, as we have seen it in the case of the apostles and we'll see some comparison to the Old Testament, a miracle is an extraordinary supernatural event wrought by God...listen carefully...through a human agent. A miracle is an extraordinary supernatural event wrought by God through a human agent. Why does it have to be through a human agent? Because miracles are designed to authenticate that human agent as the true spokesman for God. It's a...it's an extraordinary supernatural event that cannot be explained by natural law or natural force and they were always, always, always designed to authenticate God's spokesman, to authenticate someone that God had chosen to declare a specific revelation from Him to the people who witnessed the miracle to certify that the speaker was from God. Throughout Scripture these are also called signs and wonders. Miracles are called signs and wonders because miracles were designed to create wonder that would act as a sign pointing to a true spokesman.

Miracles don't just exist willy-nilly for no purpose other than themselves. You can see miracles connected with signs and wonders in Exodus 7, Deuteronomy 6, Deuteronomy 34, Nehemiah 9, Psalm 135, Jeremiah 32, Daniel 6...come into the New Testament, Matthew 24, Mark 13, John 4 and then we saw them in the book of Acts, even 2 Thessalonians 2:9. Miracles were to act as signs creating wonder which drew the person to the conviction that this was God's person speaking for God.

There are a lot of other things that happened that are not miracles by that definition. Creation...creation is a supernatural act but not through a human agent. The Flood, a supernatural act not through a human agent. Some writers, particularly Jack Deare(?)has tried to say that miracles are normative because God does supernatural acts a lot through...through redemptive history, particularly in the Old Testament. But supernatural acts by God are not necessarily signs, wonders and miracles. Signs, wonders and miracles is a sub-category of the supernatural. Destructions, judgments, the Old Testament is full of a lot of supernatural judgments and destructions and

occasionally even some supernatural blessings, but mostly judgments. Those are not miracles designed to come through human agents to authenticate a spokesman for God. Calling down fire from heaven to consume people, walls falling down in the destruction of a city, those are supernatural acts in some way, but we want to draw a very careful distinction. There were times in redemptive history when God did do judgments and He did do miraculous things through human instruments. But in the Old Testament those are very, very rare. In fact, there are only really two major periods when that happened. The time of Moses and Joshua, the time of Elijah and Elisha. And both of those time periods were times of a flourishing of the...of the writing of Old Testament Scripture. Moses and Joshua were God's spokesmen and God authenticated them with signs and wonders and miracles. Elijah and Elisha were God's spokesmen and God authenticated those prophets by signs, wonders and mighty deeds. But those are very, very limited historical times.

Let me even say further. There are three time periods in redemptive history when miracles happened in large amounts: Moses and Joshua, Elijah and Elisha, Christ and the apostles. None of those periods lasted over a hundred years, none of them. In the whole flow of the thousands of years of redemptive history those periods were very brief...very brief. And miracles were to authenticate God's messengers. Most specifically note this, the miracles that occurred in Moses' time were limited...the plagues in Egypt, the parting of the Red Sea, manna from the wilderness, water from the rock, those things did occur, the law of God coming down on the mountain, Moses and Joshua being the instruments. They go in...the land of Canaan is conquered and the leadership to Joshua, some marvelous miracles happened there as God was authenticating Moses as His messenger and His spokesman, Joshua as His messenger and His spokesman. You really don't find miracles for a long time, there weren't that many then when you think about the time period involved...all the way from the beginning of the ministry of Moses to the end of the ministry of Moses and Joshua, Moses' ministry lasted only 40 years, right? And then Joshua's ministry. And then come Elijah and Elisha who don't have a particularly long ministry and a flurry of miracles there as God is establishing His prophets and laying down His Word. And then you don't find miracles at all.

The one sort of strange exception to all of that is the odd figure of Samson who was not a prophet, not a preacher and not a teacher. But God raised him up miraculously to do one thing and one thing alone. And that was to preserve Israel from the destruction by the Philistines. And he chose an immoral, unfaithful man to do it. And He had to put the man in a horrible situation because of his profound iniquity, He had to make him blind and then give him back his strength to destroy the Philistines so they didn't destroy Israel. God could raise up a man to preserve the nation Israel miraculously, He did it in the case of Samson. But Samson is an anomaly, the norm...and just an isolated figure, no other man in all of history had the strength of Samson or was used in that miraculous way. Miracles are very rare. Predominantly again I say Moses and Joshua, Elijah and Elisha.

Now you get into the time of Christ and the apostles and miracles way beyond anything ever-ever known during the time of Moses and Joshua or Elijah and Elisha. There were...there were...there were numbers of miracles in those two periods but there was still not that too many. Then comes Christ and there are miracles by the thousands going on all the time. All day long every day He's healing everybody that comes to Him with every single disease. And then come the apostles and the same explosion of miracles takes place, the likes of which has never existed in all of redemptive history. Why would we conclude that that period when the Messiah finally comes, the Redeemer of the world comes and the apostles come to write down the message of the gospel of redemption, what happened to authenticate Christ and authenticate the apostles would somehow be normal fare for the rest of humanity for the rest of history? That's ridiculous. That was a very, very unique and glorious moment in which Christ and 13 men, and those closely associated with them, were given great power to authenticate themselves as God's spokesmen. And mark it, as time went on even in the apostolic era and the apostles began to die and that age began to end, miracles began to cease as the apostles disappeared. They were unique and what they left us was this..[Bible]....and this is all you need to measure anybody against, isn't it? You can know who the true teachers are. And yet people make wild claims today.

Oral Roberts, for example, speaking at a charismatic Bible conference said, quote: "I can't tell you about all the dead people I've raised, I've had to stop a sermon, go back and raise a dead person." No less an authority than Peter Wagner of church growth(??)and Fuller Seminary said, quote: "I now believe that dead people are literally being raised in the world today. As soon as I say that, some ask if I believe it is normative. I doubt if it would be normative in any local situation but it probably is normative in terms of the universal body of Christ. Even though it is an extremely uncommon event, I would not be surprised if it were happening several times a year," end quote.

You just get the idea that people are just being raised from the dead all over the place. John Wimber listed raising the dead as one of the basic elements of his healing ministry. He never could raise David Watson and yet he was early in his ministry teaching people the power of raising the dead. David Watson was his early partner, died of cancer, and now John Wimber has succumbed as well in the last couple of weeks. It should be significant then, shouldn't it?, that not one modern occurrence of raising the dead can be verified, not one...not one.

Challenged...Oral Roberts was challenged to produce the names and addresses of people he raised. He couldn't do it. He later recalled only one incident, some 20 years before, when he had supposedly raised a dead child in front of ten thousand witnesses, he says, during a healing service. A mother in the audience jumped up and shouted, "My baby's dead." Roberts said he prayed over the child and it jerked. He admitted that neither the child nor others had any verification as to whether the child was actually dead.

If as Dr. Wagner says, dead people are being raised all over the place, wouldn't we expect to find one somewhere? We're not talking about some near-death experience, we're talking about going to somebody who is in the casket at the funeral and saying, "Get out of there, come with me," and let's be honest about that. The truth is, those who claim miracles today can't substantiate their claims. If God wants to heal a sick person, He can do that. He can do that. But this is not the day of miracles. God may use prayer to heal the sick and He may use medicine to heal the sick, but this is not the time when God is authenticating messengers because the Bible is finished. It's complete. And why is it that it's unlike the miracles in the New Testament? The miracles in the New Testament were always done with crowds of unbelievers watching. And modern miracles typically happen privately or in highly controlled religious meetings where there's all kinds of screenings going on to make sure who gets where in the process. Types of miracles are nothing like the miracles of the New Testament. What is claimed today is nothing like New Testament miracles. People born blind, people without eyes, people totally paralyzed, people with a withered arm, dead people coming out of their casket while the funeral's going on, never was a miracle done by the Lord slowly or incompletely either. Some of these people who claim to be healed are wrongly diagnosed, psychosomatically ill, who knows?

Biblical miracles happen in three brief periods...Moses and Joshua, Elijah and Elisha, to authenticate God's spokesmen in a time when His Word needed to be heard and the time of Christ and the apostles. None of those periods lasted over a hundred years and in the first two periods, Moses and Elijah, miracles were even rare then. There was nothing like the period of Christ and the apostles. Now go back to the text.

Paul says the signs of a true apostle were performed among you. Let me say it again, folks. If anybody and everybody could do that, then it wouldn't be the sign of a true apostle, right? Then you couldn't separate Paul from anybody else. You go through the Bible, apart from those three time periods you would have a hard time finding a miracle. In the days of Isaiah you have one, the Lord supernaturally defeated Sennacherib's army, 2 Kings 19. Then healed Hezekiah and turned the son's shadow backwards, remember in 2 Kings 20? In the days of Daniel God preserved Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the fiery furnace and Daniel in the mouth of the lion. But, I mean, that's about it. Miracles just aren't there. Yes there are invasions of God's divine supernatural judgment but not through a human agent. And yet Charles and Frances Hunter who...who write prolifically in the Charismatic Movement say in the twentieth century, quote: "We don't have to settle for anything less than the apostles did. God is pouring out His Spirit in the same manner then as He is today. There is no difference," end quote. And David Duplicey[??] whose is considered the father of the modern Pentecostal movement, or Charismatic Movement whose library and artifacts are kept at Fuller Seminary which has become sort of a bastian of Duplicey viewpoint, and I quote him, he

says...he's dead now..."The New Testament is not a record of what happened in one generation, it is a blueprint of what should happen in every generation until Jesus comes."

Let me tell you something. If I may be at the same time straightforward and loving and kind and say this, the one core flaw, the one disastrous fatal error at the very core of the modern Charismatic Movement is a failure to understand the uniqueness of the era of Christ and the apostles. You can't normalize that. And attempts to do so have led to fantasy and falsehood and concoction and confusion and fakery and chicanery and charlatanism of the worst kind. And the core problem is a failure to grasp what Scripture says about the uniqueness of the apostolic era and the apostles themselves.

Now I just introduced the issue to you. Next time we're going to ask the question...Is the apostolic era with all its elements normative for today? And then sometime we're going to even finish the few verses we're supposed to be finishing. Join me in prayer.

Father, this is important for us because we want to honor You and we don't want to dishonor You and we want to exalt Your Word because You've exalted Your Word above Your name and we don't want to dishonor Your Word and we don't want to think you to be something that You're not, we don't want to think You're doing something You're not. We don't want to attribute to You things that You don't want attributed to You. Lord, we just want the truth. We want to let God be God and let Christ be Christ and let the Spirit be the Spirit and not speak of You in ways and about activities which do not represent You. Father, we need to understand these foundational truths. We thank You that You did authenticate Your Son, the Messiah, You did authenticate the apostles who preached His gospel and established the church and who were used to write the New Testament. And now we have this book, this once-for-all-delivered-to-the saints faith by which we can measure everyone. And we know, Lord, that if You chose to raise up a Samson or someone to preserve Your people, You certainly are a God who can do that. If You chose for some reason of Your own to raise up someone in the future to speak Your truth and You wanted to authenticate them, You could do that because we know that's exactly what You're going to do because Revelation tells us You will. That coming in the future Tribulation You're going to raise up two witnesses and You're going to give them great power, they're going to come back from the dead and as a result of that Jerusalem is going to be saved, the gospel will fly through Jerusalem because of that sign and the city of Jerusalem will fall on its knees and worship. We're not saying You can't do those things in Your good time, but we are saying we must understand that You've told us Your Word is sufficient, Your Word is complete and that these miraculous powers were marking out a very, very, very special group of men. Lord, we don't want to be chasing around for things that aren't from You, we know Your Word is, we want to just be faithful to pursue it and through it to know You and to know Your power in our lives. Continue to lead us as we discuss these things and we'll thank You in our Savior's name. Amen.

Available online at: http://www.gty.org
COPYRIGHT (C) 2014 Grace to You
You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (http://www.gty.org/connect/copyright).