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

The Signs of an Apostle, Part 2
Scripture: 2 Corinthians 12:12
Code: 47-86

Part of the adventure of expository preaching through the Word of God as we've done it all these years is going from theme to theme and from style to style and from emphasis to emphasis just as it kind of lays out in the Scripture. Sometimes we're dealing with a narrative passage. Sometimes we're dealing with historical emphasis. Sometimes we're dealing with a parable or an illustration, sometimes a heavily doctrinal passage, sometimes a corrective passage. They just kind of come that way and that's part of the adventure. That's part really of the thrill of just taking the Word of God as it comes.

We're in the flow of 2 Corinthians, find ourselves in chapter 12 in a section that is basically under the general title of apostolic credentials. Paul was an apostle of Jesus Christ. That means he was a messenger of Jesus Christ. He was sent by Christ to speak the Word of God.. God basically told him what to say, gave him His Word, revealed it to him and he proclaimed it. The issue was, how did people know that he was a spokesman for God? How could it be proven? What was there to attest to that, to affirm that, to give credibility to that claim? And Paul in this particular passage is laying out his credentials. He started doing this way back in chapter 11 verse 22 in a very specific way, that is in contrast to the false apostles who were in Corinth. False apostles, as we remember, had come into the church and managed to woo over the people to win their affection and to gain their ears. And they were then undermining the apostle Paul's credibility and so he has to answer this and he has to reposition himself as the true apostle of Jesus Christ, and thus he asserts his apostolic credentials.

Now as we come down in to chapter 12 verses 11 to 13, just a little brief passage, at first glance perhaps we could read through it and just sort of with a nod of the head go on. But we best not do that because it introduces to us a subject that is of formidable significance in our contemporary church and so we've taken a bit of a digression in this passage to address that.

Let me read these verses to you, starting in verse 11. "I have become foolish; you yourselves compelled me. Actually I should have been commended by you, for in no respect was I inferior to the most eminent apostles, even though I am a nobody. The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with all perseverance, by signs and wonders and miracles. For in what respect were you treated as inferior to the rest of the churches, except that I myself did not become a burden to you? Forgive me this wrong!"

For those of you who have been with us through 2 Corinthians, most of that makes sense to you. For those of you who haven't, it may be a little oblique and we'll try to cover that as we move through it.

Satan, the father of lies, and the enemy of God's truth therefore has always worked to spread lies and deception, always worked to counter the truth of God, to undermine Scripture. He has also worked to destroy the credibility of God's messengers, God's spokesmen. Since God's Word has been spoken and written by humans, since God has used men to be His preachers and men to write the Word of God, Satan has endeavored to destroy the credibility of those men so that people will not believe that what they say and what they write is in fact God's Word. And along that line, no one except Christ Himself has been more systematically assaulted by Satan than the apostle Paul. God used Paul to write, as you know, 13 books out of the New Testament 27 books, nearly half of them. And because of the formidable significance of this man as a mouthpiece for the Word of God, Satan set an all-out attack against him to destroy his credibility. An attack which, by the way, still goes on even today as liberal scholars who want to debunk the Bible attempt to discredit the apostle Paul long after he has passed from this earth.

It is because of the assault that Satan has made on his credibility in the church at Corinth at the time this was written that Paul has to defend himself and that's precisely what he's been doing since chapter 11 verse 22. It's not a matter of his own personal pride at stake, it's a matter of the truth is at stake and if they listen to liars, they're going to hear lies. If they listen to him, they're going to hear God's truth and so he must defend himself.

In verse 11 he calls it foolish and we've gone through this before. The whole idea of having to do this is really foolish. "You yourselves have compelled me, you've made me do this foolish thing of having to defend myself. Actually I should have been commended by you." In other words, you knew enough about me, I was there for nearly two years, I've been back to visit you. I've written you three letters before this letter and this is letter number four. You know about me, you know me personally, you know my ministry, you know my life, you know my message. There's been enough interaction with the influence I've had even beyond you of people coming and telling you about what God has used me to do in other places. I shouldn't be defending myself, you should be coming to my defense. My praise should be in your lips, not my own. You've made me do this foolish thing because of an unwillingness to stand up and be my defender. I have to do this, you've compelled me and I will do it because I am not inferior to these most eminent apostles. They call themselves the most eminent apostles, the super apostles, the false apostles did. I'm not inferior to them so I will defend myself even though apparently in your eyes and theirs, I'm a nobody.

He is forced into this defense. And we've been going through this defense systematically since chapter 11 verse 22. Now in verses 12 and 13 he sort of summarizes the categories of that defense. In trying to affirm that he was in fact a true apostle, he has to turn to some proof. And he gives three categories of proof in verses 12 and 13 which simply sum up, basically, what we already know to be true about him. But let's look at the first category. His apostleship is proven because he was supernatural in power...he was supernatural in power. In case you're wondering what the others are,

number two, he was sustained in patience and number three, he was selfless in purpose. It was his power, his patience and his selfless purpose that were the evidences of his true apostleship. And we'll develop the final two at a later time. In fact, at a much later time after our dedication next Sunday and after the Bible conference the following Sunday. But let's go back to this idea of his being supernatural in power, verse 12.

"The signs of a true apostle were performed among you." And then the end of the verse, "By signs and wonders and powers, or mighty deeds."

Now you remember back in chapter 12 verses 1 to 4 that he was reluctant to speak about visions. He said in verse 1 that they're not profitable, it's not profitable to speak about revelations and visions. Why? Because they're personal. They're private. They can't be verified. They can't be repeated. So there's no point in speaking about them and that's why he said he hadn't even told about a vision and 14 years had gone by and it was a remarkable one, he was taken to heaven. He was taken up into heaven and he came back again which is an astonishing experience but he hadn't spoken of it in 14 years because it didn't help to speak about it, since it couldn't be proven, it couldn't be verified, and couldn't be repeated and it had no value to other people apart from him. So he doesn't defend his apostleship on the basis of private visions.

But when powerful miracles were done through him in view of everyone, that is a verifiable credential and that's what he means in chapter 12...or verse 12, the signs of a true apostle were performed among you. And then at the end he defines them as signs, wonders and miracles. These refer to the supernatural miracles done by God through Paul that proved he was not a mere mortal man just on a human mission, but rather he was a man anointed by God to speak for God as attested to by God granting him miracle power.

The word "sign" speaks of the purpose of the miracle, to point to something. The word "wonder" speaks of the effect of the miracle, it produced astonishment and amazement. The word "power" speaks of the nature of the miracle, that is to say it was a supernatural act which created astonishment and wonder because it had no human explanation and therefore acted as a sign pointing to the apostle Paul as an instrument of the power of God. Supernatural miracles then were the first category of apostolic credentials that Paul mentions here in his summary, mighty miracles to authenticate the apostles.

Back to verse 12 again. They are called here the signs of a true apostle. And last time I talked about this with you and I'm going to talk about it again today because it is a very, very important subject. It is perhaps less important to us who are here at Grace Church and have been here any time because we have this subject pretty well in hand. But there's a wide world of people in the evangelical world across this country and all over the globe who are very, very confused about the issue of miracles. In fact, so confused that they have turned miracles into trivia. I'm always amazed when I hear somebody

say, "Oh, the other day I went to the mall and I found a parking place, it was a miracle." Well close, but not quite. What is a miracle? A miracle isn't just everything that happens in your life. A miracle is a supernatural act, it's a supernatural act for which there is no natural explanation that acts to create amazement, astonishment and wonder that points to the fact that God has invaded the human world. And there is no other explanation. There is no human explanation for a miracle period.

And what I tried to tell you last time, and I'm going to go on and kind of emphasize this morning is that there...there's never been a time in human history, except the time of Christ and the apostles, in that one little location in Palestine, there's never been a time in human history when miracles were common...never. They were never normal. They were never common. And one well-known popular charismatic preacher has written a book called A Miracle A Day Keeps The Devil Away which sort of is the idea that somehow if you're going to deal with Satan you're going to have to have miracles and you ought to have them daily. And if you've got enough faith, you can have them hourly. The idea is that just miracles are a way of life. They are normative and they're normative through all of redemptive history. They should be a daily experience in the life of every Christian. And if you're not seeing miracle after miracle after miracle in your life, there's something wrong with the way you're spiritually wired, or you have weak faith.

Let me tell you something, and I say this with all honesty and I hope you'll understand it. In my entire life I have never seen a miracle...never in my entire life have I seen a supernatural invasion so that something occurred of a supernatural character, visible to me which had no earthly explanation. I have never in my entire life seen a miracle. The new birth, salvation, regeneration is miraculous, but I can't see it although I can view the evidence of it in the fruit of a transformed life. But I have never seen an instantaneous, complete, verifiable, inexplicable, supernatural invasion by God in a miraculous way, instantaneously. And that's what miracles are. And I've been around a while and I've been around the Christian community a while and I've certainly been with people who pray fervently and who serve the Lord faithfully. And I say again, I've never seen in my entire life a miracle. That's not to say that God didn't do some supernaturally wonderful things, but I've never seen a miracle. And that's okay, I'm not looking for one because miracles were a sign to validate some very important things which are no longer occurring today. And I'll explain that to you as we go.

The modern mystics have the idea that there's no difference in any era of human history. There's no difference between the present age, the apostolic age, the Old Testament age, it's all the same. This is a...this is, in my conviction, this is at the very core of the modern Charismatic Movement. You see it all the time on Christian television. This is at the very core of the movement. They want to normalize the miraculous. The grave error that is the foundation of this entire movement is a failure to grasp the uniqueness of miracles, and a failure to grasp the absolute uniqueness of the time of Christ and the apostles...the time when redemption reached its great culmination and the Messiah came and died and rose again and the apostles went out to proclaim the gospel of the Christ who had come and lived and died and rose. If you do not understand the uniqueness of miracles and you do not

understand the uniqueness of the apostolic era, then you might come to the conclusion that we ought to expect miracles all the time. But if you understand those matters, then you will understand why miracles are not a necessity in the economy of God to accomplish what God needs to accomplish.

Now the question is this, and here's the question I'll ask and endeavor to answer this morning...Is the apostolic era with all of its elements, all of its miraculous elements normative for all times? Is it?

Well there are people today who tell us that it absolutely is, that it is the norm for today. We ought to be repeating exactly what went on in the apostolic time. The question again, is the apostolic era with all its elements normative for all ages? Should things be happening today just like they did in Jesus' time? And just like they did in the time of the apostle Paul?

Well, let's start in a general way. According to Scripture, the purpose of miracles can be seen in four aspects. You need to understand what miracles are for as revealed in Scripture and then you can begin to ask the question and answer the question about whether they should be normative for today. Scripture indicates to us that the purpose of miracles unfolds in sort of four sequential features.

Number one, miracles were used by God to introduce a new era of revelation. They were used by God to introduce a new era of revelation. So, the first period of miracles in redemptive history is the time of Moses and Joshua, and mostly Moses but Joshua got in on it as well. And you had the miracles that were attesting to the fact that Moses was God's prophet, Moses was God's spokesman. It was at that time that God gave the law, right? It was at the time of Moses that God gave the law, that great massive era of revelation in which God gave His law. It was the time when within that law God gave that codification of divine morality that we call the Ten Commandments. It was at that time that God identified a new nation brought out of Egypt and constituted as the people of God the nation Israel led through the wilderness, brought into the land of Canaan and established as God's people and then they became the receptors of God's revelation. It was at that time that God established the tabernacle, the place of worship with all of its features. It was at that time that God established the sacrificial system by which sin could be dealt with. It was at that time that God instituted the priesthood. And all those revelations were around the time of Moses and Joshua as God gave His great law. Little wonder that God attested to the fact of that great time of revelation miraculously. Again if we didn't see miracles, we wouldn't know God was giving His law. We could assume that maybe some committee somewhere was putting this all together, or some men were doing it, or some individual was doing it who had claimed to speak for God. But the attestation of that great time by the miracles that occurred around Moses and Joshua were the affirmation that it was a time of new revelation.

Then secondly, not only in the Old Testament did God give the law and attest to that era of revelation with miracles, but following the law came what is commonly called the prophets. And during the lives of Elijah and Elisha who certainly were symbolic of the office of the prophet, miracles occurred. They

occurred not in any way in the number that they occurred in the time of Christ and the apostles, neither did they at Moses' time, but miracles did occur as Elijah and Elisha carried out their ministry which was a revival of the prophetic era. Prophets spoke for God. And so at the time of Elijah and Elisha there were miracles attesting to the fact that these men as prophets spoke for God and God therefore miraculously verified the law and the prophets.

Following the law and the prophets, of course, came the New Testament, the New Covenant. And miracles introduced at that time verified that Christ and the apostles represented the coming of the New Covenant. Moses and Joshua, the law...Elijah and Elisha, the prophets...Christ and the apostles, the New Covenant, that's the New Testament and that completes God's revelation. The law and the prophets, the Old Testament, and then there is the New Testament, the gospel.

So the first thing to understand about miracles is they are associated with the introduction of a new era of revelation. And as I told you last time, the periods in between that, outside Moses and Joshua, outside Elijah and Elisha, you just don't find miracles in the Old Testament. Beyond Christ and the apostles you just won't find miracles even in the New Testament.

Secondly as we move through this little progress, miracles were not only used to introduce a new era of revelation, but secondly, building on that, they were used to authenticate the messengers of that revelation...to authenticate the messengers of that revelation, that new era of revelation. So it was in the case of Moses and Joshua. Moses and Joshua were going to be God's spokesmen. They were going to be the ones that God would use as instruments to speak for Him. And in the case of Moses, you remember, in Exodus chapter 4, God said, "Take up this staff, throw it on the ground. It became a serpent. The Lord said to Moses, 'Stretch out your hand, grasp it by the tail.' He stretched out his hand, caught it, became a staff in his hand that they may believe that the Lord the God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob has appeared to you." How are they going to know that God is talking through Moses? They're going to know because Moses is going to do things that have no human explanation. And this is God attesting to Moses as His spokesman. God was verifying.

And then in verse 9 he says, "If they...if they will not believe even these signs, or heed what you say, then take some water from the Nile, pour it on the dry ground and the water which you take from the Nile will become blood on the dry ground." If they don't believe after those two miracles, do another one. And God was attesting to Moses as His spokesman.

In 1 Kings chapter 17, just briefly, a wonderful testimony is given here to the prophet Elijah. You remember he went into the widow's house and he provided food which he had no food. And then he raised her son from the dead and the woman says to him in chapter 17 of 1 Kings verse 24, "Now I know that you're a man of God and that the Word of the Lord in your mouth is truth." Folks, I cannot

tell you how important that statement is. Write it down, 1 Kings 17:24. The woman got the picture, "I know you're a man of God." Why? "Because you raised my dead son." Her son was dead and you remember what Elijah did, he goes up there and he lays on top of this child three times and asks the Lord to give him back his life and he's raised from the dead. He produces oil and flour for this woman and then he raises her son from the dead and the woman says, "You are a man from God. I mean, there is no human explanation for this." And, then she comes to the right conclusion, "And that the Word of the Lord in your mouth is truth." That was the whole point of a miracle, to attest to this man as the one who spoke the truth of God.

Now let me give you just a little footnote to that. The people who are running around today claiming miracle power, and you see them all the time on television, they're claiming miracle power. Inevitably they have an unbiblical theology, have you noticed that? Have you noticed that they are in doctrinal error? Have you noticed that they are confused about things like the trinity? Pretty basic stuff, a representation of the true nature of God. They're confused about the actual sin-bearing work of Christ on the cross. They're confused about the ministry of the Holy Spirit. They're confused about the completion of the Scripture. They're confused about a lot of things. And let me tell you, folks, God would never attest those men by giving them miraculous abilities or He would be confirming people who teach error. I mean, that alone should cause people to realize what's going on. God does not authenticate any but those who speak the truth.

The woman got it, "You're a man of God and the Word of the Lord in your mouth is truth." That was the whole point that the people would know that Moses spoke for God and that the people would know that the prophets spoke for God, God attested them by miracles and thus established the law and the prophets as from Him.

When you come into the New Testament, it's the same thing. Here comes Jesus and He speaks for God and Jesus says, "If you look at My life and you look at My works and you listen to My words, you will know that I speak for God." John 10:25, "I told you the works that I do in My Father's name, these bear witness of Me." Just look at My works, look at My miracles, look at the resurrections, look at the healings. Banished disease from Palestine during the time of His ministry. Look at the feeding of the crowds, did it twice. Look at the walking on water. I mean, you name it. Same with the apostles. They followed Jesus. They were given the ability to do miracles in order that it might be made known to all who watched that these were the men who spoke and wrote the truth of God.

So, summing up. First of all, miracles were used by God to introduce a new era of revelation. Two, to authenticate the messengers of that revelation. Three, to authenticate the message of that revelation. And we're just kind of building the whole picture here. And that's why I say God is not about to give miracle power to a messenger who speaks a faulty message. God is not going to attract people to error. Who's going to do that? Satan. Just be a little discerning, will you? God has only given three periods of relatively extensive miracles, three periods really of any miracles other than a very rare,

rare occasion. And that's Moses and Joshua, Elijah and Elisha, but even those two don't come close to the kind of miracles and the number of miracles that were done during the ministry of Jesus and the apostles. Just thousands fold more miracles at that time because, of course, this was the great culmination of all redemptive history in the coming of God to earth in the form of Jesus Christ, His death, burial and resurrection, His saving work on the cross and the gospel being preached and written down by the apostles. In each case though that new message is validated by miracles. And you cannot have the miracle unless you have the new revelation and that that new revelation is the authentic Word of God.

Now one last point just fills out the picture. God used miracles to introduce a new era of revelation, to authenticate the messengers, to authenticate the message and then finally, to instruct the observers that God was revealing Himself. Look, go back to Egypt and what was going on in Egypt? Well miracles were being done in Egypt by the instrumentality of Moses, God was working through Moses. And what were those miracles supposed to do? They were supposed to show the Egyptians that God was the true God, right? That was the whole point. To instruct the observers about the fact that God was revealing Himself.

The intention of those miracles was to instruct Pharaoh and the other Egyptians as to the futility and the impotence of their own deities. Each plague, by the way, and that's a very interesting study. You go back and you study the book of Exodus chapter 7 through 12 where the plagues are and as you go studying through those, you will find that all of those plagues somehow linked up with one of the Egyptian deities. Somehow it was intended to smash the confidence of the people in the ability of their gods. They worshiped the sun, for example. And the sun burned them up. They worshiped frogs, and frogs overran the land. The point was God was just decimating their confidence in their false deities. And in Exodus 6, I'll just give you one verse there, a lot I could give you but Exodus 6...well, I'll give you two...Exodus 6:6 and 7, God says to Moses, "You tell the sons of Israel I'm the Lord, I'm going to bring you out from the burdens of the Egyptians, deliver you from their bondage. I'm going to redeem you. I'm going to get you out of there." And then verse 7, "I will take you for My people and I will be your God and you shall know that I am the Lord your God who brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians." I mean, the whole point of those miracles was that those people would never question who was God, never.

Verse 17 of chapter 7, "By this you shall know that I am the Lord." How? "I'll strike the water in the Nile and it will be turned to blood." And that's the way it went. Chapter 8 says the same thing, verse 19, chapter 14 verse 31, God was putting Himself on display.

The same thing is true of the miracles of Elijah and Elisha. During their time those miracles were to call Israel away from idols. Israel had drifted toward idols and God was reconfirming the prophetic office, reaffirming His divine revelation, calling them away from their false gods and their idols back to the Word of God. And that dear lady whose son was raised, she got it and she got it very clearly. She

realized exactly what was going on. He was a man of God and he was speaking the Word of God which was the absolute truth against all the lies of all the false gods.

Elijah the prophet came near, in chapter 18 verse 36, he's on Mount Carmel now and he's just absolutely obliterating the prophets of Baal up there. And he said, "O Lord, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, today let it be known that You are God in Israel." And you know what happened? You remember? Fire fell and consumed the stuff on the altar and all though it was drowned in water and lapped up all the water and just destroyed everything, fire from God and put Himself on display, didn't He? And again you see the miracles of Moses and Joshua were to point to the true and living God, and that He had spoken. And the miracles of Elijah and Elisha were to point to the true and living God that He had spoken and called people away from false gods. And the miracles of Christ and the apostles were the same, they were to confirm to the world that this indeed was God and that He was speaking the truth of God. John writes in John 20, "These things are written about Christ and the story of His miracles, which is what the gospel of John is about, that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God and believing you might have life in His name," right?

Now listen, folks, the law and the prophets, that's the Old Testament. The New Testament and God is through speaking, isn't He? God's revelation is now complete. Hebrews 1:1 and 2 sum it up, "God spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son." You have the Old Testament, the New Testament, it's complete. And God authenticated the law and the prophets, God authenticated the New Testament writers and therefore the New Testament message as well.

And you know what He asks of us now? Don't be running around looking for more revelation and don't be looking around for more apostles, and don't be looking around for more miracles, just trust the Word already revealed. I don't need a miracles, you don't need a miracle, nobody needs a miracle, we just have what we need right here in our hands. This is the "once-for-all delivered to the saints faith," friend. There isn't anything to be added to this. In fact, if you get to messing around with adding things, you're in some real trouble. Revelation 22:18 says, "You add anything to this book and the plagues that are written in it will be added to you." That's a pretty final statement, wouldn't you say? There isn't much room for equivocation on that one. In case you're wondering where that is, it's Revelation 22:18. God authenticated the Scripture. He will not re-authenticate it. And He isn't running around authenticating people who don't understand it. And it's not still being written. He asks us to trust the testimony of the Scripture.

It's very simple, folks, we walk by faith and not by sight. We love Him whom we have not seen. All these people running around looking for miracles say, "Oh we have enough faith to believe in miracles." That's not faith, that's doubt looking for proof. I don't need a miracle. I don't...if I never see a miracle that...I don't care. A miracle adds nothing to me. This is all I need. The only miracle I'm looking for is the miracle of my transformation when I die, or get raptured. The only miracle I want to

see in my life time is the miracle of salvation and transformation of the soul. Anything else is a temporary deal. I don't care if an axe head floats down a stream I'm looking at. I really don't. I don't care whether somebody multiplies food, that's not material to me. And I can't imagine that there would be any purpose for God to do that because there's nobody to authenticate today as a true apostle, right? Because the revelation is complete. You know, if all these people running around looking for God to reveal Himself in miracles would just open their Bibles and begin to discern carefully what's in there, they would get to the source of the very hope that they so languish for and that is real spiritual growth.

Now you're saying...are you saying God can't do a miracle? Of course not, God can do anything He wants to do, He doesn't ask me. He can do whatever He wants to do. I'm not telling Him anything. What I'm telling you is I don't need a miracle, I just need the Word of God.

Are you saying God can't heal somebody? No, He may heal somebody. He may choose to do that for His own purposes and that's fine and I believe that we should pray and the prayer of faith can save the sick, I believe that. I believe God works in wonderful ways. As I said, I've never seen something that could be described only as a supernatural event with my own eyes because it's just not common. There are times when God does wonderful things and, you know, we...lots of folks want to say, "Well, you know, somebody had a disease and they had an illness and they don't have it anymore and you can say it was a miracle." Well, I would rather say God intervened providentially, I don't know how He did it or what He was doing, but I wouldn't want to call it a sign and wonder. I'm not...I don't want to say God can't do things, He can. But I'll tell you one thing, He's going to be consistent and when the text is complete in the Word of God, signs and wonders and mighty deeds intended to point toward the law and the prophets and the New Testament ceased. And should God choose to do something miraculous today, it's not normal, it's rare. It's in His power to do whatever He chooses to do. Nothing in Scripture indicates that such has occurred in the day of the apostles is normative for us. The opposite is true.

And it's so sad because you see these people, you know, they're trying to get a fix on how to...how to really get some action in their Christian life and they're just running around chasing the next big deal. How do you think those guys pack those stadiums with all those people and they get them so worked up in all the emotional stuff? Is that a sign of great faith? That's a sign of doubt desperately looking for proof. That's a sign of people who haven't got anything to hold on to cognitive and they're just reaching out for some emotional charge that can convince them that God must like them because He did this for them. They don't understand the reality of God's relation to them as it's outlined in Scripture. I hope you don't need that to know you're His. It's not normative.

Well, people say, "There's one miracle that is and that's my heavenly language, speaking in tongues." I just remind you, and I don't want to get into all of this, but 1 Corinthians 14:22 is...people say they

have a hard time understanding the tongues, but just this verse alone, let's just take this one and we'll leave it at that. First Corinthians 14:22, "So then tongues are for a sign not to those who believe." Now stop there, "But to unbelievers."

Well okay, that's pretty clear, isn't it? Did you get that? Tongues have nothing to do with you, they're not for edification, they're a sign for people who don't believe. People so often...people say, "Well, you know, if I'm going to be edified and built up in my life I need to do this." It's not even...it's not even for that. It's a sign not to those who believe, but to those who don't believe. You know, it was a divine miracle in the apostolic era to show Israel, listen to this, that when they...when they wouldn't listen to a language they could understand, God was going to judge them by speaking to them they couldn't understand. That was a judgment. I mean, we...we just need to go back to the Word and sort through these things.

Tongues and miracles were signs to authenticate the era of a new revelation, the messenger of that revelation, the message of that revelation, and to call the people who saw those signs to the true and living God away from idols and lies. The great Princeton theologian, Presbyterian theologian, B.B. Warfield who had an immense effect on me as a young seminary student when I began to devour his writings, and by the way, most of us are not able to read all the richness of Warfield because it's all in 20 volumes and it's, you know, it gets pretty wordy but we can thank our dear friend Sinclair Ferguson who told me this last week in Florida that he is condensing Warfield down to a manageable size for all of us. That will be a great, great legacy. He'll be finished with it in two years. Warfield was an immense mind and Warfield understood from the perspective of a Reformed theologian what I'm saying to you. Listen to this quote from B.B. Warfield, "Miracles do not appear on the page of Scripture flagrantly, here, there or elsewhere indifferently without assignable reason. They belong to revelation periods and appear only when God is speaking to His people through accredited messengers declaring His gracious purposes. Their abundant display in the apostolic era is the mark of the richness of the apostolic age in revelation. And when this revelation period closed," that would be the closing of the New Testament, "the period of miracle working has passed by also as a mere matter of course," end quote. Well said.

Joel Gurlach[?] who is a Lutheran writing on this subject of tongue speaking in particular says, " *Glossalalia*...which is the Greek term for languages...was given primarily for an evidential purpose to authenticate and substantiate some facet of God's truth. This purpose is always distorted by those who shift the emphasis from objective sign to subjective experience. That's a distortion," end quote.

The sign gifts were to authenticate those who came with God's new revelation. Just for an illustration, Acts 2:22...Acts 2:22. Here is Peter, day of Pentecost, he's preaching, "Men of Israel," he says, "listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene," now listen to this, "a man attested to you," that is affirmed to be in fact God, the spokesman from God, the Messiah of God, "attested to you by God," and how did God do it? "Through miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your

midst just as you yourselves know." You see, the miracles, signs and wonder was to attest to the claims of Jesus to have come from God.

In the sixteenth chapter of Mark, the last verse, verse 20, speaks of the apostles, it says, "They went out, they preached everywhere while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the Word by the signs that followed." He confirmed the Word by the signs that followed. You see, it's always to confirm the Messiah, to confirm those who preached in the apostolic era and who wrote the Scripture.

I love this, Acts 7, here's another little footnote on this, Stephen was preaching a great sermon. They actually stoned him for it because the Jews got so mad at him. But in Acts 7 verse 36, this man led them out, speaking of Moses, performing wonders and signs in the land of Egypt and in the Red Sea and in the wilderness for 40 years, and he sort of gives us an overview of the time of the Moses' miracles. O he led you out, he did miracles in Egypt and the Red Sea and the wilderness over the 40 years, such as water from the rock and manna from heaven and all of that. But verse 37 is so key. "This is the Moses who said to the sons of Israel," and he quotes Deuteronomy 18:15, "God shall raise up for you a prophet like me from your brethren." That's a messianic prophecy. Why did God give Moses miracle power? Because he wanted the people to know that he spoke for God. He literally spoke the Scripture. End of verse 38, "He received...Moses did...living oracles to pass on to you." You see, God authenticates those who speak and write His Scripture.

Look at Hebrews 2 for a minute, this also is an important Scripture in this regard. Hebrews is written to Jewish people, obviously, who knew the gospel but were sort of hesitant to embrace it because it had so many social effects they would be unsynagogued and ostracized from their community and so forth. And so he's really telling them, you better not drift away from what you've heard, you know it's the truth, you better accept it. Verse 2, "If the word spoken through angels," that by the way refers to the law given to Moses which was brought by angels, "if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable, the law of God is unalterable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?" If they couldn't violate Moses' law and get away with it, what are we going to do if we violate the gospel? Why? After it was at first spoken through the Lord...the Lord was the first to speak it...it was confirmed to us by those who heard Him. Who was that? The apostles. So they had heard from the apostles who had heard from the Lord.

And how did they know it was the truth? Verse 4, "God also bearing witness with them by signs, wonders and various miracles, and by gifts of the Holy Spirit." Those would be the gifts of the Holy Spirit, the miraculous gifts, mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12:28 and here it indicates that those gifts there were specifically for the apostles.

So he is saying we better listen to this gospel because it was preached by Christ who was attested by God through miracles and it was proclaimed by apostles who heard Christ and they too were attested

to by signs, wonders and miracles. And again it is a solemn warning to Jewish readers not to treat such authenticated revelation lightly. Which was confirmed miraculously.

Well clearly from just those few verses you get the picture. You get the idea here. Miracles were for special times and special individuals who were proclaiming new revelation. And now the Word of God is done and it's complete. And there are no more apostles. You know, I will grant these modern charismatic folks the fact that they...they want to have continual miracles, continual revelation and continual apostles and they're wrong on all counts, unfortunately. Listen again to B.B. Warfield, quoting from Abraham Khyper[??] a great European theologian, he says, "As Abraham Khyper figuratively expresses it, it has not been God's way to communicate to each and every man a separate store of divine knowledge of his own to meet his separate needs." What a great statement. I would like to shout that from the housetop. I would like to buy billboards across the country near churches and put that up. It has not been God's way to communicate to each and every man a separate store of divine knowledge of his own to meet his separate needs. That defines a whole movement today of people running around trying to hear a personal word from God for them. I hope you're not looking for that. I really hope you're not looking for that.

Warfield goes on to say this, "God has given the world one complete revelation adapted to all, sufficient for all, provided for all and from this one completed revelation, He requires each person to draw his whole spiritual sustenance." And you have it in your hand, my friend, and this is it. That is so greatly important, isn't it? If you're running around beyond the pages of this looking for answers, they're not there or you're going to get the wrong answers.

Warfield goes on, "Therefore it is the miraculous working which is but the sign of God's revealing power and it cannot be expected to continue after the revelation of which it is the sign has been complete," end quote.

Well, one age of miracles, the time of Moses. One age of miracles, at the time of Elijah. One age of miracles, at the time of Christ. And we have the result. We have the law and the prophets and the New Testament, a complete revelation established and verified and the record of the miracles is in the text itself. You see...back to your text now...I'm like the preacher who had three points...point one, I read my text; point two, I depart from my text; point three, I never return...I'm going to blow point three, I'm taking you back. Second Corinthians 12, when Paul says the signs of a true apostle were performed, he is asserting that these signs belong to a true apostle and if they belonged to everybody, then they can't be any good to verify an apostle. He is saying that following Pentecost, listen to this, following Pentecost when the Spirit of God came and the church was born, every sign and every wonder and every powerful deed, every miracle was to authenticate the apostles, messengers of the new revelation, the new age, the New Testament.

Listen now, it is important to be aware that after Pentecost no miracles, no unusual manifestation of the Spirit of God occurred except in the presence of an apostle or those directly ministered to as an associate of an apostle, in the case of Philip and Stephen. I'll say that again, no miracle ever occurred except in the presence of an apostle or one of the intimate associates of the apostles. And no miraculous gift was ever received apart from the presence of an apostle. Acts 8, the Holy Spirit didn't come to the Samaritans until the apostles came. Acts 10, they didn't come to the Gentiles...the Holy Spirit didn't come to the Gentiles until the apostles were there. Acts 19, when the disciples of John wandered in and said, "We don't even know about Christ, we just know about the preaching of John the Baptist," they heard the gospel, they believed and in the presence of the apostles the Holy Spirit was given...always in the presence of the apostles. And so here in 2 Corinthians 12:12 Paul was actually proving his apostleship by his ability to do these things, and if everybody could do them, it wouldn't prove anything.

Well, somebody's going to say, "Well look, why are these apostles so unique? I mean, you've said this about the apostles, but what makes the apostles unique?" Well I don't have time to answer that question. But I will answer it next time and it's very important, so just kind of hang in there and we'll get back...amazing how much material is in that verse, isn't it? You say, "It's mostly in the white spaces, isn't it? It is, it's just...you have to have a very thick magnifying glass, but if you did you could see it's all there. Join me in prayer.

Father, this is just wonderful and rich, rich truth to search out in the pages of Your Scripture. And we thank You so much for leading us to the truth. Lord, we don't take any credit for that, we...we don't rightly understand the Word of God because we're better than anybody else, we...we've just been blessed, we've been privileged. And these dear people have been faithful to search the Scriptures like the Bereans to check things out and make sure they're so. But, Lord, it's all Your grace and we pray for dear brothers and sisters who are in other movements in Christianity who are wandering all over the place, confused about such matters. And the main problem that's so distressing is that they have lost their singular confidence in the power of Scripture. To be the beginning and the end, the all and all for us. It is true, Lord, You're not going to give us our little individual revelations, You've spread one great table before all of us and we all eat at the same feast and that feast is contained for us, bracketed in the rich and profound truth set between Genesis 1:1 and Revelation 22. Father, we thank You for this veritable feast of truth and we come to it asking nothing more than we would understand the Word, that it would dwell in us richly and empower us to honor and serve You. Thank You for our time this morning, and we pray that we might with a greater understanding of Your Word have a greater understanding of who You are and worship You in spirit and in truth. In Your Son's name and our Savior we pray. Amen.

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