

Modern-Day Miracles, Tongue-Speaking, and Holy Spirit Baptism: A Refutation--EXTENDED VERSION

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Numerous religious groups commonly claim the assistance of the Holy Spirit in their lives. Famed religious television personalities boldly announce the active influence of the Holy Spirit even as they speak. Supposedly, the Holy Spirit talks to them personally, heals viewers instantaneously, and enables them to babble uncontrollably in an “unknown tongue.” All of this is claimed to be “proof positive” of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Do miracles still happen? Can people speak in tongues today? Does God, in the 21st century, supernaturally countermand the laws of nature and heal people miraculously?

“Come now, and let us reason together.” (Isaiah 1:18). It is absolutely imperative that we examine **Scripture**—not our feelings, not what someone else says happened to them, and not our own experience. The only sure and certain approach is to ask: What does the Bible teach? The reader must ask: “Do I honestly believe the Bible to be the Word of God?” Answers to critical questions of human existence require that a person be willing to spend time in the Word, “rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15). One must “search the scriptures” (Acts 17:11). One must be honest and willing to go where the evidence takes him. If you had to choose between what you genuinely think you have experienced or seen firsthand and what the Bible actually says, which would you choose? You must ask yourself: “Will I honestly accept God’s written Word on the matter of miracles?” If you will, I invite you to join me in an examination of what the Bible teaches pertaining to miracles.

THE DEFINITION OF MIRACLES

First of all, what exactly is a “miracle”? How does the Bible use the word? The three central terms used in the Bible to designate a supernatural (as contrasted with a natural) manifestation are: (1) “miracle” (*dunamis*); (2) “sign” (*semeion*); and (3) “wonder” (*teras*). All three terms occur together in Acts 2:22, Hebrews 2:4, and 2 Corinthians 12:12. Related terms include “work” (*ergon*) and “mighty deed” (*kratos*). The occurrence of a miracle in the Bible meant that God worked **outside** the laws of nature. W.E. Vine, whose Greek scholarship, according to F.F. Bruce, was “wide, accurate and up-to-date” (Vine, 1952, Foreword), stated that “miracle” (*dunamis*) is used in the New Testament of “works of a **supernatural** origin and character, such as could not be produced by **natural** agents and means” (1952, p. 75, emp. added). Otfried Hofius noted that a “sign” (*semeion*) “contradicts the **natural** course of things” (1976, 2:626, emp. added) and, similarly, “wonder” (*teras*) referred to events that “contradict the ordered unity of **nature**” (2:633, emp. added). Thus a miracle in the Bible was not merely an event that was astonishing, incredible, extraordinary, or unusual—like the birth of a baby, or a flower, or the narrow avoidance of an accident. A miracle in the Bible was a **supernatural** act. It was an event that was contrary to the usual course of nature (Arndt and Gingrich, 1957, p. 755). The miraculous is not to be confused with the **providential**, where God operates **within** the usual course of nature.

THE DESIGN OF MIRACLES

Second, it is absolutely imperative that one recognizes the **purpose** of the miraculous. Miracles in the New Testament served the singular function of **confirmation**. When an inspired speaker stepped forward to declare God’s Word, God **validated** or **endorsed** the speaker’s remarks by empowering the speaker to perform a miracle. Many New Testament passages articulate this fact quite plainly. For example, the apostles “went forth, and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, and **confirming** the word by the **signs** that followed” (Mark 16:20, emp. added). The Hebrews writer asked: “[H]ow shall we escape, if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be **spoken** by the Lord, and was **confirmed** to us by those who heard, God also **bearing witness** both with **signs and wonders**, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit” (Hebrews 2:3-4). Referring to the initial proclamation of the Gospel to the Samaritans, Luke stated: “And the multitudes with one accord heeded **the things spoken** by Philip, hearing and seeing the **miracles** which he did” (Acts 8:6). The apostles prayed to God: “[G]rant to Your servants that with all boldness they may **speak Your word**, by stretching out Your hand to **heal**, and that **signs and wonders** may be done” (Acts 4:29-30).

These passages, and many others (e.g., Acts 13:12; 14:3; 15:12; Romans 15:18-19; 1 Corinthians 2:4; 1 Thessalonians 1:5; cf. Exodus 4:30), show that the purpose of miracles was to **authenticate** the oral/spoken word as God’s Word. Miracles **legitimized** and **verified** the teaching of God’s messengers, as over against the many false teachers (like Simon in Acts 8:9, or Pharaoh’s magicians in Exodus 7:11) who attempted to mislead the people. In the late 19th century, Greek lexicographer Joseph Thayer worded this point well when he noted that “sign” (*semeion*) was used in the New Testament “of miracles and wonders by which God authenticates the men sent by him, or by which men prove that the cause they are pleading is God’s” (1901, p. 573). Even the miracles

that Jesus performed were designed to back up His claim (i.e., spoken words) to be deity. Consider two examples: (1) Using the parallel term “works” (a key word in the book of John), Jesus remarked to Philip, “Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? the **words** that I say unto you I speak not from myself: but the Father abiding in me doeth his **works**. Believe Me that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me: or else believe Me for the very **works’** sake” (John 14:10-11, emp. added); (2) Nicodemus said to Jesus: “Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God; for no one can do these **signs** that thou doest except God be with him” (John 3:2, emp. added). This pattern is repeated in the New Testament many times over (e.g., John 2:23; 5:36; 6:14; 7:31; 10:37-38,41-42; 20:30-31; Acts 2:22). In other words, Jesus performed signs and miracles to prove His divine identity and thereby authenticate His message. His message, in turn, generated faith in those who chose to believe His teachings (cf. Romans 10:17). Here is the consistent sequence presented in Scripture:

Signs → Word → Faith

(1) Signs confirmed the Word; (2) the Word was presented to hearers; and (3) faith was created (by the Word) in those who received it.

An excellent demonstration of this process is provided by Luke in his report of the conversion of the Roman proconsul, Sergius Paulus. Elymas the sorcerer attempted to thwart Paul’s effort to teach Sergius the Gospel. So Paul performed a miracle by striking Elymas blind. Luke next recorded: “Then the proconsul, when he saw what was done, believed, being astonished at the **teaching** of the Lord” (Acts 13:12, emp. added). One might well expect the text to have said that Sergius was astonished at the **miracle** that Paul performed. But Luke was careful to report the situation with precision. The miracle that Paul performed captured Sergius’ attention, causing him to recognize the divine origin of Paul’s Gospel message. The Gospel message, in turn, generated faith in the proconsul—in harmony with Paul’s later affirmation to Christians in Rome that faith comes by hearing the Word of God (Romans 10:17). Over and over again in the New Testament, a close correlation is seen between the performance of miracles and the preaching of the Word of God (cf. Mark 6:12-13; Luke 9:2,6).

MIRACLES CONFIRM THE WORD			
PASSAGE	MESSAGE	CONFIRMATION	RESPONSE
Acts 4:29-32	“Speak Your Word with all boldness”	“by stretching out Your hand to heal and that signs and wonders may be done”	“those who believed were of one heart and soul”
Acts 8:5-12	“the things spoken by Philip;” “Philip...preached Christ”	“hearing and seeing the miracles which he did”	“they believed Philip as he preached the things...and were baptized”
Acts 13:7-12	“sought to hear the word of God”	“You shall be blind, not seeing”	“the proconsul believed... being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord”
Acts 14:2-3	“speaking boldly in the Lord”	“The Lord...was bearing witness to the word...granting signs/wonders to be done”	“a great multitude...believed”
Romans 15:18-19	“I have fully preached the gospel of Christ”	“in mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God”	“to make the Gentiles obedient”
1 Corinthians 2:4-5	“my speech and my preaching”	“in demonstration of the Spirit and of power”	“that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God”
1 Thessalonians 1:5-6	“our gospel did not come to you in word only”	“but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance”	“you became followers of us and the Lord, having received the word”
Hebrews 2:1-4	“so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord”	“God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit”	“give the more earnest heed”
Mark 16:15-20	“preach the gospel...they went out and preached... the word”	“the Lord working with them and confirming the word through the accompanying signs”	“he who believes and is baptized will be saved”
John 2:22	“He had said this...the Scripture and the word which Jesus had said”	“when he had risen from the dead”	“they believed”

Other Purposes: Super-Spiritual?

But some maintain that there are other reasons for divine healing and tongue-speaking. Some say tongue-speaking is a sign that the tongue-speaker is super-spiritual. Others say miraculous healing serves the purpose of making the believer well—a mere act of mercy to relieve his pain and suffering. They say God does not want us to suffer, and so He will heal us just to ease our pain in this life because we are His children.

Regarding the first claim, in Paul's admonitions directed to the church of Christ at Corinth, he insisted that the person who possessed the ability to speak in tongues was not spiritually superior to the one who had no such ability. The tongue-speaker had a responsibility to utilize his gift appropriately, i.e., to help others (1 Corinthians 14:6,9,12,19). His gift no more placed him in a spiritually superior position than did any other gift possessed by any other member—whether the ability was miraculous or non-miraculous (1 Corinthians 12:11-27). Tongue-speaking was simply one miraculous capability among many bestowed by God without regard to a member's spiritual status, let alone his spiritual **superiority** over another member (1 Corinthians 12:7-11,28-30).

Other Purposes: To Make Well?

Regarding the second claim, certainly, the compassion of God was evident when people received miraculous healing in New Testament times. And, surely, relief from suffering would have been a side effect of being healed. But the Bible teaches that **relieving suffering was not the purpose of miracles**. Such a purpose would contradict—even thwart—the divine intent of this created Earth as a place where hardship exists to prepare us for eternity (see Warren, 1972). Death and sin entered the world due to human choice, and God allows the circumstances caused by human decisions to take their course. God is not going to interfere with the natural order of things to show partiality to some over others. The Christian is subject to the same diseases, the same tragedies, and the same physical death that befall non-Christians: "for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return" (Genesis 3:19). The Bible, in fact, warns Christians that they can **expect** to be the recipients of all sorts of hardship, opposition, temptation, and suffering (e.g., 1 Corinthians 10:13; 2 Timothy 3:12; 1 Peter 4:12-17). Commenting on the purpose of miracles, J.W. McGarvey wrote: "[T]o say that they were wrought for the single purpose of showing divine compassion toward the sick, and those oppressed by the devil, would be to ignore a purpose which is easily discerned, which is openly avowed by Christ himself, and which is of much greater importance (1910, p. 354). That purpose was "to support his proclamation...a necessary proof of the claim of Jesus" (pp. 355-356).

If God's intention was to exempt Christians from sickness and disease, He certainly has fallen down on the job, since the vast majority of Christians throughout the last 2,000 years have experienced the exact same afflictions suffered by unbelievers. If miracles in the first century had as their object to improve the health or physical well-being of the recipient, then Jesus and the apostles were failures, because they left untouched a lot of sick and dying folk! Jesus healed the minority of the sick people of Palestine, and healed **none** outside of that tiny geographical region (with the exception of the Canaanite woman's daughter). In fact, one would be forced to conclude that God's compassion did not extend to **everybody**. But the Bible affirms that **God loves the entire world of humanity** (John 3:16; Romans 5:8). Hence, miracles did not have as their central purpose to demonstrate God's compassion, nor to ease pain, sickness, and suffering. Writing in 1898, McGarvey made the following observations:

[U]nlike these modern advocates of "divine healing," the apostles were never known to go about exhorting people to come forward for the healing of the body. They effected miraculous cures in a few instances, "as a sign to the unbelievers," but they never proclaimed, either to saints or sinners, that the healing of all diseases was a part of the gospel which they were sent to preach. These so-called faith-cure churches, therefore, and the preachers who officiate in them as "divine healers," or what not, are not modeled after the apostolic type, but are misleading the people by humbuggery (p. 351).

Insufficient Faith?

The usual rebuttal to these observations is that the reason some people do not receive a miracle is that "they do not have sufficient faith." But this objection is likewise unscriptural. It is true that some individuals in the New Testament were commended for the faith that they possessed **prior** to being the recipient of a miracle (e.g., Mark 5:34). It does not automatically follow, however, that faith was a **necessary** prerequisite to miraculous reception. Many people were **not** required to have faith as a prerequisite. For example, all individuals who were raised from the dead obviously were not in a position to "have faith" (e.g., John 11:44). Nor did those possessed by demons have faith before being healed, since they were not in their right mind (e.g., Luke 9:42; 11:14). The man who was blind from birth actually showed uncertainty regarding the identity of Jesus (John 9:11-12,17,25,35-36). The man who was healed by Jesus as he laid beside a pool of water, in fact, did not even know who healed him (John 5:13). On one occasion, Jesus healed a paralytic after observing, not **his** faith, but the faith of **his companions**

(Mark 2:5). Additional texts indicate that many who received the benefits of miracles were not required to have faith (Luke 13:12; 14:4; Acts 3:1-10).

The opposite was true as well. There were individuals who possessed faith, and yet were not healed of their ailments. The apostle Paul obviously had plenty of faith. He had an “infirmity” that was so painful that he called it “a thorn in the flesh” and “a messenger of Satan” (2 Corinthians 12:7-10). Yet his earnest prayers to God for relief did not result in his being healed. Timothy was a faithful and effective servant of the Lord. He had “frequent illnesses” and stomach trouble of such severity as to warrant Paul referring to it by inspiration. But rather than simply healing him, or telling him to “pray for healing,” Paul advised him to use a little wine as a tonic (1 Timothy 5:23). Another Christian worker and companion of Paul in his evangelistic travels, Trophimus (Acts 20:4: 21:29), had to be left at Miletus due to his sickness (2 Timothy 4:20). Epaphroditus was an extremely valuable worker in the kingdom of Christ, so much so that Paul referred to him as “my brother and fellow-worker and fellow-soldier... and minister to my need” (Philippians 2:25). When he became sick “nigh unto death” (Philippians 2:27,30)—likely due to his exhausting kingdom activity and service to Paul—Paul did not heal him. These examples demonstrate that personal faith was not prerequisite to the reception of a miracle in the first century. Miracles were inextricably bound to the authentication of the spoken Word of God.

But what about those verses that seem to indicate that faith **did** have something to do with whether a miracle would be forthcoming? For instance, what of Matthew’s observation that when Jesus went to His own country, He “did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief” (Matthew 13:58)? Notice that the text cannot be correlating the presence of the miraculous with the presence of belief. After all, “not many” implies that **some** miracles were performed—even though unbelief was rampant. The point that Matthew was making, therefore, was that when Jesus performed a few miracles to authenticate His oral claim to deity, the evidence was rejected, making it superfluous for Christ to offer any further miraculous demonstrations. Albert Barnes explained this matter succinctly:

We are not to suppose that his [Jesus—DM] **power** was limited by the belief or unbelief of men; but they were so **prejudiced**, so set against him, that they were not in a condition to **judge of evidence** and to be convinced. ... It would have been of no use, therefore, in proving **to them** that he was from God, to have worked miracles. ... He gave sufficient proof of his mission, and left them in their chosen unbelief without excuse (1956, p. 150, emp. in orig.).

Jesus was simply doing what He instructed the Twelve to do: “whatsoever place shall not receive you, and they hear you not, ...shake off the dust that is under your feet” (Mark 6:11). He also had said: “[N]either cast your pearls before the swine” (Matthew 7:6). If performing additional miracles would have confirmed the Word, Jesus would have performed them.

John actually settled this question for the unbiased searcher. He worded the thematic statement of his Gospel record in the following words: “Many other **signs** therefore did Jesus in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book: but these are written, **that ye may believe** that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye may have life in His name” (John 20:30-31, emp. added). John said that belief occurs **after** the miracle—not before, in order to receive a miracle! The New Testament teaches the very opposite of those who claim that miracles occur today. They say a person must have faith **before** he or she can receive a miracle. The New Testament teaches that miracles were performed to authenticate the divine origin of the speaker’s message and/or identity. The message, in turn, generated faith in the hearer (cf. Romans 10:17). Hence, **miracles preceded faith**. Even tongue-speaking was designed to convince the **unbeliever** to give heed to the message (1 Corinthians 14:22).

What About Elders?

Some have suggested that James 5:14-15 indicates that elders can heal people today. But James refers to the first century phenomenon of supernatural healing that is mentioned as one of the gifts available to the first century church (1 Corinthians 12:9,30; see also Mark 6:13). Yet, as demonstrated above, all such miraculous gifts have ceased. Elders in the first century churches would have acquired the ability to heal by receiving the laying on of the apostles’ hands. The olive oil, though used medicinally in the first century, was merely a symbol of Christ’s power to heal, which the elders would have applied to the sick person as they prayed for God to heal the individual. The miraculous healing was not imparted by either the oil or the elders’ hands, but by “the prayer of faith” (vs. 15). Such miraculous intervention on God’s part would have been immediate with complete and full recovery. Those who believe these verses apply today are inevitably stymied when the sick individual is not instantaneously healed, and then must resort to excuses and unscriptural explanations. It is obvious from the text that the illness referred to is a **life-threatening one**, since “save” in verse 15 refers, not to spiritual salvation, but to physical salvation, i.e., he will be made well (cf. “the Lord will raise him up”). When they bring elders to pray over a person who has been diagnosed with terminal cancer, does he recover? What if the elders pray over and anoint a person who lost his hand or arm in an accident? Will his arm be restored? Again, the desire to have miraculous healing in the church today fails completely to grasp why healing occurred in Bible times: not merely to make people well, but to spotlight the validity of God’s Word as conveyed by His emissaries.

SUMMARY

A good summary passage that pinpoints precisely the purpose of miracles throughout the Bible is seen in the incident concerning the widow of Zarephath to whom Elijah was sent for assistance in surviving the famine during the reign of King Ahab. When her son's serious illness culminated in his death, Elijah brought the boy back to life, raising him from the dead. Her subsequent verbal observation summarizes succinctly the function of the miraculous: "Now by this I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the LORD in your mouth is the truth" (1 Kings 17:24). The miracle fulfilled its intended purpose: to verify that, as a genuine emissary of the one true God, Elijah was a communicator of God's Word. The restoration of the life of her son—though magnificent and thrilling in itself—was secondary to the verified realization that Elijah was a legitimate communicator of the Word of the one true God.

THE DURATION OF MIRACLES

These observations bring us to a third extremely critical realization: once God revealed the entirety of the information that He wished to make available to mankind (later contained in what we call the New Testament), the need for miraculous confirmation of the oral Word came to an end. Now, people can sit down with a New Testament, the written Word of God, and, with honest and diligent study, conclude that it is God's Word. Many preachers and teachers today have failed to acknowledge this crucial biblical factor. They fail to face the fact that we have absolutely no need for the miraculous. Since the purpose of miracles has been achieved, the miracles, themselves, have ceased. I repeat: the Bible teaches that miracles are no longer necessary. We have everything we need to function in this life, to be pleasing to God, and to survive spiritually (2 Peter 1:3). Spiritual maturity is now within the grasp of every single individual who chooses to access the means to maturity—the written Word of God. To insist that we have need for the miraculous today is to undermine, and to cast aspersions upon, the all-sufficiency of God's Word (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:22; 2 Timothy 3:16-17).

The most detailed treatment of the phenomena of miracles in the New Testament, including tongue-speaking, healing, and prophecy, is 1 Corinthians 12, 13, and 14. These three chapters were written to Christians at Corinth because miracles were being abused and misused. Chapter 12 defines the miracles. Chapter 13 indicates their duration. Chapter 14 explains their disposition. In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul argued that the body (the church) should function harmoniously by using miraculous gifts properly. In 1 Corinthians 13, Paul argued that love is a more excellent attribute than miraculous gifts. After all, miraculous gifts (i.e., prophecy, tongue-speaking, supernatural knowledge, etc.) were going to fail, cease, vanish, and be done away (13:8). These miraculous gifts are identified in the text with the expression "in part" (13:9-10). The "in part," or miraculous, would cease and be done away when the "perfect" had come. But to what does the "perfect" refer?

The Greek word translated "perfect" is *teleios*. The term does not refer to "perfect" in the sense typically understood by the average modern English reader, i.e., to be sinless. Following this faulty notion, some have concluded that the "perfect" refers to Jesus—since He has been the only perfect person. Other interpretations apply "perfect" to heaven (the only perfect place that will be free of sin and imperfection), or Christian maturity and perfect love (the perfect condition or quality). But, in context, Paul was not contrasting qualities or places. He was contrasting quantities, i.e., those things that were incomplete and partial (miraculous gifts) with that which would be total and complete (the fully revealed Word of God). The inaccuracy of these interpretations is seen further in the Greek definition of *teleios*. The word refers to totality, that which is whole, brought to its end, finished, and lacking nothing necessary to completeness (Delling, 1972, 8:73; Arndt and Gingrich, 1957, p. 816; Thayer, 1901, p. 618). When referring to persons, *teleios* refers to being full-grown, adult, and mature (Arndt and Gingrich, 1957, p. 817; Thayer, 1977, p. 618). Used in its neuter form, Paul was referring to a thing—not a person—something that, when completed or finished, would replace the incomplete or partial, i.e., the miraculous gifts—which clearly had only temporary significance. Commenting on the abolition of the miraculous gifts of prophecy and supernatural knowledge (mentioned in vss. 8 and 9), W.R. Nicoll observed that "these charisms are **partial** in scope, and therefore temporary: the **fragmentary** gives place to the **complete**" (1900, 2:900, emp. added). Kenneth Wuest agreed: "In 1 Corinthians 13:10, the word means 'complete,' and is contrasted to that which is incomplete" (1943a, pp. 117-118). Whereas James used the term *teleios* to refer to the all-sufficiency of God's Word in its ability to achieve everything it was intended to do (James 1:25), the exegete is forced to conclude that Paul's use of "perfect" referred to the completed revelation or totally revealed New Testament Scriptures. The revelation of God's will was completed in its entirety when the final book of the New Testament, Revelation, was written by John prior to A.D. 100.

Paul offered a useful illustration to clarify his point. When the church possessed only bits and pieces of God's will, as revealed through scattered miraculous gifts and the gradual production, between approximately A.D. 57 and A.D. 95, of the written documents from the inspired writers of the New Testament, it could not achieve full spiritual maturity. It therefore was like a child (13:11). It lacked the necessary constituent elements to reach spiritual adulthood. However, when the totality of God's will, which became the New Testament, had been revealed, the church then had the means available to become "a man" (13:11). Once the church had access to all of God's written Word, the means by which the Word was given (i.e., miraculous gifts) would be obsolete, useless, and therefore "put away" (13:11). Notice that in this illustration, Paul likened miracles to "childish things" (13:11). In other words, miracles were the spiritual equivalents of pacifiers that were necessary while the church was in a

state of infancy. Now that the church has access to “all truth” (John 16:13), the use of tongue-speaking and other miraculous enhancements in the church today would be comparable to an adult man or woman sucking on a pacifier!

Paul then explained his point by making a contrast between the initial necessity of miracles to reveal and confirm God’s Word, and the idea of looking through a clouded mirror (see Workman, 1983, p. 8). Once the entire contents of the New Testament had been revealed, the miraculous gifts no longer would be necessary. Having all of God’s revealed Word would enable one to be face to face with that Word rather than “looking through a clouded mirror,” i.e., having partial access. Paul wrote (13:11): “Now I know in part [i.e., my knowledge of God’s revelation is incomplete and partial due to limited access via the miraculous element—DM], but then [i.e., when all of God’s Word is revealed—DM] shall I know fully even as also I was fully known [i.e., I shall be made to know or taught thoroughly (which is the figure of speech known as heterosis of the verb in which the intransitive is put for the transitive—see Bullinger, 1898, p. 512)—DM].”

Paul made essentially the same point to the Ephesians that he made to the Corinthians. Miracles—the “gifts” given by Christ (Ephesians 4:8)—were to last “till the unity of **the** faith and **the** knowledge of the Son of God” (Ephesians 4:13, emp. added). Two significant observations emerge from this latter verse. First, the word translated “till” (Middle English for “until”) is *mechri*, and was used as a conjunction to indicate the *terminus ad quem* [finishing point] of the miraculous offices (mentioned in vs. 11) bestowed as gifts by Christ. [For treatments of the use of *mechri* in this verse, see Thayer, 1977, p. 408; Arndt and Gingrich, 1957, p. 517; Moulton and Milligan, 1982, p. 407; Blass, et al., 1961, pp. 193-194; Robertson, 1934, pp. 974-975; Dana and Mantey, 1927, p. 281; see also the use of the term in Mark 13:30 and Galatians 4:19]. Nicoll observed: “The statement of the great object of Christ’s gifts and the provision made by Him for its fulfillment is now followed by a statement of the **time** this provision and the consequent service are to last” (1900, 3:332, emp. in orig.). Paul was “[s]pecifying the **time** up to which this ministry and impartation of gifts are to last” (Vincent, 1890, p. 390, emp. added).

Second, the phrase “the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God” often is misunderstood to refer to the eventual **unifying** of all believers in Christ. But this conclusion cannot be correct. Both Scripture and common sense dispel such a notion. Complete unity within Christendom will never occur. Those who profess affiliation with Christianity are in a hopeless state of disunity. Catholicism and Protestant denominationalism are fractured into a plethora of factions and splinter groups—literally thousands of divisions and disagreements. Besides, Protestant denominationalism did not exist in the New Testament era, and the New Testament neither countenances nor legitimizes any such “manifestation” of Christianity. Nor will unity ever be achieved even within churches of Christ. The first-century congregations did not attain complete internal unity. Nor have the post first-century congregations achieved unity within.

In contrast with this interpretation, notice the use of the articles in the phrases: “**the** faith” and “**the** knowledge.” Contextually, Paul was referring to **the system of faith** alluded to so often in the New Testament. Jude urged his readers to “contend earnestly for **the** faith” (Jude 3). Paul referred to himself when he quoted others as saying, “He that once persecuted us now preacheth **the** faith of which he once made havoc” (Galatians 1:23). Luke reported that “a great company of the priests were obedient to **the** faith” (Acts 6:7). Elymas sought to “turn aside the proconsul from **the** faith” (Acts 13:8). The early disciples were exhorted to “continue in **the** faith” (Acts 14:22). Due to Paul’s repeat visits in Lycaonia, “the churches were strengthened in **the** faith” (Acts 16:5).

So “the faith” and “the knowledge” refer to the **completed body of information** that constitutes the Christian religion. Indeed, eight verses earlier (Ephesians 4:5), Paul already had referred to “the faith” as the summation and totality of Christian doctrine—now situated in the repository of the New Testament. An honest exegete is driven to conclude that once the precepts of New Testament Christianity were revealed on Earth, the miraculous element no longer was necessary. Miracles lasted until “the faith” was completely revealed. They had served their purpose, in the same way that scaffolding is useful while a building is under construction. However, once construction is complete, the scaffolding is removed and discarded as unnecessary and superfluous paraphernalia.

THE TEMPORARY NATURE OF MIRACLES IN CORINTH AND EPHESUS	
1 Corinthians 12-14	Ephesians 4
“Gifts” (12:4,9, 28,30,31)	“Gifts” (4:7-8)
“no schism in the body” (12:25)	“joined and knit together” (4:16)
“one body, many members” (12:12,14,18-20,27)	“whole body, every part” (4:16)
“apostles, prophets, teachers” (12:29)	“apostles, prophets, pastor-teachers” (4:11)
“prophecies, knowledge” (13:8)	“prophets, evangelists, pastor-teachers” (4:11)

"fail, cease, vanish, done away" (13:8-10)	"until" (4:13) "we come to the unity of the faith" (4:13)
"when perfect comes" (13:10)	"the knowledge/the fullness of Christ" (4:13)
"shall know" (13:12)	"the knowledge/the fullness of Christ" (4:13)
"child" (13:11)	"children" (4:14)
"man" (13:11)	"man" (4:13)
"put away childish things" (13:11)	"grow up" (4:15)
"love" (13:1-8)	"love" (4:15-16)
"edification of the church" (14:3-5,12,17)	"edifying the body of Christ" (4:12)

THE DISPLAY AND DISPOSITION OF MIRACLES

Fourth, the actual exercise of miraculous gifts by Christians is addressed in 1 Corinthians 14. In this context, Paul used the term "gifts" (*charismata*, from *charisma*) in a technical sense (like *pneumatika*) to refer to miraculous abilities, designated by Thayer "extraordinary powers...by the Holy Spirit" (1901, p. 667, emp. added; cf. Arndt and Gingrich, 1957, p. 887). Hans Conzelmann stated that the term indicated that "[t]he operations are **supernatural**" and of "**supernatural** potency" (1974, 9:405, emp. added). [The word is so used in the Pauline corpus in 10 of its 16 occurrences (Romans 1:11; 12:6; 1 Corinthians 1:7; 12:4,9,28,30,31; 1 Timothy 4:14; 2 Timothy 1:6). The only other occurrence of the word in the New Testament was Peter's comparable use, i.e., to refer to supernatural ability (1 Peter 4:10)—see Moulton, et al., 1978, p. 1005]. In the Corinthian context of chapter 14, special attention was given by Paul to two of the miraculous gifts in particular: prophecy and tongue-speaking. Several relevant points occur with regard to the gift of tongue-speaking that help one to understand both the temporary nature of miracles as well as their irrelevance to a contemporary pursuit and practice of New Testament Christianity.

Tongue-Speaking

First, in 1 Corinthians 14, the term "unknown" (in regard to tongues) was italicized in the KJV because it does not appear in the original Greek text (14:2,4,13-14,19,27). By inserting this word into their translation, the translators were attempting to aid the English reader. They undoubtedly were hoping to convey the idea that the languages to which Paul referred were **unknown** to the speaker, i.e., the speaker had no prior training by which to learn or know the language. He spoke the language strictly by God's miraculous empowerment. "Unknown" certainly was not intended to convey the idea that the tongues were unknown **to all humans** and, as such, were non-earthly, non-human languages.

Second, the events reported at the very beginning of the Christian religion (Acts 2) set the precedent for understanding that tongue-speaking entailed no more than the ability to speak a foreign human language (which the speaker had not studied) to people from a variety of geographical locales (e.g., Parthians, Medes, Arabians—Acts 2:9-11). The unbiased Bible student must conclude that what is described in detail in Acts 2 is the same phenomenon alluded to in 1 Corinthians 14. All tongue-speaking in the Bible consisted of known human languages (ideally known to the very audience being addressed) that were unknown (i.e., unstudied, unlearned) by the one who was speaking the language.

Third, there is simply no such thing as an "ecstatic utterance" in the New Testament. The tongue-speaking of 1 Corinthians 14 entailed human language—not incoherent gibberish. A simple reading of the chapter demonstrates that known human languages are under consideration. For example, Paul paralleled tongue-speaking with the use of the trumpet in warfare. If the bugler sounded meaningless noise, the military would be thrown into confusion. It was imperative for the bugler to blow the proper notes and tones, i.e., meaningful musical "language," so that the army would understand what was being communicated (whether to charge, engage, or retreat). Sound without sense fails to achieve the very purpose of tongue-speaking. Paul then stated:

So likewise ye, unless ye utter by the tongue speech easy to be understood, how shall it be known what is spoken? for ye will be speaking into the air. There are, it may be, so many kinds of languages **in the world**, and no kind is without signification. If then I know not the meaning of the language, I shall be to him that speaketh a barbarian, and he that speaketh will be a barbarian unto me (1 Corinthians 14:9-11, emp. added).

Obviously, Paul was referring to human languages—those that exist "in the world." He envisioned a scenario where two individuals, who spoke different languages, are attempting to communicate with each other. If one speaks in Spanish and the other in German, as they attempt to speak to one another, each would be a "foreigner" to the other. Neither would understand what the other was attempting to say. Hence the need for tongue-speaking, i.e., the ability to speak human language unknown to the speaker but known to the recipient.

Later in the chapter, Paul quoted Isaiah 28:11-12 where God threatened the Israelites with the fact that their failure to listen to Him (by means of the words spoken by His prophets) meant that He soon would be communicating to them through the language of their Assyrian conquerors—conquerors whom God would send against them. This powerful illustration presupposes the fact that in both Isaiah and 1 Corinthians, human languages are under consideration. After quoting Isaiah, Paul drew the conclusion that tongue-speaking was intended by God to be directed to **unbelievers**. Why? Because it would prove to the unbeliever that the tongue-speaker, who did not possess the natural ability to speak that language, was being empowered by God to speak in the language spoken by the unbeliever. The unbeliever would recognize the divine origin of the tongue-speaker's ability, and thereby be willing to consider the words being spoken as the instructions of God. Again, an examination of 1 Corinthians 14 yields the result that no contextual justification exists for drawing the conclusion that the Bible refers to, let alone endorses, the notion of "**ecstatic**" speech.

Tongues of Angels?

But what about Paul's passing reference to the "tongues of angels" in 1 Corinthians 13:1? Would not this reference prove that tongue-speaking could involve languages beyond those spoken by humans? In the first place, consider the role, purpose, and activity of angels described in the Bible. The word "angel" (Greek—*angelos*; Hebrew—*malak*) simply means "messenger"—one who "speaks and acts in the place of the one who has sent him" (Bietenhard, 1975, 1:101; Botterweck, et al., 1997, 8:308; Grundmann, 1964, 1:74ff; Gesenius, 1847, p. 475; Arndt and Gingrich, 1957, p. 7). It does not mean merely "to send," but rather "to send a messenger/message" (Ringgren, 1997, 8:310). It is true that angels in both the Old and New Testaments carried out a wide range of activities beyond message-bearing, including: worshipping God (Revelation 5:11-12); comforting, aiding, and protecting (Daniel 6:22; Matthew 4:11; Luke 22:43; Acts 5:19; Hebrews 1:14); and executing judgment and inflicting punishment and death (e.g., Matthew 13:49; Acts 12:23). But it still remains true to say that the meaning of the term "angel" is a messenger—one who communicates a spoken message. Therefore, their principal role in God's scheme of things was to function as messengers to humans (Grundmann, 1964, 1:74). Consequently, angels always are represented in Scripture as communicating in human language.

In the second place, what logical reason exists for humans to speak in an alleged "angelic" language that is different from human language? What would be the spiritual benefit? The Bible certainly makes no provision for humans to communicate with angels in such a language, nor would there be any need for an angel to communicate to a human in a non-earthly language. The whole point of 1 Corinthians 12-13 was to stress the need to function in the church in ways that were meaningful and understandable. Since God, by His very nature, never would do anything that is superfluous, unnecessary, or frivolous, it follows that He would not bestow upon a human being the ability to speak in a non-human language. The ability would serve no purpose! The Bible simply offers no rationale nor justification for identifying the "tongues of angels" in 1 Corinthians 13:1 with some heavenly, otherworldly, non-earthly languages.

In the third place, if, in fact, the "tongues of angels" refers to known human languages, what was Paul's point? Since angels were God's appointed spokesmen, they naturally would perform their assignment in such a way that God would be represented as He would want to be. God's own angelic emissaries would have complied with their responsibility in such a way and manner that they would have God's approval. In other words, angels would naturally articulate God's message as well as it could be expressed (i.e., perfectly). When God inspired mere humans to communicate His will, He integrated their own educational background, stylistic idiosyncrasies, and vocabulary into their oral and literary productions. No such need would have existed for angels. Their communications would have been unfiltered through human agency. Their announcements would have been the epitome and pinnacle of eloquence and oratorical skill.

Perhaps, then, Paul was not drawing a contrast between human and nonhuman languages at all. Before referring to the "tongues of angels," he referred to "the tongues of men." Why would Paul say, "Though I speak with the tongues of men"? After all, isn't that precisely what all adult humans do? We humans speak at least one human language! Paul must have been referring, then, not to the ability to speak a human language, but to the ability to speak **all** human languages. No tongue-speaker in the first-century church had the ability to speak all human languages. In fact, the textual evidence indicates that most tongue-speakers probably had the ability to speak only one human language—which he, himself, did not understand—thus necessitating the need for an inspired interpreter (1 Corinthians 12:30; 14:26-28). Paul could apparently speak more languages than any of the others (1 Corinthians 14:18). If the "tongues of men" referred to the number of human languages (rather than referring to the ability to speak a human language), then the "tongues of angels" would refer—not to the ability to speak an angelic language—but to the ability to speak human languages **the way angels do**.

Here, then, would have been Paul's point: even if a tongue-speaker could speak every human language known to man, and even if that tongue-speaker could speak those human languages with the efficiency, skill, and perfection that God's angelic messengers have spoken them in history, without love, the ability would be wasted. With this understanding of the text, Paul was not contrasting human with nonhuman language. He was encompassing both the quantity (if I could speak all human languages) and the quality (if I could speak them perfectly) of speaking human language.

One final point on the matter of the “tongues of angels” merits mention. Even if the expression actually refers to angelic tongues that are nonhuman, it still is likely that tongue-speakers were incapable of speaking such languages. Why? Paul was speaking hypothetically and hyperbolically. No human being (with the exception of perhaps Jesus) has ever been able to speak in all human languages. For Paul to suggest such was to pose a hypothetical situation. It was to exaggerate the facts. So Paul’s meaning was: “even if I were capable of speaking all human languages—which I’m not.” Likewise, no human being has ever been able to speak the tongues of angels. So Paul’s meaning was: “even if I were capable of speaking the languages of angels—which I’m not.” This conclusion is supported further by the verse that follows the reference to the “tongues of angels.” There, Paul used two additional hypothetical events when he said, “if I...know all mysteries and all knowledge” and “if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains” (1 Corinthians 13:2). But no one on the planet (with the exception of deity) has understood all mysteries and all knowledge, nor has had faith that could literally remove mountains. Again, Paul was merely saying, “even if I could do such things—which I can’t.”

Fourth, Paul stated very clearly that tongue-speaking was a sign to **unbelievers**—not believers (14:22). Tongue-speaking was to be done in **their** presence, to convince **them** of the truth being spoken, i.e., to confirm the Word. The tongue-speaking being practiced today is done in the presence of those who **already believe** that tongue-speaking is occurring and, when an unbeliever, who is skeptical of the genuineness of the activity, makes an appearance in such an assembly, the claim often is made that tongue-speaking cannot occur because of the presence of unbelief. Once again, the New Testament teaches the very opposite of those who claim the ability to speak in tongues today.

Fifth, the recipient of a miraculous gift in the New Testament could control himself (14:32). He was not overwhelmed by the Holy Spirit so that he began to babble or flail about. Tongue-speaking today is frequently practiced in a setting where the individuals who claim to be exercising the gift are speaking uncontrollably at the very time that others are either doing the same thing or engaging in some other action. This overlapping activity is in direct violation of three of Paul’s commands: (1) that each individual take their turn one at a time; (2) that no more than three tongue-speakers speak per service; and (3) that tongue-speakers remain silent if no interpreter is present (14:27-28).

The claim by many today to be able to speak in tongues is simply out of harmony with New Testament teaching. Anyone can babble, make up sounds, and claim he or she is speaking in tongues. But such conduct is no **sign** today. It is precisely the same phenomenon that pagan religions have practiced through the centuries. In the New Testament, however, no one questioned the authenticity of tongue-speaking. Why? The speaker was speaking a known human language that could be understood by those present who knew that language and knew that that particular speaker did not know that language beforehand. As McGarvey observed about Acts 2: “Not only did the apostles speak in foreign languages that were understood by the hearers, some understanding one and some another, but the fact that this was done by Galileans, who knew only their mother tongue, was the one significant fact that gave to Peter’s speech which followed all of its power over the multitude” (1910, p. 318). If and when self-proclaimed tongue-speakers today demonstrate that genuine New Testament gift, their message could be accepted as being from God. But no one today has demonstrated that genuine New Testament gift.

Holy Spirit Baptism

Where does the baptism of the Holy Spirit fit into this discussion? Today’s alleged practitioners typically associate the expression “Holy Spirit baptism” with the phenomenon that enables the believer to speak in tongues, heal someone, or work other miracles. In other words, Holy Spirit baptism is simply a generic reference to miraculous empowerment. Anyone who can speak in a tongue or perform any other miraculous action is said to have been baptized in the Holy Spirit. He is said to be “Spirit-filled.” However, it might surprise the reader to find that the Bible alludes to Holy Spirit baptism in a very narrow, specialized, even technical sense. Just because a person could speak in tongues or work miracles did not necessarily mean he had been baptized in the Holy Spirit.

The very first allusion to Holy Spirit baptism in the New Testament is John’s statement: “I indeed baptize you in water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me...will **baptize you in the Holy Spirit**” (Matthew 3:11, emp. added). From this statement alone, one might be tempted to assume that Christians **in general** would be baptized in the Holy Spirit. But this assumption would be a premature conclusion. John was not addressing a Christian audience. He was speaking to Jews. Nothing in the context allows the interpreter to distinguish John’s intended recipients of the promise of Holy Spirit baptism—whether all humans, all Jews, all Christians, or merely some of those in one or more of these categories. Likewise, the exact recipients of the baptism of fire (i.e., hell) are not specified. However, as is often the case in the Bible, the specific recipients of this promise are clarified in later passages.

Just before His ascension, Jesus told the apostles to wait in Jerusalem until “clothed with power from on high” (Luke 24:49). In John chapters 14-16, Jesus made several specific promises to the apostles concerning the coming of the Spirit—the “Comforter” or “Helper” (*parakletos*)—upon them, to empower them to do the peculiar work of an apostle (i.e., to recall the words Jesus had spoken to them, to speak and write by inspiration, and to launch the Christian religion). If these verses apply to all Christians, then all Christians ought to have been

personally guided “into all the truth” (John 16:13), and thus would have absolutely no need of written Scripture (John 14:26). However, in context, these verses clearly refer to **the apostolic office**.

Jesus further clarified the application of Holy Spirit baptism when He told the apostles that the earlier statement made in Luke 24:49 applied to **them**, and would come to pass “not many days hence” (Acts 1:4-5). Jesus also stated that the “power” that they would receive would be from the Holy Spirit, which would enable them to witness to the world what they had experienced by being with Jesus (Acts 1:8). Notice very carefully that on this occasion Jesus made an explicit reference to the very statement that John had uttered previously in Matthew 3: “for John indeed baptized with water; but **ye** [apostles—DM] shall be **baptized in the Holy Spirit** not many days hence” (Acts 1:5, emp. added). Jesus specifically and explicitly identified the Holy Spirit baptism that He would administer (in keeping with John’s prediction) would take place within a few days, and would be confined to the apostles.

All one need do is turn the page to see the promise of Holy Spirit baptism achieve dramatic and climactic fulfillment in Acts 2 when the Spirit was poured out only upon the apostles. The antecedent of “they” in Acts 2:4 is “the apostles” in Acts 1:26. The apostles were the ones who spoke in tongues and taught the people. **They** were the recipients of the baptism of the Holy Spirit, as is evident from the following contextual indicators: (1) “are not all these that speak **Galileans?**” (2:7); (2) “Peter, standing up with **the eleven**” (2:14); (3) “they...said unto Peter and the rest of **the apostles**” (2:37); (4) Peter quoted Joel 2:28-32 and applied it to that occasion as proof that **the apostles** were not intoxicated; and (5) the text even states explicitly that the signs and wonders were “done through **the apostles**” (2:43). This pattern continues in the book of Acts: “And by the hands of **the apostles** were many signs and wonders wrought among the people” (5:12); “the Lord, who bare witness unto the word of his grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by **their hands**” (14:3); “what signs and wonders God had wrought... through **them**” (15:12).

The next direct reference to Holy Spirit baptism consisted of Peter describing the experience of the Gentiles in Acts 10. Referring to their empowerment to speak in tongues, Peter explicitly identified it as being comparable to the experience of the apostles in Acts 2. Note his explanation: “And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them, even as on **us** [apostles—DM] at the beginning. And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he said, John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized in the Holy Spirit. If then God gave unto them the like gift as he did also unto **us** [apostles—DM]...” (Acts 11:15-17, emp. added). Peter unmistakably linked the baptism of the Holy Spirit predicted by John in Matthew 3:11, and applied by Jesus to the apostles in Acts 1:5, with the unique and exclusive bestowal of the same on the first Gentile candidates of salvation. If the baptism of the Holy Spirit had occurred between Acts 2 and Acts 10, why did Peter compare the Gentiles’ experience with the experience of the **apostles**—rather than comparing it with many other Christians who allegedly would have received it during the intervening years? The answer lies in the fact that the baptism of the Holy Spirit did not occur during the intervening years. Baptism of the Holy Spirit was a unique and infrequent occurrence that came directly from deity.

This understanding harmonizes with additional facts. The great prophecy of the Old Testament, which made special reference to the coming New Testament era as the dispensation of the Spirit, incorporated a most noteworthy expression. God declared, “I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh” (Joel 2:28). Peter repeated it on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:17). What did God mean by the expression “**all flesh**”? Members of the charismatic community insist that “all flesh” means “all **Christians**.” They maintain that every Christian can receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit. They claim that to narrow the application of the promise of Holy Spirit baptism to a select group of individuals would deprive all other Christians of the opportunity to receive miraculous power. However, upon what **biblical** basis may such a claim be made?

Those who claim the presence of miraculous gifts are guilty of the very thing they condemn—narrowing the expression “all flesh.” Surely no one would take the position that it means all **animal** flesh—since animals are not the recipients of God’s spiritual provisions. Nor would anyone contend that it means all **human** flesh—since all wicked, disobedient, unbelieving people would hardly expect, let alone desire, to receive God’s Spirit. Those who agree that the expression “all flesh” must undoubtedly be qualified to exclude the animals and the unbelieving will nonetheless insist that narrowing the meaning to less than “all Christians” is unjustifiable.

To understand the proper meaning and application of the expression “all flesh,” one must examine the **biblical** use of the expression. “All flesh” often is used in the Bible to refer to the bulk of humanity (e.g., Genesis 6:12-13). It also can include all animal flesh (e.g., Genesis 6:17,19). However, with God’s special utilization of the descendants of Abraham in His scheme of redemption, “all flesh” often has the more technical meaning of “all **nationalities**.” The primary reason for this specialized use of the expression was due to the fact that most of the Old Testament was written against the backdrop of the presence of the nation of Israel. God is certainly “no respecter of persons” (Romans 2:11; Ephesians 6:9; Colossians 3:25; 1 Peter 1:17; Acts 10:34-35). He does not favor one ethnic group over another. However, since His redemptive intention included bringing Jesus into the world for the benefit of all, someone had to be selected through whom Jesus’ arrival might be achieved. That man was Abraham (Galatians 3:8,16) and, consequently, his descendants.

As a result of this circumstance, the Jewish writers of the Bible frequently divided humanity into **only two** racial groupings, i.e., Jew and non-Jew (Gentile). For example, in what is obviously a strongly Messianic passage, Isaiah

(the “Messianic prophet”) predicted the coming of John the baptizer who would prepare the way for Jesus. He exclaimed: “The glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together” (40:5). The reference to “all flesh” was an unmistakable reference to the availability of salvation to both Jew and Gentile in the Christian era, as evinced by Luke’s quotation of the passage (Luke 3:6). The same is true in another prophecy that Isaiah uttered pertaining to the coming Christian era: “All flesh shall come to worship before Me” (Isaiah 66:23). The Jews of Isaiah’s day would not have been very pleased with Isaiah’s declarations, since they most certainly would have understood him to be predicting the incorporation of Gentiles into God’s favor—which the Jews felt they alone enjoyed.

Paul cinched the meaning of “all flesh” in his premiere treatise on justification by faith. He drew a clear distinction between the two ethnic categories by first declaring the sins of the Gentiles (Romans 1:18-32) and then declaring the sins of the Jews (Romans 2:1-3:8). Notice carefully his concluding remarks as he brought the first section of the book to its climax: “What then? are **we** [the Jews—DM] better than **they** [the Gentiles—DM]? No, in no wise: for we before laid to the charge **both** of Jews and Greeks, that they are **all** under sin” (Romans 3:9, emp. added). He then quoted a series of Old Testament verses, which verified his emphasis upon the two (and only two) categories of human flesh, using two significant terms: “none” and “all.” “None” means neither Jew nor Gentile. “All” means both Jew and Gentile. Then he articulated his grand and climactic conclusion: “because by the works of the law shall **no flesh** be justified” (Romans 3:20, emp. added). “No flesh” referred to Jew and Gentile. In other words, neither Jew nor Gentile could be justified by law alone. “No flesh” and “all flesh” were technical allusions to the two **categories** of human flesh, i.e., Jew and non-Jew (cf. John 17:2).

Observe, then, that the first recipients of Holy Spirit baptism, as we have seen, were the **Jewish** apostles on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2. It equipped them to establish the church and to write, speak, and confirm inspired truth. The second recipients of Holy Spirit baptism were the **Gentile** members of the household of Cornelius in Acts 10. It convinced Jewish Christians that Gentiles were fit prospects for the reception of the Gospel, and valid candidates for entrance into the kingdom (Acts 10:34-35,45; 11:18). So Joel’s statement, that God would pour out His Spirit on “all flesh,” applied to the outpouring on **Jews** in Acts 2 and on **Gentiles** in Acts 10. The only other conceivable occurrence of Holy Spirit baptism would have been Paul, who would have received direct miraculous ability from God as well. His reception was obviously unique because (1) he was not an apostle when the Twelve received the Spirit, and (2) he was “one born out of due time” (1 Corinthians 15:8). Holy Spirit baptism, then, filled two unique and exclusive purposes: (1) to prepare the apostles for their apostolic (not Christian) roles, and (2) to provide divine demonstration that Gentiles were to be allowed to become Christians.

One additional consideration deserves comment regarding Joel’s prophecy. If “all flesh” referred exclusively to the Jewish apostles and the first Gentile converts, why did Joel include “sons, daughters, old men, young men, servants, and handmaids” in the reception of God’s Spirit (Joel 2:28-29)? As was typical of Hebrew prophecy, progressive, sequential, and complete fulfillment would be forthcoming. A prophecy could possess several features that found fulfillment in a variety of circumstances. It is apparent, on the basis of the references already discussed (e.g., Matthew 3:11; Acts 1:5; 11:15-17), that only the **first part** of Joel’s prophecy was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost. The “last days” (Acts 2:17) referred to the **entire** Christian dispensation from Pentecost to the Judgment. The outpouring of the Spirit, therefore, would include more than just the baptism of the Holy Spirit that was confined to the Jewish apostles on Pentecost and the Gentiles a few years later. Though the peculiar phenomenon of Holy Spirit baptism was limited to those two specific ethnic groups (i.e., the twelve apostles and the household of Cornelius), **additional** activity of the Spirit would include the impartation of miraculous gifts through the laying on of the apostles’ hands (discussed below). This conclusion is evident from the fact that no “**daughters**” or “**handmaids**” received Holy Spirit baptism on Pentecost. Nor is there any evidence of the occurrence of “**dreams**” or “**visions**” on Pentecost. With the Holy Spirit’s expanded presence in the instigation of Christianity in the first century came the eventual impartation of miraculous ability separate and apart from Holy Spirit baptism. The broadened fulfillment of Joel’s prophecy (subsequent to Acts 2) is seen in the references to Philip’s **daughters** who prophesied (Acts 21:9) and in the occurrence of **visions** (Acts 9:10; 10:3,10; 16:9). However, these miraculous manifestations, though included in Joel’s prophecy, were not instances of Holy Spirit baptism. The common link in the Holy Spirit’s outpouring on Pentecost and the manifestations of the Spirit thereafter was the baptism of the Holy Spirit on **the apostles**—who were the keys to the further distribution of miraculous power in the early years of Christianity.

1 Corinthians 12:13

But what about Paul’s statement to the Corinthians? He wrote: “For in one Spirit were we all baptized into one body...and were all made to drink of one Spirit” (1 Corinthians 12:13). Some have insisted that this verse teaches that the baptism of the Holy Spirit is imparted to **all Christians**. Careful analysis of the verse, however, demonstrates that Paul was not referring to the baptism of the Holy Spirit that was received only twice in the New Testament (if you omit Paul). If the Corinthians had been baptized in the Holy Spirit, Paul likely would have worded the verse: “We were all baptized in one Spirit into one body.” This wording would have made it plain that their baptism was Holy Spirit baptism. However, Paul connected “baptized” with “into one body,” and placed “in one Spirit” **before** both “baptized” and “into one body.” Did he mean to say that their baptism entailed being indwelt with the Spirit, or having the Spirit overwhelm (i.e., immerse) them, or come upon them, i.e., that the Holy Spirit, **Himself**, was what the Corinthians had received or been baptized in?

The grammar of the passage provides a decisive and definitive answer. The word “Spirit” is in the instrumental case in Greek, indicating personal agency. The personal agent in the passage who did the baptizing is the Holy Spirit. His baptizing resulted in the placement of the individuals into the one body of Christ. The verb is aorist, showing that Paul was referring to a once-for-all act in the past. Wuest explained: “It is not the baptism **with** the Spirit or **of** the Spirit, in the sense that the Holy Spirit is the element which is applied to us. It is the baptism **by** the Spirit. This baptism does not bring the Spirit to us in the sense that God places the Spirit **upon** or **in** us. Rather, this baptism brings the believer into vital union with Jesus Christ” (1943b, p. 86, emp. added). The Corinthians were the beneficiaries—not of the Spirit—but of the Spirit’s guidance or assistance. They were baptized **by** the Spirit (cf. KJV, NKJV, NASV, RSV, NIV).

Further grammatical evidence in the context supports this conclusion. Earlier in the chapter, Paul said that no person could say that Jesus is Lord “but in the Holy Spirit” (vs. 3). A person could say Jesus is Lord without being **in** the Spirit or having the Holy Spirit **in** or **on** him. But a person could not say Jesus is Lord if the Holy Spirit had not revealed such information about Jesus—as He did by empowering the apostles to produce written revelation. A few verses later, Paul pinpointed several gifts that were given “through the Spirit,” “according to the same Spirit,” and “in the same Spirit” (vss. 8-9, ASV). All three phrases are equivalent, and refer to the Holy Spirit’s **action**, not the **state of being** in the Holy Spirit. Paul’s summary of the section verifies that this meaning is intended: “But one and the same Spirit **works** all these things, **distributing to** each one individually as He wills” (vs. 11).

In view of these contextual details, one is forced to conclude that in verse 13, Paul could be referring to no other baptism than the baptism enjoined by Christ in the Great Commission, i.e., the “one baptism” of Ephesians 4:5, the baptism which Paul, himself, administered to the Corinthians (Acts 18:8)—**water** baptism. The Holy Spirit was the agent through Whom Christ enjoined water baptism by means of the preached message. When a person complies with the instruction to be baptized in water, that person is baptized into the one body of Christ. Other verses in the New Testament confirm this understanding. Jesus announced: “[U]nless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God” (John 3:5). Jesus meant what Paul meant, that when one obeys the teaching of the Spirit to be baptized in water, he is granted entrance into the kingdom. Paul reiterated this same teaching on two other occasions. To the Ephesian church, he pointed out that Jesus gave His life for the church “that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word” (Ephesians 5:26). He meant that an individual is permitted to be a part of the cleansed church of Christ when he submits to water baptism in accordance with the Holy Spirit’s inspired Word. Likewise, Paul told young Titus that Jesus “saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit” (Titus 3:5). Again, he meant that one is saved (and hence added to the body) at the point of water immersion, in which spiritual renewal is extended by the Holy Spirit.

We are forced to conclude that 1 Corinthians 12:13 does not refer to Holy Spirit baptism (see also McGarvey, 1910, pp. 254-256, and Reese, 1976, p. 76). The two instances of Holy Spirit baptism previously discussed (i.e., in Acts 2 and 10) stand unmistakably in stark contrast with the baptism alluded to by Paul in 1 Corinthians 12:13. The Corinthian baptism placed the Corinthians into the body of Christ, i.e., at their conversion. But when the apostles were baptized in the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, they were **already** saved. When the household of Cornelius was baptized in the Holy Spirit, they were not yet saved and were inducted into the body of Christ only **after** Peter called for “water” (Acts 10:47-48).

Laying on of Hands

If Acts 2 and Acts 10 are the only instances of Holy Spirit baptism in the New Testament, how then do we account for the fact that many others in the New Testament performed miracles or spoke in tongues? If they were not recipients of Holy Spirit baptism, how did they get the ability? The New Testament dictates only one other way to receive miraculous capability: through the laying on of the apostles’ hands. Only the apostles possessed the ability to transfer miraculous capability to others. This phenomenon is described succinctly by Luke:

Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit. Now when Simon saw that **through the laying on of the apostles’ hands** the Holy Spirit was given, he offered them money, saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Spirit. But Peter said unto him, Thy silver perish with thee, because thou hast thought to obtain the gift of God with money. Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right before God” (Acts 8:17-21, emp. added).

This description establishes two important facts: (1) only the apostles had the ability to impart to others the ability to perform miracles; and (2) those other than the apostles who could perform miracles received their ability **indirectly** through the **apostles**—not **directly from God via Holy Spirit baptism**.

This fascinating feature of the existence of the miraculous in the first century makes it possible to understand how other individuals received their supernatural powers. For example, Philip, who was not an apostle, possessed the ability to perform miracles (Acts 8:6,13). If he was not an apostle, and he did not receive direct ability from God via baptism of the Holy Spirit, where, then, did he derive his ability? Luke informs us that Philip previously

received the laying on of the apostles' hands (Acts 6:5-6). Likewise, the first Christians in Ephesus were enabled to speak in tongues when the apostle Paul laid his hands on them (Acts 19:6). Even Timothy received his gift from the laying on of Paul's hands (2 Timothy 1:6).

Some have challenged the exclusivity of the role of the apostles in their unique ability to impart the miraculous element by calling attention to the admonition given by Paul to Timothy: "Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands **of the presbytery**" (1 Timothy 4:14, emp. added). Even though Paul plainly declared that the "gift of God" which Timothy possessed was conferred "through the laying on of my hands" (2 Timothy 1:6), how does one explain the fact that Paul also stated that Timothy's gift came through the presbytery (i.e., the eldership) as well? Once again, the grammar of the text provides the answer. In 2 Timothy 1:6, where Paul claimed sole credit for imparting the gift to Timothy, he employed the Greek preposition *dia* with the genitive, which means "through" or "by means of" (Machen, 1923, p. 41; Dana and Mantey, 1927, p. 101). However, in 1 Timothy 4:14, where Paul included the eldership in the action of impartation, he employed a completely different Greek preposition—*meta*. The root meaning of *meta* is "in the midst of" (Dana and Mantey, p. 107). It denotes the **attendant circumstances** of something that takes place—the **accompanying** phenomena (Arndt and Gingrich, 1957, pp. 510-511). It means "in association with" or "accompanied by" (Moule, 1959, p. 61; Thayer, 1901, p. 404; cf. Robertson, 1934, p. 611). In other words, Paul—as an apostle—imparted the miraculous gift to Timothy. It came from God through Paul. However, on that occasion, the local eldership of the church was present and participated with Paul in the event, lending their simultaneous support and accompanying commendation. After examining the grammatical data on the matter, Nicoll concluded: "[I]t was the imposition of hands by St. Paul that was the instrument used by God in the communication of the charisma to Timothy" (1900, 4:127; cf. Jamieson, et al., n.d., 2:414; Williams, 1960, p. 956). Consequently, 1 Timothy 4:14 provides no proof that miraculous capability could be received through other means in addition to apostolic imposition of hands and the two clear instances of Holy Spirit baptism.

CONCLUSION

In light of all the biblical data set forth in this study, certain conclusions are quite evident. Since there are no apostles living today, and since Holy Spirit baptism was unique to the apostles (Acts 2) and the first Gentile converts (Acts 10), there is no Holy Spirit baptism today. Likewise, there is no miraculous healing today. There are no tongue-speakers today. The miraculous element in the Christian religion was terminated by God near the close of the first century. Once the last apostle died, the means by which miraculous capability was made available was dissolved. With the completion of God's revelation to humanity, now available in the Bible, people living today have all that is needed to be complete and to enjoy the fullness of Christian existence (2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:3; Ephesians 4:14).

The alleged miracles and tongue-speaking of today simply do not measure up to the Bible's description of the miraculous. They are unverifiable, ambiguous, and counterfeit. Today's "divine healing" consists of vague, unseen, non-quantifiable aches and pains like arthritis and headaches. But in the New Testament, people were raised from the dead—even days after death (e.g., John 11:17). Severed body parts were instantly restored (e.g., Luke 22:50-51). People who had been **born** blind had their sight restored (e.g., John 9:1). Those lame **from birth** were empowered to walk (Acts 3:2). First-century miracles were not limited only to certain ailments and psychosomatic illnesses that could be cured through natural means, or by mental adjustments on the part of the infirm. Jesus healed "**all** kinds of sickness and **all** kinds of disease" (Matthew 4:23, emp. added). No disease or sickness was exempt in the New Testament (cf. Acts 28:8-9). Where are these instances today? When has anyone restored a severed limb lost in an accident? When has a self-proclaimed "faith-healer" raised anyone from the dead? Where are the miracle workers who have healed the blind, the crippled, the paralyzed, and those whose infirmities have been documented as having been in existence for many years (John 5:3,5)? Where are the televangelists who will go to the children's hospitals and rectify birth defects and childhood diseases? Where are those who have ingested poison or been bitten by a venomous snake and remained unharmed (Mark 16:18; Acts 28:3-5)? An honest searcher for the truth is forced to conclude that the miraculous age has passed.

But human beings always are looking for something new, something exciting, and something flashy. They grasp for the attractive and the appealing, they want the easy way out, and they want something that makes them **feel** religious and secure—without having to face up to personal responsibilities. Hence, there will always be those who, instead of searching the Scriptures to find out whether these things are so (Acts 17:11), will simply disengage their minds, their spiritual sense, and their ability to assess "the words of truth and reason" (Acts 26:25).

Genuine Christianity today consists of simply taking the written Word of God, and studying it carefully in order to learn what God expects of us: simple meditation and reflection upon the Word of God—no brass bands or circus theatrics, no flash of light, or dream, or vision, no sudden rush attributable to the Holy Spirit. The pathway to heaven consists of honest, intensive investigation of written revelation, and a life of diligent self-discipline and self-denial that strives to incorporate spiritual attributes into one's life—attributes like patience, compassion, kindness, humility, forgiveness, honesty, integrity, peace of soul, joy, and clean, moral living. There are no short cuts to spirituality. **The miraculous is no answer.** Even in the first century, miracles were not designed to develop these spiritual attributes.

Certainly, God loves us and has promised to care for us (e.g., Matthew 6:33). But His workings in the Universe and in our lives are undertaken today providentially through the natural laws that He set into motion. After the first century, He has not—and will not—violate His own purposes by interfering with these laws in order to perform a miracle. In the final analysis, we are under obligation to seek His assistance by listening to the instructions found in His written Word. Only words from God, then and now, will equip us and prepare us for eternity. As Peter said to Jesus, “Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the **words** of eternal life” (John 6:68, emp. added). Jesus said to the Father, “Sanctify them in the truth: thy **word** is truth” (John 17:17, emp. added). When Satan attempted to prod Jesus into performing a miracle, Jesus said to him, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every **word** that proceedeth out of the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4, emp. added).

[NOTE: To listen to an audio sermon on this subject, [click here](#).]

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