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# THE ENDING OF MIRACLES

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(Part 2)

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## QUESTIONS:

- 1) What is the longest section in the Bible about miraculous powers?
- 2) What can "*snake oil*" do for you?
- 3) For whose benefit were miraculous gifts given?
- 4) Did miraculous powers guarantee that people would become more spiritual? Did they guarantee people were saved?
- 5) What is the "*gift of knowledge*" (1 Cor 12:8)?
- 6) 1 Cor 13:8 says tongues shall "*cease*" but knowledge and prophecies will "*vanish away*." What's the difference between "*cease*" and "*vanish away*"?
- 7) What does an Olympic runner do when he crosses the finish line?
- 8) What were mirrors made out of before there was glass?

## INTRODUCTION

In the NT we read of many Christians who possessed miraculous abilities.

- They were foretold by Jesus (Mk 16:17-18)
- These abilities began on the day of Pentecost (Acts 11:15)
- They are stated as a fact (Mk 16:20; Heb 2:3-4)

## THE CORINTHIANS

The Bible has quite a bit to say about these miracles. The longest section found discussing this subject begins in:

### 1 Corinthians 12:1

<sup>1</sup> Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be ignorant:

This subject will continue thru three chapters (ch 12-14).

What sort of miraculous abilities did they have? A list is given:

### 1 Corinthians 12:4-11

<sup>4</sup> There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit.

<sup>5</sup> There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord.

<sup>6</sup> And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all.

<sup>7</sup> But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all:

<sup>8</sup> for to one is given the **word of wisdom** through the Spirit, to another the **word of knowledge** through the same Spirit,

<sup>9</sup> to another **faith** by the same Spirit, to another **gifts of healings** by the same Spirit,

<sup>10</sup> to another the **working of miracles**, to another **prophecy**, to another **discerning of spirits**, to another different kinds of **tongues**, to another the **interpretation of tongues**.

<sup>11</sup> But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills.

Here are nine gifts:

- **Word of wisdom** – not ordinary wisdom, but wisdom given miraculously. Remember Solomon (1 Kings 3:12).
- **Word of knowledge** – not ordinary knowledge, but miraculous knowledge. Remember what Jesus told the apostles (Mt 10:19).
- **Faith** – not ordinary faith, but miraculous faith that enabled men to move mountains (Mt 21:21).

- **Gifts of healings** – not ordinary healing abilities (like doctors and nurses today), but miraculous healings – instantaneous healings (Lk 4:39 – Peter's mother-in-law).
- **Working of miracles** – other miraculous abilities – e.g. enduring snake bite, enduring poison, casting out demons (Mk 16:17-18; Acts 27:1-6).
- **Prophecy** – not ordinary preaching, but inspired preaching; giving new truths which had not previously been revealed (2 Pet 1:21).
- **Discerning of spirits** – the ability to distinguish between truth and error; between false doctrine and truth (1 Cor 14:29).
- **Tongues** – not ordinary ability to speak in other languages, but miraculous ability to speak in other languages without studying (Act 2:6).
- **Interpretation of tongues** – the companion of speaking in other languages; translating languages without studying that language previously (Dan 5:26).

### **LIMITED BENEFITS**

Focus on the fact that these miraculous abilities were not for the benefit of individual men.

#### **1 Corinthians 12:7**

<sup>7</sup> But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all:

Miraculous powers were given for the benefit of the church as a whole, but not for the benefit of one individual person.

**ILL:** If it would benefit the entire church for a man to be healed, he would be healed. If there was no universal benefit, the man would stay sick and ordinary means were used to try to heal him.

#### **1 Timothy 5:23**

<sup>23</sup> No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for your stomach's sake and your frequent infirmities.

## **2 Timothy 4:20**

<sup>20</sup> ... Trophimus I have left in Miletus sick.

## **LIMITED ABILITIES**

Focus in on the point that people were limited in what they could do:

## **1 Corinthians 12:29-30**

<sup>29</sup> Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all workers of miracles?

<sup>30</sup> Do all have gifts of healings? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret?

The answer to all of these questions is, "**NO.**" Not everyone could do these things.

**NOTE:** Not everyone could speak in tongues. Yet ... some churches today say that unless one speaks in tongues, he is not saved.

In fact, there were some Christians who were saved and they had no miraculous abilities whatsoever. In other words, miracles were not given to save anyone from their sins. That was not their purpose. (**Remember Cornelius**).

## **Acts 8**

<sup>12</sup> But when they believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were **baptized**.

<sup>14</sup> Now when the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that **Samaria had received the word** of God, they sent Peter and John to them,

<sup>15</sup> who, when they had come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit.

<sup>16</sup> For **as yet He had fallen upon none of them**. They had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

<sup>17</sup> Then they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.

<sup>18</sup> And when Simon saw that through the laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Spirit was given, he offered them money,

Samaria had:

- "received the word"
- "been baptized"

They were saved (Mk 16:16). Yet, they did not have miraculous abilities. They later received miraculous abilities from the hands of the apostles.

### **Romans 1:11**

<sup>11</sup> For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift, so that you may be established;

Paul (an apostle) wanted to go to Rome and impart miraculous power to some there. Yet, these people were saved – even without miraculous powers.

You should learn two things from this:

- **People can be saved without having miraculous powers.**
- **Miraculous powers came from laying on of apostles' hands.**

### **NOT A "CURE ALL"**

Miracles were not "**snake oil**." The "medicine man" would promise his snake oil could cure everything – from dandruff to cancer. Miracles were not like that. They were not a "cure all." They did not solve all of the church's problems. They did not guarantee men would be as spiritually minded as they should be.

Corinth had spiritual gifts, but they were not very spiritual. Listen to some of their problems:

### **1 Corinthians 3:1-3**

<sup>1</sup> And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to **carnal**, as to babes in Christ.

<sup>2</sup> I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able;

<sup>3</sup> for you are still **carnal**. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not **carnal** and **behaving like mere men**?

### **5:1**

<sup>1</sup> It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and such sexual immorality as is not even named among the Gentiles; that a man has his father's wife!

### **6:5-6**

<sup>5</sup> I say this to your shame. Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you, not even one, who will be able to judge between his brethren?

<sup>6</sup> But brother goes to law against brother, and that before unbelievers!

### **11:17-18**

<sup>17</sup> Now in giving these instructions **I do not praise you**, since you come together not for the better but for the worse.

<sup>18</sup> For first of all, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are **divisions** among you, and in part I believe it.

### **15:12**

<sup>12</sup> Now if Christ is preached that He has been raised from the dead, how do **some among you** say that there is no resurrection of the dead?

When people claim that spiritual gifts make them more spiritual than others, they are deceived. Spiritual gifts did not make people more spiritually minded.

### **John 6:63**

<sup>63</sup> "It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. **The words that I speak to you** are spirit, and they are life.

It is the word of God that will make us more spiritual – not miraculous powers.

## A MORE "EXCELLENT WAY"

At the end of chapter 12, Paul makes this statement:

### **1 Corinthians 12:31**

<sup>31</sup> But earnestly desire the best gifts. And yet I show you a more excellent way.

The English translation makes this sound like a command, but the Greek can be translated two ways:

- ***As a command*** (imperative mood)
- ***As a statement*** (indicative mood)

If translated as a statement, Paul is simply stating that the Corinthians had a problem: *they were earnestly desiring the best spiritual gifts.*

They were fussing and bickering over who had the best gifts, but Paul was going to show them a better way.

### **1 Corinthians 13:1-2**

<sup>1</sup> Though I speak with the **tongues** of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal.

<sup>2</sup> And though I have the gift of **prophecy**, and understand all mysteries and all **knowledge**, and though I have all **faith**, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.

Here are four of the nine spiritual gifts mentioned:

- **Tongues** – not ordinary, but miraculous
- **Prophecy** – not ordinary preaching, but miraculous
- **Knowledge** – not ordinary, but miraculous (**important later**) (12:8)
- **Faith** – not ordinary (12:9)

Notice the point: **Having miraculous abilities does not guarantee you are saved.** Even if you speak in tongues, it does not guarantee you are saved.

Paul is going to show us a "more excellent way" that was coming – a way that would be better than having miraculous powers with envy and strife.

## **MIRACLES WOULD END**

**LISTEN**: The "more excellent way" is a more excellent way.

**Q**: What do you mean by that? ⇒ Look at vv8-10:

### **1 Corinthians 13:8-10**

<sup>8</sup> Love never fails. But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away.

<sup>9</sup> For we know in part and we prophesy in part.

<sup>10</sup> But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away.

**ARGUMENT**: "This 'perfect' thing is Jesus. He's the only perfect person. When He comes again miracles will cease."

**A**: No! Paul is describing a "more excellent **way**" – not a "most excellent **person**." He says:

- Prophecies will fail
- Tongues will cease
- Knowledge will vanish away

**ARGUMENT**: "Well, according to you, if miraculous powers cease, then we'll all be a bunch of dummies running around down here, because it says 'knowledge' will vanish away."

**R**: **First, it's not me** – it's the Bible that says knowledge will vanish away. **Second, knowledge will vanish away.**



**NOTE:** It's not a question of "if" it will happen, but "when" will it happen. It's just a matter of time before "knowledge will vanish away."

If this refers to ordinary knowledge then: We're going to be a bunch of dummies running around somewhere. Either:

- This life
- The next life

But we have already noticed from **chapter 12:8** and **13:2** that this refers to miraculous knowledge – the ability to know things without study.

**"whether there are tongues, they will cease"** (παύω) – this means to *stop because the goal has been reached*.<sup>1</sup>

**Footnote #1:** Cf. A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures*, 4:179; Gary Workman, *Has That Which Is Perfect Come?*, pp. 4-5.

This same word (παύω) is used in:

### **Hebrews 10:1-2**

<sup>1</sup> For the law, having a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect.

<sup>2</sup> For then would they not have **ceased** to be offered? For the worshipers, once purified, would have had no more consciousness of sins.

Animal sacrifices **did not "cease" of themselves** because they never achieved their goal. If the goal had been achieved, they would have stopped themselves.

Tongues **WILL stop themselves** because they will have achieved their goal.

**ILL:** When an Olympic runner crosses the finished line, he stops running because he has reached his goal.

**"prophecies ... will fail ... knowledge ... will vanish away"** (καταργέω) – a different word than used with tongues. This means to *become inactive because they will be replaced with something else.*<sup>2</sup>

**Footnote #2:** Workman, pp. 4-5; "God's removing and *displacing* what is transient to make way for better and abiding things," *Dictionary of NT Theology*, 1:73.

Since animal sacrifices never reached their goal, they could not "cease" (παύω). Therefore, they had to be rendered inactive by replacing them with something else – the sacrifice of Christ (Heb 10:12).

## **SUMMARY**

Two words are used to describe (a) the stoppage of tongues on the one hand and (b) prophecies and knowledge on the other hand:

### **1) Tongues will simply stop themselves because they finally reached their goal.**

They will not be replaced with anything else.

Tongues were a "sign" (Mk 16:17) to unbelievers (1 Cor 14:22). They convinced unbelievers the new message of the apostles was genuine.

### **Hebrews 2:3-4**

<sup>3</sup> how 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 Him,

<sup>4</sup> God also **bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit**, according to His own will?

**Q:** Don't we still need miracles (tongues) for this purpose today?

**R:** NO. Watch closely:

### **John 20:30-31**

<sup>30</sup> And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book;

<sup>31</sup> but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.

**2) Prophecies and knowledge will be rendered inactive because they will be replaced with something else - something permanent.**

**Q:** What will replace these?

**A:** "That which is perfect."

### **VERSE 9**

**Q:** Why will miracles stop?

### **1 Corinthians 13:9**

<sup>9</sup> For we **know** in part and we **prophesy** in part.

Paul now focuses on the two gifts which will end because they will be replaced with something else.

Verse 10 will explain what will replace these gifts.

**"In part"** – contrasted with "that which is perfect" or complete (v10).

Paul knew only part of God's will. He prophesied only part of God's will.

- **Matthew** knew part
- **Mark**
- **Luke**
- **John**

- Peter
- James
- Jude

Each part which each man revealed would be put together for the benefit of the entire church.

It was all progressing toward the complete revelation of God's will.

## VERSE 10

**Q:** When will miracles stop?

### **1 Corinthians 13:10**

<sup>10</sup> But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away.

**"that which is perfect"** (τὸ τέλειον) – "complete." This word "perfect" does not mean "flawless" or "without sin."

### **Matthew 5:48**

<sup>48</sup> "Therefore you shall be **perfect** (complete), just as your Father in heaven is perfect.

### **Matthew 19:21**

<sup>21</sup> Jesus said to him, "If you want to be **perfect** (complete), go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me."

### **1 Corinthians 14:20**

<sup>20</sup> Brethren, do not be children in understanding; however, in malice be babes, but in understanding be **mature** (complete).

## **James 1:25**

<sup>25</sup> But he who looks into the **perfect** (complete) law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does.

**"that which is perfect"** (13:10) – refers to that which is "complete." It is used in direct contrast to the partial prophesying and knowledge of v9. In this context, it can mean nothing except the completed revelation of God's will.

When all the parts have been revealed and made known, when the revelation of God's will has been "completed" or "perfected," then miracles will end.

## **VERSE 11**

### **1 Corinthians 13:11**

<sup>11</sup> When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I **put away** (καταργέω) childish things.

Miracles are being compared to "childish things" that are "put away" (καταργέω). They would not continue forever.

Miracles were for the "infant" stage of the church. When the church matured and possessed God's entire, revealed will, these "childish things" would be put away (replaced) with something better.

## **VERSE 12**

### **1 Corinthians 13:12**

<sup>12</sup> For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known.

Mirrors in those days were simply polished metal.

### **Exodus 38:8**

<sup>8</sup> He made the laver of bronze and its base of bronze, from the **bronze mirrors** of the serving women who assembled at the door of the tabernacle of meeting.

As the mirror was being made, people could begin to see their reflection. The more the mirror was polished, the better the image became. When the mirror was completed, men could see themselves clearly – they could see themselves as others saw them.

God's revealed will is compared to a mirror:

### **James 1:22-25**

<sup>22</sup> But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.

<sup>23</sup> For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror;

<sup>24</sup> for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was.

<sup>25</sup> But **he who looks into the perfect law of liberty** and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does.

At the time Paul wrote, the "mirror" was in the process of being made. Each time another book of the NT was written, things were becoming clearer and clearer.

**"Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known"** – Paul himself was polishing the mirror – i.e. he was contributing his part to the NT scriptures. When the mirror was completed, men could look into the scriptures and see themselves clearly – just as others saw them.

## **VERSE 13**

### **1 Corinthians 13:13**

<sup>13</sup> And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

While miracles would end, faith, hope and love would continue.

The "more excellent way" (12:31) than miraculous powers with envy and strife, is living a loving life with the completed revelation of God's will.

## **CONCLUSION**

**REMEMBER:** The question is not "if" but "**when**" miracles will end.

The purpose of miracles was to confirm the message of the apostles. Once that was completed, miracles ended. The church grew into an adult and is guided today, not by miracles, but by the completed NT scriptures.

### **John 16:12-13**

<sup>12</sup> "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now.

<sup>13</sup> "However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, **He will guide you into all truth**; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come.

### **Jude 3**

<sup>3</sup> Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was **once for all delivered** to the saints.