

Recently I was listening to a preacher on AM radio when he went on a tangent condemning what is commonly referred to as “signs and wonders.” He appeared to be quite set against the modern proliferation of prophetic utterances and so-called miraculous healings dominating “Christian” radio and television. I agree with his sentiment; my concern with his message is not that he opposed the so-called apostolic gifts of modern charismania but rather the way in which he framed his argument.

Basically, the argument was as follows: “How do we know that there are no charismatic gifts of healing today? Because we do not see any happening. Charismatics can talk all they want about gifts of healing but we do not see these miracles being performed today and so we can rest assured that such gifts have ceased.”

For this gentleman, whose opinion concerning the continuation of gifts given to the NT apostles I am in agreement with, the lack of empirical evidence was sufficient to dismiss such an alleged spiritual phenomenon. The problem with this argument, however, should be pointed out so that we do not make the same mistake in our zeal to defend against the excesses of charismania.

The premise upon which the conclusion (that miracles have ceased) is built is: *we do not see them happening*. First, this preacher appears to miss the fact that his opponents—the advocates for continuationism—would simply retort that we *do* see them happening. In fact, the epistemological method employed by both parties here is the same: empiricism. Certainly, while I have not personally observed such purported miracles myself, there are many who claim that they have indeed witnessed them. The fallacy of induction is evident because neither party is capable of observing every case in history across the globe in order to definitively say, empirically, “miracles do not happen”. If someone claims to have experienced a miraculous healing by way of a Word of Faith healer in Africa (even though the smartphone-laden generation did not take it upon themselves to document such a rare and miraculous occurrence), who am I to argue against his experience? Likewise, if I insist that I have yet to observe a purported miracle by way of a Word of Faith healer, how can the WoF advocate insist that I *must* have in fact observed such occurrences?

The *point* is, in fact, that all of this is *beside the point*. Rather than a discourse on the flaws of empiricism (which would itself invalidate the claims of the WoF movement), I want to show that this probably well-intentioned preacher was delivering an argument against modern miracles by appealing to his experience and not by appealing to the Word of God. My criticism is not of his position as a cessationist, nor do I disagree that there is a lack of

the empirical evidence you would expect to find if such miracles were happening today,[1] nor will I here attempt to exegete the necessary Scriptures to make a case for cessationism. My point here simply is that the man's authority on this subject was his personal experience—*his appeal was to the same authority as the advocate of modern miracles!* Word of Faith advocates appeal to their experience which is what validates the movement, putting us in a stalemate. Only when one is willing to appeal to the only authority (Scripture) can we find a legitimate basis for either accepting or denying post-apostolic miraculous healings. If knowledge is propositional truth as revealed in Scripture and not a collection of universals formulated by *a posteriori* reasoning, then it is the biblical text which must be the foundation upon which our position rests, irrespective of the experience had by continuationists and cessationists alike.

[1] Justin Peters' comments are of interest here. On page 72 of his 2002 Master's thesis (*An examination and critique of the life, ministry, and theology of healing evangelist Benny Hinn*) he writes: "The proof of Hinn's purported healings is conspicuous by its absence. Even if documented miracles *were* common in Hinn's ministry, they would not in and of themselves legitimize it (Matt. 7:22-23). It seems that nearly all of those on stage claiming to have been healed suffer from maladies that are not readily visible, such as stomach ulcers, cancers, or bad backs. If God is truly healing people through Benny Hinn, where are the amputees, the blind, the imbecilic, the maimed, and the crippled? They are sitting, or sometimes lying, on the back of the floor area safely away from the watchful eyes of the numerous television cameras. If some do venture forward, they are ushered away just as was this author."