

A Biblical History of Sign Gifts

The Holy Spirit Today

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Well, we return this morning to a study that we're doing on the nature of the ministry of the Holy Spirit today and what the Spirit of God is doing and what he is not doing, and as I've tried to explain over the prior weeks, there's a lot of foundation that we need to lay in order to consider this properly and rightly. First of all, we need to understand the work that the Bible ascribes to the Spirit of God in the work of salvation, how he regenerates sinners and indwells them and sanctifies them once they have been placed in Christ, and beyond that there is a corporate dimension as he empowers us and indwells us and works unity in our midst, and those things are just so very vital for us to protect and to guard and to be on the lookout for. So there is this work of the Holy Spirit that is very critical that shows that we believe in an active working of the Holy Spirit in the church today. It's vital for us to understand and to begin from that position of understanding and strength but that leaves unanswered for us, so far, what are we to think about the various so-called gifts that we see in the church today, gifts of so-called gifts of tongues and miracles and prophecies and people claiming that God is speaking to them in private revelation of his will for their personal lives? What are we to think of those things? We haven't gotten to that yet. We're still laying the groundwork for it and today is a very critical matter for us to lay further groundwork for the consideration of those things in the days to come. We've called today's message "A Biblical History of Sign Gifts." A biblical history of sign gifts, tongues and prophecies and miracles were sign gifts. Well, before we talk about them and what they may or may not signify for today, we need to understand the biblical perspective on these. How did God use these when revelation was still unfolding in the lives of Israel, in the life of Jesus, in the lives of the apostles. What were these gifts and, critically, why were they given? Why was God doing these things at the time that he was doing them?

Now last time we spoke about the nature of the apostolic office. The apostles, the 12 apostles plus Paul were a gift to the church. They were the foundation of the New Testament church. They were the chosen representatives who had the exclusive legal authority to represent Christ, to receive revelation from him, and to communicate it to men and to communicate it to the church. They were personally chosen by Jesus, we said. They were eyewitnesses of the resurrection and their ministry was accompanied by signs and wonders, and all three of those qualifications were present; the absence of any one disqualified a man from being an apostle. And one of the things, one of the conclusions that we drew from that is that there are no apostles today and there have not been any

apostles since the first century. Churches that claim apostolic authority notwithstanding, it is obvious from biblical testimony that the gift of apostles ceased, that the apostles were a unique group of men given to provide a foundation to the church, and everything builds on that sense, then. Not a continuing office. Not new apostles with each passing generation. No, they were a select limited group that Jesus personally chose to be his unique representatives in the dispensing of revelation.

Now, the signs that the apostles did which we looked at in some degree last time, the signs attested to their authenticity. The signs that the apostles performed showed that they were true messengers of God because the signs were an outside intervention into the natural order to show that there was something supernatural going on that could be explained by no other means. And these signs that the apostles did that we looked at last time, here's what I want you to see for today and this is so very helpful, that's why we're talking about it: the signs that the apostles did were in keeping with, they followed the biblical pattern that God had established over the prior 1,500 years when there was not a completed canon for people to know the revelation of God by. God from the beginning used signs and wonders but he was using them for a purpose. They were not an end in themselves. As we're going to see, it wasn't simply showing power in order to show that they could do something cool; that they could do something powerful because they wanted to. The signs were a means – mark this – to a far more important end. The signs were a stamp of authenticity that these men were actually, truly, rightly speaking for God in a way that no one else could do. That was the biblical pattern. This was the manner in which God established who his spokesmen were in biblical times.

Think about it with me, beloved. Anyone can stand up and speak the words, "I'm speaking for God." Anybody could stand up and say that if they wanted to. What the problem is for those who hear them is how do we know that you are truly speaking for God? How do we know that you're not one of the many false prophets that have gone out into the world? How can we distinguish you from the false ones if your claim is true? Stated in a different way, the people of God needed to verify that a man of God was the real thing and not an impostor; not a satanic substitute; not someone wearing a mask behind which was a demon; not someone who was wearing the clothing of a sheep when inside he was actually a wolf. How in biblical times as distinct from today, how in biblical times was that established? Well, what we find is that God used miracles, he used signs that attested to the authenticity of his spokesmen that they were the real thing; that they came from the true and living God; that they were not an impostor.

There are four sections to today's message. What we're going to do at the start is we're going to look quickly at the Old Testament pattern and the New Testament pattern and you're going to see this idea of attestation, this stamp of authenticity being emphasized repeatedly through the new segments of revelation as God was progressively unfolding his will for his people.

Let's look, first of all, at the Old Testament pattern. The Old Testament pattern, and you may remember, we won't turn there for now, you may remember that at the start when God sent Moses to the people of Israel in Egypt, they did not receive him. They were not

too keen to have this man as their leader. In fact, in Exodus 2:14, they made this piercing question central to Moses at the start of his ministry. They said, "Who made you a prince or a judge over us?" Who made you our leader? And you can see built into that question, although they were saying it in a skeptical unbelieving way, you can see that there was a real issue that needed to be settled, who is the real leader for God that's at stake? Who is the one who truly speaks for God in such a way that his words carry the authority of God? That his words must be believed and be obeyed? How do you know who is speaking for God in that way? Well, when the time came for Moses to lead the people of Israel, God set his seal on him in an unmistakable way.

Look at Exodus 4 as we come into some of these texts now. Exodus 4, and we're going to look at a lot of different things here this morning. It will take us some time to go through and as we do that, I just encourage you to remember that we are laying a foundation so that we can say still other things in the future. This sets the context for what we want to say next week and the following week, so these things are interlocked together, but it's my conviction, it is my assessment that what we're dealing with in these issues of signs, miracles, tongues, prophecies, private voices from God, we are dealing with one of the most critical threats to the people of God in the 21st century, arguably the greatest threat, and therefore having a measure of responsibility for the oversight here and the teaching here, I don't want to rush through this. I want to treat this carefully so that you are guarded going forward from things that would lead you astray; from things that would lead you away from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ; from those things that would spin you off into deception. I'm not willing to rush through something that can protect you from that lethal outcome and that's why we're spending the time on this. So I just beg your indulgence and I beg your patience as we go through these things because this is all for the upbuilding and the well-being of your eternal soul that we do these things and, you know, these things have been on my mind for well over a year and finally I'm getting to them to share them with you.

In Exodus 4:1, Moses said, "What if they will not believe me or listen to what I say? For they may say, 'The LORD has not appeared to you.'" Do you see the issue there? Moses recognized it also. "God, what if they don't believe me? I say these words, what if they don't believe? What if they don't obey?" This is a real problem. "What is the attestation that I am truly your spokesmen going to be?" And the Lord answers him and he said to him in verse 2, "'What is that in your hand?' And he said, 'A staff.' Then He said, 'Throw it on the ground.' So he threw it on the ground, and it became a serpent; and Moses fled from it." Which is probably what I would have done also. I do not like snakes. Verse 4, "But the LORD said to Moses, 'Stretch out your hand and grasp it by its tail'--so he stretched out his hand and caught it, and it became a staff in his hand." Now pause there for a moment. This is supernatural, to take an inanimate staff, throw it on the ground and have it become a living serpent, then you reach out and you grab it and it's back to an inanimate object again, from inanimate to animate, from staff to snake and back again. Well, what's the purpose of that? What is that supposed to do? What does that accomplish? Verse 5, here we see the principle introduced, "that they may believe that the LORD, the God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has appeared to you." It wasn't simply that Moses was given a cool lightsaber to

throw around and to battle people with on a movie set. It wasn't just that he was given this cool trick to do. It had a purpose to it. It was an authenticating mark to show that God had truly appeared to him and that the people were to believe and obey him. They were to listen to what he said as shown by the miraculous sign that accompanied him as he spoke. That's the idea. That's what's so critical here.

Now you'll see this repeated in a different realm to a different audience in Exodus 6:28. Moses, of course, had to go to Pharaoh and say, "Let my people go." Now on what basis is the greatest king of that era, the leader of the greatest nation, if I'm Pharaoh, if you're Pharaoh and a guy comes up and says let all of these millions of people go out of your country that's performing a great labor force work for you, "Who are you? Why should I do what you tell me to do? By what right do you come and assert authority over my kingdom?" That's the right and proper, natural, reasonable thing to say. In Exodus 6:28, "Now it came about on the day when the LORD spoke to Moses in the land of Egypt, that the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 'I am the LORD; speak to Pharaoh king of Egypt all that I speak to you.' But Moses said before the LORD, 'Behold, I am unskilled in speech; how then will Pharaoh listen to me?'" The same problem, the same issue accompanying whether the people of Israel would listen to him or not now comes up with a different audience. In chapter 7, verse 1, "Then the LORD said to Moses, 'See, I make you as God to Pharaoh, and your brother Aaron shall be your prophet. You shall speak all that I command you, and your brother Aaron shall speak to Pharaoh that he let the sons of Israel go out of his land. But I will harden Pharaoh's heart that I may multiply My signs and My wonders in the land of Egypt. When Pharaoh does not listen to you,'" verse 4, "then I will lay My hand on Egypt and bring out My hosts, My people the sons of Israel, from the land of Egypt by great judgments." By great judgments and here it is, look at verse 5, "The Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD, when I stretch out My hand on Egypt and bring out the sons of Israel from their midst." And 10 great miracles followed that, culminated by the death of the firstborn throughout the land of Egypt, the point being this: those multiplied signs verified Moses, they authenticated him as being the true spokesman of God. Moses says, "Lord, how will they believe, I am unskilled in speech?" God says, "I will supply to you miraculous signs and wonders that no one else can do," so the Egyptians imitated some of them but there were things that the Egyptians magicians could not replicate indicating that Moses had a unique authority that God was with him in such a way that his words were to be believed and obeyed. Old Testament pattern.

Now, later on God, centuries later God used a miracle to authenticate the ministry of the prophet Elijah. Look at 1 Kings 18. You'll remember, this is one of the great historic events in the Old Testament. 1 Kings 18:36. Remember, we're laying a groundwork for things to be said later. 1 Kings 18:36, Elijah was facing a different audience, a hostile audience. He was dealing with the competing claims of the prophets of Baal and in verse 36, "At the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, Elijah the prophet came near and said, 'O LORD, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, today let it be known that You are God in Israel and that I am Your servant and I have done all these things at Your word.'" Do you see it? He's saying, "God, authenticate me. Vindicate my claim. Vindicate my office as a true prophet of God. God, show by your power that you are with me and that I am speaking by divine authority, by divine right, by divine appointment."

Verse 37, "Answer me, O LORD, answer me, that," here it is again, "that this people may know that You, O LORD, are God, and that You have turned their heart back again."
"God, do this not simply for my sake, do it so the people will know, that they will see and understand, that they will have reason to believe the words that I say."

Then in verse 38, we didn't review all of the things that went up as the prophets of Baal tried to call down fire from their god and nothing happened. Elijah, you remember, put the fire on, poured water on it again and again, and now after that Elijah had prayed as we have just read. Then what happened in verse 38? "Then the fire of the LORD fell and consumed the burnt offering and the wood and the stones and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench." Verse 39, "When all the people saw it, they fell on their faces; and they said, 'The LORD, He is God; the LORD, He is God.' Then Elijah said to them, 'Seize the prophets of Baal; do not let one of them escape.' So they seized them; and Elijah brought them down to the brook Kishon, and slew them there." Elijah says, "God, there is a dispute here about who is really speaking for you, who the true God is. Do something. Act in a way that will show that I am the true spokesman and that my words come from you." God miraculously sends fire to consume a water-laden sacrifice thereby vindicating Elijah's claim to be a true prophet. This is the pattern. The signs were given to authenticate the true spokesman of God.

Now, this is the pattern that is established and it's carried over into, point 2, it's carried over into the New Testament pattern as well. The New Testament pattern as well. As you know, as you read the four Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, Jesus repeatedly performed spectacular miracles throughout the course of his ministry. He raised Lazarus from the dead. He walked on water. He cast out demons. He healed the sick. He multiplied bread and fish to feed thousands with a portion of food that could barely feed one or two. Again and again and again, he turned water to wine and on and on it goes. Well, as Jesus was teaching, as he was going about his ministry, here's what he did: he appealed repeatedly, as we're going to see, he appealed to those attesting miracles to authenticate his teaching to show that he was distinct from anyone else and that, therefore, his words were to be believed and to be obeyed. This is the connection that we are to make. The true miracles authenticated the true spokesman of God and because he was authenticated, his words were to be believed and to be obeyed in a way that was not true of others who falsely claimed to be speaking for God.

Look at John 5. We'll look at half-dozen passages here in the Gospel of John, and if I don't forget, we'll go to John 20 to establish an important point as well. John 5:36, Jesus said to his audience, "the testimony which I have is greater than the testimony of John," meaning the testimony of John the Baptist. Look at what he says, "for the works which the Father has given Me to accomplish--the very works that I do--testify about Me, that the Father has sent Me." He says, "I'm doing miracles here that no one else has ever done and that no one else can do." He opened the eyes of men born blind. He caused the lame to walk simply by his spoken word. He says, "Look at those things and understand that they testify uniquely about me, that the one true God has sent me and, therefore, my

words are to be believed and to be obeyed. You are to respond to me in a way that you respond to no one else."

Chapter 6, verse 14, turn over a page or scroll down a screen or two. Chapter 6. You remember the feeding, I alluded to it earlier, the feeding of the 5,000. Jesus sat the people down in verse 10, numbered about 5,000. He took these loaves, distributed them, likewise the fish as much as they wanted. When they were filled, he said to his disciples, "'gather up the leftover fragments so that nothing will be lost.' So they gathered them up, and filled twelve baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves which were left over by those who had eaten." After feeding thousands and thousands of people, they still had more food left over than when they began. And what did that do? That was a sign that showed the unique authority of Jesus. The people saw, verse 14, "when the people saw the sign which He had performed, they said, 'This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world.'" The sign verified his words. The signs communicated, gave the umbrella of authority, the works gave authority to the words.

Chapter 7, verse 31, "many of the crowd believed in Him." And why did they believe in him? "They were saying, 'When the Christ comes, He will not perform more signs than those which this man has, will He?'" The expected answer is, no. No one could come and exceed the signs which Christ had done, therefore, they believed in Christ in response. His words had validity, had authority because they were attested by signs which no man could do; that no man had ever done; that no man ever could do. There was a uniqueness about his authority that set him apart that showed him to be truly the unique Son of God. No one else can do those things.

Look at John 10 as Jesus begins to appeal to these things. John 10:24. The Jews put his identity directly in question. In verse 24, "[they] gathered around Him, and were saying to Him, 'How long will You keep us in suspense? If You are the Christ, tell us plainly.' Jesus answered them, 'I told you, and you do not believe; the works that I do in My Father's name, these testify of Me.'" There is a validity to my words as shown by the works that I have done in my Father's name. "You don't believe," verse 26, "because you are not of My sheep." But the signs have vindicated my claim to divine authority in everything that I say.

Then finally in verse 37 of John 10, actually let's go back to verse 33, the Jews were ready to stone him. Jesus said, "Why do you want to stone me?" Verse 32, "Which of my good works are you going to stone Me for?" And the Jews answered him in verse 33, "For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy; and because You, being a man, make Yourself out to be God." He says they understood his words, "You are claiming to be full deity. That's blasphemy." And Jesus in response points to the works that he had done. Look at verse 37, "If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me; but if I do them, though you do not believe Me, believe the works, so that you may know and understand that the Father is in Me, and I in the Father." He says, "You are drawing the wrong conclusion when you accuse Me of blasphemy. The works that I do vindicate My claim to be who I am. If you won't take My word for it, look at the miraculous signs and wonders that have been done at My hand and realize that I am

telling you the truth. I am God Incarnate. I am the Son of God. I am," John 14:6, "I am the way, the truth and the life; no man comes to the Father but through Me." Now beloved, if anyone else had come to us and said those staggering words that are so familiar to us from John 14:6, here is a man who by visible appearance was just a man, and this man, true 100% man, the man Jesus Christ, says, "I am the way and the truth and the life, and no one comes to the Father except through Me. If you want to go to heaven, you have to come through Me. If you try to go around Me, you will be lost in your sins. You will be judged and condemned eternally because I'm the only way." Well, that's a staggering claim for anyone to make. What distinguished Jesus was he had backed up that claim with works that no one else could do and those works attested to the reality of his claim.

Peter understood this in Acts 2:22. Turn to the book of Acts 2:22. Peter is preaching on the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit had come down, the Holy Spirit had verified his presence as the men gathered and spoke in other tongues that they had not previously spoken, known human languages that were recognized by native speakers of those languages, and the question is what's going on here? And in Acts 2:22, Peter says this to his audience, he says, "Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst." He says you saw this. God attested to his words by powerful works that no one else could do. Verse 23, "this Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death." Now, the men, read on there and you will see that the audience was pierced. "Oh, my goodness, we just crucified the Messiah! What hope is there for us? We killed our own Messiah! We crucified him! Peter, what do we do?" He says, "Repent. Repent and turn to Christ." The thing that Peter pointed to to remind them of the authority of Christ were the signs and wonders and miracles that God had done in and through Christ that vindicated every claim that he made to divine authority, every claim that he made to divine essence. Now as we're reading it in Acts 2, the ultimate capstone miracle had taken place and the resurrection verified in a final climactic way that everything that Christ has said was true, and now the risen Lord and he is declared by the apostles to be Lord, God and King, the one to whom all men must repent of sin and come to him by faith alone in order to be saved from their sins. Apart from that there is no salvation. Apart from that you are all miserably lost with no hope of eternal life. The signs attested to Christ. They vindicated the claim.

Going back now as I promised to do, go back to the end of John 20. What does this mean for us today? What does this mean for you that are here and maybe you are new to Christianity, you are new, you've never heard things like this before, what does it all mean to you as a sinner now realizing that you are separated from God? What does it mean to you? John 20:30 says this, "Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book." He says, "Look, I've just given you a sampling. I've given you a few. Jesus did so many other things in the presence of witnesses that I could have mentioned but didn't, but what I've written here is sufficient for this purpose, to fulfill the reason I wrote this Gospel." Verse 31, "these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that

believing you may have life in His name." The Gospel of John records in narrative fashion these miracles that Jesus performed. They vindicated his claim to be the way, the truth and the life, and John says, "Now that you have this Gospel in your hands, let me tell you why it was all said, it was all said so that you would believe that Jesus truly is the Son of God, that you would respond to Him in repentant believing faith so that you could be saved from your sins." In other words he says, "You have in writing here a record which is more than sufficient for you to believe in Christ. The truth has been established for you in a way that is conclusive and to which you are now accountable." He said, "I wrote these things so that you would believe." Wow, signs and wonders designed to promote an effect on the human mind in the time that says, "I have no alternative but to believe the words that are being spoken by this spokesman by God, Moses, Elijah, culminating in Christ himself." His ministry attested by signs, miracles and wonders that no one else could do, indicating – watch it, beloved – a supernatural intervention from outside the natural world beyond natural power to show that God was acting, that God was speaking and, therefore, the words of his spokesman were to be believed and obeyed. That's the point of signs and wonders. The primary purpose was not simply to relieve physical suffering in a time and space realm. If that was the point, then we're kind of wasting our time because eventually all men die because it is appointed for all men to die and then after that face judgment. It wasn't simply an act of mercy to an individual who was suffering, it was that but there was a greater purpose at stake in what Christ did, the miracles were to vindicate his claim to be the Son of God and to compel people to understand that salvation is found only in him. You must understand that, beloved, the attesting purpose of these signs on the Messiah.

Now, the apostles as we saw last time, performed miracles with the same attesting purpose. Let me remind you of one verse among the dozen or so that we read last time. 2 Corinthians 12:12, the Apostle Paul says, "The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with all perseverance, by signs and wonders and miracles." So these personally appointed legal representatives of Christ went out preaching in his name. How were men to know in the first century that what they said was to be believed and to be obeyed? Notice how repeatedly I join that together, you believe those words and you obey them. If you don't obey them, you don't truly believe them. How were they to know? Paul says, "I came to you holding the office of an apostle and I vindicated my claim by the signs and wonders that I did in your midst." Therefore you should not be questioning Paul saying in the first century to the Corinthian church, "You have all of the proof that you need. I have been authenticated before you because I did the signs of a true apostle in your midst. You are eyewitnesses of these things."

Now beloved, that's just a survey. There's more that we could have said about this, I understand, but you look at Moses, you look at Elijah, you look at Christ, you look at the apostles, and what you see is that at every key point, at every revelatory episode that was taking place, God was using signs and wonders to vindicate these claims to be agents of revelation to him. They had a purpose. They had a reason for these things to occur. My friend, Tom Pennington, said this and I quote, he said, "The miraculous gifts that accompanied the apostles were intended to confirm that they were God's genuine instrument of revelation just as they had been with Moses, with the Old Testament

prophets Elijah and Elisha, and with Jesus himself." There is a continuity in biblical times, in biblical history. I'm emphasizing that. We're in a different age now. The apostles are gone but in the course of biblical history, God used these miraculous signs to authenticate his spokesman.

Now, the presupposition, the unspoken assumption that today's so-called workers of signs and wonders want you to believe is that God is authenticating his spokesman today in the exact same way so that they do staged events in order to vindicate their so-called claim to be a spokesman for God as well, and the assumption is that there is continuity to today from the biblical history of the signs that would show that they also are a spokesman for God in the same way. They would never really articulate it that way but that's what they're trying to do. They give you a puff of smoke and some loud booms and they knock a couple of people over down in front of the pulpit, and you're supposed to say, "Oh, the work of God and, therefore, I must believe and follow this man!" That's not the way it works today, beloved. It is obvious as you read Scripture, as you study these things all the way through, that it is not the same today as it was back then and that the means of vindicating who God's true spokesmen are today is now done differently than through signs and wonders. We'll explain this more in future weeks.

Here's what I want you to see, is that God never intended signs and wonders to be the final and ongoing pattern by which his spokesmen would be vindicated. We must understand that we're in a different realm now. I plan to talk about this in a few weeks, but let's go back and just ask this question. Maybe I'll just change the course of things here. I'm not planning this but I prepared it. What are the qualifications, what are the marks for spiritual leadership today according to the Bible? What are the marks that God has given his people today in the church to look for, for the men that should be leading the people of God? Is it pointing to signs and wonders or is it something else?

Well, look at 1 Timothy 3. What are the qualifications of an elder? It would have been so simple if signs and wonders were supposed to be the enduring mark of spiritual leadership, it would be so simple for Paul to have said that here but he points to something completely different. In 1 Timothy 3, a book that is designed to help us know how we are to conduct ourselves in the household of God which is the church of the living God, look at 1 Timothy 3:15. I realize I'm spinning a couple of tops here but look at 1 Timothy 3:14 and 15. Paul writes to Timothy as an apostle with the authority of an apostle whose words are to be believed and obeyed, he says in verse 14, "I am writing these things to you, hoping to come to you before long; but in case I am delayed, I write so that you will know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth."

Let's take a breath here. Let's step back. Paul says, "I'm writing to tell you how things are to operate in the church after my departure." Paul was a man marked by signs and wonders that authenticated him as a spokesman of God, right? We've seen that again and again, but when it comes looking forward to how things are to function in the church with the true people of God, how are those who speak for God not in a revelatory sense but how are spiritual leaders to be identified? He has just said that just prior to what I read in

verses 14 and 15, he described this in chapter 3, verse 1. He says, "It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires to do. An overseer, then," must do signs, wonders and miracles just like the apostles did to verify his claim to spiritual authority. Is that what it says? Answer me, is that what it says? No, that is not what it says. This is not, the signs and wonders are no longer the mark of verified spiritual leadership. It's a different standard now. The signs and wonders passed with the apostolic office. There is no longer new revelation being given because the apostles are gone. Instead, spiritual leadership in the church is recognized by matters of character and ability and having been tested by time.

Look at verse 2, "An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not addicted to wine or pugnacious, but gentle, peaceable, free from the love of money. He must be one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity (but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?), and not a new convert, so that he will not become conceited and fall into the condemnation incurred by the devil." Verse 7, "And he must have a good reputation with those outside the church, so that he will not fall into reproach and the snare of the devil." Beloved, I intended this to be a separate message and I'll probably still preach it down the road soon in a few weeks, but you need to see that God through the Apostle Paul, Paul, an authorized representative of Jesus Christ said, "Here are the marks of spiritual leadership going forward in the church of God." If anyone was in a position to emphasize that true spiritual leadership going forward after the apostolic era would be verified by signs and wonders, Paul would have said it right here. He said, "You've got to look for a guy who can do the signs just like Moses, just like Elijah, just like Jesus, and just like me." He doesn't say that. It's obvious that a change has taken place and now spiritual authority, spiritual leadership, does not give new revelation because that ended with the apostles, but spiritual leadership is recognized by different criteria; recognized by character proven over time; recognized by ability in teaching the word of God proven over time; recognized by matters of character that have been tested in daily life within a family and within life in the world. That is now the new identifying mark of spiritual leadership and the fact that a guy can fake signs, prophecies and wonders, is no reason to follow him. We are looking for different qualifications within the church now because the pattern has changed, because the sign gifts are over and now there is a new mark that God has given to his people to recognize the men that they should follow.

In Titus 1, you see the same thing being laid out again. Titus 1:5, and I realize that we're just barely touching on the depth of what these two passages in the pastoral epistles point to but this is such a critical difference to see. Paul tells Titus, "I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city as I directed you." What do you look for as you are appointing elders, Titus would want to know. Paul goes on to explain in verse 6 and he gives a parallel summary much like the one in 1 Timothy 3, "if any man is above reproach, the husband of one wife, having children who believe, not accused of dissipation or rebellion. For the overseer must be above reproach as God's steward, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not addicted to wine, not pugnacious, not

fond of sordid gain," and on and on it goes. The teaching element represented in verse 9, "holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict."

Look, beloved, here's what in my judgment the evangelical church needs to get over, we need to get over our desire for flashy things, flashy demonstrations of power as though these sparkling nuggets of fool's gold would be the light that would beckon us to follow a man. It's fool's gold. It's not the real thing. It is a cheap imitation of what was real in a prior age. Now by the Lord's appointment, by the Lord's prerogative, by the Lord's revelation through his apostle, the standard of spiritual leadership is judged differently. Men are verified by their character over time, their teaching over time, and these are matters that are equally the work of the Spirit of God. The Spirit of God works in a man over time to establish him, he does it in the context of the body of Christ and the body of believers, and that's how a man is verified. He's verified by multiple witnesses who can attest to his character and ability over time, not because he can get up and make smoke appear out of a machine on a platform. So this is the idea.

You can see this in another way and then I'll just, I'll save this for next time. I'll figure out a way to pull all of this together next time. Here's the point for today, here's the point for now: the biblical history of sign gifts shows us that God used these miraculous wonders to verify his spokesmen but he limited it to the apostles. The endpoint was the apostles as shown by the fact that you cannot replicate the apostolic qualifications now that Jesus is in heaven. There are no direct physical eyewitnesses of Jesus' resurrection. There are not people doing the same kinds of signs and wonders that verified an apostle in the first century. God by his wisdom, by his design, has now delivered us into something else where he has stated plainly in his revealed, inspired, inerrant, authoritative word where spiritual leadership comes from to the people of God throughout the world going forward. It is examined in matters of character and teaching over time rather than from the signs and wonders.

So we ask the question, "Well, that's how they did it back in the Bible, how did they know back then?" Signs and wonders. "How do you know it now?" A man who has these kinds of character qualities that holds to and explains and defends the final revealed doctrine contained in the Old and New Testaments in the Bible. This is spiritual leadership as defined by Scripture itself. So we learn, we realize that we have to look for different qualifying signs for spiritual leaders today than that which God used back in biblical times, and if you understand that and can make that distinction hold in your mind, you will not be attracted to the false stuff that predominates in this day and age. So that's why it's so important for us to come to God's word, to consider it carefully, and to exercise discernment in accordance with New Testament principles.

Let's leave it there for now. We'll pick it up next week.

Father, help us as we take these things and apply them. Father, we pray for understanding, we pray for discernment, we pray for clarity of mind to recognize the purpose that you gave to sign gifts and how those things have ceased and now there are

different measures that you have given to your people to recognize spiritual leadership with. Father, we pray that you would help us understand that revelation is complete in the 66 books of the Bible. There is no new revelation coming. Everything that you have said necessary for life and godliness contained within the four corners of the 66 books of the Bible. Men don't give new revelation now, they simply explain what you have previously said and commended to your people. O God, help us, then, to exercise discernment, to help others who are caught in the trap of false signs and wonders today. Give us the strength, the grace, the mercy, Father, to snatch them, as it were, out of the fire of such false things and that we would be faithful to your word, that has been delivered once for all to the saints. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

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