

HERO

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1. THE HERO OF HUMANITY

As the world begins to celebrate the emergence of a vaccine that is possibly effective against the current threat, the church has long ago missed the opportunity to herald Jesus Christ as the Miracle Healer, the Hero of Humanity. This is due to the historic and orthodox unbelief, and the satanic gospel of sickness, that Christians have embraced for many centuries. All this time the church has held the solution to all diseases, all viruses, all injuries, all tragedies and accidents, all poisons and biological weapons, and all variations of these things through faith in Jesus. But it never had faith in Jesus. It had never regarded Jesus as master, but only as mascot.

By the time the pandemic invaded the world, it was too late to introduce the good news of Jesus the Healer, because even much of the church had never believed in it. To make the situation worse, the sermons and writings that mused about the pandemic from a supposedly Christian perspective reinforced the tiresome assumption that something like this is the "will of God," so that we are to consider what we ought to do given that we are helpless against it – at least until science saves us – rather than declaring that all sicknesses are helpless against the name of Jesus Christ, so that we are to rally humanity to overcome the sickness by faith. All things are indeed in God's power, but this is the very reason we can heal the sick by the name of Jesus. The God who controls all things has revealed the doctrine of healing to us. Success is guaranteed when we obey him by faith.

The church has achieved the seemingly impossible – in less than one year, it has made itself even more pathetic and irrelevant, and more loathsome. Amidst calamity, while everyone else is scrambling to save lives – or at least to save their livelihood – the church has been a self-righteous nuisance philosophizing about suffering and clamoring about the right to assemble while providing no direct solution to the disease. It has never been considered a disease healer, but now it is globally spurned as a disease spreader! And in its usual fashion, it victimizes itself and regards this as persecution.

While relatives and friends are perishing, Christians come along and announce that this is the "will of God" and lecture people about how to live with it and what lesson to learn from it. And it is patronizing nonsense, empty platitudes. Jesus Christ went about doing good and healing those who were oppressed by sickness. His lesson was that God saves, God heals, God provides, and God dominates. The church teaches that God is "in control," so that we must accept our circumstances, but Jesus teaches that God is "in control," so that we can overcome our circumstances. He said that, by faith, we can even uproot a tree or remove a mountain by a mere command. No sickness can withstand this kind of power. Yet this is the kind of power that any Christian who has faith can exercise. The sovereignty of God tells us that this is what the faith of man can do. The God who is in control over all things puts us in control over our circumstances by his authority.

Now that a year has passed and the world has possibly discovered its own solution with no help from the church, the unbelievers consider this further confirmation that the church is irrelevant and non-essential, and by extension, that God is irrelevant and non-essential. Christians insist that their God offers no direct solution to the world's needs and desires,

and if he had ever done this, he has gloriously ceased doing so. Why? Supposedly because he has finished his memoirs and he has nothing left to prove. Unbelievers roll their eyes and say, "Well, good for him." Then they move on. Most of them do not even bother to argue.

The church deserves the contempt that it is receiving. Having rejected the God of miracles, the God that its own Bible teaches, in the eyes of unbelievers it has become nothing more than a creepy book club that spreads outdated myths and morals. Now it also spreads deadly viruses. But Jesus does not deserve this. Jesus heals the sick, and he is more reachable today than when he walked the earth. But the church has lied about him, claiming that he has ceased. And now science, which is another name for humanity, is enjoying all the honor that belongs to God alone. The church is broken. The cure is in the Christ that it has rejected. The solution is in the message that it calls heresy. This is a recurrence of the ancient tragedy. As it is written, "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone." The church has insisted on corporate worship for its own sake, the church for the sake of the church, when it does not worship the God of the Bible, the God of endless miracles. The Bible does not know a God that has ceased to heal the sick by signs and wonders.

"Come out of her, my people, lest you take part in her sins, lest you share in her plagues." The way forward is for individual Christians who have been awakened to the truth to revolt against corporate disobedience, against the historic and orthodox gospel of unbelief and sickness, the gospel of suffering, and to reinstate the gospel of Jesus Christ, which is the gospel of power, healing, and victory. "My people, come out of her!" If the current embarrassment does not wake up slumbering believers, what will it take? It is time, not to fight for the church against the world, but to fight for Jesus Christ against the church.

The conflict between Jesus' doctrine of supernaturalism and the church's doctrine of naturalism, between Jesus' doctrine of expansion and the church's doctrine of cessation, and between his doctrine of healing and the church's doctrine of sickness, is nothing less than a contest between good and evil. Each individual must choose a side and wage war against the other. Leave churches that do not practice healing and prophecy. Overturn seminaries and denominations that teach a gospel of sickness and poverty. Excommunicate cessationist preachers and professors. Stand up in public and confront them. Pray against them with the imprecatory psalms. Curse them in the name of Jesus, so that their work will die from the roots, just as he cursed the fig tree that did not bear fruit.

It will take many years for Christians to establish a credibility and reputation for miracle healing before the world. First, we must reinforce the doctrines of miracles in believers as individuals, and after that throughout the churches. Practice these doctrines so that miracles consistently happen in our midst. Then we must bring this power to the unbelievers so that they can examine these miracles and recognize the church as an institution of healing. If Christians fail to accomplish this, then what happened this time will happen the next time – and there will be a next time. If the church remains in unbelief and disobedience, and if believers continue to tolerate such things in their leaders and institutions, and continue to endorse their sermons and writings, then this will happen over and over again, and the

unbelievers will become more and more convinced that science – or humanity – is their true savior all along, even the one and only God.

2. HEALING: THE WILL OF MAN

Introduction

Healing comes to us by faith in God, through Jesus Christ, according to the will of man. This is the summation of what Scripture teaches on the subject, especially as it is presented under the ministry of Jesus. False teachers insist on the notion that God could heal if it is his will, and it is often not his will. In response, Christian teachers who have faith in God to heal make it a major emphasis to reinforce the idea that healing is God's will. They show that Jesus expounded on the fatherhood and benevolence of God, that the will of God ordained the work of Jesus, including his ministry of healing, that Jesus himself was the will of God in action, and he was more than willing. Jesus was eager and obsessed with healing the sick, and he never refused anyone who came in faith.

Of course, the teachers and defenders of miracle healing are correct in that it is the will of God to heal, and I am often happy to teach along these same lines. In fact, I have introduced numerous observations and arguments on the will of God to heal that they have not considered. Their error is that they have allowed the false teachers to control how they present the topic. They have made much compromise. The heretics have cemented the way the whole Christian world approaches the subject, but since Scripture does not present it the same way, this means that the heretics have successfully deformed and weakened the ministry of healing. They have placed a hurdle between the desire and the outcome, and Christians have accepted this, choosing to help everyone jump over the obstacle rather than to destroy it.

Teachers of the doctrine of healing often declare that the most essential thing in bringing people to a place where they could receive from God is to convince them that it is the will of God for them. However, it seems this way to them only because their opponents have made it the most essential thing. This issue is in fact absent in the Bible and in the ministry of Christ. They lament that human tradition has maintained that it is often not the will of God to heal, and when people doubt that it is the will of God to heal, then they are hindered from receiving healing. Therefore, we must place emphasis on the will of God to heal. But this is not the Bible's emphasis. When we read about the ministries of Jesus and the apostles, we discover that the will of God is practically irrelevant.

When opponents of Christ invent an issue to attack a biblical doctrine, we are able to answer them on their terms to show that we possess answers to their objections. But then we must return to the way we ought to present the doctrine in the first place, instead of allowing baseless and foolish attacks against the word of God to forever shape our approach to the doctrine. Faith has come to mean belief in God's willingness, a willingness to do what he said in the first place. This is absurd. The Bible does not present it this way, especially when it comes to healing. There is a total absence of such an emphasis. The emphasis is on the sick person's will and desire for himself. Is it the will of God to heal? If this is the question, then our answer is "Yes." But should this be the question? Based on the way Scripture displays healing to us, our answer is "No" – this should not be the question. We should not even mention it.

God's will on healing is an artificially generated question. It is a theological scam and a trap. Christians should have never focused so much on it, even on answering challenges about it. If we were to read the Gospels without introducing concerns that they do not mention, then the question of the will of God on healing would never arise. It is possible to read through the Gospels and the Acts never having the issue cross our minds. Jesus was the supreme theologian on the sovereignty of God. He said that something insignificant like a sparrow cannot fall apart from the will of God. He said that no one can come to him for salvation without God drawing him. And he spoke as one who was with God since the beginning.

However, when it came to healing, the only times that this same Jesus mentioned the issue of the will, he referred to the will of man. Whenever he spoke specifically about the topics of faith, prayer, and healing, he focused on the will of man. This matter of the will of God on healing does not naturally proceed from what we read in the Bible. Men of spiritual rebellion and theological incompetence have taken God's singular commitment to healing and forcefully separated it into God's ability and God's will regarding the matter, and then they proceeded to undermine the artificial division of God's will on healing the sick. They created a phantom issue, and then attacked the doctrine on that ground. The entire difficulty has been manufactured.

Never allow the enemies of Christ to choose the battlefield. Indeed, we can win on any battlefield. However, a victory won on the wrong battlefield comes with reduced benefits. If you are at a wrestling tournament held in a stadium, it would not do you much good to defeat all the opponents at volleyball out on the parking lot. If we remain on the wrong battlefield, and debate about the wrong thing, then even if we win every skirmish, there is still a distorted picture of the doctrine. Now we think we must play volleyball to win that wrestling trophy. Welcome to the world of religious insanity. If we need to fight there at all, once we triumph on the heretics' own turf, do not stay there. Bring the issue back to the right place. Whether the critics follow does not matter. We must present the teaching as the Bible presents it for the maximum benefit of those who wish to listen. The dichotomy between God's power and God's will in healing the sick has been exaggerated, even outright invented. When Christians first agree with the critics' assumption about the pivotal issues of the doctrine, and then attempt to prove their position on those terms, they make it more difficult on themselves, and more difficult for the sick who wish to receive healing.

Disclaimer

Before we continue, allow me to make a disclaimer. Here I will not repeat my explanations concerning the distinctions between divine transcendence and divine immanence, between decree and precept, between actual cause and apparent cause, and between metaphysics, soteriology, and missiology. We will not consider the metaphysical aspects of the issue, and we will not address the arguments and biblical passages that the cult of unbelief usually uses to appeal to God's will or sovereignty in order to overturn God's own promises and commands. No one can fault me for this, because in other places I have offered thorough expositions on the sovereignty of God, and I have addressed the usual arguments and biblical passages used by those who exploit the doctrine to justify their own unbelief. We

know what those arguments are. We know what those passages are. And I have addressed them and refuted the abuse. Now it is time for Jesus' perspective to receive attention.

This disclaimer is made with reluctance because it is a concession that serves to preempt the foolish objections that might follow. It is to cover my bases, lest it appears to the ignorant that I am ignorant of their counter-arguments, and to the unaware that I am unaware of the biblical passages that they consider counter-examples. I know them, and I have answered them, but I resist the urge to revisit them here. To even mention this is a concession because the more time I spend on this, the more I undermine my effort, which is to redirect our focus toward the manner and emphasis of Jesus' ministry and his doctrine of healing, faith, and prayer.

When the Bible presents the doctrine of healing, especially in the Gospels, it does not speak on the level of the metaphysical power of God, but on the level of man's faith and experience. When I address a specific audience that is spiritual and knowledgeable, I would not need to provide such a reminder. However, I address a mixed audience that includes biased and stupid people who nevertheless consider themselves experts and defenders of orthodoxy, individuals that have inherited centuries of theological deception and foolishness. Nevertheless, I refuse to concede too much by allowing the usual points and passages of debate, which I have answered, to distract from my main purpose.

The Bible says, "Choose life" (Deuteronomy 30:19). So we also declare, "Choose life." We ought to do this without needing to reaffirm what the Bible says about the sovereignty of God every time. Peter said, "Save yourselves from this crooked generation" (Acts 2:40). So we also declare, "Save yourselves." We ought to do this without needing to repeat a disclaimer that this does not mean we think men can save themselves apart from God. Of course the reverse is also true, that is, when we refer to what the Bible says about the sovereignty of God, we should not need to explain each of the hundreds upon hundreds of verses that say things like "choose life" and "save yourselves," and to repeat all of this every time. If Peter does not need to cover his bases to prevent unjust criticisms, I should not need to cover my bases to prevent unjust criticisms.

Yet we often encounter the demand to do this silly thing. The more nuisances there are on a topic, the more chaotic the discussion becomes, because those who are interested in debating the issues are in fact unable to grasp the whole scope of relevant biblical data. The opponents are interested in making objections, but we cannot count on them to have any knowledge or ability to reason. Thus it is as if each time we wish to introduce one thought to the discussion, we need to restate a whole library of materials. They are not competent, just obsessed. If critics attack us when we speak in biblical terms that are unfamiliar to them, it means that they are so taken with their theological obsessions that there is no room for the language of the Bible. They are the ones who are disqualified. Grow up, so we can move forward instead of staying in the same place, same debate, same unbelief, forever and ever.

The sovereignty of God is not in debate. My formulation of the doctrine from Scripture is more precise, more consistent, more absolute than the others, so much so that it threatens

the self-appointed guardians of the doctrine. However, right now we do not want to talk about it, because the Bible does not talk about it when it comes to healing, as well as faith and prayer. The universal error is to affirm God's sovereignty and then make false inferences and applications from it. The usual inference is that because God is sovereign, we do not know what will happen until it happens, even if we have faith for a definite outcome. But the correct application is that because God is sovereign, he is able to fulfill his word, so that when we have faith, we know what will happen and we can expect the desired outcome. The sovereign power of God guarantees victory. But you see, after all this time we are still talking about the will of God. If we are not careful, we will allow false teachers to dictate the terms of every discussion on every topic. This is the pitfall of Christian polemics and apologetics. So let us stop this foolishness and move forward. If one refuses to see the truth that is placed in front of him and persists in resisting it, then he will lose even that which he thinks he has (Luke 8:18).

God's will is the reason for success, not the excuse for failure. The sovereignty of God guarantees that I will receive more than what I deserve, not less than what he promised. It is a beautiful and victorious doctrine. In every way, it honors God, it affirms his promises and commands, and it benefits the people of faith. This is the difference between the doctrine of divine sovereignty that I teach from Scripture, and the standard version we see in the historic and orthodox cult. Even if we relate the sovereignty of God to healing, it must be done by the hands of faith. Otherwise, it would be better to follow the example of the Gospels and the Acts, and not mention it at all.

God is Able

God's ability is equivalent to his willingness in the context of a relation of redemption or a mission of redemption. We are not referring to direction in life and ministry, which might be specific to individuals, but to such things as answers and miracles from God. When we are talking about the benefits of redemption and the powers of mission (we can minister healing and prophecy even to unbelievers as a witness to them), the difference between God's ability and God's willingness has been exaggerated, even altogether invented.

Christian theology has made such a sharp dichotomy between the two that it has in many ways made God's ability meaningless. The historic and orthodox cult behaves as if the fact that God is able means nothing, but only the will of God means anything, and we never know the will of God until an event has happened. This, of course, also renders faith meaningless. And this is the real agenda – the cult members have no faith, but they do not want to be exposed.

The Bible writers often identify God's ability and God's will. They do not make such a sharp distinction between the two that they always need to say both in order to indicate that something would occur. In many contexts, to state either is to affirm both. They do not refer to God's ability in a way that the discussion makes no progress until they also refer to God's will. To affirm that God is able is to affirm confidence in the outcome. Because he is able, it is assumed that the desired result is guaranteed.

For example, Paul wrote, "Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls. And he will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make him stand" (Romans 14:4). The fact that God is able to make a person stand translates into assurance that the person will stand. Paul did not have to add, "if it is his will." If God can, the man will. But if we take how the cult of unbelief thinks about healing and apply it here, then there would be no basis for assurance. The outcome would still remain open and unknown. By the standard of the historic and orthodox cult, Paul's statement would be fallacious.

However, it is unlikely that religious scoundrels would glibly throw "if it is his will" at this verse, because it is referring to either something that they are comfortable to affirm, or something where their unbelief and failure can remain hidden. Thus even if they do not believe that God will uphold them as believers, or as it is often the case, even if they have never been genuine believers, they would boldly declare this verse without adding "if it is his will" and remain unexposed. But when it comes to healing, they add "if it is his will." They say this so that they can exclaim, "God can heal," as if they have faith, but add, "if it is his will," for they have no faith.

If they were to be consistent, they would have to say that Paul's statement provides no assurance of the outcome, although the apostle himself was confident. They would have to say that Paul was mistaken, and call him a theological novice or even a heretic just like they call anyone who follows the teachings of Jesus on healing. Otherwise, they would have to say that, "And he will be healed, for the Lord is able to make him well." They would have to say that God's ability guarantees the outcome. But they cannot be consistent, because their theological system is defined by the agenda of unbelief, rebellion, and tradition.

Then Paul did it again. He wrote, "I was appointed a preacher and apostle and teacher, which is why I suffer as I do. But I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able to guard until that day what has been entrusted to me." He was convinced that "he is able"? So what? Didn't he know that God would only do it "if it is his will"? For Paul, God's ability to preserve the gospel legacy was sufficient to guarantee the outcome. He never bothered to show that it was also God's will to do it. He could say God can or God will. He did not make a distinction and then tried to satisfy it. But for our stupid theologians, it means nothing to say "God is able to heal." They have artificially introduced the variable, "if it is his will," into the equation. This is a failure to grasp the biblical language of theology at the fundamental level. They are total trash as scholars, total failures as teachers and leaders. They dishonor God and misrepresent the gospel, and they make things worse for everybody.

Jude also speaks in terms of God's ability: "Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy." My heart erupts in assurance and thankfulness. The apostles and I speak the same language, so when I read this I hear, "God will keep me from stumbling and present me blameless." Praise God! What insolence it would be to sneer and mumble, "Yeah, if it is his will." But this is the satanic legacy of the historic and orthodox cult. This is the kind of thing preachers

and theologians do to the revelation of God when it comes to things they do not wish you to believe, such as effective prayer and miracle healing. And you pay them to do it.

Want more? "For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted" (Hebrews 2:18). Your pastor says, "God is able to heal anyone, and he will heal you if it is his will." But the idiot would use this verse to encourage the whole congregation, claiming that God would help those who are tempted. Next Sunday, when he uses the verse this way again for the hundredth time, stand up and confront him: "Yeah! If it is his will!" Do this every time he appeals to God's ability to exhort the people, and see how he likes it. "He is able to preserve us? If it is his will, right? So prove it! Prove separately that it is his will to preserve us. Prove it for each individual here, one by one. Prove it, or else these sermons from your filthy mouth are useless. Prove it, or else we can know God preserves us only after each one of us reaches the end of our days. Where is the assurance? We pay you for this? Stop wasting our time and say something that you know is God's will."

Then the preacher recites in his obnoxious religious tone, "Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them" (Hebrews 7:25). "He is able to save?" Good for him! Why does this mean anything to me if his ability means nothing unless it is "the will of God"? The cult of orthodox unbelief insists that God is able to heal, but even if you have faith for it, it will happen only "if it is his will." Jesus promised that God would give us what we ask when we pray in faith, but the cult again adds, "if it is his will." So can the fact that "he is able to save" give me any assurance that he will save any particular individual, even an individual who has faith that he will save him to the uttermost? How come his ability guarantees one thing but not the other? This is the hypocrisy of the cult of unbelief and tradition. If "he is able" gives me assurance that he saves to the uttermost, then "he is able" gives me assurance that he heals to the uttermost. If "he is able" does not mean that he heals, then "he is able" does not mean that he saves.

How do we unravel this silliness? Return to the language and theology of Scripture. God's ability is equivalent to his willingness in the context of a relation of redemption or a mission of redemption. This applies to God's ability to uphold our faith, to preserve our legacy – and to heal our bodies. It applies to God's ability to save us from temptation, from apostasy – and from sickness. If we follow the God-centered language and reasoning of the Bible writers, we must conclude that the historic and orthodox distinction between God's ability and God's will in his benefits and powers was a satanic invention.

Given the way Scripture presents God's ability to save and to heal, to make rich and to make safe, if we must discuss the will of God at all, then the burden rests on those who suppose it might not be the will of God in specific instances to do these things, rather than on those who assume that he would, for God is able. In other words, because God is able to heal, the starting point is to assume that he would heal, and not to assume that he would heal only "if it is his will," as if it would be the exception for him to heal. But again, to even suggest this exercise is a discomfiting concession. It is only an "even if" observation. The cult of historic and orthodox scholarship has complicated everything and installed

hurdles between God and people, between the benefits of God and the needs of men. This is why people hate religion.

Abraham

Paul said Abraham was convinced that "God was able to do what he had promised" (Romans 4:21), and the outcome was certain. This faith was "counted to him as righteousness" (v. 22). Now Jesus said, "And whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith" (Matthew 21:22). This is also a promise, but the cult of orthodox unbelief adds, "if it is his will" and leaves the outcome unknown. Was Jesus too stupid to add "if it is his will"? This kind of faith cannot be counted as righteousness.

God promised that Abraham would have a son, and that his descendants would become numerous like the stars. He promised that he would make his name great. It was not presented as a promise of salvation or justification as such, and it was not a call to suffering discipleship. It was a promise of healing, prosperity, and glory for Abraham. And Abraham was justified by believing in this promise. The sort of message that false teachers call heresy today has been the foundation for the calling of Moses, the coming of Christ, and the salvation of Christians. Abraham recognized that his own body and his wife's body were old and barren, but because God said that he would have a son, natural circumstances became irrelevant. He believed that God was able to perform a miracle of healing.

It would have been redundant to believe that God was willing to do what he said. Of course he was willing – he said it. God said, "Abraham, I have made you the father of nations. You are going to have a son. I will make your name great." Imagine if Abraham had said, "I know you are able, but are you willing to do it?" This would have made no sense, but somehow it has become a pillar in Christian reasoning. "Well...I just said you are going to have a son." "Right, I heard you. But are you willing to do it?" Should we treat God like a child? It is even more absurd to focus on the will of God for healing given all that the Bible says about the nature of God, the work of Christ, and the ministry of the apostles and the believers. Even the attempt to demonstrate the will of God for healing seems redundant and ridiculous. Abraham believed that God was able to do this thing that was impossible for human power to accomplish. And that was faith.

Suppose I order breakfast at a restaurant. Vincent: "I would like an omelette with lots of spinach and mushroom." Waiter: "Good choice, but are you willing to have an omelette with lots of spinach and mushroom?" Vincent: "Get me that omelette!" Waiter: "Yeah, but is it your will though?" If you overhear this frustrating conversation, your suspicion would be correct – it is the will of the waiter to hinder the order, not Vincent. Or, mother: "Son, please wash the dishes." Son: "I will do it, if it is your will." Mother: "Stop stalling and go wash the dishes!" Son: "Yeah, but is it your will though?" The son, who verbally defers to the mother's will again and again, in fact displays a most blatant and obnoxious kind of defiance. He cares nothing about the will of the mother. He is driven by his own rebellious will, but he is too proud and dishonest to admit the truth. This is the reality of the constant deference to the will of God on healing. The topic is mentioned in the first place due to a deep-seated defiance toward God.

Faith is Able

A man's son had a demon and the disciples of Jesus failed to cast it out (Mark 9:17-18). Jesus declared that they failed not because it was the will of God, but because of the unbelief in them (Matthew 17:20). He placed the explanation on the faith of man. He told them, "If you have faith like a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move, and nothing will be impossible for you." He did not say, "nothing will be impossible for God," but "nothing will be impossible for you" – nothing will be impossible for man. Hey, don't look at me, he was the one who said it.

The father turned to Jesus and said, "If you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us" (Mark 9:22). Throughout the entire episode, no one – Jesus, the disciples, the man, the son, the demon – said anything about the will of God. We would assume the man believed that God had the ability to expel the demon and that the demon could not be stronger than God himself. Thus when he said to Jesus, "if you can do anything," he was not addressing Jesus as God, but as a teacher or prophet (v. 17). When Peter confessed that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God, Jesus answered that it was revealed to specific individuals: "For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven." We cannot assume that those who came to Jesus knew that he was the Son of God, or God himself. Many of the people did not even know that he was the Messiah. This reminder will become useful in the next section.

Jesus answered the man, "All things are possible for one who believes." The context was healing, so although this statement applies to other things, it must apply to healing. As if to teach us that faith applies to all things, Jesus said that faith can even uproot trees and remove mountains. All miracles, all cases of healing the sick and casting out demons are possible for a person who believes. All miracles are possible for the human, the man – not "if it is God's will" but "if the man has faith." This is heresy to the cult of historic and orthodox religion, the cult of human tradition, but this is the heresy that Jesus taught. We must decide who is the true heretic, and our answer reflects whether we are true followers of Christ.

He did not say, "All things are possible with God" or "All things are possible to me, for I am God." He did not say, "Anything is possible, if it is God's will." There was no consideration and no implication of anything that has to do with the will of God in this whole transaction. If the will of God never came up when Jesus healed the sick, why does it come up every time when Christians talk about the topic? Why is it emphasized all the time even by those who believe in healing? Satan has so successfully guided the development of Christian theology and practice that every time the issue is mentioned, it is already set up against the biblical teaching. Christians who follow Jesus on the matter fight an uphill battle. We still win, but it is better to expose the fraud and level the mountain.

Jesus made the outcome dependent on the man. He kept the burden on the faith of man. Later in private he also rebuked the disciples for their lack of faith, but at that moment it was understood that he referred to this man's faith, not Jesus' ability or faith, and not the disciples' ability or faith. So the man answered, "I believe. Help my unbelief." Even in his unbelief, he never wondered about the will of God. He never mentioned it. No one

mentioned it. No one in the Gospels and the Acts mentioned it relative to healing and the prayer of faith. And Jesus cast out the demon.

"I will. Be clean."

Now what about this? A leper came to Jesus and said, "Lord, if you will, you can make me clean" (Matthew 8:1-3). This was the closest thing to asking if it was God's will to heal, and since Jesus responded in the affirmative, it is often used by teachers on biblical healing to support their case. He was the only person who said anything that resembled a question about the will of God on healing. However, it looks this way to us only because we already have the will of God in mind. He did not ask about the will of God. He directed the statement to Jesus. For the leper to have intended this as a question about the will of God, he must have had the same revelation that Peter received about the deity of Christ, and to have received it even before Peter did.

Just as the father with a demon-possessed child was not asking if it was within God's power to deliver his son, here the leper was not asking if it was God's will to grant him healing. Rather, he was asking if it was Jesus' will to minister healing to him, that is, Jesus as a teacher or prophet, not as God. Even if we accept the false assumption that the leper was wondering about the will of God, Jesus answered, "I will. Be clean." But then, we would have to suppose that the father in that other passage doubted God's ability, as if a demon could be stronger than God himself. He said, "I believe. Help my unbelief." He did not have zero faith. Just as it makes no sense to think that the father was asking about God's ability, it makes no sense to think that the leper was asking about God's will.

It was not a strange thing to ask a man of God. When Naaman visited Elisha, the prophet never went out to meet him, but healed him in a way that the leper did not expect (2 Kings 5:9-11). When the kings of Israel and Judah went to Elisha, this same prophet said that if not for the presence of the king of Judah, he would have refused to meet with the king of Israel (2 Kings 3:14). So of course a servant of God can be willing or unwilling to minister. People sometimes ask me if I am willing to pray about this or that. They are not asking if it is God's will to grant their requests, but they are asking if I am willing to pray for them about those requests. My answer would not indicate whether it is God's will to grant them. Someone can invite me to their church to preach, and I might refuse for one reason or another, but that would not suggest God does not want them to hear the gospel.

Thus our observation holds true. It remains that of all the people who were healed under the ministry of Jesus, there is not even one recorded instance where the sick asked about the will of God in healing, not one indication that they even cared about it, and not one example where Jesus urged anyone to consider the matter. The silence is significant, because Jesus actively emphasized other things when it came to healing, things that he portrayed as factors that determined the outcome, and none of those things had anything to do with the will of God. But wait...as we shall see, there is one apparent exception where Jesus appealed to the will of God to refuse a request for healing, but when the seeker defied him and persisted, Jesus called that faith and performed the miracle anyway. This reinforces our point even more. "The will of God" – this supposedly defining factor in every instance of healing – was practically irrelevant in the ministry of Jesus.

Let me make a disclaimer again at halftime for the biased and feeble-minded. I did not say that God's will is metaphysically irrelevant – God is never metaphysically irrelevant to any object or event. But God's will is practically irrelevant when it comes to healing. Practically, it is so irrelevant that it should not need to be taught, asked, or mentioned. Any effort to do so should only stem from a necessity to recover from the unchecked deception that has propagated throughout the world all these centuries. Even the teaching that it is the will of God to heal everyone without exception is a compromise, a concession to the pressure of an enduring deception and false emphasis. Follow the pattern of Jesus.

"Do you believe?"

Two blind men followed Jesus and cried, "Have mercy on us, Son of David" (Matthew 9:27). Jesus asked them, "Do you believe that I am able to do this?" Since they followed him and cried out to him, was it not obvious that they believed he was able? They believed that he was able, enough for them to approach him aggressively. But Jesus still asked them if they believed. He did not ask them if they believed that it was the will of God to heal them. He asked for a confession of faith. What was the faith that he demanded? Faith in the ability of Jesus to minister healing, not faith that it was the will of God to give them healing.

"Do you want?"

The vast majority of the miracles of healing were initiated by the sick. Never asking whether it was the will of God to heal, and never asking whether it was the will of Jesus to minister, they came to Jesus expecting to receive what they wanted, and in some cases they took healing from him without even talking to him (Matthew 9:20, 14:36). Thus even the will of Jesus to minister as a teacher or prophet was often irrelevant.

Jesus initiated some of the miracles. In one instance he approached a man who had been an invalid for thirty-eight years (John 5:5). He asked the man, "Do you want to be healed?" He did not say, "Do you believe it is the will of God to heal you?" or even "It is the will of God to heal you" or "It is my will to heal you." He focused only on the will of man. No other person's will was discussed, implied, or wondered about. Nowadays people would think, "Well, isn't it a given that a man wants to be healed? The real question is whether it is the will of God!" Jesus did the opposite throughout his ministry. The man did not realize that Jesus was the one who could provide the healing, but he was looking to an existing phenomenon that he had trouble taking advantage of (John 5:7). Nevertheless, his answer indicated that he wanted to be healed – the will of man – and Jesus healed him.

He did not mention the will of God. I am not even saying that the will of God is always to heal. No, I am saying that based on what we observe from Scripture, the will of God was practically never part of the equation. It was never mentioned, debated, or considered. When a "will" was mentioned, it was always the will of man, the one who was sick. And Jesus' own will did not matter either. One time he said that he was going to visit a man's home to heal his servant, but the man suggested that Jesus could speak the word only, and the servant would be healed at a distance (Matthew 8:7-8). He had faith, not in the will of

God to heal – there is no indication this crossed his mind – but in the ability of Jesus to minister. Jesus did not say, "Do you know who I am? How dare you tell me how to do my job?" Instead, he was amazed and complied, and he called it faith. He allowed the faith of man and the will of man to change his original approach to the miracle.

Christians claim that they believe God is able, and then they trip up themselves and everybody else by wondering if God is willing, when that question should have never been asked, especially when it comes to healing. Jesus never said, "Father, if it is your will, heal this person." But in one way or another he did say to some of the people, "What is your will – the will of man?" Our ministries of healing would become much stronger in the long run if we will follow the pattern of Jesus and change the people's focus. Are you willing to be healed? What is your will – the will of man?

"What do you want?"

Two blind men heard that Jesus was passing by and cried out, "Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!" (Matthew 20:30). The crowd rebuked them, but they cried out all the more. So Jesus said to them, "What do you want me to do for you?" In other words, "What is your will – the will of man?" Was it not obvious that they were blind men, and that they wanted to be healed? But Jesus still asked them, and he asked them not about the will of God, but about the will of man. Then he restored their sight.

Another passage is similar. A blind beggar called Bartimaeus said, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" (Mark 10:47). Jesus asked him, "What do you want me to do for you?" He said nothing about the will of God, and nothing about his own will as the Christ. What is the man's desire? What is the will of man? Bartimaeus stated the will of man: "Rabbi, that I might recover my sight." Jesus counted his aggressive approach and his statement on the will of man as stemming from faith. "Go, your faith has made you well."

"Great is your faith!"

A Gentile woman asked Jesus to deliver her daughter from a demon (Matthew 15:22). Jesus ignored her and the disciples rebuffed her, but she persisted. Then Jesus answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (v. 24). It was not time for the benefits of the gospel to be unleashed upon the whole world. This was the closest thing to a statement concerning the will of God that Jesus made about a specific person when it came to healing, and he implied that it was not God's will at this time to heal the woman's daughter. He even added that it was "not right" to prematurely take what belonged to Israel and offer it to the Gentiles (v. 26). In effect, he said, "God has not sent me to heal you. It is not right to heal you."

(My assertion holds true that the will of God was never mentioned in specific instances of healing, because Jesus only made an implication, not a direct statement, and it was a reference to the general will of God for the world, not a reference to the specific will of God about the woman's daughter. What Jesus said was true, but that was before faith came up. God's general will for faith supersedes God's general will for the world. In addition, we also observe that a number of Gentiles were healed under the ministry of Jesus.)

The woman was not a theologian. She did not know all the lofty debates about the sovereignty of God. She did not know about covenants and dispensations. She did not know about all the complicated excuses that people invented to justify their failures. And if she knew, she did not care. She only knew that she wanted deliverance for her daughter, and that Jesus could provide what she wanted. Good for her! It meant that she was able to bypass all the false and deadly applications that scholars have made of the doctrine of divine sovereignty.

So she insisted on her will even in the face of Jesus' implication that it was not in the will of God to heal her daughter, and that healing was unavailable to her at that time. She answered that although God had sent Jesus only to Israel, so that it was not God's will for her to receive the benefits of the gospel at that time, even the leftovers of God's power would have been sufficient. She believed in God's ability, not God's will. She decided that even the debris from God's table was strong enough to grant her will, although the full provision of healing kept hitting his own people in the face over and over again, and many of them still refused. History had repeated itself in the Christian world.

Jesus exclaimed, "Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you desire." In other words, "Now that is some faith! Let it be done according to your will" – the will of man. This was how miracles of healing operated under Jesus and the apostles, and how miracles of healing happen today. God has a standing agreement with faith to give it whatever it demands regardless of covenants and dispensations. Faith has priority even over God's own set times and programs. The benefit of healing was intended for wide distribution among the Gentiles after the resurrection of Jesus and starting from the ministry of the apostles (Acts 1:8). It was meant for the future, but faith could seize it now. Nowadays, theologians seize benefits that are intended for today, and shove them way off into the past or into the future. But what of it? If you have faith, you can seize what you want now.

"Ask what you will"

Our topic is healing, but Jesus maintained the same focus on the faith of man and the will of man in his teachings on faith and prayer. He taught the opposite of what Christian historic and orthodox rubbish have said about these things for most of the past two thousand years. The cult of tradition is anti-Christ on faith, prayer, healing, miracles, and the benefits and powers of the gospel.

Jesus said, "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you" (Matthew 7:7). He did not say, "Ask, and it will be given to you, if it is his will. Seek, and you will find, if it is his will. Knock, and it will be opened to you, if it is his will." And what kinds of things did people ask for in his day? The same things that people want in our day. The people were not spiritual gurus that devoted their days to attaining greater and greater enlightenment. They were not interested in some Christian nirvana. Among other things, they wanted to be free from diseases and demons.

Of course, many of them also wanted spiritual direction, to worship God, and to follow the right path, but to force all the teachings of Jesus to apply only to this category would be an injustice to Christ, and an injustice to all the people who came to him for their ordinary and natural desires. Jesus emphasized the will and the action of man on purpose: "For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened" (v. 8). The will of God is not mentioned or considered. But do you ask? Do you seek? Do you knock?

As if to anticipate the betrayal of Christian orthodoxy, he continued, "Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent?" He was correcting the orthodox theology and heathen mindset of his day, but unbelief has never changed. Let man specify what he wants from God, and God will not give him something different, or something painful and the opposite of what he wants, and then force the man to pretend that it is a better gift. The cult of tradition has tried to shove this kind of religious rubbish down our throats, but Jesus confronted this in his own day and also anticipated the unbelief in our day.

Elsewhere, Jesus said, "Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you receive it, and you will have it" (Mark 11:24), or "And whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith" (Matthew 21:22). The cult of unbelief adds, "Yes, if it is his will." But again and again, Jesus made special effort to teach the opposite, focusing only on the faith and the will of man. Since his teaching came from the will of God (John 7:16, 8:26, 38), it must mean that the will of God is to focus on the will of man when it comes to faith, prayer, and healing. The will of God is to ask, "What is the will of man?" The ones who keep adding "if it is his will" are the very ones who reject the will of God.

Suppose Jesus said what he wanted to say, exactly what he meant, what would it take for the religious cults to accept this? If his words mean nothing until we modify them to accommodate our theories and our failures, then why do we pay him any attention in the first place? Why not stop pretending that we care about what he said? Let Jesus say what he wanted to say. He had said it so many times and in so many different ways. God gives you what you ask, not what he arbitrarily decides to give. God gives you what you believe, not what he decides to give regardless of what you believe. God gives according to your faith and according to your will, not according to his will.

Jesus went out of his way to teach this lesson. Don't you think that in those days the religious scholars as well as many of the common people believed in the sovereignty of God? Of course they did. "The will of God" was even more ingrained in their minds than in our religious cults. Far more ingrained. So don't you think that Jesus also opened himself to their criticisms for teaching like this? He was opening himself up to attacks even more than I am opening up myself to objections and misrepresentations by repeating what he taught. But he still did it. It was the truth, and it was what he wanted to teach. If you disagree with him, then renounce your discipleship and challenge him, but let him say what he said. Otherwise, it would be pointless to study or to debate about what he said.

Teaching on faith, he said in another place, "If you had faith like a grain of mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it would obey you" (Luke 17:6). Jesus was intelligent. He knew what words he wanted to use. And he said, "The tree would obey you." He did not say that the tree would obey the will of God, but the will of man. And he did not say that the tree would obey the word of God, but the word of man. He also said that he taught what the Father wanted him to say. Therefore, it is the will of God to teach us that when we have faith, our situation would obey us, the will of man. It is the will of God to contradict the historic and orthodox cult. It is the will of God to contradict the cult of unbelief and tradition that appeals to the will of God to glamorize sickness and suffering, and unanswered prayer.

Then Jesus said, "If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you" (John 15:7, see also John 14:13-14, 16:23-24). Of course you must abide in Christ. Of course his words must abide in you. To pray as a Christian, you do need to be a Christian, don't you? But if you are a Christian, if you are a follower of Jesus Christ, then "ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you." You will ask for your will, and it will be done according to your will. If this is not what Jesus meant, then he would not have said it this way. But he did say it this way, and no one has the authority to add to it or to change the thrust of the statement.

It is a remarkable fact that of all the characters in Scripture, Jesus placed the most emphasis on the will of man in faith, in prayer, and in miracles of healing and miracles of nature. His emphasis was consistently on the will of man and the desire of man, not the will of God. He was so explicit and deliberate in this that it was as if he could predict the betrayal of our scholars and creeds, who would insist on the opposite, and who would count as heretics those who repeat and follow his teachings. They condemn Jesus even to the point of willing to die in his name! But they do not follow his teachings. They follow their own human inventions of what is proper piety. Their Jesus is a projection of their unbelief and delusion.

Let Your Will Be Done

Satan is a master of deception and a master of distraction. But Paul wrote, "We are not ignorant of his schemes." At least I am not ignorant of his schemes, but others have strayed far. The enemy digs a hole next to the main issue, and he tricks everybody to jump into it and fight it out. Whoever wins is still in the hole, and has made no significant progress. He has inspired faithless cult members to invent a battlefield on the will of God concerning healing that did not exist before and never should have existed. If he has shoved you into that hole, win the fight in front of you, and then jump out as soon as you can. Never fall into that trap again.

The real battlefield is the faith of man and the will of man. Jesus placed the success or failure for receiving healing on man alone, not God. One must believe that God is able, without any thought of whether God is willing. And then he must decide that he indeed desires to become well, that it is his will – the will of man – to receive healing. This completes the equation for the miracle of healing. It is also the equation for answered prayer.

This "will of God" that the cult of tradition exalts as the determining factor in healing in fact never entered the equation in the ministries of Jesus and the apostles in the sense defined in the present discussion. The scholars and ministers have no understanding of what the Bible teaches about the will of God and how the Bible presents the doctrine of divine sovereignty. They exploit the notion of the will of God as an excuse for their unbelief and failure. They fashion the doctrine of the sovereignty of God into a theological device that enables them to destroy the meaning and relevance of God's own doctrines and commands.

An emphasis on the will of God in healing forces the doctrine or ministry toward a direction that Jesus did not want anyone to take. Then the whole thing remains defective even when one demonstrates that it is the will of God to heal. Jesus, instead of introducing the will of God into the equation, went out of his way to stress the faith of man and the will of man. What do you believe? What do you want? Follow Jesus in the way you approach healing, whether as one who receives it or as one who ministers it. Teach about God, that he is one who forgives all sins and heals all sicknesses (Psalm 103:3). Tell people to have faith that he is able to heal. God is able to overcome any demon by the authority that he has given to us, and to restore the body from any disease or damage, and he is able to shield us from any attack from the devil and the environment. Then focus the attention on the will of man, on what the people want from God, on what they want to receive or want to happen.

If the people are under severe assault from the cult of unbelief using "the will of God" to spread doubt on healing, then make an appropriate reply. But refuse to allow this to permanently distort how the doctrine ought to be perceived and presented. Return to the arrangement and proportion that Jesus showed us – focus on the faith of man and the will of man. I am not suggesting that we ought to tell people that the will of God is never mentioned in healing, because it would be a concession even to draw attention to this. I mean we should not even mention it unless it is unavoidable, perhaps at the very beginning of a process of recovery from the theology of unbelief and tradition. Preach like Jesus did. Heal like Jesus did. You should not even need to tell people, "It is God's will to heal you." Don't mention the will of God at all. Instead, challenge them: "Is it your will to be healed?" The matter is simple, isn't it? Do you believe that God is able to do all things? And what is it that you want God to do for you? Is it your will to receive healing? Is it your will to receive this thing that you ask? Then let your will be done!

3. THE CHARISMATIC MATRIX

The Great Expansion

Long ago, God spoke by the prophets that the Spirit of God would be given to all of his people for signs and wonders, visions and dreams, prophecies and miracles. Then the Son of God himself appeared and declared that the time had arrived. He said that all his followers would perform miracles in his name by faith, and that they would receive another dimension of power when the Holy Spirit would come upon them. After that, God further affirmed by his apostles this promise and command for prophecies and miracles, confirming this by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit. The completion of Scripture became the guarantee that this mandate to live in the supernatural will never change. This is the final word from God on the subject, and thus it is also the final verdict concerning those who oppose. The ones who disobey it can never be honored as faithful disciples by the standard of the gospel. They might anoint themselves as champions of orthodoxy before men, but they are heralds of heresy in the eyes of God. As the Scripture says, "How shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?" Religious charlatans not only neglect this salvation, but they condemn it, and they teach others to condemn it, and they persecute those who receive it.

The supernatural powers of God are available to every Christian by faith, and especially one who has received the fullness of the Spirit. These miraculous powers are supposed to keep expanding in strength and in scope until we meet God face to face. At that time the powers of God shall increase in us to such extreme degrees that what is supernatural to us now will become our natural everyday abilities. Only then will the miraculous "cease," because the miraculous would increase to such an extent and because we would be so transformed that what we have accepted as human limitations since the time of creation would no longer apply. What we can do by God's miraculous endowments now would be dwarfed by what we can do by our natural abilities when that time comes. Only in this sense will prophecies and miracles ever cease, because by that time prophecies and miracles shall be too weak.

When our natural abilities far surpass what prophecies and miracles can do – and not until that happens – then they will become as the things of children to us. If right now you can lift a hundred pounds, and with a machine you can lift a thousand pounds, your need for that machine will cease when you become so strong that you can lift a trillion tons with your little finger. Right now we can receive healing and immunity by faith, but healing will cease when we become immortal and indestructible. Right now there is the discerning of spirits, but that ability would be a step down once we can seize a demon by the throat with our bare hands or play tag with an angel, and win. Until then, prophecy, healing, and all kinds of signs and wonders will never cease, but they are meant to increase, expand, and multiply as God's people transition toward that state of transformation and glorification in Christ. Anyone who dares to suggest that these things should wane even a little is a false teacher. He is an enemy of Christ, of the church, and of humanity. He is a wolf in wolf's clothing – he is obviously an intruder, but people choose not to see when they have itching ears for doctrines that assure them in their unbelief.

The Three-by-Nine Prison

As Paul discusses the operation of spiritual things in 1 Corinthians 12, he lists some examples of the manifestations of the Spirit (v. 7-11). Charismatics often label all of these items as "gifts" and organize them into three categories: the gifts of revelation, the gifts of inspiration, and the gifts of power. The gifts of revelation would include wisdom, knowledge, and discerning of spirits. The gifts of inspiration would include, prophecy, tongues, and the interpretation of tongues. The gifts of power would include faith, healing, and the working of miracles. They are said to be gifts that know something, gifts that say something, and gifts that do something. (For our purpose, when we refer to the charismatics, we are also including the Pentecostals.)

This scheme is false. The charismatics have not only misdefined the items and invented the categories, but the act of defining and categorizing them has been a mistake. The errors involved are so numerous and the implications so far-reaching that a series of books can be written about this. It would require a long and tedious effort to trace out the damage that this false teaching has caused. However, the errors are so silly that I lack the interest to pursue a detailed discussion about them. Since not all charismatics say exactly the same things, we might also consider the need to address every little nuance and variation to cover our bases, but that would get boring fast as well. It is not worth the frustration. If you have not perceived the foolishness of this charismatic scheme before, it will become obvious once I point it out. So instead of attempting a careful dissection, I will perform a rapid-fire rant. Putting the axe to the root of the issue ought to be sufficient.

Paul's purpose is to affirm unity in diversity. He writes that there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit, and that there are varieties of service, but the same Lord. His intention is not to establish a definitive list of possible spiritual powers and manifestations, but to rattle off a number of them to produce the effect of variety. It would work against his purpose to force them into a neat package. The variety is supposed to be a mess only to be resolved in the fact that all the powers and manifestations come from the same Spirit. The order is not supposed to be inherent in the list itself. If the list can be organized and resolved into a unity apart from the Spirit, then Paul has not successfully listed a variety of manifestations as he intends in the passage. Thus the list cannot be arranged and the items cannot be organized in the way charismatic tradition has done.

Many charismatics attempt to categorize every spiritual manifestation under one of the nine items. This is good only if Paul intends for the nine items to encompass all the possibilities, and if the charismatics have correctly defined these items, and if the only way miracles can happen is by the gifts. However, the context suggests that Paul is only listing various things that come to mind for the sake of producing a sense of variety. If Paul does not intend to produce a complete list in the first place, and if the gifts have been misdefined by the charismatics, and if there are a number of ways miracles can happen other than by the gifts, then to place every miracle or manifestation under the nine items can only produce destructive effects. What if there are in fact ten items? A large number of spiritual abilities and manifestations, even entire ministries, would be placed under wrong categories. But what if there are twelve? What if there are fifty trillion possibilities? And we force all miracles, all manifestations, all supernatural ministries into nine misdefined labels? And

then stuff them into three categories that we invented? Perhaps many of the gifts overlap in powers and functions, so that they cannot be numbered. That is, depending on how each item is defined, perhaps the nine can count as seven, or perhaps fifteen can count as six. Or, perhaps the great diversity in how each gift operates is such that a definite number becomes meaningless. That is, depending on how much difference is tolerated before two ways a gift manifests become defined as two different gifts, perhaps one gift can be seen as three, or three trillion. If the text and other parts of Scripture provides no clue, then any decision is arbitrary.

Charismatics have failed to consider these issues. This is why, once they moved beyond the point of affirming belief in them, their teachings on the gifts of the Spirit have done more harm than good. Of course, the charismatics are still superior to the cessationists, who have invented an anti-Christian religion altogether. It is a religion where God does not do what he said, and where Christ's followers prove their faithfulness to him by disbelieving what their Master promised and by disobeying what their Master commanded. Cessationists have no right to make any input on this matter, because their doctrine does not even enter the realm of Christian doctrine. They have no place at the table. They damn themselves more and more whenever they mention this subject. Their only right move is repentance in great terror and wailing. It is not a respectable achievement to be merely better than spiritual scum. Christians must be fully engaged with the truth of God and the power of God. The cessationists speak from a theological position that is outside of the Christian faith. That said, the charismatics have issued ludicrous teachings on the gifts of the Spirit. They know very little beyond acknowledging that they happen, and much of what they think they know, they invented and formed into their own tradition. If they would stop pretending to be clever and read the words of the Bible, the truth is there staring them right in the face.

Paul's intention is to produce a sense of variety, not to produce a complete list with inherent order. He intends to acknowledge the variety to the point of apparent chaos, and then consolidate all things by one Spirit. This is what would address the Corinthian situation. Thus to reintroduce order by an attempt to consolidate the list itself works against Paul's purpose of listing these items in the first place. This is especially true when it is an artificial order that has no basis in the text, imposed by unthinking individuals that pass on what they have heard elsewhere. There is no indication that the apostle considers the nine items a full representation of the manifestations of the Spirit, but every indication suggests the contrary, and still less does he intend to allow categories that he has not listed to box in the nine items further. What the charismatics have done is against the purpose of the passage and would not make sense to the Corinthians themselves, whose experiences were not so restrictively organized.

There is another list in Romans 12. Some of the items appear to be abilities of a different nature, but we cannot regard it as another kind of list altogether, because Paul includes prophecy there, which also appears here. And that list in Romans 12 also seems to be a list of examples, and not a complete list of a certain kind. Should we combine the list, or keep them separate? We cannot keep them separate thinking that they are two lists concerning totally different kinds of items, because prophecy appears on both lists. But if we add those

items to this list in First Corinthians, we end up with more than nine items. Then what happens to the three categories? And would we then have the complete list? If both lists are only examples to illustrate the main point in each passage, which is the correct understanding, then there is no need to overanalyze them. Just allow them to stand on their own as lists of examples. And if they are only examples, then both lists combined would not make a complete catalog.

We cannot say that one list refers to supernatural manifestations and the other list refers to general ministry gifts, since prophecy appears on both lists without distinction. Sometimes the claim is that the list in Romans refers to so-called motivational gifts. But this is yet another invention to organize the items in a way that finds no basis in the text, as well as to harmonize what is done here to what is done elsewhere, so that the product becomes more and more twisted. The theory is contradicted by the passage, because Paul specifies the proper motivation for each gift separately after he mentions the gift. The motivation is not the gift itself, but it is something separate from the gift, and it is the attitude by which one should exercise the gift. In this sense there is no such thing as a motivational gift or ministry. For example, he writes that the one who has the gift of giving should do it with generosity. The gift is the ministry of giving, and the motivation is generosity. Paul says he should exercise the ministry of giving with the proper motivation, which is generosity. The gift is not the motivation of generosity. Likewise, he writes that the one who leads should do it with diligence, and the one who shows mercy should do it with cheerfulness. The gifts are leadership and mercy, not the motivational forces of diligence and cheerfulness.

Then it is sometimes said that these are vocational gifts. If so, then it is even more obvious that this is not a complete list, since there are many more spiritual vocations than the items listed. But if these are vocational gifts, then why not just call them gifts? The gifts listed in First Corinthians also refer to the consistent ministries or "vocations" of those who have those gifts. Thus this is yet another thing people have invented to sound clever, when it is unintelligent and unnecessary. (Some cessationists also refer to the items in Romans 12 as motivational or vocational gifts, but our topic is about the charismatics. The cessationist theology of spiritual gifts and ministries is much worse, because while they do not have more wisdom, they have no faith. Thus their theology not only carries the same problems, but the gifts and ministries are either naturalized or rejected. The result is a non-Christian religion.)

You see, the errors in charismatic tradition regarding a number of these passages are so numerous and far-reaching in their damage that it would take excruciating effort to unravel them. The charismatics also like to teach about the so-called "five-fold ministries" from Ephesians 4:11. The teaching is also false. They have again miscounted the items, and misdefined the items, and made them into a complete list of its kind. In restoring a correct understanding about the gifts and ministries, it would be better to start from zero by observing the correct meanings of the relevant passages instead of addressing the errors in detail. It would be infuriating to wrestle with the combined chaos of three or more misidentified lists of miscounted, misdefined, and miscategorized items. Multiple interlocking matrices of nonsense. The combinations and permutations of errors would

become astronomical, as we have witnessed in the charismatic world for many decades. We shall let our focus remain in First Corinthians.

All the nine items are misdefined to various degrees by the charismatics. They would arbitrarily define an item with no basis from the passage or from other parts of Scripture, and then they would find passages from the Bible describing events that seem to fit their definition of that item, and present those as examples of that item. The result satisfies themselves but the procedure is absurd. Suppose I define the gift of healing as the ability to walk from one place to another. This has no basis in this part of the Bible or any other part of the Bible. It even contradicts how the Bible uses the word or idea of healing. In fact, it contradicts what everybody means by healing. But I tell you this is what the gift means anyway. Then I find passages that describe people walking from place to place, and present those as examples of the gift of healing. Moreover, even if there are other ways that a person could walk, such as by the power of his own muscles and bones, when I am teaching about the gifts, all biblical passages that describe walking become examples of this specific way to enable walking. This is how the charismatics teach from 1 Corinthians 12, and it is utter foolishness.

The correct approach is to learn what the Bible means by the word or idea of healing, and acknowledge that this is likely what Paul also means when he uses the word or idea in this passage. Do the same with knowledge, wisdom, prophecy, faith, and the others. As for locating biblical examples, as if this is needed in the first place, it is more difficult. This is because the Bible teaches that healing, prophecy, and such things can happen in a number of ways, and it practically never uses the "gift" language when it describes a healing miracle, or when it describes any miracle, any feat of faith, or any answer to prayer. Thus it is difficult to insist that any miracle in the Bible serves as an illustration of the gift of healing or of any so-called gift. The Bible often credits the miracles to other things, such as faith, prayer, grace, power, God, and so on. It is ridiculous to associate every miracle to a gift just because we happen to be speaking about the gifts of the Spirit. The charismatics have lacked the aptitude to properly move forward from the starting point of acknowledging the gifts or miracles. They credit too many things to the gifts of the Spirit, and fail to acknowledge the other more prominent and frequent ways by which miracles can happen or by which Scripture describes how miracles happen.

The Random Definitions

According to charismatic tradition, the word of knowledge is a supernatural revelation of information about the present and the past. But the Bible does not refer to knowledge with this meaning or with this restriction. Knowledge is knowledge – it can refer to information of all kinds, such as doctrinal, technological, personal, and to information of all times, whether past, present, or future. Readers of the Bible should know this. Just think about how the Bible uses the word or the idea of knowledge, and the charismatic definition of the word of knowledge does not fit. It is ridiculous to restrict the word to this narrow meaning when the context offers no indication that this is what the word means, and to ignore all the ways that the Bible uses the word.

Then the word of wisdom is said to be knowledge of the future. This is so stupid it defies all wisdom. If the charismatics would receive a word of wisdom about this, they would realize that in the Bible wisdom as such is not knowledge of the future. But we do not need a word of wisdom to know this. Any ordinary reader of the Bible can think about how the Bible uses the word or the idea of wisdom and conclude that the charismatic definition of the word of wisdom does not fit. Wisdom is not just a specific kind of knowledge. In Scripture, wisdom and knowledge are closely related, but they are not distinguished by time. Wisdom can refer to intelligence, to understanding, to philosophical insight, to strategic design, such as the quality that God exhibited in the creation of the world and in the plan of redemption, or in the quality of Scripture as it explains these things to us, and as it teaches us what to think about various matters, about how to relate to God and to people, and so on. What the historic and orthodox theologians regard as impenetrable redemptive mysteries are open revelations to anyone who possesses wisdom. Wisdom can refer to the ability to offer sage advice. Wisdom teaches us how to attain personal and financial success, how to attain health and happiness, and to attain a spiritual and virtuous life. Wisdom refers to a distinct category of things, but the meaning can remain broad. It is outrageous to force an instance of the term to denote information about the future when the context provides zero justification for this. It demonstrates both a lack of wisdom and a lack of knowledge, and almost a lack of literacy.

This is what theological tradition does. This is what man-made religion produces – a bunch of nonsense to confuse and burden people. Someone dreams up a dumb idea and suggests it to others, and then it gets passed on, and on and on. Then it becomes orthodoxy, at least to that circle of people. This is how many of the satanic and damnable doctrines in the historic creeds have developed and survived to this day. One example is cessationism. As Jesus said, "Every plant not planted by my heavenly Father will be uprooted, so ignore them. They are blind guides leading the blind, and if one blind person guides another, they will both fall into a ditch." Of course, although the charismatic error is destructive, it is not a damnable heresy like cessationism, which opposes Jesus Christ on purpose. Still, there is no reason to perpetuate any false doctrine.

As for the discerning of spirits, how does it operate? If it is an intuitive knowledge about spirits or if it is a verbal revelation about spirits, or something along this line, then why does it not come under knowledge? Does the word of knowledge cover information about the present and the past, except when the information has to do with spirits? And does the word of wisdom refer to information about the future, except when it is about spirits? What if I receive a revelation about what you decided in the past as to what you would do in the future? Suppose God tells me that last week a demon persuaded you to have eggplant for breakfast, lunch, and dinner all through next week. Is that a word of knowledge, because you made that decision in the past, or is that a word of wisdom, because it concerns what you will do in the future? Is it both? Or is it the discerning of spirits because this is an evil diet? Even though it is only knowledge, somehow it becomes all three gifts rolled into one super prophetic revelation. How can we deduce any of this from 1 Corinthians 12 or from other parts of Scripture?

Perhaps the discerning of spirits occurs in the form of a vision, or perhaps it allows us to perceive and interact with the spirit world in the same way that we interact with the physical world. This would distinguish it from how the word of knowledge and the word of wisdom usually operate according to the charismatics. However, if the discerning of spirits either merges our perception of the physical world with the spiritual world, or if it exchanges our perception of the physical world with the spiritual world, does it offer any knowledge or wisdom when it happens? It would seem impossible for no information or insight to take place when something like this happens. But then the discerning of spirits becomes only one manifestation of knowledge and wisdom. Should something like this come under "discerning" of spirits in the first place, or does it come under some other manifestation that is not listed here?

When some people's cherished traditions are shown to be absurd, they often claim that the criticism is a strawman. The cessationists often use this excuse when our criticism against them is correct and they have no direct answer to it. The truth is they are shocked that their doctrines are so easily destroyed, and they cannot accept that they have been so stupid and misled all along. They resort to this defense when they do not understand their own traditions and the implications of these traditions. If you are acquainted with popular charismatic teachings, you would recognize that what I have been saying is not a strawman. I understand them exactly. Even if some charismatics define these things in different ways, do some thinking on your own and you will see that if they affirm anything like the tradition I am referring to, then it is similarly absurd. If there are those who call themselves charismatics, but if they do not think that Paul intends to list the nine items as a complete list of supernatural abilities, if they do not define the items like the charismatic tradition I am describing, if they do not organize them into the three categories mentioned or into any categories, and if they acknowledge that most miracles do not happen by the gifts but by other means, then the main criticisms might indeed not apply to these individuals. But if they apply, then they apply, and it is futile to make excuses or pretend that they have been misunderstood. Just admit that it has been an obvious and idiotic mistake all along.

Prophecy, in this tradition of the charismatics, is said to be mainly "forthtelling" instead of foretelling. Some would say that there is no revelation in prophecy as such, but that prophecy in its basic form is nothing more than an inspired utterance for "edification, and exhortation, and comfort" (1 Corinthians 14:3). In conjunction with their false definitions of knowledge and wisdom, prophecy that includes revelation would be prophecy plus the word of knowledge or the word of wisdom, or both. Again, the problem is that this is not how the word or the idea of prophecy is used here, or everywhere else in the Bible.

It is true that prophecy does not need to overtly contain unknown or hidden information. For example, it can inspire a person to utter a song of praise to God that rephrases what has been previously revealed or a message that happens to address the precise needs and thoughts of the audience. The error is in the claim that prophecy in itself does not include revelation, and that revelation comes under the word of wisdom and the word of knowledge. In fact, 1 Corinthians 14 itself would make this limitation on prophecy impossible. Verse 3 is often the only evidence presented to show that so-called simple prophecy does not contain any revelation. However, the verse only says that prophecy is

able to effect edification in others. It does not limit the content of the prophecy that would produce this edification. If God speaks to me by the Scriptures, I am edified. And if God speaks to me by a voice from heaven, I am also edified. If a prophecy says, "God loves you," I am edified. And if a prophecy says, "The man called John Smith that you met in Texas in March 2003 is now married to Mary Jane with three sons, two daughters, and five turtles. When you travel to Toronto next month, his second son Peter will bump into you in front of the Japanese bakery on Main Street, at which time he will drop two coins on the floor. Pick up one of those coins and throw it into the dirty water fountain on your left, but be careful not to hit the white stray cat," I am also edified.

Edification, exhortation, and comfort state the purposes or the effects, and not the means used to carry out these purposes and effects. They are general terms that place no restriction on how they are produced. God can use an inspired word spoken at the right time to edify someone, without adding revelation to it. Although there is no revelation, the content of the message would seem too fitting to be dismissed as coincidence. But God can also unleash a torrent of revelations to exhort and comfort someone. Edification can come from a mere reminder of God's care, but it can also come from detailed direction and information. Paul says that if one comes into a congregation where the believers exercise prophecy, then he would be convinced and judged, and "the secrets of his heart will be exposed" (v. 25).

We are offered sufficient context to come to this conclusion earlier in the text, even as soon as verse 2. There Paul explains that when a person speaks in tongues, he edifies himself, since "in the spirit he speaks mysteries." This sounds like more than mere "forthtelling," and prophecy is the equivalent of tongues in a language understood (v. 5). Prophecy can indeed contain revelation, even the deep things of God. And the word can refer to this without specific reference to the word of knowledge and the word of wisdom. Thus the charismatic definitions for the word of knowledge and the word of wisdom are redundant, which is possibly additional evidence that their definitions are false. If they claim that the knowledge and wisdom consist only of the revelations, and the prophecy is the means by which to speak them out, this is also contradicted by the terms "word of knowledge" and "word of wisdom," since the "word" refers to a "message," so that some translations reads "message of knowledge" and "message of wisdom." All three items are misdefined and robbed of their proper definitions.

Prophecy as mere "forthtelling" becomes a liability in the church. Everything can be a prophecy – you just need to say it a bit religiously. The definition provides an excuse for cringey gibberish posing as inspired utterances from God. Many of the prophecies from even the most prominent charismatic leaders are nonsense stream of consciousness poems with poorly conceived rhymes. We see true prophecies in the words of Jesus, the words of Paul, the words of Agabus and others. They included much direction and insight, and they addressed things past, present, and future, in the program of God, in the hearts of men, and in the conditions of the world. Prophecy can also provide the context to confer spiritual gifts and ministries (1 Timothy 4:14). All without any reference to the word of knowledge and the word of wisdom. How likely is it, that when Paul refers to prophecy in 1 Corinthians 12, the meaning would change to something different? Something neutered? And then it changes back again in 1 Corinthians 14. The silliness carries over to tongues

and interpretation. One person speaks in tongues at church, and then another stands up and makes a bunch of bad rhymes as interpretation. It is nothing more than a lousy spontaneous poem. Nobody's secrets are exposed, but everybody is cringing. The visitors are confused and embarrassed. So...God speaks like this? Then the social pressure compels all the people to clap and cheer. The cessationists take this as validation and harden their hearts.

All of this does not deny that there are genuine manifestations of the Spirit. And it does not deny that there are genuine manifestations of the Spirit even among these same charismatics that are so confused about everything. There are indeed thousands of authentic prophecies among them. They are accurate, detailed, and supernatural, impossible to counterfeit by human ability. The same is true with tongues and interpretation. There are documented cases in which the tongues are verified to be human languages never learned by the speakers, at times elevated or rare dialects. Then the interpretations would come from those who had also never learned the languages, and they would offer either exact translations of the messages, or an accurate interpretation or summary of what was said. Genuine miracles of healing also happen among them. My criticisms do not undermine the fact that there are such operations of the Spirit, or that these things happen among the people. If they are followers of Jesus Christ who have faith, and especially if they have also received the fullness of the Spirit of God, then they can function in these things.

However, this does not mean that they are capable students of the Bible, or that they understand the spiritual gifts and know how to teach about them. You can know how to do something really well and still be unable to teach it, just as not every player can be a coach, and a coach is not better than every player. One does not even need to be literate to operate in the supernatural, but he needs to have faith in Jesus and obey what he taught. Nevertheless, if a person believes the wrong things, this will more or less limit the ways he can operate in the things of the Spirit, and this is indeed what happens among the charismatics. There is a mixture of the genuine and the counterfeit, a mixture of spectacular miracles and embarrassing displays. The false scheme is partly responsible for this. Accurate teachings on the gifts of the Spirit and the ministry of miracles would reduce the mixture and release believers from the artificial limits. The three-by-nine prison distorts what Scripture teaches about the things of the Spirit. It is a self-imposed cage that forces them to put everything under a restrictive matrix. Read all the texts in the Bible related to spiritual gifts and ministries. The scheme we are talking about can never naturally develop from any of them, but it is contradicted by the biblical texts.

There are so many things wrong with what the charismatics think about the gifts of healing that we can only consider several of them. (Although it is often pointed out that healing is in the plural in 1 Corinthians 12:9, we will refer to it in either the plural or the singular since the issue does not affect our point.) The errors are so numerous and varied that not all charismatics can commit all of them at the same time. We must make generalizations that do not apply to everyone, but you will likely see most charismatic teachers and believers commit many of the errors mentioned throughout this discussion about the gifts, as well as others that we cannot take time to discuss.

In one sense, it would be correct to say that believers have specialized ministries, because the text says that the body has many parts, and God is the one who decides where each one belongs in the body. Although all believers can preach the gospel, some are more gifted at preaching, or at least God arranges some to devote more time and effort to preaching. And although all believers must handle their own finances, only some are called and gifted to oversee the accounting of churches and ministries. All believers can heal the sick by faith, but some are more gifted at healing the sick, and called to devote their lives to it in a more significant way. That said, among charismatics there is the teaching that the gifts of healing themselves are specialized, that individuals who operate in the gifts of healing are more effective with different diseases and conditions. This is inferred from circumstantial and anecdotal evidence, and then it is imposed upon biblical passages that they cite as examples.

Healing comes from God, not from the gifts of healing as such, and God is not specialized or limited. The gifts might offer you a start, but to allow your initial success to become your specialization is also to allow it to become your limitation. It is a limitation that you have no reason to accept, but if you accept it, and even boast about it as your specialization, then it becomes a self-fulfilling belief that imprisons your ministry to the initial boost that God gives you. It is a trap. You have allowed a gift to become a curse. You have allowed a key to become a lock. The doctrine is not true, unless you make it true for yourself. Regardless of why you started to think this way, if you are more effective with certain diseases and conditions, it is because you believe you ought to be more effective with those diseases and conditions. And if you are less effective with others, it is because you believe you ought to be less effective. The more you brag about it, the more this limitation becomes permanent. And it is not something to brag about, because it is a weakness and not a strength. An arm is not a leg or an eye, and in this sense it is specialized. But if the arm is so specialized that it only lifts donuts, it is because that is the only thing it wants to feed the mouth. It can just as easily lift eggplants, if only to throw them into the trash.

Just because you have a gift does not mean that you should start to depend on it instead of God, and it does not mean you should start to preach on your gift instead of God's word. God can do all things, and he is not specialized or limited. And God's word is not specialized or limited. Any Christian who depends on God and who teaches his word can expect to see all kinds of diseases and conditions healed. And if God has ordained you to operate in a ministry of healing, you should expect even more results in ministering to people with all kinds of diseases and conditions. It would be stupid to conclude that you are less effective with most diseases and conditions because you have a gift! Moreover, it would be impossible that a person who has the faith to receive healing somehow cannot receive from your ministry because you do not have the gift for his particular disease or condition. If he has the faith, he can receive from God and he does not truly need you at all, let alone your gift. Never suggest that a person might be less likely to receive healing under your ministry because his need does not match what your gift does. His need always matches what my God does! If you allow the way you think about your gift to limit yourself, then it would be better to stop thinking about your gift and start talking about faith in God. If you notice narrow and specific results in your healing ministry, rather than specialize, you should expand.

When the charismatics teach about spiritual gifts, they often place every miracle under one of the nine items on the list. They do not always do this when they are referring to miracles outside of this context, as if they understand that miracles usually happen without the gifts, but when they are talking about the gifts, they often do it, as if all miracles occur because of the gifts. Certain charismatics somehow place casting out demons under the working of miracles or the "gift" of faith. This is partly due to the fact that their vision of the ministry of miracles is so limited that they make no room for miracles other than healing. Thus the ones they call power gifts – faith, healing, and miracles – at times become only variations of healing gifts. They leave no room for miracles of nature and judgment, and other kinds of miracles, as if it never crossed their minds that these miracles are possible for them. In any case, the Bible suggests that casting out demons can fall under the ministry of healing (Matthew 8:16-17). It would be wrong to place it under a separate category without basis. It seems that the reason to place casting out demons under the working of miracles is to make the working of miracles serve a purpose, once the other kinds of miracles are assumed to be impossible under the ministry of believers. Of course, there is no need for a special gift for us to do what every believer can do by faith apart from any gift. Casting out demons is a routine ability that belongs to any follower of Jesus.

Another claim is that cases that demand the power of creation should not come under the gifts of healing, but the working of miracles. Suppose an amputated limb needs to be restored or a missing or destroyed organ needs to be replaced, then the healing would involve a creative miracle. And it is said that in a case like this, the gifts of healing would be unable to accomplish the task because "there is nothing to heal." If there is an example of how stupid people should not play with semantics, this would be it. Healing refers to the restoration of the body to its proper condition, whatever it takes. You do not need to know if there is a missing part that needs to be replaced or created, and you do not need to care. If the person is sick or disabled because of this missing part of the body, then to heal that person would involve recreating that missing part. This is healing. There is no need to reserve another category for this. Now if God creates something for the body that is not in the original design or that is not required to restore the body's proper condition, then we can say that it goes beyond healing. Suppose God creates a laser cannon on your shoulder that becomes part of your body, then it would be fair to say that it is not a case of healing. You are not sick or disabled without the laser cannon. Otherwise, healing is healing, whether or not it entails a creative miracle.

Moreover, we might wonder at what point a miracle constitutes creation in the first place. Healing that mends a paper cut causes tissues to grow back on the body, and something like this is not considered creation. But a person with an amputated limb still has a body from which to grow back the limb. Is it not only a matter of degree from our perspective? How is that creation then? If the materials and the energy to restore the limb do not come from the body itself but from God, especially if the limb is restored in an instant instead of over a period of time, we can say the same thing about the materials and the energy that mend the paper cut. There is still no necessary categorical difference. To restore a limb might seem like more difficult to us when we walk by sight and not by faith, but a miracle

is a miracle, and it makes no difference to God. If one does not involve creation, it is unreasonable to insist that the other one does.

If healing is strictly restoration, then it would require a different gift even when there is the need to remove diseased tissues from the body. According to this way of thinking about the gift of healing, if there is a cancer in the body, the removal of the cancer or cancerous tissues in the body would require something like the gift of faith, since Jesus said faith can destroy a tree and remove a mountain, and then the gifts of healing could restore the damaged areas. And if the cancer has destroyed any tissues or organs, these would have to be recreated by the working of miracles. Consider the hundreds of situations in which certain issues or substances must be removed in order for the body to recover, and in which diseases so ravage the bodies that certain organs are destroyed. In all these cases, we would need a person with the gift of healing plus the gift of faith or the working of miracles, or even all three gifts. Otherwise we would need two or three people to make one healing miracle happen. Can the gifts of healing do anything much at all? When it comes to some of these situations, such as cancer, or where the need for creative power is not as obvious, the charismatics forget about the limitations that they impose upon the gift of healing and assume that it can accomplish the task.

This is too silly, so let us move on. Whatever the motive, this act of packing miracles of healing into the working of miracles becomes a distraction from what the working of miracles can probably do. In effect, it erases the working of miracles. What about changing water into wine, walking on water, multiplying food to feed thousands, calling down fire from heaven, ripping apart a lion with one's bare hands, and all the other miraculous feats in Scripture that do not come under the category of healing? I do not assert that these things come under the working of miracles. I am only reminding ourselves that there are other kinds of miracles besides healing the sick. We cannot say that these are examples of working of miracles or of the "gift" of faith, for the reason I mentioned before, that the Bible does not attribute specific instances of miracles to the gifts. Rather, Scripture associates miracles to God, Jesus, the Spirit of God, and to our faith, prayer, and so on. It is best to follow this practice. Thus we cannot say that something like walking on water comes under the working of miracles, or under any spiritual gift, because from what we see in the Bible even ordinary faith can do it. When Peter walked on water, he did it by his own faith in the words of Jesus, and he started to sink when his faith faltered. This suggests that no special gift was involved. To make working of miracles come under healing eliminates entire groups of miracles in our daily thought. This is a devastating mistake.

Faith receives similar treatment from the charismatics. (Paul does not apply the word "gift" directly to faith in our text, but we will use the word sometimes to avoid confusion with the ordinary miracle faith that belongs to every Christian.) Some charismatics make casting out demons come under the gift of faith instead of the working of miracles. But casting out demons is such a routine ability that it should not require any gift like the gift of faith or the working of miracles to perform. Even Christians who have not yet received the baptism of the Spirit – an awkward situation indeed – can cast out demons by faith in the name of Jesus. Thus when a Christian casts out a demon, we cannot reliably attribute it to any gift. It is most likely accomplished by the person's ordinary faith, or by the faith of the person

who seeks help, but if a gift becomes involved, it could still be the gift of healing. To place casting out demons under any special gift, and to replace the actual work that the gift is intended to do, effectively neutralizes the gift. If we must categorize, casting out demons can come under the category of healing, and neither healing the sick nor casting out demons require any special gift to perform. But God is mighty and merciful, and he offers the gifts of healing in addition to other means, so that the work of healing the sick and casting out demons may advance with greater success. (This is not to say that the working of miracles and the gift of faith never have anything to do with miracles of healing, but my purpose is to dispel some basic errors, and so I think we should not add more nuances to burden the discussion.)

In the context of Paul's list in 1 Corinthians 12, not all Christians have the gift of faith (since the list is a list of variety), yet all Christians have faith (since it takes faith to be a Christian), and this means the "gift" of faith for personal salvation and the "gift" of faith for public ministry cannot be the same. All Christians ought to have faith for miracles as part of the same faith for salvation, but the gift of faith likely enables a person to perform feats beyond his current level of faith. A Christian should have the faith to move a mountain, but if he has not reached that level, his ministry does not need to remain stagnant, and he does not need to be hopeless in the face of insurmountable odds. The Spirit of God can infuse into him a surge of faith for that time to cast a mountain into the sea. A Christian with strong personal faith can regularly do the same thing as a weak Christian who has a temporary gift of faith. And the personal faith is more reliable, because it is the native and consistent quality of the person. This involves very little speculation, since I am referring to what the Bible itself says that faith can do. Both are called faith. The difference is that one is the faith that every Christian has to various degrees, and the other is the faith that comes as a manifestation of the Spirit, usually for public ministry.

Some charismatics make the distinction that the working of miracles performs or "works" a miracle while the gift of faith receives a miracle. (There is no end to how silly and tedious this is, you see?) However, we see all kinds of miracles credited to faith in the Bible, whether they are performed or received, and whether they are creative or restorative. Hebrews 11 illustrates the wide range of feats that come under faith. And Jesus explained the failures to cast out a spirit and to walk on water as failures of faith. Moreover, the difference between working a miracle and receiving a miracle is often unclear. In Mark 11:23, Jesus says that anyone who has faith can command a mountain to move. The miracle is initiated by the man, and the faith is expressed as a command spoken on purpose stating a specific outcome, yet the miracle is not one where the man himself throws the mountain with his bare hands. Is that working a miracle or receiving a miracle? We should not play this game invented by those who are not intelligent enough about these things to dabble with semantics. Either way, even moving a mountain cannot be used exclusively as an illustration of the gift of faith, because Jesus teaches about this kind of faith as part of ordinary discipleship. A miracle like this might or might not be empowered by a gift of faith, depending on the person and the moment (1 Corinthians 13:2). A gift of healing can indeed heal the sick, but it does not require a gift of healing to heal the sick. In the same way, a gift of faith can indeed move a mountain, but it does not require a gift of faith to move a mountain. When a follower of Jesus has faith like a mustard seed, he can command

a mountain to move from one place to another, and it would obey him, and nothing shall be impossible to the man (Matthew 17:20). Jesus says, "Have faith in God" (Mark 11:22). The faith is not something that they should wait for or leave up to God, but something that they can decide to have, and commanded to possess. Part of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ is to develop this faith for miracles.

Any miracle or answer to prayer can be linked to faith, so that no instance of miracle can be reliably designated as an example of the gift of faith unless a text provides specific indication. In the teachings of Jesus, there is no concept of special gifts to work miracles, but only a faith that can do all miracles, and the Spirit who endues us with an all-encompassing power, the same power that he possessed to receive prophetic revelations and to perform miracles of all kinds. It is impossible to use Paul's statements on the gifts to weaken what Jesus has handed down to all his disciples. Therefore, the charismatic scheme on the gifts of healing, the working of miracles, and the gift of faith cannot be true. Charismatics may have some experience in operating in spiritual gifts, and they are much more faithful in this regard than the cessationists, so much so that it is unfair to mention the two at the same time, as if it is meaningful to say that golden retrievers are more friendly than mass murderers. Yet charismatics do not know how to teach about the gifts, or miracles in general. Charismatic scholars are not better in teaching about the gifts either. They commit some of the same errors, avoid some of the other errors, and then commit some different errors of their own, with much less power or experience to show for it, if any at all. Most people should not be teachers, but they can be exhorters to encourage faith and obedience in the things of God. Preachers ought to encourage people to seek the manifestations of the Spirit and to pursue the ministry of miracles by faith, without making restrictive pronouncements regarding definitions and categories.

The Infinite Possibilities

When the charismatics teach about spiritual gifts, they make the biblical examples come under the gifts, but when they teach about something else, such as faith or prayer, they make the same examples come under their current topic. When Peter heals the cripple in Acts 3, does he do it by a spiritual gift? Peter explains that it happens by faith in the name of Jesus. Every Christian ought to have faith in the name of Jesus, gift or no gift. When James writes that anyone who is sick could call the elders of the church, so that they may minister to him in the name of Lord, and the prayer of faith will heal the sick, does he mean that it would be done by a gift of healing? If all miracles must come under the gifts, then this would be a gift of healing. And so some charismatics suggest that all elders have the gifts of healing. That is, if all elders can minister to the sick, and if any ministry to the sick requires the gifts of healing, then it follows all elders must have the gifts of healing. But James credits the healing to "the prayer of faith," not the gifts of healing. And he continues to say that anybody can pray for the sick: "Pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective." Any believer can pray for the sick and expect a miracle. Does this mean that every Christian has the gifts of healing? This would contradict what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 12 about the diversity of spiritual gifts. James means that any believer can pray "the prayer of faith." When Paul casts out the demon from the fortune-teller in Acts 16, is he inspired by the discerning of spirits and then empowered by the working of miracles or the gift of faith? But the Bible says Paul

does it because he is "greatly annoyed." If an evil spirit annoys you, just tell it to leave. If a sickness or disability annoys you, get rid of it. And you ought to be annoyed. There is no need for some special gift or inspiration. There is no need to wait for some great unknown "will of God." Your annoyance with a situation is reason enough for a miracle to change it. If you tolerate something, do not be a sore loser and blame it on God. Just admit you have learned to live with it because you are too weak or lazy to make a change by faith.

This is why it is so pathetic to argue about whether the gifts even happen. The miracles recorded in the Bible cannot be reliably traced to special gifts, because the Bible describes the miracles as only an ordinary part of God's relation to those who have faith in him and an ordinary part of Christ's relation to those who follow him and obey him. The Bible does not use the language of gifts to explain particular instances of miracles, but it would refer to God, Jesus, the Spirit, the hand of the Lord, or faith, prayer, and other expressions. Thus we ought to debate about God, Christ, faith, prayer, and such things instead of gifts.

We should discuss whether cessationists believe in God. There is only one God in the Bible, the one who does miracles in response to faith and prayer. Christians believe in this God, but cessationists declare that their God is not like this. The only Christ in the Bible is the one who never refuses to heal the sick when approached by faith and who commands his disciples to perform miracles by faith in his name and the power of his Spirit. Christians follow this Christ and obey his teachings, but cessationists refuse to follow this Christ and refuse to obey his teachings. Their Christ behaves and teaches differently. The faith in the Bible is one that moves mountains, heals the sick, casts out demons, and receives all kinds of miraculous answers to prayer. Christians have this faith, but cessationists confess that their faith is not like this. In the Bible, prayer produces miracles of healing and miracles of nature, and God also answers by visions and dreams and prophecies. Christians believe in this kind of prayer, but cessationists say prayer is not like this. They pretend to believe in prayer, or they pray to some other God who never answers them the way the God in Scripture answers.

Since the Bible speaks about miracles in such terms – God, faith, etc. – we should discuss miracles in such terms. The gifts, if they are mentioned at all, should come up only after we have affirmed the God of miracles, the Christ of miracles, and the faith of miracles. Then the gifts are acknowledged as a minor way by which God speaks to his people and performs miracles through them. Even prophecy does not require a gift, or do you think that King Saul and his soldiers received the gift of prophecy when they were compelled to prophesy by the Spirit of God (1 Samuel 19:18-24)? Speaking in tongues is a native ability to one who has the Spirit of God, by which he talks to God and edifies himself in private, but there is a "gift" of speaking in tongues for public ministry. The same is true with the interpretation of tongues. Spiritual manifestations and miracles happen in a variety of ways. To debate about the gifts is to fight over things that were never needed for miracles to happen in the first place. Such a super massive waste of time. Stop being like children. Grow up in understanding.

If we consider them worthy to talk to us at all, the debate should focus on whether cessationists are Christians. Refuse to discuss the gifts, but press this issue full force

whenever cessationists raise the banner of Satan to attack the kingdom of Christ. Who are they really? They reject what the Bible teaches about the God of signs and wonders, as if they worship another. They disobey what the Bible records about the Christ who commanded the ministry of miracles, as if they follow another. They blaspheme what the Bible says about the Spirit who confers revelations and performs miracles, as if they are filled by another spirit. They deny what the Bible says faith can accomplish, as if there is another kind of faith in their hearts. They despise what the Bible says about the purpose and power of prayer, as if their prayer appeals to another deity and expresses a different religion. And then they wish to hijack Christianity as their own, and make themselves the guardians and defenders of our faith? And after this we are still willing to negotiate with them on their terms? Really? I refuse. There is no chance that they can scam me like this.

So what if they claim to affirm a form of the atonement of Christ and justification by faith, or some other foundational doctrine? If God, Christ, the Spirit, faith, prayer, the benefits of redemption, and so on, to them mean things that are contrary to what the Bible describes, then how can the atonement of Christ and justification by faith mean the same to them as what the Bible teaches and as what we believe? Listen to me, I am not claiming that all cessationists are non-Christians, although I am sure that many of them are indeed unsaved and headed to hell. If I truly pursue this there would be no place for them to stand, but this is not my purpose. Here I only wish to point out that people have been distracted in their discussions. I am drawing attention to a number of suspicious differences between the religion of cessationism and the religion of Christ.

If cessationists are Christians, good! But they will need to exert much effort to prove it. Their faith is virtually a kind of liberal theology, rejecting the authority of Christ and the Scripture, and reinventing their own orthodoxy. Why allow them to get away with this and engage them on their own terms before they have answered for their heresies? Why tolerate this kind of liberalism, when we castigate all other schools of liberalism? Refuse to budge from the real issue: "How can you be Christians, when in the Bible I cannot find people like you in the teachings of Christ and the lives of the disciples? How can you be saved, when if we compare you with the people in the Bible, by your attitude and behavior you most resemble the ones who blasphemed the Holy Spirit and murdered the Son of God?" Rather than allowing them to put on trial the gifts and powers of God, put on trial the disciples of unbelief and of cessationism, with their salvation at stake. Keep the pressure on them, and refuse to let them divert our attention to the gifts, especially when that topic is such a minor issue in how miracles happen.

Charismatics are often criticized as those who seek signs and wonders and experiences rather than God. Let the charismatics answer for themselves, but I will speak from the perspective of what a follower of Jesus Christ ought to be. Jesus taught his disciples to work miracles, to heal the sick and cast out demons, and to pray in faith and expect God to answer by miracles. As a disciple I am told to have faith that God will perform miracles to benefit me, and I am also told to follow his example and command to perform miracles by his power. This is part of what it means to follow Jesus as the Master.

People often neglect the fact that when Jesus is called master, it often does not refer to the master-servant relationship, but the master-apprentice relationship. Jesus is not only our Lord and our God, but he is our Master, or Sifu. By definition, the relationship is intended to train us to follow his philosophy and his character, and also to develop his abilities and skills. The apprentice lives with his master to learn his craft, and with our Sifu, this means the craft of worship, the craft of doctrine, the craft of character, the craft of prayer, and no less essentially, the craft of miracles. All of these would constitute one craft of faith, or what it means to be "Christian." We learn to become what he is and to do what he does. This is the meaning of any apprenticeship. In the Bible, this is what we see in the disciples of Jesus. They were instructed to perform miracles as an integral and pervasive part of their training. For the apprenticeship program to change, the master himself has to change. It is more reasonable to say that those who refuse to follow Jesus in his miracles are not his disciples rather than to say that Sifu himself has changed.

In any case, the apprentice of Jesus maintains that signs and wonders and supernatural experiences ought to be part of the ordinary life of the individual and of the church. He is just following Sifu's teachings when he says this. If someone like this is criticized as a person who seeks signs and wonders, in the sense that he is unspiritual and immature, or some such thing, then the criticism must first apply to Jesus himself. When I am merely repeating Sifu's teachings, any criticism directed at me goes straight to him first. Out of all the characters in the Bible, he talked the most about receiving and performing miracles on purpose by faith and by the power of the Spirit. He made special effort to teach it and demand it in the people. He would become irritable not only when people fail to have faith in him for miracles, but also when they fail to have faith to perform the miracles by themselves.

He spoke about the power to perform miracles in the most extreme and unrestrained manner, such as to say that anyone who has faith can command a tree to be replanted in the sea or command a mountain to throw itself into the ocean. Referring to miracles, he said that nothing – nothing – is impossible to someone who has faith. And he performed the most miracles, thousands and thousands of them. When he answered John the Baptist, he mentioned healing the sick five times before he mentioned preaching one time. Likewise, when he sent out disciples, he emphasized healing the sick and casting out demons even more than preaching the gospel. And we know how important it is to preach. His final recorded instruction before his ascension was for the disciples to wait for even more power to perform miracles.

Therefore, if anyone seems to be obsessed with signs, miracles, and spiritual experiences, it was Jesus. The criticism reflects the true opinion about Jesus among those who oppose the ministry of miracles. As Jesus said, if the people truly believed Moses, they would have believed in Jesus as well, because Moses talked about Jesus. And if the critics truly follow Jesus, they would support those who follow the teachings of Jesus on faith, prayer, and miracles. The criticism is self-damning. As Jesus said, "For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks" (Matthew 12:34). He made this statement in a context similar to ours, concerning those who undermined his work in signs and wonders, in healing the sick and casting out demons (Matthew 12:24). The more a person complains about the ministry

of miracles in the followers of Jesus, the more he attacks Jesus himself. He is an enemy of Christ, like those who blasphemed the Holy Spirit in Scripture (Matthew 12:31-32).

Nevertheless, charismatics do not know how to teach about spiritual gifts or miracles. How should we proceed once we realize their errors? How can believers recover from this stronghold of false teaching that holds them back from greatness and liberty in the ministry of faith and of the Spirit? Abandon the charismatic matrix. Forget the teaching. Forget about the three categories. Stop thinking about the manifestations of the Spirit as the nine gifts, because there could be many more than nine, and the charismatics define none of them correctly. Stop wasting time and throw away the teaching. The whole thing was made up. Reduce the use of the language of "gifts" when talking about miracles, even abandon it for a time while forming new habits. The Bible almost never uses it compared to other terms and expressions. Covet the miracles and manifestations of the Spirit to the point of obsession and insanity, but there is no need to call them gifts when the Bible does not use the word. Desires these things as from God, from the Spirit, and from faith, not from gifts. Do not think that all miracles come under the gifts. Most miracles do not happen by the gifts, but the Bible attributes them to other factors. Restore the biblical ways of referring to miracles before picking up the language of "gifts" again, and then only use it in the manner and proportion that the Bible uses it, that is, not in specific instances and on rare occasions. Instead of calling every little thing a word of knowledge, which charismatics cannot define correctly, talk about the God who speaks and shows. Instead of talking about the word of wisdom, talk about the Spirit who teaches us and grants us deep insights. Instead of talking about the gifts of healing, and who specializes in this or that, forget this foolishness and talk about Jesus Christ who heals all who come to him by faith. Stop debating people about spiritual gifts. Let all the gifts cease and almost nothing changes. Miracles have always happened because of God, because of Jesus, because of the Spirit, and because of the faith of man and will of man. This is the Bible's teaching.

Recognize the variety of spiritual abilities and manifestations among God's people. Resist the urge to label every spiritual event or ministry, or to make it come under some made-up category, when the Bible provides no basis to do this. Do not take every list that the Bible makes as some exhaustive catalog of a category of things that you impose on the text, when the list serves a different purpose. Find out why the writer lists those things and learn that lesson. A list like the one in 1 Corinthians 12 is never intended to limit you. Let the list expand your thinking and your imagination. Perhaps it has never occurred to you that God can make you wiser than Solomon, that he can show you the spirit world like he showed Ezekiel, that he can recreate lost limbs and organs as his power works through your hands, or that you can speak in a language that you have never learned to edify yourself or as a sign to those before you. The Bible will plant these seeds of faith into you. Never become obsessed with a list, but focus on Jesus Christ whose Spirit can perform all kinds of supernatural feats through you. When you come across a list of what God can do with his people, or a list of the various ministries that he has installed, resist the urge to compress it and shove the thing in your pocket. Let the items spark your initiative and fuel your expectation. And God is able to do even more than what we ask or think.

4. THE STONES CRY OUT

They brought it to Jesus, threw their cloaks on the colt and put Jesus on it. As he went along, people spread their cloaks on the road. When he came near the place where the road goes down the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen: "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!" Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, "Teacher, rebuke your disciples!" He replied, "I tell you, if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out." (Luke 19:35-40)

Let us begin by loosely labeling three styles of worship. Even without any description, you should – loosely – know what they mean. The first kind is found in mainstream, traditional, historic and orthodox churches. We can call it formal worship or funeral worship (FW). When you enter a church and you see the members behave like they are holding a funeral for God with a group of awkward people at the front dressed up like cartoon ghosts but pretending to be angels, as if they are aching to return to Catholicism, that is FW. It is also found in traditional liberal churches. The second kind is found in contemporary churches, as well as some traditional churches. It is popular in charismatic congregations, but it is also accepted in contemporary cessationist cults. We can call it modern worship (MW). The third kind is biblical worship (BW). By this we refer to the kind of worship that is found in the Bible and that is approved by God. Our text presents one example of biblical worship.

Of course, FW and MW can include characteristics that overlap with BW, but BW remains on its own so that it can be discussed as the standard. There are variations within FW and MW. Some FW people believe that God is barely alive instead of totally dead. Or they believe that God is very much alive, but he does not do anything that he promised because he is a sovereign liar. Once in a while, both FW and MW people even accidentally worship God in spirit and in truth. Whether FW or MW, there are severe flaws in the way people worship, flaws that they seem reluctant to admit. In any case, the one we truly care about is BW. And the reason we can speak loosely is because we have only one purpose that does not demand much precision, and that is to consider some of the criticisms that FW make against MW.

All four Gospels report this incident (Matthew 21:1-16; Mark 11:1-11; Luke 19:28-40; John 12:12-19). The people praised God in a way that Jesus approved. They praised God for miracles. Their words were simple. They were emotional. They were loud, and physical. And they probably maintained a refrain for an extended period. The text is one example, but we see the same characteristics in some of the other portions of Scripture where people worshiped God in a way that he approved. However, we see FW attack MW for these very things. This is important: I am not defending MW. There are too many variations in MW for me to dissect in order to attack this or defend that in a short piece. Rather, I mean that FW expose themselves by the criticisms that they make against others. I am pointing out that FW are so full of themselves and out of touch with God that when they attack MW, they are acting like the Pharisees who told Jesus to rebuke his own disciples for praising him excellently. They are like those who hated Jesus and murdered

Jesus in order to protect their own traditions and interests, and not like those who welcomed Jesus and worshiped Jesus. The event revealed the hearts of men. And FW expose themselves as haters of God rather than lovers of God when they echo the same attitudes that caused their spiritual ancestors to kill the Son of God, so that they can keep their religion. If we were to accept the FW standard, then the people that Jesus approved did everything wrong. What is excellent praise? What is true and right worship? The text answers us.

It is good to praise God for miracles, prophecies, healing, prosperity, and all kinds of blessings, and to expect more of these things from him. It is proper to see him as one who does these things, and to praise him because of these things. There are other reasons to praise God, but this reason is not wrong – it is a reason that Jesus approved. They were not seeking signs and wonders instead of Jesus. They have already seen them, and they are praising God and welcoming Christ because of these miracles. They perceived that God cannot be separated from his power, just as he cannot be separated from his love or wisdom. To praise God for what he is and what he does is to praise God. What if you praise God for his holiness, and someone accuses you of seeking his holiness instead of seeking God himself? It is just as stupid to criticize those who worship God for his miracles and for his benefits. The truth is, the critics are the ones whose hearts are divided about the person of God and the blessing of God – I do not think this way at all – and they expose themselves when they attack others. Obviously, the people were not seeking signs and wonders so that they could believe in Jesus. They already believed in him, and welcomed him. But Jesus was against those who are like our cessationists, who would refuse the things that the word of God plainly teaches but demand signs to prove them, and then still refuse to believe when miracles occur.

It is good to praise God with simple words, or what FW would call "shallow" theology. Shallow or not, anything that is true theology is good theology. Simple, or even shallow theology, is not the same as false theology. Admittedly, if we never exhibit richness in our prayers and praises, then something is amiss. Anti-intellectualism stalls spiritual progress. But regardless of how much knowledge we have gained, it is never too shallow to shout, "Oh God, I love you and I praise you!" five hundred times – if you mean it five hundred times. In fact, it is shallow theology to despise this. If some people are too shallow in their worship, we can also say that the FW are too stuck-up – stuck-up against God! – in their weekly funeral procession for Jesus. It is important to attain a deep theology, because God revealed his mind with much richness and wisdom, and because it is sometimes needed to address more complicated issues. But many people are motivated by a wrong spirit, and they pretend to be experts when they lack aptitude or development. They pursue theological knowledge to support their religious pride and to feel superior. This is vanity. Theology ought to be an act of worship, but this is the opposite of worship. It is better for people like these to remain simple for a while, so that their character and knowledge can grow together.

Moreover, the FW do not exercise deep theology in their worship. They think they do, but it is mostly deep unbelief and tradition, not deep truth. Give me their hymnbooks. Locate the best songs. For many of them, we can tear apart their theology until it resembles nothing more than dishonest atheism. But FW people would not notice the errors in them, because

unbelief is the way they think all the time, and those hymns often express the zenith of their thinking in distilled form. They represent the culmination of their faith. Yet when they are sung, we hear them heralding the wretchedness of sin in men rather than the righteousness of Christ in us. We hear them worshiping sin, sickness, poverty, suffering and defeat. But isn't there a God around somewhere? Apparently, he is the one doing all these terrible things to them in the first place. God and Satan have joined hands against them, and when there is any relief, any healing, any prosperity, it most likely comes from Satan. No wonder they are depressed. No wonder they require constant therapy, often from non-Christians. It is so that they can find respite from their deadly theology.

Imagine if Jesus walks into the church and listens to that. Wouldn't he say, "Wait, you people know I did something about all of this 2000 years ago, right? I mean, with a little faith, you didn't have to put up with these things even before I came. But I made everything better, even easier, not worse. My disciples didn't tell you? Nobody preached the gospel all these years? Ah, I assumed you were Christians. This sounds more like a study group for Confucianism or Buddhism. I think Vincent gave me the wrong address." They would say, "Can't you see this is a funeral for the God who has ceased? We are worshiping you and we demand order! Shut up so we can reverence you some more! Or do you want us to crucify you again?" Jesus whines, "No! Please, no! You are so boring and pretentious I want to puke! I have said that the church is to be a light on a hill, but you have made it a den of losers. This worship is torture. Let me out!" If you think that this is ridiculous and Jesus would not react this way, you would be correct. The Jesus we know from Scripture is much less lenient toward unbelief and defeat. He would probably remove the light from that congregation, as he has done to thousands of traditional churches. Do not mistake God's patience as his approval. How long will he tolerate your unbelief? How long will it be, before the ax strikes at the root of the tree?

It is good to praise God with emotional outbursts. We can make room for different temperaments. Some people are more excitable. Some people are more calm. Then there are people who act very dignified when the truth is that they are too arrogant before the Lord. Certainly, we cannot say that emotional displays are wrong in worship, unless someone is being emotional for its own sake or to attract attention to himself. But you see, if everybody is praising God with joy and dancing, and you are the only one sitting down with that forlorn look on your face, then you are the one attracting attention to yourself. You are the one out of order. Even if you hate God so much, you can at least be polite. Stand up and lift your hands to support the people around you who are worshiping God with their whole hearts. Perhaps the spirit of faith and gladness will fall on you too.

There is no need to shout or dance every time you worship God, but it is not wrong to shout or dance, if this is how you sincerely express yourself at the time. In fact, there is no need for emotions when you shout or dance. You can shout by faith. You can dance by faith. Even when you feel nothing, you can rejoice because of what the word of God says about God and about your redemption. If it comes from faith, it is a sincere expression. And the corresponding feelings would come once you begin by faith. This is the same as how healing comes from the word of God. Of course, when all sickness has disappeared and you are feeling well, you can praise God with joy and sincerity. This is proper, but anybody

can do that. The one who walks by faith and not by sight, or not by feelings, can praise God for his healing because of what the word of God says even when he is looking death in the face, and then the healing comes. This is the model of faith that Abraham left us, and God counted this faith for physical healing as righteousness (Romans 4:16-22).

Praise must come from faith, whether with emotions or without emotions, and whether in shallow theology or deep theology. Without faith, the deeper the theology, the greater the condemnation. And it seems that most of those who urge deep theology in worship, and who look down on others for their shallow words, have no faith. They think they have a lot of faith, but it is not the kind of faith that Jesus taught his disciples. It is nothing more than human tradition and willpower that they count as faith. People argue about a long list of things when it comes to worship, but the most essential issue is faith. Sing the Psalms, don't sing the Psalms. Use instruments, don't use instruments. Stand up, or sit down. Dance, or fall down. Protestants with Catholic robes, or without Catholic robes. Make it like a rock concert, don't make it like a rock concert. When there is no faith, it does not matter who wins the debate, because everyone loses. Worship God by faith. Praise the Lord with sounds of victory in whatever situation. Paul and Silas praised God when they were beaten and jailed. Then God sent an earthquake that shook the very foundations. All the doors flew open and all the chains came loose. This is biblical worship. Do that first, and then after we drop you off at daycare, you can have an all-out street brawl about whether you can find Jesus in that tiny cup of grape juice.

It is good to praise God with loud shouts and physical expressions. This is seen throughout the Bible. There is no need to defend this, and there is no way to attack it. It is only a matter of whether or not we accept the authority of Scripture, and that is a matter of whether or not we are Christians in the first place. We can be loud, or we can be quiet, but loud is not wrong. There is shouting for the sake of shouting, and that is not worship. But then there is thunderous and triumphant praise toward God, and that is glorious. If even trees know to clap their hands, those who refuse to clap their hands are wrong. If even stones would cry out like these people, those who refuse to shout praises to God are worse than rocks. We ought to ordain the rocks and put them on our pulpits instead of manufacturing more seminary drones.

It is good to praise God with the same refrain over and over again. You do not need to do this, but it is not wrong. The people likely did not agree on a long series of hymns as Jesus arrived, but mainly repeated the words as recorded, even if our text could be an abridged version. Some Christian theologians have accused charismatic worship of practicing hypnotism or brainwashing because the people keep singing the same words! This is their "apologetics" and "cult-watching" at work. If you are against chanting "Jesus is Lord!" or "The Lord reigns!" or "Praise the Lord, for his mercy endures forever!" five hundred times together with your brothers and sisters, then you are the one who is defective. Just writing this makes me want to do it right now. Yet the defenders of the faith harden their hearts. Brainwashed? Brainwashed with what? With truth? With words of faith and worship? Doesn't the issue depend on what words we are repeating? Or can't we even praise God with the same words more than two or three times in a row? Four times, and you are a cult! Ten times, and you are in a trance, man! If the words are wrong, then we should not sing

them even once. But if the words are good, then why does it matter how many times we repeat them? Too many theologians have been brainwashed by Satan.

All four Gospels note the Pharisees' disapproval of the crowd's behavior (Matthew 21:16-18; Mark 11:12-18; Luke 19:39-46; John 12:9-11, 17-19). Although the religious elite despised the common people (John 9:34), they were the ones who had lost contact with God. Anyone who had faith rose above them and exceeded the theological leaders in their place with God. A perspective that condemns simple, sincere, and exuberant worship of Jesus is a false religion. The religious elite anoint themselves as the guardians of the faith, but they are the ones who would demand the Lord himself to stop people from offering proper worship. Do not fall into this trap. Never allow knowledge to become an excuse for high-mindedness, to become a license to condemn those who sincerely worship God just because they are more shallow or boisterous. When they judge worshipers that God approves, they have ceased to be worshipers themselves. Worship does not need to be complex and technical to be excellent. Certainly, it does not need to be dignified. If some are too shallow, then instead of saying that their worship is illegitimate, why don't you teach them? However, if you lack the same liberty to shout and dance, to sing and chant, to speak words of triumph and celebration, and if all you have to offer is your cynical attitude, then it would be better to shut your mouth and learn from the people first. They are the better worshipers. Whatever they lack, you are much worse.

When religionists are obsessed with an agenda to destroy their enemies, they often forget the most obvious things, such as the Bible that they claim to defend. They fail to see that their criticisms apply against the Bible, or against God himself. In the end Jesus and the outcasts end up on the same side, while the scholars and critics end up on the outside looking in. They are constantly making judgments, but always end up condemning themselves. Look at our text again. Is the worship in your church ever like this? Or is this the kind of worship that your church condemns? Does your church stand with the common people who worshiped Jesus, or with the high-minded people who murdered Jesus? Perhaps you have never considered the question, but once you think about it, the answer should be clear, because the differences are obvious. It might shock you to realize that for so long you have gathered with religious frauds that would stand against Jesus, and would have murdered him just like the Pharisees you read about in the Bible. You are amazed that you stand with those who hate God so intensely, but who dare to speak in his name. Perhaps you are ashamed that you are even one of the more vocal ones, finding every opportunity to attack those who, unlike you, worship God in spirit and in truth. And all this time you thought that you were doing God a favor.

You remember how you secretly gloated when your Pentecostal neighbor died of cancer. You felt vindicated. But when someone else testified that God healed him of paralysis and he could walk again, you made fun of him and tried to discredit him. You inherited this from your spiritual forefathers, for the ones who murdered Jesus also wanted to kill Lazarus (John 12:9-11). Regardless of what Scripture says, you steel yourself and refuse to believe. Now that you think about it, you never prayed for your neighbor. You never helped him. You never asked God to do a miracle for him. You only argued with him. What kind of person would behave like that? Now you fear for your soul. You fight your "worship war,"

as it has been called. Those on the other side do not fight you – they just worship. You go cult-hunting and do your "apologetics." Your neighbor did not have your degrees from human institutions. He could not use seminary words like you. He knew only the Scriptures and tried to explain things to you from the word of God, but you rebuffed him. Still, when he heard that your daughter was gravely ill, he prayed to God for her and rejoiced with tears when she recovered. What kind of person was he? He was a follower of Jesus. And you? You are nothing like him. You are just an arrogant, useless fool. And now you are afraid. Or am I too optimistic? You could harden your heart even more and forever seal your fate.

The FW claim that their form of worship is reverence, but it is their tradition and not the Bible that defines their reverence. Since their tradition is man-made, and the tradition is either made by them or accepted by them, in reality they reverence themselves. They worship themselves. They seethe with indignation when others worship the true God, and this is why they criticize other people's form of worship, complaining about things that often correspond exactly to biblical worship. They do not worship God. They speak from the outside looking in. As God said, they draw near to him with their lips, but their hearts are far from him.

All the Gospels, and especially the Synoptics, foreshadow God's judgment against the religious system that subverts true worship (Matthew 21:12-13, 18-19; Mark 11:13-17; Luke 19:41-46; John 12:31-32). Jesus cursed the fig tree, saying, "May you never bear fruit again!" And the tree withered from the roots. He foretold that the system would cease forever, and also predicted the destruction of the temple. The Bible says that when David brought the ark of the Lord, "he danced before the Lord with all his might" and "with shouts and the sound of trumpets" (2 Samuel 6:14-15). When Michal saw this, "she despised him in her heart" (v. 16). She mocked, "How distinguished the king of Israel looked today, exposing himself to the servant girls like any vulgar person would!" (v. 20). "Vulgar" – that is how everybody else must look to FW people. This must be how they see me. David replied, "I am willing to become even more undignified than this, even to be humiliated in my own eyes!" (v. 22). What was God's verdict? The Bible says, "And Michal daughter of Saul had no children to the day of her death" (v. 23).

Man-made religious tradition thinks that biblical worship is degrading. They have a dignified alternative. Everyone is respectable. No one is embarrassed. God deserves the solemnity of a funeral. Who says? Looking at the Bible, it seems he wants some noise. It looks like he wants some participation from everyone, not just from the awfully ordained drones. It looks like he wants some variety, like spiritual songs and melodies, like tongues and prophecies. And it looks like he wants some miracles, like healing the sick and casting out demons, and even greater works. Do you know what is truly degrading? What is truly degrading is a fruitless religious tradition that makes lofty claims about itself, that polices everybody else, but that does not know anything about worshiping God except to stop others from doing it. What is truly obscene is a church that casts out the Holy Spirit in the name of Jesus when the people gather. What is truly vulgar is a church that is under the curse of God to remain forever barren, a church that produces no converts, that speaks no prophecies, that performs no miracles, but that just preaches a lot of ethics and politics.

What is truly humiliating is a group of stuck-up religious frauds that teach from a book that talks about a God who forgives all our iniquities and heals all our diseases, when the whole congregation is stricken with sin-consciousness and everybody is rotting away with disease and reliant on medicine, dying of depression and poverty, all the while claiming that their suffering is the gift of God. Oh, that is disgusting. I tell you, if we do not speak up, the stones will throw up.

5. THE UNPARDONABLE SIN

Now it is common for Satan to harass people by suggesting that they have committed the unpardonable sin. At this point, theology will either sink us into a deeper level of deception, or it will offer a clear statement that removes all deception, to relieve those who ought to be relieved. Almost 100 percent of historically accepted orthodox theology has added to the deception. Christian preachers and thinkers respond by calling the spiritual attack a deception, but their explanation amounts to either reducing the words of Jesus to irrelevance or outright contradicting him on the subject. They claim that this sin is either a persistent and permanent rejection of Christ or it is something that is impossible to commit. This is supposed to be the truth that sets people free. However, this universal teaching is false. Jesus said that if you blaspheme the Son, you can be forgiven, but if you blaspheme the Spirit, you cannot be forgiven. He did not say that if you blaspheme the Son intensely and endlessly, then eventually that is to blaspheme the Spirit. He clearly distinguished between speaking against the Son and speaking against the Spirit. He was referring to those who opposed his ministry of healing and called the work of the Spirit the work of a demon, so that they indirectly spoke against the Spirit and called the Spirit himself a demon. These are different sins because they speak against two different objects or persons. The Pharisees were doing it left and right, in front of everybody, and spreading the blasphemy around like butter. It was easy to commit. It was so easy to commit that when he warned about this sin, Jesus said that “on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak.” He did not say that the Pharisees were making scholarly premeditated blasphemies. He warned that a “careless word” could be blasphemy. This is the truth about the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.

The popular antidote for this attack is in fact poison. It attempts to comfort people by dismissing what Jesus said. Some people have indeed committed this sin of speaking against the Holy Spirit, and they will burn in hell forever and ever and ever. The proper way to face the spiritual attack is to study what Jesus said about it to obtain the correct definition. Then if you have never committed it, you will know for sure because any sin you have done will not fit the definition. And the truth has set you free. If you have committed the sin, then it does not change anything even if someone lies to you about it to make you feel better. If you have indeed done it, then no one can help you. I have no authority to change what Jesus said. And if you have committed this sin, I have no power to save you. What I know is that it is possible to commit this sin. Perhaps your pastor does it every Sunday when he criticizes those preachers on television as you shout “Amen!” Perhaps your shelf is full of books by scholars who blaspheme the Spirit in every volume as they persecute those who have faith in God for the ministry of healing and miracles. I don’t know what trash you read. What I know is that you cannot fight deception with deception. When you do, Satan wins. Either the second deception replaces the first, so that the person thinks he is no longer deceived when he is taken even deeper, or the second deception reinforces the first deception, and also takes the person deeper. Either way, compound deceptions make the person more stubborn in his delusion and it becomes harder for him to escape. Satan knows this, and Christian preachers and thinkers have been his accomplices.

This is often a very religious sin. The people of the world usually do not care to speak against the Holy Spirit, if they even know there is a Holy Spirit. If they witness a ministry or miracle of healing and such, they might marvel at the reality and compassion of God, and often become followers of Christ, while others might remain skeptical without calling the ministry the work of demons and wickedness. Some might indeed commit the unpardonable sin at this point, but they are rare in comparison. Most of the people who commit this sin are church leaders and church members. Like the Pharisees, they are those who consider themselves experts in religious matters, and zealous to defend the orthodox faith. It would not occur to them that they have committed this sin, and that they will burn in hell forever. They are so self-righteous that this is the last thing on their minds. They consider themselves the most educated and the most faithful, the Christian elite. Theologians extraordinaire. Apologists supreme. They will harden their hearts and continue their wickedness. And they will burn in hell. If you tell them this, they will become enraged with you, do some of their apologetics on you...and then burn in hell. They did that to Jesus too, and then they burned in hell.

Of course, Satan incites some people to think that they have committed this unpardonable sin when the truth is that they have not. They become pressed down and extremely fearful. Some of them become crazed and obsessed. Some choose the way of denial. Others choose to resign themselves to a life of wickedness. Some commit suicide. It is possible for Satan to cause such damage because people are not clear about what this sin is. The solution is to restate the correct definition of the sin, rebuke the devil in the name of Jesus, and set them free. The most common reaction is destructive. Preachers would rush to offer false assurance, nullifying the words of Jesus in the process, so that even those who have committed this sin would think that they have not done it. This response in itself is blasphemy against Jesus Christ, because it shoves him out of the way in order to introduce a lie to make people feel better about themselves, whether or not they should have relief. And the lie makes it more likely for people to commit the sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. People would assume that whatever they have done or whatever they want to do, it is not the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit, or that they can be forgiven even if they were to speak against the Holy Spirit, to imply that he is a demon, to call his work in healing the sick and casting out demons deceptive, fanatical, against orthodoxy, or some such thing. They would not think to avoid the sin. In fact, they would think that they perform God a service by doing some of their apologetics on those who follow the example of Jesus, when their whole enterprise is a ministry of blaspheming the Holy Spirit! All this certainly sounds ridiculous to them. See, it is because they are deceived, and they are deceiving others.

For our purpose I have no interest in specifying individuals or groups that might have committed this sin. I might have my opinion, but you can judge for yourself based on what they say. Examples are easy to find. Here I am only telling you what Jesus said. If you do not want to hear it from me, read what he said about it. He said that if you speak against the Holy Spirit, such as to imply that the ministry of healing is the work of a demon, a work of evil, then you are finished. Taking what he said elsewhere about God's judgment against sin, we deduce that if someone makes a habit of doing this or even build a ministry dedicated to calling the Holy Spirit demonic, then he will suffer more extreme punishment

when he burns in hell. All this is a direct application of what Jesus said. You are not accountable to me. If you do not believe me, forget about me and go read this from him. Believe him. But if he said the same thing I am telling you, then more than a few people are in deep trouble. Oh, they are in so much trouble. They will suffer and hurt in ways that I cannot describe or imagine. The pain and anguish will never end. It will never become dull for them. It will be as fresh and intense ten thousand years later as it shall be on the first day. And it will keep going and going and going.

Some people have criticized me for agreeing with Jesus on the definition of this sin and on the fact that it is possible to commit. They blame me for troubling the faith of some and instilling a sense of hopelessness in them. But...I am not troubled and I am not hopeless. How come? Because I have never committed this sin! If the people are troubled by a clear definition of the sin rather than liberated by it, then they are the ones in the wrong, not me. In fact, I have done very well. The ones who blame me are those who perpetuate the lie, and thus continue to allow more and more people to commit this unpardonable sin. I have troubled some people by repeating what Jesus said and agreeing with him, and this is because I have done well. In contrast, my critics are smoothing the way for people to slide into hell and burn forever. They are the problem, not me. Let those who ought to be disturbed, be disturbed. Let those who ought to lose hope, lose hope. In fact, many people instinctively know that the common teaching on this sin is false, so that even if they take hold of it as the only lifeline, the worry remains at the back of their minds. On the other hand, anyone who has not committed this sin no longer needs to wonder, because we know what this sin is, and so anyone who has not done it is fortified by the truth. Satan can no longer find any vulnerability to trick us into thinking that we have done something unpardonable when we have not done it. This is what I have done for the people.

If you are disturbed when I define the sin of adultery directly from the words of Scripture, how is that my fault? Why blame me? Is it not because you have probably committed adultery? If you have not committed adultery, you would be liberated by a proper definition of it, especially if you have been confused about it before. A burden would lift from your shoulders. The dark cloud of condemnation would depart. You would thank me. You would share the teaching with other people. If you become troubled and blame me, you bring condemnation upon yourself, because it is as if you are admitting to something. To criticize me for this would be more like a confession than some heroic attempt to defend everybody's faith and feelings. Either you have committed adultery, or you have not defined it correctly, and you are angry because I have made you look bad. As Paul said, "Have I become your enemy by telling you the truth?" The more you complain, the more guilty you appear. Why are those people disturbed by a definition of sin? Have they done something that they should be worried about? If so, why weren't they disturbed before? No one showed them the truth. You see, I have done so well. Perhaps you should blame your conscience instead, because it agrees with me more than you will admit. I must talk about the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit and tell it like it is. People are so dismissive about this ultimate sin, and some are even eager to commit this sin, and I do not want their blood on my hands.

Practically all Christian preachers and thinkers that mention this topic condemn Jesus' definition of this sin, and also against the possibility of committing it. They would assure people that they have not committed this sin without even asking what these people have done. This does not come from compassion, for true compassion cannot break ranks with Jesus. They are zealous to do away with what Jesus said about it probably because they have done it or they want to do it. Why are you so eager to establish a right to speak against the Holy Spirit? Have you done it yourself? Do you want to do it again? Is this why you are like this? Hmm. The more you deny the definition or the possibility of this sin, the more problems you allow because there is no clarity. The way to fight Satan is with the truth, and not with more deception. The way to fight doubt is not by covering up the conscience, but by the knowledge of the truth and the assurance of the Spirit.

Even Peter's triple denial of Christ was not unpardonable. What he did was not good, but it was not blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. He did not speak about the Spirit, speak against the Spirit, or make disparaging implications about the Spirit. He spoke about Christ. He denied Christ. He even cursed while he denied Christ to add emphasis. But he did not speak against the Holy Spirit. He did not call the Spirit a demon. He did not say that the ministry of healing the sick and casting out demons was evil, or any such thing. If someone sins like Peter did and becomes disillusioned, the truth would set him free from condemnation and hopelessness. The truth would be that his sin can be forgiven. As the Scriptures say, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." As he repents and returns to Christ, he is restored. This is the solution for those who are being deceived by the devil to think that they have committed the unpardonable sin, when the truth is that they have not.

The blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is what it is, and it is unpardonable. If you have done it, you will never be forgiven. If you have not committed this sin, then whatever you have done, you will be forgiven if you repent and confess that Jesus Christ died in your place. The whole thing is not complicated. You say, "But Jesus died for all sins." Well, don't tell me that. Tell him! See how far that gets you. He is the one who said, "The blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven" and "Whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come." Tell him: "You died for all sins. So why don't you shut up, Lord!" Go. Go tell him that. Leave me out of it. If Jesus died for all sins in the sense you mean, then he also died for the sin of the final rejection of Christ, and there is no need to believe in him. You say, "He died for all sins, but each one must receive what he has done by faith." But if he died for all sins in the sense you mean, in a sense that can even overturn Jesus' own explicit exception to forgiveness, then he must have also died for the sin of refusing to receive what he has done by faith.

Of course, the Bible is clear that faith is necessary to receive the benefits that Jesus Christ achieved for his people. Anyone who does not receive Jesus by faith will burn in hell. The notion that he died for all sins does not overturn this, but it is understood in the context that salvation is received by faith. Likewise, the Bible is clear that the one who speaks against the Holy Spirit, such as calling the ministry of miracle healing demonic, evil, or some such thing, will never be forgiven. The notion that he died for all sins does not overturn this, but it is understood in the context that blasphemy against the Spirit will never be forgiven. In

fact, another way of looking at this is that the one who speaks against the Holy Spirit has never been given faith in Christ and he will never be given faith in Christ. You can declare that Jesus died for all sins in any sense you wish to mean it, as long as the gospel saves only those who have faith, a person who speaks against the Holy Spirit is still locked out forever.

It follows that another attempt at false comfort is also futile, which is to declare that a Christian will never commit the sin of speaking against the Holy Spirit. This is marvelously stupid. This solves nothing. Suppose I say, "God can never die." This is true. But then I continue, "Therefore, John Smith can never die." This would be true only if John Smith himself is God. The first premise does not show that John Smith is God, and it does not show that John Smith will never die, because John Smith might have nothing to do with this first premise. But if John Smith dies, it shows that he has never been God in the first place. The first premise is true — God can never die. But we cannot establish that John Smith is God by this premise. The second premise is missing: "John Smith is God." In an argument, the first premise is never meant to establish the second premise, but they are both supposed to be known as true, so that the conclusion follows from them. If we can establish that John Smith himself is God by some other way, then we can use the first premise to deduce that John Smith will never die.

We can say that a believer will never fall away, because God will keep him by divine power, and a believer will never commit the sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. However, this premise does nothing to show if a specific person is a believer. It provides assurance only if we can establish that a person is a believer by some other way. Only then can we deduce that this person has never committed the sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, and that he never will commit this sin because God will keep him from it. Otherwise, if he has spoken against the Spirit, and if a Christian would never commit this sin, then obviously he has never been a Christian. All claims and appearances are then irrelevant. For him, the doctrine that a believer will never commit the unpardonable sin becomes a pronouncement of ultimate damnation instead of assurance.

All of this is simple and impossible to refute, but people will still resist and criticize me. Why? It is because I am correct about this, and as much as they want to attack Jesus openly, they do not want to expose themselves as false disciples. They dislike the idea of an unpardonable sin. They refuse to honor the Holy Spirit as much as God does. They resent God for extending this unique jealousy toward the Spirit. They resist because their own historic and modern heroes might have committed this sin, and have convinced many to do the same. It is because they themselves might have done it, repeatedly and gleefully, full of mocking words and condescending tones. Now someone tells them they will reap what they have sown, and they are afraid and angry. As Jesus said, "There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." Even the sinful rich man said, "Father Abraham, at least send someone from the dead to warn my brothers, so that they will not come here to suffer with me." These "Christians" are worse than this rich man who went to hell. They strive to tell everyone, "Be comforted. What Jesus said does not apply. You have not committed this sin. In fact, it is probably impossible to commit." When the blind leads the blind, they will

both fall into the ditch. They wish to lead others to hell with them. The result is that these liars will suffer even more than others in hell, where they will burn but they cannot die.

We talk about the unpardonable sin not because we wish to frighten people and rub it in their faces. We have a duty to talk about it, so that their blood will not be on our hands, so that God will not hold us accountable for their damnation. We wish to warn people about it, so that they will not commit this sin, and so that they will not endorse those who claim to be teachers but who diminish the seriousness of this sin. The accepted orthodoxy, characterized by a man-made theology of unbelief and defeat, actually increases the rate of depression, apostasy, blasphemy, and by extension also increases the rate of terminal tragedies such as suicide and damnation. This is because man-made orthodoxy does not believe in the promises of God for deliverance, and it does not accept the words of Jesus about sin. From the view of biblical orthodoxy, this traditional orthodoxy is in fact heretical and demonic. The good news is that it has no authority over us. If you flush it down the toilet, people cannot do much to you. As Jesus said, “Do not fear those who can kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.” Even if I twist the words of Christ to destroy his teaching, he still said what he said, and even you would still know he said what he said. God will not send you to hell based on my words, but his words. So it does not help you at all to criticize what I said. If you wish to sin, but still save yourself, then refute God. That’s all you need to do. Destroy him if you can, and you will be saved. But if you have not committed this sin, then you have not committed this sin. And now that we are clear about it, you are free in Christ Jesus.

6. INSPIRED BY ACTS 19:1-7

Although Jason had some experience in healing the sick, this was his first time to lead a healing service by himself, and so he came to Vincent for advice. Vincent replied, "The most important thing is to teach the people. Tell them that healing comes to us by faith in Jesus Christ. We are aware that you have a gift or ministry in healing the sick, so I would not be surprised if a number of sicknesses in the audience would be wiped out even before you finish speaking. This might happen even if you were not gifted in healing, because the sovereignty of God and the faith of the people could account for a number of miracles right from the start. After that, you can call the people up and have them describe their conditions, and put your hands on them and pray as you have done before. At the end of this, it is possible that all of the people might be healed and there would be nothing left to do, but if not, the remaining ones might require additional attention. You might not have time to speak to all of them on the same day. Schedule appointments to meet with them individually and resolve their issues. You can do this yourself, or better yet, train some people in the congregation to do it, but leave the difficult cases to you. Even a brief conversation would often expose the things that have been hindering the people from receiving healing. Just repeating the same things that you said from the pulpit is often sufficient to bring a person to a position to receive from God, because for some reason he might not catch what you said at first, but he might take hold of it right away when you say it to him in person, or when you apply the same teachings to him specifically. In some cases, the person might understand and believe, but it takes additional time for the healing process to complete. There is nothing wrong with this."

Then Vincent added, "Remember to let the people testify to what God has done for them publicly and without exaggeration, preferably accompanied by witnesses and documentations, such as video recordings, x-rays, test reports, and affidavits from medical professionals. God is able to testify for himself by his words and miracles, and his testimony is true and sure. However, until certain people learn to respect the testimony of God, confirmation from outsiders might give critics some pause. As in the days when they murdered Jesus, most of the critics against the work of God will be those who pretend to be the most faithful and educated believers. They flaunt their skepticism and boast that they are not deceived. However, we are the ones not deceived – we discern that they are agents of Satan and that many of them have even blasphemed the Holy Spirit, sealing their damnation. Speaking in the context of his ministry of healing and about blasphemy against the Spirit, Jesus said, 'Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters' (Matthew 12:30). You cannot even pretend to be neutral. Everyone must choose a side. Anyone who does not support his ministry of healing today is against Jesus. Such a person is anti-Christ. This is undeniable. So no matter how much they taunt and brag, we are not deceived. We know what kind of people they are. Do not fear them or respect them. Regard them with suspicion and contempt. Persist in the work of God, in the ministry of faith."

He urged Jason to remain in New Haven until every sick person in the church has been healed, and after he has trained a team of people to continue the healing ministry and to visit the sick that are outside the church. Then Vincent traveled down the east coast and

came to New York City. As he was setting up to preach at Times Square, a group of people saw what he was doing and came up to him. "Preacher, need some help? We are believers too." Vincent rejoiced in his heart. He assumed that they were followers of Jesus, and it would be convenient to have people help him distribute literature and to heal the sick. So naturally he asked them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" They answered, "We...what? What are you talking about? We have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit."

Vincent exclaimed, "How is that possible? Wait a minute, whose disciples are you? Perhaps I made the wrong assumption about you. Who are you following? Whose name did you come under when you were baptized in water, if you were at all?" They rolled their eyes at him and said, "John the BAPTIST, of course." Vincent said, "Ah, now I understand. You see, John the Baptist was legit, but John himself talked about someone who would come after him, and he said that people should follow this person instead. Well, this man has arrived, and his name is Jesus. He is the Son of God, the Messiah who was to come. He suffered humiliation and judgment, even death, in the place of his people, and then he rose from the dead as the head of his people for their justification." Hearing this, they were in deep thought for a while, and then one of them slapped another one on the shoulder and said, "Remember? John said that he was not worthy to even handle the shoes of this man who was to come." The other man answered, "No wonder! The Messiah who would come was the Son of God himself." So they believed in Jesus and were baptized.

Vincent muttered to himself, "I think some of you were not paying attention when John was preaching, or you did not hear him firsthand and were not taught everything that he said, because John did say that Jesus would baptize his people, not with water, but with the Holy Spirit." Then he said to the group, "Now that you are followers of Jesus and have come under his name, you are saved. Saved from the power of darkness. Saved from the wrath of God. You are righteous in him, and you are accepted by God just as Jesus is accepted by God. The Father accepts Jesus and calls him righteous, and therefore he accepts his followers and calls them righteous. There is nothing you need to do to gain God's favor, because he has already decided to favor you. And you will remain in this grace by the faith that he sustains in you." They cheered, "This is indeed good news!" Vincent laughs, "That's what we call it."

Then Vincent said, "There is more, and John also talked about this. This same Jesus promised that, as his followers, you can now receive the Holy Spirit. From the Master's own words, and from the testimony of all the Scriptures, this can mean only one thing – superhuman powers and supernatural experiences. The Holy Spirit will give you power to live as followers of Jesus. He will give you power to speak for him, power to heal the sick, power to cast out demons, power to work signs and wonders, power to receive visions and dreams and prophecies, power to speak in tongues and interpret these languages. You will have power from heaven like the prophets and the apostles, and like the Son of God himself when he walked the earth. When John admitted that he could not compare to Jesus, it was this very thing that he emphasized. John baptized only with water, but Jesus would baptize with this Spirit, this Spirit that could transform you into another kind of human, an ambassador from another world – that is, if you will walk in this power by faith."

And he continued to explain, "Of course, your faith is evidence that you have been recreated in Christ, or born again, and that is indeed a work of the Spirit. Do not allow this to confuse you. I am referring to something different, something that happens after you have become followers of Jesus, and after the Spirit has recreated you. Both John and Jesus described this second thing as a work of Christ, and not a work of the Spirit. And the apostle Peter also referred to it as something that Christ bestows, not something that the Spirit does (Acts 2:33). When I baptized you with water just now, the water did not baptize you with Vincent, but Vincent baptized you with water. It was a work of Vincent using the element of water. So I am referring to a work of Christ baptizing you WITH the element of Spirit. The work of the Spirit regenerating you, or to say it another way, baptizing you INTO Christ, is a separate procedure. Do not confuse or conflate the two. You do not receive the Holy Spirit in order to become his followers, but you become his followers in order to receive the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38). So even though receiving the Messiah entails a work of the Spirit, we refer to receiving the Messiah and receiving the Spirit as two different things. When I refer to receiving the Spirit, I mean this second thing, without denying the work of the Spirit in the first thing, because when I talk about the first thing, I could just refer to Jesus without mentioning the Spirit."

Vincent was pleased with his explanation and looked at the group expectantly. To his surprise, they were annoyed: "Look, preacher. We appreciate you bringing us the good news. We did not know that the man John predicted had already arrived, so we are thankful that we met you today. But even though we are new followers of Jesus, we are not children. We are not brain damaged. We are intelligent. We are educated. It was clear that receiving the Holy Spirit was something very different to you than receiving Jesus Christ, or else if you were trying to confirm our discipleship you would have directly asked us about Jesus Christ. Obviously, when we told you that we were believers, you assumed that we were believers of Jesus like you, so you asked us if we had also received something that believers of Jesus were entitled to receive. Anyone would instantly perceive this. This is intuitive to anyone who has any grasp of language. It is inconceivable to us that something like this could be misunderstood. Perhaps we are noobs and you know more than we do, but do not look down on us. Don't talk to us like we are sick in the head. The way you explained this baptism with the Holy Spirit was somewhat condescending, as if you assumed that we would misconstrue it. We take offense at that. Perhaps you should give us the benefit of the doubt before you assume that we are stupid?"

Vincent held up his hands and said, "Sorry, sorry, I apologize. This is my fault. You are my brothers and sisters in Christ, and I have insulted you. Please forgive me. If I have an excuse, it would be that this comes from habit. I realize that I have explained something simple and obvious in such a tedious manner that it was perceived as condescension. But you would be surprised by how many religious people among us, even those claiming to be teachers and scholars, who are either unable to perceive this distinction or unwilling to acknowledge it. Now I see that I am indeed talking to normal and intelligent people. You are not like some of the religious people or theological scholars, whose minds have been warped by self-serving agendas and demonic influences. John himself said that he must decrease and Jesus must increase, and I have preached Jesus for years, so when you told

me you were believers, I assumed that you were believers of Jesus. When I asked you about the Holy Spirit, it was not a trick or a test, and it was not an indirect way of asking about Jesus. You understood me the first time, that I was really asking about the Holy Spirit. Had I wanted to ask if you were followers of Jesus, I would have asked if you were followers of Jesus. I assumed that you were already followers of Jesus, and so I asked you if you had the next thing – so I asked if you had received the Holy Spirit. Peter, John, Phillip, Paul, Luke...well, I will tell you about them later...anyway, they all know this and talk the same way."

He continued, "So I learned from Jesus and his original disciples to ask about this: 'Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?' Paul once asked another group this same question, but even some of our scholars insisted that it was just a roundabout way of asking if someone had believed in Jesus. We reacted like you did: 'If that's what he meant, then why didn't he ask about Jesus? Of course he was asking about the Holy Spirit INSTEAD of asking about Jesus.' If there are other weird theories, they will not work, because Paul immediately confirmed his meaning. After these people became followers of Jesus, Paul did not walk away, as if his original intention was satisfied, but instead he laid his hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit and spoke in tongues. Thus he was asking about this second thing, the Holy Spirit, and not the first thing, Jesus Christ. We thought even illiterate children with severe brain damage, if they could understand some words here and there, would still possibly grasp this. In fact, perhaps even a dog or a parrot could be taught to discern the difference, but these scholars could not. They were like the people who refused to acknowledge the truth during the ministry of Jesus, and then they hardened their hearts and conspired to murder him. He said something they did not like and so they decided to get rid of him. See, the baptism of the Spirit represents something that many of our religious people resent, and something that they do not have. Although they consider themselves the elite of the faith, this deficiency exposes them as, in this essential aspect, inferior to hundreds of thousands of believers who have eagerly received the Holy Spirit on the first days or weeks of their discipleship. God has long abandoned them in their unbelief and tradition. The admiration of men is all that they have, and all that they dare hope to obtain in life. Thus they cannot tolerate the shame, and so they conspire against the Spirit of God, to suppress and to murder him, just as their forefathers did to the Son of God. Of course, they can never physically attack him, and so they persecute those who believe in this baptism of the Spirit, and they twist the Scriptures to silence this doctrine about him."

They cried, "That's horrible! They...they are criminals! Even before we became the disciples of John the Baptist, we would have been too afraid of God's punishment to do something like that." Vincent nodded, "I know. They are awful people. Very selfish and disobedient. And they are not afraid of God because they have never believed what he said in the first place. They do not like him or respect him very much. Because I am accustomed to dealing with such human garbage, I treated you the same way out of habit. I am sorry." They replied, "We understand now. Knowing now what you have to endure, we can overlook your insult. But is this what it means to follow Jesus? Are all disciples of Jesus like these people? Wouldn't it be better to be damned, than to become faithless and disgusting people like them? Certainly we never wish to lose what intelligence we have

and become like these imbeciles! And after all of this, we will still have to face opposition from the world? Is it worth the misery?" Vincent said, "People like them often have very little to do with Jesus, even though they may be leaders of churches and teachers in seminaries. They hold high the banner of Christ in order to smuggle their own views and agendas under it, and in the process they usually end up opposing Jesus himself. Follow Jesus, my brothers and sisters. He is worth it. Just do not follow men and their unbelief, their tradition, and their hate against the teachings of Jesus. Cast them aside. Jesus said that he will place a light and easy burden on you. If you follow him, you will be happy. But if you follow men who claim to represent him but in fact usurp him to make disciples for their own traditions, then you will have a rough time. You will come to resent God in your hearts. Many people hate religion, hate Jesus, and hate God because of this, because of scum like them. Never give up your life, your faith, and your happiness to some creed or opinion that's worth less than that slice of New York pizza I just had across the street."

"We hear you, brother, they make delicious pizzas over there," they agreed. And Vincent continued, "Right, if someone does not teach faith and hope, or love and happiness, or power and joy, or miracles and prophecies like Jesus did, then don't buy their books, don't pay their churches. Take that money and get yourself a stack of pizzas over there. Have a great lunch, and share the rest to some people in need. While they are eating, count on the power of the Holy Spirit to convince them about Jesus, to heal their diseases, and to cast out their demons. That is incomparably more holy and pious than swimming around in all that religious excrement that they call scholarship."

They laughed, "Seems like you're done warming up, preacher! Now let us set up your things. We will start with the audio system." Vincent looked at them and held up a finger, "Not yet. Remember what made us talk about this in the first place?" Then he laid his hands on each of them, and they received the Holy Spirit and began to speak in tongues and prophecies. They were infused with boldness and excitement. Some of them looked at their hands and felt empowered to heal the sick. Others narrowed their eyes and felt prepared to cast out demons, to set people free from satanic oppression and sickness. Vincent nodded and said, "Now then, let's do this!" They shouted, "Huzzah!"

7. THE DOCTRINE THAT JESUS WEAPONIZED

Restoration of the Doctrine

The wonderful doctrine of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit appears in all three Synoptic Gospels (Matthew 12:22-32, Mark 3:22-30, Luke 12:8-12). The idea is arguably suggested or assumed in several other places, but we shall focus our attention on the direct statements from Jesus. All three writers offer significant space and context to the doctrine, but Matthew's account is more convenient. Thus we often use his text when discussing the topic. When the task at hand is to read through the Gospel of Mark or the Gospel of Luke, then we would address the topic using the passages from those Gospels instead.

Compared to Matthew, the Gospel of Luke appears to accommodate additional material between the accusation against Jesus (Luke 11:15) and his statement on the unpardonable sin (Luke 12:10), but it is easy to see that these verses between the two sustain a consistent theme (Luke 11:16-12:9), that is, the damnable religion of unbelief and tradition. This kind of religion stems from hostility against God, leads to misery for those burdened by it, and then hellfire for its adherents. In their pursuit of a faithless religion, many end up committing the unpardonable sin. In fact, if we take time to consider those verses, we might conclude that even more people have committed the unpardonable sin than a study of Matthew's passage alone. Thus all three Gospels maintain a tight relation between the criticism against the healing ministry of Jesus and the damning response that came from him.

The doctrine of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is a major teaching in the Gospels. It is no less extensive than the doctrines of marriage and communion, and more explicit than the doctrines of water baptism and church government. And whenever this doctrine applies, there is more at stake than all of these other doctrines combined multiplied by a trillion. Why is it not a major teaching in our churches and our creeds? How is it not a test for doctrinal orthodoxy and church membership? Rather, it is rarely mentioned, and when mentioned, it is vehemently denied. It is regarded as a problem (that Jesus created!) to be suppressed in counseling.

Let me say this. To neutralize the doctrine is to make way for more people to commit the sin. And although to neglect the doctrine is not as devastating as to commit the sin, it is...how should I say this...it can mean to dance awfully close to it. When it comes to this doctrine, the place of negligence, ignorance, and dismissiveness are dangerous positions. This is because, in the same context, Jesus said, "Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters." The only safe place is a conscious endorsement of the ministry of miracles and of the doctrine of the unpardonable sin.

Here was a man who was afflicted by a demon, so that he could not see and could not speak, and Jesus "healed him," so that the man could both see and speak. So we are referring to a ministry of healing the sick and casting out demons. The religionists said, "He is possessed by Beelzebub" (Mark 3:22) – we can say "Satan" – and "by the prince of demons he casts out the demons." Thus they called the spirit within Jesus a demon, or Satan, and they called the power that Jesus wielded the power of a demon. Since it was the

Holy Spirit that was within Jesus, and it was by the power of the Holy Spirit that Jesus healed the sick and cast out demons, these people indirectly called the Holy Spirit a demon.

They were the most ostentatiously religious people at the time. Do you think they would have called the Holy Spirit a demon directly? No. They would not have done that if only for the sake of their reputation. Do you think they believed that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of God, filled with the Holy Spirit, and then still referred to the Holy Spirit as a demon? No, they did not believe that Jesus was the Messiah. Whatever their motivation was, it was not a direct or entirely knowing and intentional insult against the Spirit. Moreover, the target of their attack was Jesus and not the Holy Spirit at all. They were not even attacking Satan or the demons. The indirect suggestion that the Holy Spirit was a demon was only incidental to their statement against Jesus. They attacked Jesus, not "Beelzebub." The Holy Spirit was collateral damage. But even that was enough to trigger the doctrine of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.

What will happen to the church leaders and theologians throughout history who had castigated the work of the Holy Spirit in healing the sick, casting out demons, speaking in tongues, and in granting visions, dreams, prophecies, and various signs and wonders? Today people regard some of them as spiritual heroes. Why, some of them wrote your creeds! If the extent of the apostasy seems too farfetched to you, it is because you have decided that certain persons and traditions are beyond reproach, and then you use that assumption to interpret the word of God. If they did it, then what they did must not be what Jesus meant by this sin. This is backward, and it reveals that your faith is corrupt. If you use the word of God to judge these persons and traditions, then they would not pass the test.

Then there are people in our time, including many who claim to be followers of Jesus Christ, who claim to be knowledgeable Christians, or scholars and defenders of the faith, who have made equivalent statements as those made against Jesus by the Pharisees. In fact, there are those who have said things that are even worse, things that are more scathing, more deliberate, more explicit, more detailed, and more sarcastic and demeaning against the work of the Holy Spirit. There have been whole volumes dedicated to this subject. There have been entire ministries established for this purpose. Their statements against the Holy Spirit in healing the sick, speaking in tongues, and such things, were made after the ministry of Jesus had been published in the Gospels, including this incident that triggered the doctrine of the unpardonable sin. This makes them even more culpable than the Pharisees. Do you see how serious this is?

This brings to mind another point, which is the claim that very few people could be in the same position as the Pharisees. However, Jesus said nothing to suggest that it required a Pharisee to commit this sin. And the truth is that, due to the completion of Scripture and the dissemination of its knowledge – again, including the record of this very incident in all three Synoptic Gospels – even an ordinary unbeliever or church member nowadays is in an even more inexcusable position than the Pharisees, so that if one's background matters at all, this makes it even more likely for violations to occur. In any case, blasphemy is

blasphemy. By definition, it refers to the words and implications. The individual's backstory is irrelevant as to whether a statement counts as blasphemy.

Someone whined to me that "intention matters." So...did you intend to endorse the ministry to heal the sick and cast out demons by calling it a work of Satan? Did you intend to encourage the manifestations of the Spirit when you insisted that tongues and prophecies have ceased? What if someone intended to worship the true God when he bowed down to Satan instead? Just say "oops"? If your intention is contrary to truth, Scripture does not define it as good intention. You cannot rape someone with good intention and call it holy communion. You cannot worship an idol with good intention and call it misdirected zeal. You cannot crucify Jesus Christ with good intention and call it a spiritual accident. Paul said that he was zealous and ignorant before he followed Jesus, but he still called his words blasphemy. He was able to receive forgiveness, because although he blasphemed Jesus, by the grace of providence, he did not blaspheme the Spirit.

The Pharisees themselves intended to speak against Jesus, not the Holy Spirit, just as many people today intend to speak against the preacher who heals the sick or speaks in tongues, not the Holy Spirit. The unpardonable sin refers to evil statements, not evil intentions. Blasphemy refers to the words and implications. As far as the definition goes, intention is irrelevant. Evil intention could make it worse for the offender, since it would be an additional sin, but good intention – if it can be called good at all – does not change blasphemy into something else. The attempt to excuse the sin is itself another sin. If you excuse unintended and uninformed statements against the Spirit, it might even mean that you now commit the unpardonable sin a second time, only that this time the statements are intended and informed. And by your own standard, this time intention matters, and it translates into even more extreme tortures in endless hellfire. Before you say, "What about...", just stop. It does not matter what other variable you introduce into the situation. The answer is that it does not change anything. When the words or implications amount to blasphemy, then they count as blasphemy.

All this is me indulging a desperate objection just to practice my typing, because it was a useless discussion as far as whether something counts as blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. This is because, in the same context, Jesus declared that people will be judged for "every careless word" that they speak. And he said, "by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned." End of debate.

There is more. The sin refers to the act of insult, to denigrate, or to speak against a person or thing. It is called blasphemy when the insult is against deity. Jesus said that the sin is blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, not specifically calling the Holy Spirit a demon. Any insult against deity is blasphemy. He did not restrict the sin to calling the Spirit a demon. Of course, to call the Holy Spirit a demon would be blasphemy, but this is not the only way to insult or speak against the Spirit. You do not have to call Jesus a demon for it to be blasphemy. You can call him a mere man and deny his deity, or you can call him weak or foolish, and that would be blasphemy. The same applies to the Holy Spirit. Just as there are many ways to insult or speak against Jesus, there are many ways to insult, to denigrate, or to speak against the Holy Spirit. There are many ways to criticize his ministry in healing

the sick and casting out demons, his work in speaking in tongues and prophecies, and in granting visions and dreams. Imagine how many people have committed this sin. Do we still want to pretend that this is a non-existent issue?

Jesus answered that a kingdom would not fight against itself, and so Satan would not cast out Satan. Therefore, it did not make sense to say that Jesus would cast out Satan by the power of Satan. When Christians read this text, this is as far as they go. Of course, this conclusion is on the face of the text, so there is nothing wrong with it. However, this conclusion about Satan is not the principle itself. The conclusion is reached by an application of a general principle, which is, a kingdom would not fight against itself. And there are two kingdoms here – the kingdom of Satan, and also the kingdom of God, or of Christ. If Satan would not cast out himself, then neither would God attack himself. God would not oppose the ministry of healing the sick and casting out demons. This means that any force that attacks the ministry of healing the sick and casting out demons cannot belong to the kingdom of God. Watch it, if you even lift a finger to suggest that I can be wrong about this, you would have to say that Satan would indeed cast out Satan, that Jesus was wrong about the situation, so that perhaps the Spirit by which Jesus healed the sick and cast out demons could be Satan. Do you really want to go that route?

Satan would not cast out Satan, therefore Jesus did not cast out Satan by the power of Satan. A kingdom would not oppose itself. Since Jesus came from the kingdom of God, the fact that the Pharisees opposed his ministry in healing the sick and casting out demons proved that they did not belong in the same kingdom – the Pharisees did not belong in the kingdom of God. Can you think of other people in history, perhaps those considered heroes of the faith, who opposed the ministry of healing the sick and casting out demons? Can you think of other people today, perhaps authors you have admired and preachers that you have supported, who have opposed the work of the Spirit in speaking in tongues and prophecies, in visions and dreams, and in various signs and wonders? By the principle that Jesus stated, which kingdom did these people come from? And if you stand with these people, then which kingdom do you think you belong to? Is this too scary? But it can be more scary, because there is even more in what Jesus said. I cannot be wrong about this. If I say that the text does not tell us all these things, then I would be fighting against Jesus, and everything would be wrong. A kingdom does not fight against itself. Jesus healed the sick and cast out demons, because he was not from the kingdom of Satan. The Pharisees attacked Jesus when he healed the sick and cast out demons, because they were not from the kingdom of God.

Jesus said, "Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters." And he also said, "I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak, for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned." People often read these statements without the context in mind. These things were said in the context of the ministry of healing and miracles, and blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. Context determines the meaning. We can apply these statements to broader concerns whenever appropriate, but we must at least apply them to the ministry of healing and the work of the Spirit. Until we apply them in this context, we

have no right to apply it in any other context, because we would have decided to disregard what the statements truly intend.

Let us rephrase the statements to force our attention on the context. Thus Jesus said, "Whoever is not with me [in this ministry of the Spirit, in healing the sick and casting out demons] is against me, and whoever does not gather with me [in this ministry of the Spirit, in healing the sick and casting out demons] scatters." To use the words of another translation: "Anyone who is not working with me [in this ministry of the Spirit, in healing the sick and casting out demons] is actually working against me." Support for the ministry of miracles is not optional, because support for Jesus is not optional. Everyone is required to agree, and everyone is required to join. This is the first and original meaning. Unless we acknowledge this, we have no business wresting it out of its context to make it say that we must work with Jesus in some general sense, such as following him as disciples or preaching the gospel. What does it mean to follow him as disciples anyway? In this passage, it must mean working with Jesus in healing the sick and casting out demons. What does it mean to preach the gospel? In this passage, it must mean working with Jesus in healing the sick and casting out demons. And then Jesus said, "I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak [about the ministry of the Spirit, in healing the sick and casting out demons], for by your words [about the ministry of the Spirit, in healing the sick and casting out demons] you will be justified, and by your words [about the ministry of the Spirit, in healing the sick and casting out demons] you will be condemned."

Retribution by the Doctrine

The unpardonable sin is a lovely doctrine if you are on the right side of the issue. It was a doctrine that Jesus weaponized against unbelief. Then he inspired all three Synoptic writers to emphasize it, equipping us to launch a counterattack against the continuing opposition toward his ministry of healing the sick and casting out demons. What's not to like about it, unless you are on the side that is attacking him? It also equips us to expose the imposters who have infiltrated the communities of faith. Without this doctrine, these cancers often hide in plain sight. What's so scary about it, unless you are one of these imposters? It is a lovely doctrine.

Jesus has entrusted to us this doctrine as a weapon to combat unbelief. Christians indeed love to fight, but instead of fighting unbelief using this doctrine, they fight Jesus about this doctrine. Listen, if you are going to fight Jesus on anything, never fight him on this doctrine. Are you stupid? Didn't you read what he said about it? This is the most dangerous thing to fight Jesus on. If you want to keep your life and your soul, do not fight him on this. Do not argue with him. Do not dilute it. Do not explain it away. Do not get in front of the doctrine to confront it and debate it. Join Jesus in the ministry of the Spirit and of miracles, stand behind doctrine, and point it at the unbelievers and the religionists.

The doctrine is a mandate to get on the offensive. It is a directive to attack unbelief, rather than only to defend faith. If he had only wanted to defend himself, Jesus could have stopped after explaining that it did not make sense to say that he would cast out Satan by the power of Satan. Instead, he kept talking. He drew a clear line between friends and enemies,

excluding from the kingdom of God all those who would not stand with him. Then he weaponized the doctrine of the unpardonable sin and deployed it against the people who challenged him. And he kept talking. He likened them to evil trees, so that because their essence was corrupt, they produced evil fruit. In this context, the evil fruit did not refer to things like greed, adultery, and murder, but derogatory speech against the Spirit in the ministry of healing the sick and casting out demons: "You brood of vipers! How can you speak good, when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks." By what they said, they showed that they blasphemed the Holy Spirit, that they did not belong in the kingdom of God, and that they were evil to the core. His response to their unbelief about the ministry of healing consisted of a multi-layered pronouncement of damnation. He is our teacher and our example.

The doctrine is a divinely commissioned weapon against the critics of healing and miracle ministry. It is something to be honored and utilized to the fullest extent. It is a sin to suppress it. The ministry of healing is a ministry of kindness and compassion, especially toward the believing and the teachable. Just because it is a ministry of compassion does not mean that we are doormats to be trampled by the agents of Satan. God's kindness does not imply weakness toward unbelief. The truth is that a ministry of kindness is also a testimony against unbelief. In fact, a ministry that destroys diseases and demons is a ministry of violence against the kingdom of Satan. It is concerning this kind of ministry that Jesus said the strong man that was Satan would be subdued by one who was even stronger (Matthew 12:29, Luke 11:22). This is said in the same context as the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. Moreover, the work of the Spirit in prophecies and miracles can also carry the power of judgment. Never suppose that the ministry of the Spirit is something passive or defensive that can be attacked with immunity. It might be the last mistake you make.

We know that the ministry of healing is genuine and legitimate. We know that we can cast out demons, prophesy, receive visions and dreams, and speak in tongues. We know that these things are true because of the testimony of God's word. And by faith in God's word, we have been performing these works and experiencing their results. There are millions of people around the world, on our streets, in our churches, in our families, in our friend circles, who in one way or another are suffering under the oppression of Satan. And we have the answer right here. We have it now. Many of these people will live in misery and then perish without learning about it. They could be healed if they were to obtain God's solution from us. But whenever they venture near the solution, there are religionists and unbelievers who discourage them, even threaten them. Who will fight for these people when they are surrounded by skeptics and mockers, even from their own churches and seminaries? It is cowardly and selfish to remain on the defensive and refuse to deploy a weapon that God himself has ordained. It is spiritually and ethically repugnant.

Satan can never win a theological argument against the doctrine of the unpardonable sin or the ministry of healing the sick. He can only inspire his agents to dilute the doctrine to reduce the perceived danger, and to deceive God's people so that they settle into a passive and protracted defensive position. The correct strategy is to turn up the doctrine of the unpardonable sin to maximum, and launch an all-out attack against critics and skeptics.

Invade en masse into their territory and blow it up with the word of God. Then do it again. And again. And again. And again. Then walk away, and return the attention to the suffering and the believing ones. When the next attack comes, do not allow it to marinate for months and years before you make a counterattack. Retaliate instantly. Attack thoroughly. Kill everything that moves. Jesus gave us a weapon – the doctrine of the unpardonable sin. Point it right in the face of the critics and fire it over and over again. Do not hesitate. Do not stop. It takes very little effort, and they have no defense against it, because the doctrine is true and clear, and it applies to exactly what they are doing. They are the ones who must answer us. Each time they oppose us, they are the ones who must prove that they have not committed the unpardonable sin. Let every attack against us trigger an immediate and disproportionate response. March into their territory. Blow up everything by the doctrine of the unpardonable sin – their churches, their seminaries, their creeds, their pastors, their idol heroes and scholars, their families and friends, and all others who might think like them. Then walk away. This is how you deal with critics, and how you prevent Satan from robbing the attention needed to rescue those who are suffering and those who are believing.

It is unwise to invest too much time in contending with people who would never believe the truth, but who are addicted to the excitement of debate. They debate the issues as a religious exercise, and by the very act of debate, they feel that they are engaging in something that is spiritual and productive. They are deceived, especially if they stand on the wrong side of an issue when they debate. But you are also deceived, if you allow yourself to become trapped in their lifestyle, even if you stand on the right side of the issue. If you argue with a dog or a pig five hours every day, even if you are always right, it does not mean that you are spiritual or intelligent. In the end, you are just as unproductive as these people, and you become just as ineffective for the truth of the gospel. Thus Jesus said, do not throw your pearls down before swine, because they will not appreciate your insights and good intentions, but they will turn to attack you instead. If it is unwise to invest too much time in these people, it is just as unwise to settle into a defensive position, because when there is nothing to discourage their attacks, and when they are not forced to put their own eternal welfare on the line, they will continue to derive a sense of excitement and accomplishment from the interaction.

Therefore, when you are challenged, feel free to offer an explanation for the ministry of the Spirit, of healing and such, and then stop. Just stop it. Get up from that defensive position and get on the offensive. And stay on the offensive without looking back. Do not let them trick you into returning to the defensive. Make them defend their salvation instead of allowing them to make you defend the ministry of healing. Refuse to keep explaining yourself, but keep the unpardonable sin in their face. If they call themselves Christians, or scholars, or even just decent human beings, they ought to support the ministry of healing. If they do not support it, then obviously they do not belong on the same side as Jesus Christ. They are foreign to, and outside of, the kingdom of God. If they respond with anything other than immediate and complete compliance, we hit them again. Before they can come up for air, we hit them again. And then we hit them again. And after all that, we hit them again. Next time you come across them on the street, if they dare to even glance at you, hit them again. Let them come face to face with the unpardonable sin day and night, week after week, year after year. Every time you come at me with unbelief and criticism about

the Spirit's work in healing the sick, casting out demons, speaking in tongues, and such things, I will slam you over the head with this doctrine of the unpardonable sin over and over again until you bleed from every orifice. Then I will take this sword of the spirit and thrust it into your eyeball...slowly, and then I will twist the sword just to hear you scream.

Participation in the Doctrine

As I mentioned in the beginning, the doctrine of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is a major teaching in the Gospels. It is more explicit than some of the doctrines that people care very much about, such as water baptism, church government, and the sabbath. It is certainly far more graphic. In this doctrine there is more at stake to any individual than the doctrines of the Lord's supper, marriage and divorce, biblical prophecy and the last things, and numerous other things combined multiplied by a trillion. Entire denominations had been established upon doctrines that were less detailed, less explicit, with less biblical support, and which had less significance. Yet this doctrine has been worse than neglected. It has been twisted almost to its opposite, as if it is somehow forgivable to speak against the Holy Spirit. But Jesus indicated it was unforgivable even when the Holy Spirit was incidentally insulted. The consequence for committing this sin is an immutable verdict of damnation – to forever burn, and burn, and burn in hell – without any possibility of forgiveness, whether in this life or in the life to come. How in the world had something like this become the most shunned and rejected doctrine in Scripture? How? It is not because the doctrine is obscure. In the Gospel of Mark, we run into it by the third chapter. Any literate person can read about it for himself and understand it in less than a minute. The doctrine is in this condition because people refuse to accept that such a sin can exist. Like it or not, the sin exists, and it has been committed by numerous people. Satan is not nearly as afraid of many other doctrines as this one. This doctrine can single-handedly restore the fear of God to the church and to the world. It can restore power and honor to the ministry of the Spirit in healing the sick and casting out demons. As Jesus explained, this ministry is the one that destroys the kingdom of Satan, so that it cannot be the work of Satan, for Satan would not destroy himself. Thus this is the doctrine that can make way for a ministry that destroys the kingdom of Satan. No wonder he wishes to make it disappear.

Christians are eager to preach that every person must believe in Jesus to be saved, and anyone who does not believe in him will burn in hell. Preaching salvation in Jesus alone increases assurance in those who ought to have assurance, in those who follow Jesus. However, it removes assurance from those who should not have assurance, those who think that they have no need to be saved, or that they can be saved some other way. Why not censure this? Enemies of the Christian faith indeed reject the doctrine, but why don't Christians also oppose it? Presumably many more people have been sent to hell for rejecting Christ than for blaspheming the Spirit. The doctrine threatens the disbelieving and disobedient just as the doctrine of the unpardonable sin threatens the disbelieving and disobedient. Is the doctrine concerning Christ more palatable because the damnation is not confirmed until the person's death? How is this much better, if that person indeed never believes? The difference is that someone who hears about Christ can repent and believe, but it remains that many people would never believe. It is ridiculous to regard the doctrine concerning the Spirit as something especially despicable, just because it could expose a reprobate sooner. How does that make any sense? The doctrine that any person who does

not believe in Christ will burn in hell poses no problem to me, because I believe in him. It only poses a problem to the person who refuses to believe. The doctrine that any person who blasphemes the Holy Spirit is guaranteed a place in hellfire poses no problem to me, because I do not speak against the Holy Spirit. There is no danger if we honor his work in everything that we say. It is dangerous to even remain a spectator about this, because Jesus said that whoever is not working with him is working against him. But there is no danger if we participate in this work of healing the sick and casting out demons, in speaking in tongues and prophecies, and in visions and dreams. There is no danger if we stop being skeptics or spectators of the Spirit's work, but if we stand with the Spirit to attack the critics.

Sometimes people complain that I have disturbed their peace by teaching this doctrine from Jesus. Well...HOW IS THAT MY FAULT? If you had not been mocking God day and night, would you be in this predicament? Blame yourself. I refuse to apologize, recant, or weaken the doctrine by one iota. And even given your strange addiction to speaking against the Holy Spirit, if you could refute me on what this sin means – if you could refute what Jesus said – you would still be at peace. So the only villain here is you. To blame me for what you did makes you look like exactly the kind of religious scum who would blaspheme the Holy Spirit without much misgiving. And if I have disturbed your friends by this doctrine from Jesus, as the complaints sometimes go, you should rebuke your friends, not me. Or rebuke Jesus, if you dare. Why are you talking to me, if they are the ones who blasphemed the Spirit? If they have done it, it is out of my hands. No one can save them.

You say, "I have believed in Jesus Christ, so I couldn't have committed this sin, nor will I ever commit it!" Why are you talking to me then, if there is no problem? What I know is, if you had committed this sin, then regardless of what you claim, you have never really believed in Jesus, nor will you ever. You say, "Well, I was an unbeliever when I said those things." And that is my fault again? If you had committed this sin, then you are still an unbeliever, and that is not my fault. If Christians had been teaching about this sin, so as to strike the fear of God even into the hearts of those outside the church, then fewer people would have committed this sin. Fewer people would have been disturbed when they heard the truth about it. If people are disturbed when I talk about the unpardonable sin, then let them blame the other Christians through the centuries and in this generation who had shoved it aside. They are the ones responsible for the disturbance by permitting the issue to fester. But do we care only about ourselves? If Christians had been teaching about this, then God would not have been insulted so often through these centuries. If we begin to restore this doctrine to its proper place and give it due attention, then we can expect fewer problems in the future. The effect would not be immediate. The doctrine needs to become a common teaching, and even a test of orthodoxy and discipleship to show that we agree with Jesus and that we endorse the Spirit. However, it is unlikely to become a common teaching until we become diligent and forceful in talking about it.

Whenever this doctrine is mentioned, Christians usually dedicate their effort into providing assurance, as if they do not care whether the Spirit has been blasphemed in the first place. Should we preach on hell and then say that no one goes? Or, is hell an oppressive doctrine? It is oppressive only to the one who rejects Jesus. As for assurance, read the passages on blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. They are not secret texts. Read them. Do they make it

sound like Jesus intended to provide assurance? He made one attack and threat after another. If anything, he intended to destroy assurance. Nothing in these verses offer any assurance, any escape, any comfort, any excuse, any hope, any repentance or restoration toward those who attack the ministry of healing the sick and casting out demons. How can I conjure up one meaning, when the words convey another? How can I create assurance for the critics and the mockers, when the texts intend to destroy it? I am a preacher, not one of your scam theologians – I preach what is there, not what is not there.

The doctrine is what it is whether or not you admit it or preach it. Someone who has blasphemed the Holy Spirit will burn in hell even if you do not tell him about the doctrine, and even if he would never feel the hopelessness in knowing that he has committed this unpardonable sin. He will know soon enough, when he burns in hell. The point is that even before he knows about it, he has still committed it. He will still burn in hell. But if you preach about it, you might prevent some people from committing the sin. If every time someone is about to make a reckless statement concerning the ministry of healing, or speaking in tongues, or some such thing, he is reminded of this doctrine, then it could restore a holy fear of God into him and make him hesitate. The doctrine can save just as easily as it can damn. Yet if we do not preach it, it can only damn, but if we preach it, it can save.

Moreover, God said to the prophet, "If I say to the wicked, 'O wicked one, you shall surely die,' and you do not speak to warn the wicked to turn from his way, that wicked person shall die in his iniquity, but his blood I will require at your hand. But if you warn the wicked to turn from his way, and he does not turn from his way, that person shall die in his iniquity, but you will have delivered your soul" (Ezekiel 33:8-9). Do you want to be blamed when other people commit the unpardonable sin? I would never want God to say to me, "This fellow spoke against the Spirit fifteen times in one hour, right to your face, and you did not tell him about the unpardonable sin. You even complimented him here and there in your discussion on healing the sick and speaking in tongues, and you comforted him in your differences. Now he is damned forever. He is burning in hellfire, writhing and convulsing in agony, screaming in pain and despair. He deserves this, but his blood I will require at your hand." Ah...no way I will let that happen to me. Given how people seem to enjoy mocking the Spirit nowadays, I am going to sling this doctrine in every direction and tell people about the unpardonable sin everywhere I go. If God so much as glances my way, I will throw up my hands and say, "Lord, I told them! I told them not to do it. I told them what would happen to them. I talked about this straight out of what Jesus said more than anybody that I know of in the past two thousand years. This is not my fault."

8. GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY AND FAITH FOR HEALING

There are multiple instances where people have twisted what I said. When it comes to healing, there seems to be two schools. One favors God's sovereignty, so that we never know if we can be healed. One favors man's faith, so that we can always be healed. But a coherent doctrine must address both God's sovereignty and man's faith, since the Bible relates both to healing. More precisely, the Bible relates God's sovereignty to everything (not so much specifically to healing), and it relates man's faith to healing. Thus I have said that faith always receives, but God is sovereign over faith itself.

Now, those who are of weak faith on healing would twist my words to make it favor the first view above, so that we are back to not knowing if we can receive. But in the very same contexts where I said that God is sovereign over faith itself, I would also add that this is no excuse, just as one cannot excuse himself for having no faith for salvation by appealing to God's sovereignty. Moreover, I have also added that God would only withhold faith from reprobates. If a person has faith for salvation (not reprobate), he can always develop faith for healing using the means that God has established, such as the teachings of the word of God.

In fact, if we must err, I would err to favor the second view above – we can always have faith, and faith always receives. To say this, of course, is really not to err at all. This is the view that Jesus taught. He never mentioned or even hinted at the first factor in relation to healing. I only mentioned God's sovereignty when it comes to healing for the sake of completeness in theology, since God's decree is a factor that relates to everything. But when not addressing people who are always itching to bring it up, it does not need to be mentioned when teaching the doctrine of healing, just as Jesus and the apostles never referred to it when it comes to healing.

Many people quote what I say out of context to assert their own opinion, so if a subject is important to you, try to look up what I really said and observe the context. The meaning of what I said in context might be the opposite of what the person quoting me intends to assert. I have noticed that many people who claim to support my writings misinterpret me very often. It is not because I am unclear, but it is because they have an opinion that they wish to prove, and so they tend to be selective in citing my words and ignore the context.

On the other hand, I understand that I have written a lot, so that it might not be easy to keep track of my thinking on a topic from every angle, nor is it possible for me to address a topic from every angle every time it is mentioned. And a lot of what I write is contrary to popular thinking, so perhaps some people thought I must have said something in line with their opinion when I said something directly opposite. Nevertheless, I would include statements in the same context to preempt misunderstanding.

9. THE RELATIVE UNIMPORTANCE OF BAPTISM

Now as for how little God cares about water baptism – comparatively – it is easy to see. Of course baptism is important, because all the things of God are important, but religious tradition puts baptism much higher than God does.

When John the Baptist said that a greater man would come, he did not say that someone else would come to baptize with water, only that this person would be greater. Rather, he said that someone greater would come, and he would baptize with something entirely different – something far greater than water, the Holy Spirit (Matthew 3:11). Some person that is far greater would baptize with some substance that is far greater, not water at all. This was the parallel John made. Water was left out of the equation for this greater person.

The Gospels say that Jesus himself did not even baptize people with water, but he made his disciples do it (John 3:22, 4:1-2). On the other hand, he would sometimes preach for long periods and lay his hands on individuals to heal them, one by one, for hours. But about the only reference to him baptizing people with water is that he did not do it at all. In terms of direct involvement, based on what we can tell from biblical evidence, Jesus devoted no time and effort to water baptism.

As for Paul, he often did not do it either. He said that he baptized no one among the Corinthians except for a few (1 Corinthians 1:14-16). He even said, "For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel" (1 Corinthians 1:17). He was an apostle, and an apostle was supposed to bring the complete package of the Christian faith – all its doctrines and practices – yet he could speak as if preaching the gospel did not have to include performing water baptism, or at least he could let other people do it. Why not the other way around? Why didn't he perform water baptism only, and make his companions do the preaching or the healing and miracles?

Like Jesus, he would preach for long periods (Acts 20:7-9) and heal the sick for hours (Acts 28:8-9), but he would avoid performing baptism. We cannot be sure how often he abstained, but with the Corinthians, he said he did almost zero. He sounded like he wished he had baptized no one there at all, given the sectarianism of the Corinthians. But that was not the reason he avoided baptism, because he said this in hindsight. Moreover, he did not say this about other things he did with the Corinthians. He did not say that he regretted laying hands on them to heal the sick, to ordain elders, and so on.

He took time to heal the sick, cast out demons, and even sent out handkerchiefs and aprons to make these things happen (Acts 19:12), but he only baptized a few people here and there? When he first encountered the Ephesians and assumed that they were disciples, he asked them if they had received the Holy Spirit, not whether they had received water baptism or what baptism they received. Only when they appeared confused did he ask them about water baptism to identify the misunderstanding.

When he established a church, he would ordain elders as soon as he could, and when he could not, he would leave a companion he trusted to do it. But he did not baptize? When

he ordained elders, he would lay hands on them and impart spiritual gifts, and prophesy over them. But he did not baptize? He even had time to earn part of his income with his trade. But he did not baptize? Obviously he had time to do other things, but in comparison, as far as we can tell from biblical evidence, he devoted almost no time and effort to water baptism.

I can see the accusations flying. So again, all of this is relative. If the ministry of Jesus baptized more than the ministry of John, then of course the Lord did not regard water baptism as a waste of time. However, the curious fact remains that he did not do it himself. Perhaps he watched on the side as he snacked on figs. Or maybe he slept while the disciples labored, as he did on the boat. Or maybe he turned to teach the people, healed the sick, or talked to some children instead. We do not know. What we know is that he would tire himself preaching and healing, but not baptizing. And Paul was the same way.

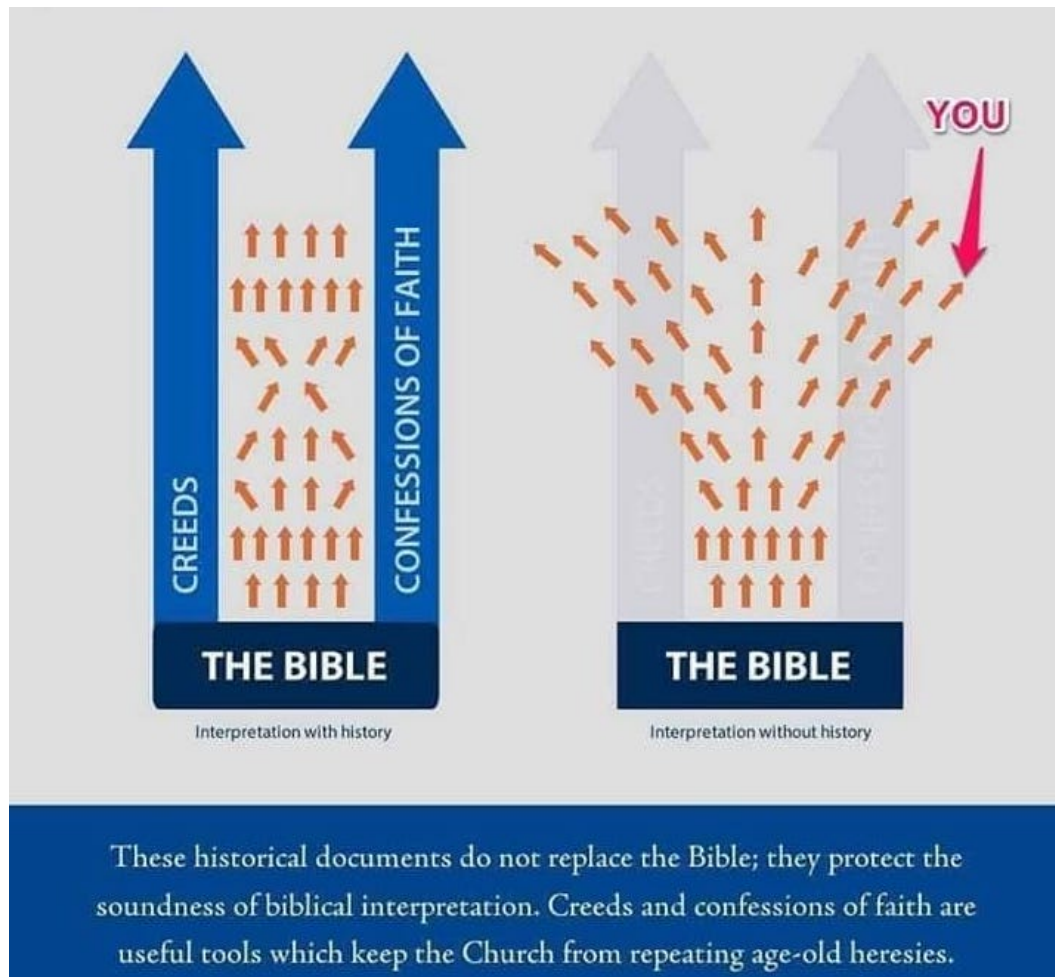
I would never dare to belittle anything that God has established, but God himself has established the relative priority of the various items in his commandments, thus to disregard this order is to belittle what he has established, and I would never dare to do that. Thus I must uphold the relative unimportance of water baptism. I could, of course, instead say that I uphold the relative importance of things like preaching and healing, and I do, but I ought to say it both ways, so as to target those who regard their ritualized version of the commandments of God as more weighty than faith, justice, and mercy (Matthew 23:23).

Shouldn't the otaku of water baptism acknowledge these things about Jesus and Paul? You might wrangle out some explanations, but the fact that you need to make up reasons for this is admission that they gave other things more prominence. There is no struggle when one tries to demonstrate the importance of preaching and healing in the lives of Jesus and the apostles. None of your reasons prevented them from doing these other things.

Pastors would preach multiple series on water baptism in their lifetimes, covering the means and the modes, the histories and the controversies, the creeds and the bylaws, and almost the pH levels of the water, but not mention healing the sick even once. The only time they would mention healing the sick by faith in the name of Jesus is to mock it and condemn it. When they teach about water baptism, they offer it from the perspective of studying something that God requires. They wish you would see their reverence in their excruciating precision. But if they care so much about what God requires, they would teach on healing the sick more than water baptism, or communion, or the sabbath.

As Jesus said, "The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath." But it is not really God or man that these religionists care about, is it? Baptism fanatics do not emphasize this doctrine due to their obedience, but they do it to camouflage their disobedience toward the weightier matters of God's commandments. A man condemns himself if he fights for what he considers important, but then fights against what God considers even more important. This is the religion of the Pharisees, and it is a road that leads to hell.

10. AN OBVIOUS SCAM



My intention is not to debate the legitimacy and role of creeds, although the arguments surrounding this topic have been so ridiculous that I suppose I would win regardless of what position I wish to take. Here I only wish to consider the above image, which I have seen several times over the years. The image is clear in what it tries to convey, so I will not explain that part. It asserts man-made creeds and confessions as necessary for a proper interpretation of the Bible. They are supposed to prevent people from wandering off into errors and heresies.

However, the thing I immediately noticed was how much of the Bible these creeds and confessions cover up, so that the individuals trapped by them are in fact forbidden from venturing into those portions of Scripture. I took measurements with a ruler, and discovered that the creeds and confessions cover up about 35% of the Bible. If we were to take this image seriously, and those who use it to advance their view wish that we would, then we would conclude that creeds and confessions forbid people from believing more than a third of the word of God.

Instead of tools to promote and protect the word of God, wouldn't this make the creeds and confessions some of the greatest enemies of the word of God in history? Indeed, creeds and confessions have been used for this purpose, to suppress and even condemn a large portion of divine revelation. Thus we find damnable tendencies toward cessationism, ritualism, and others in the creeds and confessions.

By using this image to promote man-made tools to control the word of God and to control the people of God, you condemn yourself. God will hold you accountable in the judgment. By this appeal to "history," you admit that you join with those who forbid the people of God throughout history to believe and obey all of the word of God. They could believe and obey only what you approve; otherwise, they are regarded as heretics, even when they follow what is expressly written in the word of God. You are the heretic that you claim to fight.

If creeds interpret the Bible, then who will interpret the creeds? If the creeds and confessions are "useful tools" to interpret the Bible, then what tools are there to interpret these creeds and confessions? There are indeed arguments about what the creeds and confessions mean. And when the creeds and confessions are exposed as contrary to Scripture on multiple points, their followers would take effort to explain how these creeds and confessions are misinterpreted, so that the original intent was agreeable to Scripture after all. Thus they themselves are the "useful tools" to prevent people from venturing outside the boundaries of the creeds. Perhaps they should add themselves to the image!

Christians, do you want to follow people who are so stupid? Do you want these people to choose your creeds and confessions, and interpret them for you? They use this image to try to manipulate you, but they cannot even do a proper scam. You should feel insulted. When you interpret the Bible in a way that they do not like, then they appeal to the creeds to refute you. You look around and say, "What? Is this real life? Are we Catholics now? The biblical text is right here in front of us." When you complain, they appeal to some famous author. But who will interpret that author? Wait, is the game to create more and more distance from the biblical text? Is that the scam?

If you interpret the Bible in a way they do not like – for example, if you believe what it says – then they appeal to the creeds to refute you. If you interpret the creeds in a way they do not like, or if you disagree with the creeds, then they appeal to some historical figure or even to their own academic credentials to refute you. Thus in the end, they are the ones who rule over your faith. If you are willing to accept this manipulation, then you deserve to be controlled.

They show you right in their promotional materials that they would cover up more than a third of Scripture to trap you in their man-made religion. Perhaps they prevent you from believing in the doctrines on faith and prayer, on healing the sick and casting out demons, on prophecy and speaking in tongues, on financial prosperity and the kingdom of God, and on a hundred other things that God wants you to believe and obey. They refuse to enter into God's promises, and they forbid you to enter. What will you do about it?

Am I against creeds and confessions now? I said that this was not the topic, but let me make a fair statement. If you wish to assert the legitimacy of creeds and confessions, make proper arguments, arguments that humble everything under the word of God and that promote the word of God more than the creeds and confessions themselves. Concede that it is the word of God that judges the creeds and confessions rather than the creeds and confessions that determine the interpretation of the word of God. Then concede the fact that the historic creeds and confessions contain inventions that are foreign to the word of God and that are against the word of God. Admit that people have the biblical right to dissent and change the creeds and confessions. If you are willing to do this, then there is room for discussion. If not, then there is only room for your excommunication.

11. THE ABSURD IDEA OF NEED

You may have heard it said, "God gives us what we need, not what we want." It is sometimes applied to life in general, and it is often applied to prayer. This religious platitude is in direct contradiction to the word of God. It stands especially against the teachings of Jesus on prayer. It is an excuse for unbelief. It is a self-pardon for failure. Whatever you end up having, you can tell yourself that it is what you need. If you comfort yourself this way, you will never have to admit your shortcoming. You will never have to admit that you are not the spiritual giant you think you are after all. You will never have to say, "God did not answer my prayer because of my unbelief. But I will not make excuses, and I will not give up. I will repent of my lack of faith, and I will revisit the word of God and grow in faith. Then I will come back and receive what I want from God."

The idea of need is absurd by itself. You can always need less. In fact, need is impossible to define on its own. You never absolutely need anything that you ask for in prayer. You want a steak, but you think you only need bread, so you ask for bread. If you have bread, you do not need butter. But if the purpose is to survive, you can eat tree roots. You can eat trash. You can eat animal excrements. So you do not need bread after all. Do you need to survive in the first place? If you are a Christian, then even if you starve to death, God will accept you into heaven. So pull your head back out of the dog toilet and just die. But who says you need to go to heaven? Why not burn in hell? There is nothing contradictory or unintelligible about it. Millions of people burn in hell. But you see, you do not want to burn in hell. You want to go to heaven, and that is why you need Jesus Christ. Well, I do not want to eat trash either, and I do not want to eat only bread. Therefore, I need the steak.

Need is relative. Need has no meaning without a definite point of reference. No one really needs anything – unless it is to get what they want. When people define need, they define it by what they want. If they need little, it is because they want little, or because they only dare to want little. This desire is often unspoken, but it is easily discovered once we talk about it, because inevitably the need is to satisfy what they want to achieve. Perhaps their desire has a range, and need is defined by the minimum that satisfies what they desire, but the need is still defined by the desire. When we force a dichotomy between need and want, need loses its meaning. Need is relative to something, some desired outcome or desired standard. Need cannot stand by itself. Since need cannot stand by itself, it is meaningless to say that God gives us what we need and not what we want, because this would just mean that he gives the minimum of what is desired. This limitation becomes meaningless if we increase the desire so that the minimum also becomes greater.

If I want to buy a house, then I will need hundreds of thousands of dollars. But if I want to buy a mansion, then I will need millions of dollars. You say, "But you do not need a mansion." But I do, I really do. There are some people I want to spite, and I need a mansion to do it. On the other hand, you do not even need to rent a room. Many people are homeless. They survive, assuming any of us need to survive in the first place. You do not need anything. However, what I really want is to build a space stadium so we can have church on the moon. Depending on how spectacular I want to make the place, that could cost me fifty to three hundred billion dollars. So I need fifty billion dollars, because that is the

minimum. You say, "But you do not need to build a space stadium. We can have church on the earth." You do not need dinner on the table either. You can have dinner on the field eating grass with the cows. You do not need anything.

However, to define need as the minimum of what we desire is still silly. The Bible says that God will do more than what we ask or imagine. Of course God gives us what we need. The Bible sometimes uses the idea, but it does not use the idea of need to minimize what we receive from God. If I desire to buy lunch and God gives me ten million dollars for that one meal, then of course he has given me what I need, because I only need the ten dollars to achieve my desire. There is nothing inherent in the idea of need to limit what I receive to ten dollars in this context. Twenty dollars would meet my need. Twenty trillion dollars would meet my need. There is nothing in the idea of need to restrict it to a minimum of a certain reference point. This is just another way of saying that it means nothing to say that God gives us what we need, not what we want. Indeed, the Bible says that God will meet our needs, not according to our standards, but according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus. A poor man might give you twenty dollars, if even that, to buy a pair of shoes at a bargain outlet. A born multi-trillionaire might give you several thousand dollars to make you a custom pair, because he does not know anything else. And to him, that amount means that shoes are free.

We are exploring from various perspectives how meaningless the idea of need is. And if need means nothing to us, it means even less to God. This also answers a possible challenge to what we have considered to this point. That is, if need is defined by something else, like desire, perhaps it is not defined by our desire, but by God's desire for us. In other words, God gives us what we need as defined by his desire for us. And so we do not receive what we ask in prayer because God thinks we need something different.

From the biblical perspective, this challenge is answered by what we considered above, that is, God meets our needs according to his riches, not according to our needs. Moreover, when Paul said this, he was referring to needs that his readers were aware of; in fact, he was specifically referring to money (Philippians 4:15-19). In other words, God gives us money according to how much money he has, not according to how much money we need. The point is that we cannot say that God is the one who defines our needs in a way that we do not understand, or that we would understand only by hindsight. The platitude would make us think that we might have a need or desire, but when we pray about it and do not receive what we ask, it is because God understands that our need is something else, and he gives us what he thinks we need instead. What Paul said would disprove this, since he referred to our needs as something that we would continuously grasp both in the present and in the future, and he said that God would meet those needs.

On the conceptual level, the ambiguity is built into the idea of need itself. God himself would face the same problem. Why does he think that you need a certain thing, or why does he think that you need this much of it? He would still define need according to his desire. And we know what God has decided because he tells us in his word. So it is not something that is unknown. Thus if God decides what we need, the platitude remains meaningless because we know what God has decided. He tells us in the Scriptures. If we

turn to the word of God to define what God wants for us, then this platitude is destroyed, because it cannot explain unexpected disappointments and unexpected failures in prayer as it is intended to do. Since we know what God has said, everything would be expected. But then, why should we preserve the idea of need at all? If what God desires and what we need become the same thing (in this context, it is what we need because of what he desires for us), then the platitude would mean that God gives us what he desires for us, not what we desire for ourselves. So it is all about desire, and need becomes irrelevant again. Moreover, recall that a need places no restriction on what meets that need. If God thinks I need ten dollars for lunch, he can still give me ten trillion dollars. That meets the need very well. Need is meaningless.

In any case, the biblical teaching is not that God will define our need according to his desire for us, so that we might not receive what we ask. To repeat, Paul told the Philippians that God would meet their needs, and in context, these were needs that they knew, and needs that were defined according to their desire, their perception about their lives. This means that the platitude cannot explain failed expectations, since we know what our expectations ought to be. Moreover, if we say that God gives us what he desires for us and not what we desire for ourselves, this does not automatically mean that we would receive something less or something different from what we pray for. Even if it is God who defines how much we ought to receive from him (in our terms, if it is God who defines how much we need according to his desire for us), the Bible indicates that we would receive more than what we ask or imagine. We will have more to say about this later.

What am I doing? I am showing you that the platitude is meaningless no matter how we look at it. Even if we overthink it and make room for it from every angle, it will not work. By itself, need is meaningless. You never really need anything. And this is why the platitude – "God gives us what we need, not what we want" – prepares us to get nothing. It is said by people who get nothing from God, but who feel self-righteous about it. People who are dripping with healing and prosperity, with holiness and revelation, with spiritual fruit and miraculous power, tend not to say something like this. They tend to encourage others to have faith and make progress. Then we have shown that even if we define need by desire, as we should, the platitude still fails to be meaningful regardless of whose desire we use to define our need.

The platitude is worse than useless. It is evil. Imagine if your son has terminal illness. Although you pray for his healing, he dies. Then someone says to you, "God gives you what you need, not what you want." This man mocks your son right in front of you. You do not need your son. Your son is unnecessary. What about your son? Apparently he did not need his own life either. But what if he wanted to live? Then he needed healing after all, didn't he? Next, you pray for your wife's salvation, but your wife dies without believing in Christ, and now she burns in hell. This same fellow says to you, "God gives you what you need, not what you want." You feel that you need to punch this guy in the face. You see, you think you need to, because you want to. He mocks your wife's damnation and suffering. So you do not need your wife to go to heaven. She can burn in hell just fine. But is it fine for her? What if she did not want to burn in hell? Then she needed to know Jesus

Christ, didn't she? The platitude spawns from a faithless, cruel, and evil theology. This is paganism. It is not the teaching of Jesus. It is not the Christian faith.

Why do you want food for your children so that they do not starve to death? It is not because they need food. They do not need anything. They can starve to death. What is the problem? The problem is you – you do not want it to happen. So you ask for what you want, not what you need. You work hard to earn enough to feed your children, because it is what you want, not what you need. You need it only because you want it. It is because you want this outcome that you need the money and the food. But then, you also want them to wear clothes and attend school! You monster! When will you be satisfied? Do you need any of this? Do they? No one needs any of this. But you want all of it and so much more. You are insistent on your desires. In theology, people often call that greed. I mean the Buddhist theology that seemingly a majority of Christians espouse.

Contentment and desire are not mutually exclusive. You can be content with life, but want more out of life. Contentment means that you are happy now even while you reach for more. I am content in Christ, but that does not mean I no longer desire progress in faith. I continue to reach for more, but I am not in agony in the meantime. I am happy now, and I will be happier later. This is true in other aspects of life. You can be content because you have food, clothing, and shelter, and you ought to be content. But in this state of contentment, you continue to reach for more. Contentment makes you less vulnerable to temptations, and ambition makes you less vulnerable to stagnation.

At the Bethesda pool, there was a multitude of invalids – blind, lame, and paralyzed (John 5). None of them needed anything. They could remain with their infirmities. They could suffer their limitations and degrading existence until they died. However, if the point of reference was their desire, then everybody there needed healing. All of them needed help. Jesus approached a man and asked him, "Do you want to be healed?" He did not ask the man, "Do you need to be healed?" He did not need to be healed, unless he wanted to be healed.

God does not ask you today, "Do you need my help? Do you need my grace? Do you need my power and wisdom?" You could answer no. You could rot in your problems. You could suffer depression and sickness. You can drown in debt. You can be bound by sin. You can even burn in hell – if you want. You do not need anything from God, that is, unless you want to be saved, unless you want to be healed, unless you want to win in life. So God is asking you, "Do you want my help? Do you want my grace? Do you want my power and wisdom?" He will give you what you want, not what you need.

Two blind men called out to Jesus, and he asked them, "What do you want me to do for you?" (Matthew 20:32). Certainly, they did not need healing. They had survived all this time as blind men. And they did not really need to survive in the first place. They survived until this time because they wanted to survive. Now they needed healing, only because they wanted healing. Do you see the truth? The doctrine against desire in faith and prayer is a scam doctrine that makes nonsense out of our walk with God. Jesus did not say to people, "According to your need be it unto you." But he said, "According to your faith be it unto

you." Whether or not you need something, whatever that means, if you have faith for it, then you can get whatever you want.

The disciples of Jesus failed to heal a boy who had a demon (Matthew 17:14-20). They were not stupid enough to say to the father, "God gives us what we need, not what we want." Did the boy really need healing, or deliverance from the demon? He had survived for years with the condition. And he did not need to survive in the first place. Eventually, he would have died even if he had received healing. He did not need anything. His father did not need anything either. They did not come because of need, since need means nothing. He wanted healing for his son. He wanted it. No other reason was required.

Then Jesus came and healed the boy. If the boy needed deliverance from the demon, then why didn't God give him what he needed when the disciples tried to help him? If deliverance from the demon was not something needed, but merely something desired, then why did God give him what was desired but not needed when Jesus helped him? What was the difference? Jesus told the disciples that they failed because of their lack of faith. The difference was faith. When the disciples failed, Jesus did not say, "God gives us what we need, not what we want." He did not accept failure as a revelation of the will of God. Instead, he walked right back into the situation and forced the demon to leave. He wanted something to happen, so he made it happen.

If you have faith, Jesus said that when there is a mountain in your way, you can tell it to throw itself into the sea, and it must obey you (Matthew 21:21, Mark 11:23). If you have faith, Jesus said that you can command a tree to be uprooted and be planted in the sea – a miracle that is never needed – and it must do what you say (Luke 17:6). He did not say that these are things that he could do because he was the Son of God. He said that his followers could do these things. God will back us, so that we will receive whatever we ask for in prayer, if we have faith (Matthew 21:22). He did not say that we will obtain what we need, but we will obtain what we request, what we believe, and what we command. On the one hand, we have the doctrine of Jesus: "If you want something to happen, command it to happen by faith. I don't care if it is unnecessary, unnatural, and even grotesque, make it happen by force." On the other hand, we have this stupid whiny platitude: "God gives you what you need, not what you want."

Now consider how Jesus fed the thousands. Pay attention, because we will examine three related passages (Matthew 14:15-21, Matthew 15:32-38, Matthew 16:8-11). Jesus fed thousands of people at least twice in his ministry. In Matthew 14, he started with five loaves and two fish (v. 17). He fed more than five thousand people (v. 21), and he had twelve baskets of food left over (v. 20). In Matthew 15, he started with seven loaves and a few small fish (v. 34). He fed more than four thousand people (v. 38), and he had seven baskets of food left over (v. 37).

He said, "I am unwilling to send them away hungry, lest they faint on the way." Thus the need was defined by this desire. What was needed was defined by what was wanted. The need was not to allow the people to eat until they were full and could eat no more, but the need was to allow the people to eat only until they were not so hungry that they would faint

on the way home. Yet in each instance there was so much surplus that the people could not finish the food. And if any of them tried to take some food with them, they could not carry all of it, so that the disciples had entire baskets of food left over.

In Matthew 14, Jesus started with less food, and he had a larger crowd to feed. But he ended with more food left over. That is, in Matthew 14, he started with five loaves to feed more than five thousand people, and he had twelve baskets of food left over. And in Matthew 15, he started with seven loaves to feed more than four thousand people, and he had seven baskets of food left over.

Here the need and the answer are both specified. We are able to observe how God responds to our need in exact and numerical terms. In both instances, Scripture demonstrates that God answers by supplying far more than what we need. He responds to faith and prayer by drowning out the need with overwhelming surplus. In fact, when the need is great and our resource is small, he responds with an even more outrageous excess. His answer is so unnecessarily excessive that the measure of need, or the very idea of need, becomes irrelevant. In fact, now the need becomes how to manage the excess (John 6:12).

This is the most reliable indication for what we ought to expect when we ask for our "daily bread" (Matthew 6:11). It is not a modest request. It cannot mean an amount that allows us to barely survive, while we continue to live unsatisfied and unfulfilled, and without any surplus. Again, Jesus defined the need as only sending the people away without making them faint from hunger, and God answered with overwhelming excess. Don't forget – that happened when Jesus wanted only one meal to sustain the people. What should we expect, if we ask for supplies for a whole day? And what should we expect, if we ask this every day? Our need would become how to manage the ridiculous abundance that God would throw upon us.

Then in Matthew 16, the disciples misunderstood that Jesus was asking about bread when he used it as a metaphor to warn them about false doctrine (v. 5-7). Jesus rebuked them for their lack of faith (v. 8). But what did faith have to do with it? If they had learned from how Jesus fed the thousands, it would have eliminated from their thinking the possibility that the lack of bread would ever be a problem. Since they assumed that the lack of bread was a problem, it meant that they still did not have faith in God to provide. Therefore, Jesus rebuked them for their lack of faith, and he reminded them of the amount of food left over on these occasions (v. 9-12).

Faith enables us to see things from God's perspective. Thus it enables us to understand what God means by what he says in Scripture. It enables us to agree with him. Theology becomes direct and simple. We will not have to invent traditions and platitudes to nullify his words. The lack of faith is a root of spiritual dullness. It is often exhibited in the bewildering insanity that we see in theological teachings and discussions, and some of the doctrines that have been codified in creeds and confessions. These are man-made doctrines that attempt to construct a religion without God. Unbelief makes people STUPID.

Earlier I mentioned that I would say more about one issue, and we are now ready to do it. We have noticed that need is meaningless in itself, but it is relative to a point of reference, such as our desire. Unbelief attempts to portray defeat and disappointment as triumph, and so it might claim that the point of reference is what God desires for us, not what we desire for ourselves. The purpose is to destroy any definite expectation. We have answered this several ways when we first mentioned it, but we can reinforce the point.

Jesus was the revelation of the will of God in the life of man. If we define what he needed by what he desired, then the need was only enough food to sustain the people on their way home. But God answered with overwhelming excess, allowing the people to eat until they were full, not knowing how much they carried home, and still had many baskets of food left over. Thus if we define what is needed by what God desires for us, we can only conclude that the answer would not be less than what we desire for ourselves, but it would be an even more excessive amount that far surpasses what we are able to ask or imagine. Pushing everything off to "the will of God" does not reduce the expectation of what we ought to receive, but it would increase this expectation to an inconceivable level to us.

To remove another damnable teaching, God does not give us something categorically different from what we ask and force us to call it better. When someone asks for food, God does not give him cancer and then threaten the poor fellow to confess that God knows what he truly needs after all. This is paganism. This is the kind of religion that makes the people regard deity with pure dread – not sincere reverence and admiration, but the terror and suspicion that one might show toward a rabid monster. Jesus wanted food for the people, and God gave food to the people, only much more than what they needed. No tricks. Only grace.

Therefore, whether a need is defined by what we desire for ourselves or by what God desires for us, it can only lead to excessive supply and success. There is no room for unbelief. The only place for a man who proposes modest answers to prayer is to admit that he does not believe in God at all.

12. FACTS ABOUT MARY

Mary received the word of God with a ready heart (Luke 1:38). She did an excellent thing. Zechariah and his wife were old and barren. When an angel announced to Zechariah that he would have a son, who would become John the Baptist, he doubted. What God told him was something that had happened before. Most notably, Abraham and Sarah gave birth to Isaac in their old age. Zechariah had no excuse. The angel rebuked him and shut his mouth until the child was born, and he acknowledged the word of God by naming him John. Someone who doubts the word of God ought to remain in silence. He should not be permitted to opine or teach about anything. He should never be in a position to instruct God's people.

Mary was better than Zechariah. What God told her was something that had never happened before, that a woman could give birth as a virgin, without any relation with a man. She wondered how something like this could happen, and the angel explained that the Holy Spirit would come upon her to conceive the child. Then she accepted without further question. How God's kingdom would prosper if his people would embrace his word like this! How much blessing and happiness would come upon humanity! All of us should receive his word on salvation, healing, success, righteousness, fruitfulness, and a hundred other things with the words, "Let it be unto me according to your word" (Luke 1:38).

Nevertheless, other than this commendable performance, we have no record that Mary ever contributed anything more to the work of Jesus or the kingdom of God.

Mary was out of touch with Jesus since the beginning. When Jesus was twelve years old, he stayed behind in Jerusalem after the Passover, but his parents were unaware of this. When they returned to search for him, they found him conversing with religious teachers. All those who heard him were amazed at his wisdom and insight. As someone who is obsessed with God, I would have asked him to tell me what he talked about with the theologians. And I would have said to him, "Son, next time you do something like this, let me know so I can join you and listen in." On the other hand, Mary said to him, "Son, why have you treated us like this?" And Jesus replied, "Didn't you know that I must be in my Father's house?" Of course he would be there. She should have known what he meant by this, since she knew better than anyone that his father was God himself. However, even with the message from an angel, the experience of the virgin birth, and this explanation from Jesus, Mary did not understand what he meant (Luke 2:41-50). She had no ill-intention toward Jesus, and she kept these things in her heart (v. 51). But she did not understand.

At a wedding at Cana, both Mary and Jesus were present. When the wine ran out, Mary deferred to Jesus and told the servants to follow his instructions. She said the right thing, if she was right in getting involved in the first place (John 2:4). She told the servants to do what Jesus said, not what she said. She had no power and no solution. She could only point to Jesus. That was fine. However, she appealed to Jesus only as a problem-solver, not as a miracle-worker. This is likely correct especially judging from her later attitude toward the ministry of Jesus. What she did made her spiritual defect even more obvious. By this time,

she had been with Jesus for thirty years. This episode demonstrated that she regarded Jesus as someone resourceful and dependable, but her later attitude demonstrated that she did not regard Jesus as more than that.

I mention this so that no one can point to this occasion as a counterpoint to the facts about Mary that we shall consider as we continue. (In fact, if we suppose the unlikely case that she had regarded Jesus as more than a mere man and expected him to perform a miracle, it would make her subsequent behavior even more bizarre and inexcusable, because it would become an extreme case of apostasy.) Here although it appeared Mary behaved admirably, her attitude during the ministry of Jesus revealed that she could not have thought of him as anything more than a dependable man of the house. To reach only this level of perception after spending thirty years with Jesus was concerning, to say the least. Again, she did nothing wrong here, but this episode shows us that Jesus had made himself trustworthy, so that there was no excuse for her subsequent attitude toward him.

Mary probably thought that Jesus was insane. Jesus had attracted large crowds with his ministry of preaching and healing. Instead of supporting him, his family attempted to restrain him and said, "He is out of his mind" (Mark 3:21). Mary was likely part of this effort (Mark 3:31). As Jesus said, "A prophet is not without honor, except in his hometown and among his relatives and in his own household." Perhaps it was difficult for people who had watched him grow up to regard him as someone special, even someone lightyears out of their league. On the other hand, we might say that the people who had watched him all this time should have more easily concluded he was someone special. In any case, unbelief is never justified.

We might imagine that it was difficult for Mary, who gave birth to Jesus from her own womb, to regard her son as some exceptional character from heaven. But again, she had that message from an angel, the experience of the virgin birth, and many years of living with Jesus. She had more time with him than anyone else. The angel even said to her, "He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of his father David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and his kingdom shall have no end." He told her to her face that Jesus would be the Son of God and the Messiah. Any difficulty had been overcompensated. Did she believe the angel after all? She accepted his word about conceiving a child, but how about the rest of what he said?

She should have known who Jesus was earlier than anybody. She should have supported anything he set out to do stronger than anyone else. Jesus never hesitated to teach women about God (Luke 10:42). If Mary had asked him to clarify anything, do you think he would have refused? But here she was, calling him from outside the crowd, attempting to stop him. She was not one of the insiders. Given her supernatural experiences and revelations, this was a bizarre level of unbelief and spiritual dullness. If she was among those saying that he had mental problems or that he was doing outrageous things, and the biblical evidence suggests that she was, then she committed the sin of blasphemy. She was among those who came to restrain his ministry, so that at this point she worked against the gospel

of Christ and the kingdom of God. If she had been successful in stopping Jesus, then all of us – including her – would have been doomed to burn in hell.

Mary was less blessed than any ordinary follower of Jesus in her role as his mother. A woman in the crowd called out to Jesus, "Blessed is the mother who gave you birth and nursed you" (Luke 11:27). In other words, "Blessed is Mary." But Jesus replied, "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it" (v. 28). In other words, any ordinary follower of Jesus in good standing is more blessed than Mary in her role as the physical mother of Jesus. Mary was not "the mother of God," even though some heretics like to use this blasphemous expression. In fact, since God created all things by the Son, Mary herself was a mere creation of Jesus (John 1:3, Colossians 1:16). She was mother only to the physical body of Jesus, nothing more. The privilege was unique indeed, and no one can take this honor from her, but it was inferior to the privilege of following Jesus as a deliberate and obedient disciple.

She was not more blessed than any ordinary follower of Jesus, who said that any person who hears and obeys the word of God supersedes Mary in terms of the level of blessedness. The same applies to the natural brothers of Jesus. They mocked him as someone who wanted attention (John 7:3-5). Anyone who obeys the word of God is more privileged than people like them. Nevertheless, they would later believe in him, and became like the rest of the disciples – not more privileged, but just as privileged, because of their faith. Mary and the brothers were privileged, but less privileged than any true disciple of Jesus. Those who physically followed Jesus were privileged, but less privileged than those who follow him by faith and obey his teachings, whether or not they have seen him. If we would bestow endless honor and praise to Mary for being the physical mother of Jesus, as both Catholics and Protestants often like to do, shouldn't we first honor ourselves for being the disciples of Jesus? Shouldn't we preach sermons and make ornaments about ourselves instead?

In another place, he was told, "Your mother and your brothers are standing outside, wanting to see you." But he answered, "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" and "My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it." Thus Jesus disowned Mary in the spiritual sense. He denied that the natural relationship had any significance that mattered. It was indeed a privilege and a blessing to be the vessel for the Messiah's human body, but her role was limited to the natural realm. She contributed nothing spiritual. She even reached a point where she considered her son mentally unstable and tried to stop what he was doing. Still, false religion insists on giving her undue adoration.

Carnal religion tends to emphasize ritualism and sacramentalism. Making something special out of the natural relationships of Jesus aligns with this kind of thinking. This is an empty faith, and the religion carries empty promise and empty assurance. It can provide only a feeling of religion, and a shell of holiness. For many people, this is enough, even though it is not enough to save them from hell. This is why it remains popular to prefer a kind of religion based on rituals, sacraments, and sabbath and holy days (Colossians 2:16).

Mary joined the early disciples to receive the Holy Spirit and to speak in tongues. Although the followers of Jesus had witnessed his resurrection and had believed in him unto salvation, they did not stop there. Jesus said that they must also receive the Holy Spirit to receive power from heaven (Luke 24:49). He called it baptism with the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:5). If anyone confesses with his mouth that Jesus is Lord and believes in his heart that God raised him from the dead, then he is saved (Romans 10:9). There are other things that he can know and receive, but there is nothing more he must know or receive in order to be saved. The disciples had confessed and believed in the resurrected Christ for at least forty days (Acts 1:3), but Jesus still did not send them forth to face the world. He said they needed the Holy Spirit. Whatever works of the Spirit they had experienced, in the terminology of Jesus and the Acts of the Apostles, they still did not have the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:14-16, 19:2-6). This was a different event from their conversion or salvation. Salvation is salvation. Forgiveness is forgiveness. But power is power. To receive Jesus Christ is to receive salvation. To receive the Holy Spirit is to receive power.

After Jesus ascended into heaven, the disciples gathered and devoted themselves to prayer, and Mary was among them (Acts 1:14). At some point, she repented of her previous view of Jesus and became one of his disciples. Many hundreds of people had attained a level of blessedness that surpassed her as the physical mother of Jesus (Luke 11:28). She had fallen behind by failing to follow him, and likely regarded the Son of God as someone who had mental problems. But she did not remain in this condition. She no longer considered him a madman. She finally grasped the truth and began on the path of the greater blessing. In less than three years, thousands believed in Jesus. Many believed in him within minutes or hours of knowing about him. It took Mary more than three decades to believe, but she finally became one of us and reached our level. Assuming that she did not backslide between the Ascension and Pentecost, she was among those who received the Holy Spirit and started to speak in tongues (Acts 2:4). She was correct when she said that all generations shall call her blessed (Luke 1:48). And she became even more blessed – as blessed as any ordinary follower of Jesus – when she accepted his identity and mission, and received the Holy Spirit, speaking in tongues.

Have I recited the facts about Mary to denigrate her memory? If so, then Scripture is the one that has a vendetta against her. However, the Bible also records the facts of someone like David, who committed murder and adultery. In fact, he committed adultery, and then committed murder to cover up the adultery, which made both the adultery and murder even worse. Yet the Bible has no vendetta against David, but it calls him a man after God's own heart – of course, for reasons other than the adultery and murder. We do not dishonor Mary, but facts are facts. I commend her for receiving the word of God about a miracle that had never happened before. People claim to be Christians nowadays, but remain skeptical about almost commonplace things like healing the sick and speaking in tongues. This behavior proves them to be the wicked and worthless servants that Jesus mentioned in his teachings.

Mary said, "Let it happen to me according to your word." This is what Christians ought to say when God says, "Himself took our infirmities and carried our sicknesses." This is what Christians ought to say when God says, "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you." And this is what they would say, if not for the fact that they think Jesus

was insane. Mary no longer thought that Jesus was out of his mind. She believed Jesus and was saved, and after that she obeyed his instruction to receive the Holy Spirit. If anyone admires the mother of Jesus, then follow her example to believe in Jesus for her salvation, and follow her example to receive the Holy Spirit and to speak in tongues. Was she some super saint? No. She never was. It took her more than three decades to become an ordinary follower of Jesus. But she made it. That is more than what I can say for most people, including those who claim to be Christians. For that, I call her blessed.

Mary was never mentioned again.

13. BEHOLD, I GIVE YOU POWER

When Jesus sent out his disciples, he conferred upon them power to heal the sick, cast out demons, and work other miracles. Concerning the twelve disciples, the Bible says that "he gave them authority over unclean spirits, to drive them out and to heal every disease and sickness" (Matthew 10:1, Luke 9:1). He said to them, "Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, and cast out demons. Freely you have received, freely give" (Matthew 10:8).

Then he sent out another seventy disciples and also commanded them to heal the sick (Luke 10:1, 9). They returned to him and said, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name." And he replied, "Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you" (Luke 10:19).

Those who have faith often claim these statements for themselves, as if it was to us that Jesus said, "Behold, I give you power." On the other hand, those who walk in unbelief and rebellion would say that Jesus was talking only to the disciples who followed him at that time. They would insist that these statements cannot apply to us, and we do not have this power. (There are stronger statements that explicitly apply to everyone who has faith, but our topic is this kind of statements that Jesus said to the early disciples.)

Jesus was indeed speaking to the disciples who followed him at that time, but this does not lead to the conclusion that the statements cannot apply to us, or that we do not have the power to heal the sick and work other miracles. It is acceptable to notice the context, but the context – both the context of the biblical texts and the context of the history of redemption – enforces a different outcome. In fact, we will consider three reasons why it is self-damning to appeal to the context of these statements in order to deny that we have the power to work miracles.

The Right of Faith

First, the followers of Jesus never needed his direct ordination, or even his direct permission, to work miracles in his name. One random fellow took it upon himself to cast out demons in the name of Jesus, and the disciples tried to stop him and then complained to Jesus about him. They said that "he was not following us" and "he was not one of us." But Jesus answered, "Do not stop him. No one who does a miracle in my name can in the next moment say anything bad about me" (Mark 9:38-40, Luke 9:49-50). Thus Jesus not only approved of someone like this, but he assumed that the man would succeed.

Jesus told the twelve and the seventy, and whoever else, to preach the gospel and heal the sick, so of course they had the power. But this did not mean that anyone needed this before he could preach the gospel and heal the sick in his name. The idea that because Jesus made those statements to his disciples at that time, so that we cannot claim the same power, indicates a lack of basic spiritual sense and reading ability.

On the other hand, a person can receive a direct authorization from Jesus and still fail to perform a miracle because of unbelief. Jesus told Peter to walk on the water. Peter was able

to do it at first, but then he paid attention to the winds and the waves, so that he became fearful and started to sink. Jesus held him up and rebuked him: "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" Didn't Jesus authorize him? Didn't Jesus say, "Behold, I give you power" to walk to me on the water? Jesus said it only to Peter, and he was an apostle, but he still failed because of unbelief. On another occasion, when his direct disciples could not cast out a demon, even though they had received power to do it, they asked Jesus why they failed. He answered. "Because of your unbelief" (Matthew 17:20).

Faith means more than even a direct authorization from Jesus, because faith itself is God's direct ordination in the heart, and faith is necessary for even a direct authorization from Jesus to take effect. Those who walk in unbelief and rebellion are unable to heal the sick and cast out demons, not for the lack of authorization, but for the lack of faith. In fact, they would be in the same condition even if Jesus had directly authorized them. Just as the apostles themselves failed because of a lack of faith, these people would also fail because of their lack of faith. What is more despicable is that they wish to make their unbelief the standard of orthodoxy for all the followers of Jesus.

Since faith is the gift of God, faith is the ordination of God. If God has ordained me, whether by a supernatural experience, or by divine providence, or by the word of Scripture, then I am ordained by God. And faith in my heart will enable me to fulfill this calling. If I have the recognition of men, then good for them! It does not affect what I am authorized to do. If they refuse to recognize me, then they are the ones who are judged by God, not me. The Spirit of God made a point of including in Scripture the fact that a man who did not follow Jesus and who did not receive his commission could take it upon himself to work miracles in his name – against the opposition of the apostles. When they complained about him, Jesus took his side. What if I am that man today? If even the apostles could not stop someone like me, do you think you can? Bring in your theologians, your denominations, your creeds and such. Throw in a couple of Augustines and Calvins, or whoever your Popes may be called. And Jesus would still take my side.

In any case, if anyone could use the name of Jesus to work miracles during his ministry on earth, then a person who claims that we must have a direct verbal commission from Jesus in order to have this power to work miracles must be wrong. Perhaps he rejects the record of Scripture, and if so, he has no basis to accept other things that it says about Jesus. Although this person has access to the whole word of God, he remains inferior to a random fellow that admired Jesus from a distance enough to use his name to set people free from demons and diseases. He rejects the principle and initiative of faith, and what it means to be a disciple of Christ. This position is self-damning.

The Name of Jesus

Second, since that time the name of Jesus has been glorified, so that we have access to even more power to work miracles. During his ministry on the earth, his name had the power to heal the sick and cast out demons. The mere mention of Jesus would drive away disease and scare away demons. He commissioned his followers to do this, and they returned to report their success. Even someone who did not follow him and did not receive this commission could take his name and do the same things as his disciples.

All of this happened before Jesus fulfilled his mission and achieved ultimate greatness as the Messiah. What do I mean by this? As the Son of God he had always possessed all power and majesty. He had no need to do anything in order to be with God or relate to the Father on equal footing (John 1:1). However, to save his people and to succeed as the mediator between God and man (1 Timothy 2:5), he had to become human and earn his place at the right hand of God as the God-man. He achieved this by his ministry, suffering, death, and resurrection (Hebrews 2:14-17, 9:15).

This is summed up by Paul in his letter to the Philippians: "Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God as something to cling to. Instead he made himself nothing by assuming the form of a servant, being made in human likeness. And when he had come as a man, he humbled himself in obedience to the point of death – even death on a cross. Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Philippians 2:6-11).

As the Son of God he had always ruled all three realms, but to save his people and bring them to greatness with him, he had to join his people and then attain this place at the right hand of God as the divine-human Messiah. Now at the name of Jesus, every knee must bow in heaven, earth, and hell. My point is that when he authorized his disciples to heal the sick and cast out demons in his name, he had not achieved this ultimate greatness. When a random fellow took his name without explicit permission to do the same things his disciples were authorized to do, he had not yet paid the price to save sinners and not yet ascended to his throne. Still, before all of this, his name worked miracles.

But now, when we speak the name of Jesus, nothing happens? If the mere mention of Jesus was enough to drive off diseases and demons when he was something like an exiled prince, how much more should we terrify the forces of evil now that he is the king of all nations? I say, "I am from Jesus country," and nothing happens? I declare, "Jesus sent me," and the diseases and demons just yawn? No one can say, "He commissioned those disciples at the time. He was speaking only to them. He has not done the same for us." A random fellow could name-drop Jesus without permission and it still worked. Much more should I be able to heal the sick and cast out demons, when I believe in my heart that God has raised him from the dead and when I proclaim with my mouth, "Jesus! Jesus is Lord!"

The name of Jesus has been enhanced since the time of his ministry on earth. The uses and effects of the name have not been reduced, but the authority has been magnified. Its power has not become symbolic or spiritualized. It can compel compliance in all three realms, including concrete, physical effects. After the resurrection and ascension of Jesus, Peter and John healed a crippled man by the name (Acts 3:16). Paul cast out demons by the name (Acts 16:18). The congregation of believers still expected the name of Jesus to produce signs and wonders (Acts 4:30). The evil spirits that scream out in terror when I confront them by the name of Jesus have a better theology than the loser who moans, "He said these things to his disciples at that time. We don't have this power." The one who denies that we

can work miracles in the name of Jesus today has the lowest spiritual intelligence in all three realms. He is a wicked and worthless servant. Throw him out into the outer darkness; there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Any man or woman could take the name of Jesus and work miracles during his ministry on earth. Now that his name has been glorified and made even more powerful, if anyone disagrees that we can use the name and work miracles, it must mean that this person renounces Jesus Christ and denies his resurrection and ascension. This position is self-damning.

The Power of the Spirit

Third, since that time the promise of the Father – the Holy Spirit – has been poured out. The effect of this baptism of the Spirit (Acts 1:5) is to infuse the followers of Jesus with the same power to work miracles (Acts 1:8, Luke 24:49) that Jesus himself possessed (Luke 4:14, 8:46, Acts 10:38). This power could heal the sick and cast out demons (Acts 10:38, Matthew 12:28), and it also produces visions, dreams, prophecies, and speaking in tongues (Acts 2:4, 2:17-18). This is an additional dimension of power that is categorically and paradigmatically superior to the power that the disciples wielded before the resurrection of Christ. Thus it changes nothing even if we do not apply to ourselves what Jesus said to them, because what we have now is incomparably greater.

The apostles did not maintain a monopoly on this power. They did not even have first dibs on it. The apostles consisted of a tiny minority of those who received this power. In fact, from the first moment about 90% of those who received the miracle power of the Holy Spirit were not apostles (Acts 1:8, 15, 2:4). This percentage of empowered believers increased to possibly about 99.6% within a matter of hours (Acts 2:16-18, 38, 41). Since the number of the original apostles remained the same, and the number of believers who received the Spirit continued to increase, this percentage also continued to increase, so that within a short time, practically 100% of those who could work miracles were not apostles (1 Corinthians 12:7-10). And the apostles approached 0% of those who performed miracles.

The apostles not only consisted of almost 0% of those who could perform miracles, but they were also not the ones who experienced the most extraordinary miracles and visions. One of the most extraordinary miracles was the miracle of transportation or teleportation. This possibly happened under Jesus, but there is no record that it happened under the apostles. Philip, who used to serve tables, was the one who experienced this (Acts 8:39-40). The most extraordinary vision was arguably given to Stephen. The Bible says that he was "full of the Holy Spirit" when he looked through into heaven while fully conscious and saw Jesus standing at the right hand of God (Acts 7:55).

Let us also consider the fact that the most significant initiation of a disciple did not happen by the hands of an apostle. Ananias was called "a disciple" (Acts 9:10). He was not called a prophet or apostle, or even an evangelist. Yet the Lord appeared to him in a vision and told him to lay his hands on Saul, who would become the apostle Paul, so that he would receive his sight again and also receive the Holy Spirit. He received the Holy Spirit at least

three days after he received Jesus Christ (Acts 9:9, 17). Ananias argued with Jesus about this, which led the Lord to carry a detailed conversation with him about Paul to convince him. Ananias was one of the first to know about Paul's calling: "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel." Paul the apostle was not initiated by Jesus in the flesh, or an apostle like Peter, or a prophet like Agabus, or an evangelist like Philip. He was initiated by a mere "disciple." Luke did not refrain from calling someone an apostle, or a prophet, or an evangelist. So when he called Ananias "a disciple," he meant a disciple, and likely nothing more. Yet Ananias laid his hands on Paul and spoke to him by revelation, just like any apostle or prophet might do.

You say, "But Jesus told him to do it." Yes, but Jesus told HIM – an ordinary disciple – to do it. The Bible never called him a prophet, yet he received a vision. And it was a vision of the Lord himself, who then spoke to him extensively, explaining to him the calling of someone who would enter a higher office than Ananias. Jesus apparently never commissioned him to be a prophet, but Ananias could function as a prophet. The point is that after the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, a physical in-person commission from Jesus became even less relevant. Even an apostle would not necessarily receive a stronger measure of the power of the Spirit or receive more supernatural experiences than any regular disciple.

The disciples in the Gospels who received their commission from Jesus to heal the sick and cast out demons did not have this baptism of the Holy Spirit. They did not possess this level of miracle and prophetic power. But today, anyone who believes in Jesus can afterward also receive the Holy Spirit by faith. We are in an incomparably greater position than the disciples who received their commission from Jesus. As Jesus said, "It is for your benefit that I go away, because if I do not go away the Counselor will not come to you. If I go, I will send him to you" (John 16:7).

In the Gospels, the disciples worked miracles with the commission of Jesus, but without the baptism of the Holy Spirit. And the random fellow worked miracles without the commission of Jesus as well as without the baptism of the Holy Spirit, but by the name of Jesus alone – before the name was glorified. By comparison, he was like a man who could single-handedly defeat an intergalactic invasion with a toothpick, while that faithless religionist among us has the hammer of God at his disposal but cannot even subdue a hamster. He is a wicked and worthless servant. Throw him out into the outer darkness; there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

If the Spirit is here, then power is here. Thus if someone denies that the followers of Jesus can work miracles, receive visions and revelations, prophesy and speak in tongues, it must mean he denies that the Father has fulfilled his promise to pour out his Spirit, and he denies that the Son stands as the baptizer of the Spirit, and he denies that the Spirit of God possesses the power to work signs and wonders. It is a comprehensive blasphemy against the Trinity. But there is no forgiveness for blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. If someone has indeed committed this sin, then this person is guaranteed to burn in hell. He will burn,

and burn, and burn. There can be no doctrine of cessationism for hellfire, because in hell "their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched."

The Matrix of Damnation

I have been answering those who would claim that the commission of Jesus to work miracles applied only to those disciples in the Gospels, so that we cannot expect to possess the same power today. The context indeed indicates that Jesus was speaking to the disciples that followed him during his ministry on earth. However, this observation has led to two different conclusions. The conclusion of unbelief and rebellion is that we should not expect to heal the sick and cast out demons, because Jesus has not given us the same power.

On the other hand, the correct conclusion is that if those statements do not apply to us, it is only because they are too weak to represent what we have received from God. There are stronger statements that explicitly apply to everyone who has faith, but these weaker statements remain useful to us, because they still describe what we are able to do by faith, by the name of Jesus, and by the power of the Spirit. But we must not forget that we now stand at a greater position even while we perform the same works of power. Jesus said to them, "Behold, I give you power," but the word of God would say to us today, "Behold, I give you even more power, a million times more, to all of you, regardless of office, gender, class, and background, as long as you follow me in faith."

In the context of the history of redemption, we now possess the whole word of God to teach us about the initiative of faith, we now possess the glorified name of Jesus that compels compliance in all three realms, and we now possess the power of the Holy Spirit who created the world at the beginning and who raised Jesus from the dead. This is the creed of faith. To deny that we have even greater power than the disciples who followed Jesus in the Gospels would be to reject these three points. To reject the first point is to renounce the initiative of faith, even after the word of God has told us about this man who took it upon himself to work miracles and how Jesus responded to him. It is a rejection of discipleship to Christ. To reject the second point is to renounce the name of Jesus, including its glorified form. This name could work miracles even before the resurrection of Jesus. To say that it would not work miracles as consistently now as it did before the resurrection of Jesus amounts to a rejection of the authority of Christ, even a rejection of the resurrection and ascension of Christ. To reject the third point is to renounce the promise of the Father, the words of the prophets that anticipated it, and the faithfulness of God to fulfill his word. It is to reject the role of Jesus Christ as the one who performs the baptism with the Holy Spirit. It is to reject the Spirit himself as one who always comes with creative power and inspiration.

Thus when we take into account the history of redemption, the claim that we do not have power to perform miracles like the disciples in the Gospels, and even more power than they had, represents a triple renunciation of the Christian faith – the discipleship of faith, the authority of Christ, and the outpouring of the Spirit. Then the rejection of the third item itself represents a triple blasphemy against the Godhead – it makes the Father into a liar, it strips the Son of his role, and it speaks against the Spirit as the one who confers supernatural powers and prophetic experiences. A triple renunciation of the gospel of Jesus Christ. A

triple blasphemy against the Godhead. This is the matrix of damnation. It is the creed of faithless religion and cessationism.

Faithless theology always backfires, often to the point of perdition. It comes from religionists who feign humility and scholarship, but it is a sign of reprobation. One of the amazing things about the Christian world is how people are eager to damn themselves in order to defend their unbelief and tradition. In one word, they deny Christ three times, and at the third time, they blaspheme the Godhead three times again. They portray themselves as superior in knowledge and interpretation. They ordain themselves to teach and correct others. However, this means that God will judge them as if their false doctrines are informed and deliberate. They are guaranteed an increased punishment (Luke 12:48, James 3:1). Their rejection of Christ and blasphemy against the Godhead will be judged as malicious and premeditated. If even a "careless word" would incur divine judgment (Matthew 12:36), then how can they escape the wrath of God? As Jesus said, "By your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned."

It is certain that many of them have committed the unpardonable sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. Their theology opposes the faithful ones who have learned the initiative of faith to perform the works of God. What would they say when they see us heal the sick, cast out demons, and speak in tongues? Their theology requires them to say, "Jesus told only his early disciples to do these things, so this cannot be of God. This cannot be of the Holy Spirit, but it must come from the flesh, or even from demons." And thus they pass the point of no return, and seal their damnation forever.