

# Signs and Wonders

by G.W. North

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*God performs signs and wonders to impart His wondrous grace to mankind and to lead people to salvation.*

**Scripture:** Matthew 4:24, Mark 16:17-18, Luke 4:18-19, John 20:30-31, Acts 2:22, Romans 1:20, Romans 5:8, 1 Corinthians 2:4-5, 1 Thessalonians 1:5, Hebrews 2:4

**Topics:** "Signs And Wonders", "God's Communication"

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## Description

G.W. North emphasizes the significance of signs and wonders as God's way of communicating with humanity, especially those who are spiritually uneducated. He explains that while miracles can be powerful indicators of God's presence, they must be tested against the truth of the gospel to ensure they are genuine. North highlights that signs and wonders are not merely for spectacle but serve to lead people towards understanding God's grace and love. He asserts that all mankind is accountable to God for their knowledge of Him, regardless of their cultural or religious background. Ultimately, the ministry of Jesus, accompanied by signs and wonders, aims to bring salvation and deeper understanding of God's power to all people.

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## Transcript

Long before the invention of cursive writing or ethnic script in this world, and long before formal education was given or print was known, when men could not read or write, they communicated with each other by spoken word or signs. There was no alphabet and no written language, so certain signs which had set meanings were invented, and by these messages were recorded. These signs were called hieroglyphics or cuneiform. To people of those days signs held great meaning, perhaps greater meaning than words do for us today; they were primitive but they were precise, and they exercised great power. Evidence of this is with us to this day. The ancient sign-language of the Chinese people is still being used, and it is most expressive. It is not surprising therefore, but utterly consistent with God's loving care and complete understanding of men, that he should grant signs and wonders to be done by the power of the Spirit throughout the age. Miracles are God's sign-language to men who exist in ignorance of His grace and love, and therefore do not understand Him. He wants to speak to the spiritually uneducated by signs and wonders, for these indicate to their minds power associated with a supernatural being who must be God. The logic of it is that if: (1) a thing is wonderful it must have been done by a wonderful person, and (2) a given sign must be proof that someone is wishing to communicate with them.

The second of these assumptions is certainly true, but the first is by no means to be taken for granted. Signs and wonders are not the sole prerogative of good persons. Great care should be exercised when miraculous power is at work. Because the end result is beneficial, it does not necessarily mean that the person operating the power is God or of God. The test is not the work (has he or she power to do miracles?), nor is it the result of it (is it beneficial to the person upon whom the work is wrought?), nor does the decision rest upon whether or not the person is considered to be nice. The test is this, is the power being shown and the work done as being an integral part of the gospel of the Son of God? If a man is a servant of Jesus Christ, and speaks the kind of things that Paul speaks in this letter, the work is good and the person is good. This is one of the reasons why Paul placed signs and wonders last and not first in this epistle. To the ignorant the miracles may need to be shown first; (it may be the only way to reach him) but in the order of exposition, power to perform miracles comes last. It is hard to escape the conviction that this is done so that readers may understand the ground from which power operates and works are done, and to ensure that all miracle-workers must be tested by the truth. Given this, two other reasonable facts emerge: (1) to be able to do such amazing things, that person must be very powerful, and (2) since those things are good and beneficial, that person must be good also, and a benefactor of the race. Miracles performed by the power of God may be said to be through grace, even though people may not understand grace and mercy, and may know nothing of righteousness. In some cases they may never have heard of Christ and the cross or listened to the gospel, but they can interpret signs and wonders with a certain amount of accuracy.

Signs and wonders are most arresting and sensational, and God uses them to impart His wondrous grace to mankind; but to be genuine they must be gospel works. Through no fault of their own the vast majority of men have no knowledge of God beyond what is available to them through nature, but that is sufficient to reveal Him. Heathen and pagan, civilized and uncivilized, educated and uneducated, all alike have equal access to sources of knowledge which uniformly testify that there is a God, and that He is good and powerful. Paul very strongly insists upon this; quoting from David he says that the sound of God's heavenly creation goes into all the earth, and that the words of those heavenly bodies are carried to the ends of the world. 'There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard', says the psalmist. Men 'hear' things that the ear does not hear; they 'see' things beyond the power of human sight, and 'know' more than the mind can tell them. As shown before, man is a spiritual being; he is far greater than the combined 'machinery' of his body and the faculties of his soul and the possibilities of his mind; because this is so, before God he is also a responsible being. He cannot exist without accumulating knowledge, and is capable of response according to that knowledge; God holds him accountable to Himself for this. In chapter one Paul makes it unmistakably clear that all mankind is without excuse before God on at least two counts: (1) the eternal power of God; (2) the eternal Godhead of God. In other words God holds that men know He is and that He is God. Although at this present time much of the world is unevangelized, all mankind is being held responsible by God for its present state in relationship to its degree of knowledge on these two points. But whatever the amount of opportunity or knowledge men may have, all must know this, 'the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold (down) the truth in unrighteousness'. Whether men choose to be religious or irreligious is immaterial; whether they have heard the gospel or not makes no difference; primitive or civilized, who or whatever a man may be, to repress or deny truth for the sake of sin is to incur God's wrath.

'God commends His love toward us', says Paul; to complete the sentence as written would be to add 'in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us'. But that is not all; God would also commend His love to

mankind in that while they are yet sinners He would perform signs and wonders for them to see and hear and experience. This is all part of His grace, and Paul sought always to preach the gospel this way; anything other than this he would have regarded as being less than the full truth, and he had no intention of repressing the truth; he very much regarded himself as being accountable to God for the gospel. When he said he was not ashamed of the gospel of Christ and that he gloried in it, among the many reasons he gave for this was the fact that God gave him power to perform signs and wonders. The gospel is the power of God unto salvation; it is not words about the facts of salvation, though we need that information. The gospel is the power revealed in the person of Christ and of what God did by Christ in the past reaching men now in the present: if the power be absent, preaching is in vain; Paul is very definite about the power. That power is now being both willed and brought to men by the Spirit of God through the person of Christ; that is why He must be formed in us. We, having His Spirit, must develop in His life to the point where we can minister in His name by the power of the Spirit of God as He Himself did.

The ministry of Jesus Christ is, without question, a ministry of power to men, which includes signs and wonders as well as preaching. Even a cursory reading of the Gospels is sufficient to convince the mind that wherever Jesus Christ went to preach, signs and wonders accompanied all He said. Only occasionally did He give people the bare word and leave it at that; all powerful as it was, He generally accompanied His word with actions. Even on the occasion when He said 'except ye see signs and wonders ye will not believe', He did not refuse to give a sign, but went on to perform the miracle. He did not think He was endangering true faith in the man by giving the sign, but healed the servant as requested. However, the miracles He performed were never done as an end in themselves -- they were always intended by Him to lead men on to salvation. Paul takes this line also. Signs and wonders are important; the Holy Spirit who worked them through Jesus will work them today. They are vital; but, although so important, Paul only ever saw them as means to an end, namely 'that the offering up of the Gentiles might be acceptable, being sanctified by the Holy Ghost'.

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