

rather than to the apostles and eyewitnesses of the Lord. The early churches seem to have been much like the average Bible-believing church today. They had problems much as we do today, including adultery, theft, lack of love, factions, etc. Some were weak doctrinally. The Corinthian church was saturated with problems. There is no basis for the belief that healers and other miracle-workers were in the local churches in the New Testament. There is no evidence, as is so often naively assumed, that the New Testament churches were "turning the world upside down." This is said regarding the Apostle Paul. Only a few churches were commended for outreach, and this mainly by report rather than by conscious "evangelistic outreach". This is not to criticize those churches, but it is to keep us from following a church which exists only in someone's imagination. Revelation 2 and 3 give us a realistic evaluation of the first-century church. Of the seven churches in this passage, only two are "spiritual", and they are not characterized by some miraculous powers. The five remaining churches have serious spiritual problems.

Taking into consideration these views of the Bennetts, Ryrie, and Edgar, at least four points should be made:

First, the evidence for continuance of these gifts is mainly experiential, and that mostly anecdotal, via second- or third-hand reports. The difficulty, of course, is how to interpret experience, even one's own.

Second, an emphasis on experience as the source of Christian doctrine, or on the experiential approach to Scripture, raises serious questions as to the validity and reliability of the outcomes. To say the least, the results are suspect, as far as sound theological methodology is concerned!

Third, it should be noted that many so-called miracles/healings are claimed by adherents of world religions other than Christianity, by leaders of cults, and by practitioners of the occult arts. In fact, occult practitioners regularly duplicate many of the "miracles/healings" of those who in Christianity claim to have the gifts of miracles/healing. If those who stress continuance of these gifts invoke the category of "counterfeits", the question may be asked: "Which signs are the counterfeits?"

Fourth, it should frankly be recognized that other explanations for these phenomena of "miracles/healings" are possible, including psychosomatic effects, Satanic or demonic powers, and simple fraud. In fact, the history of occult and psychic phenomena is characterized by fraud to such an extent that it should be one of the first possibilities of explanation considered for any claim of supernormal psychic or occult phenomena. The same possibility must be considered for any claim of miracle or healing by one who says he or she has the sign gift of miracles or healings.