

'Health and Wealth' or Signs and Wonders? Will The Real Charismatic Church Please Stand Up?

This article covers one of the most vital, misunderstood and controversial topics of debate in modern Christianity—the supernatural activity of the Holy Spirit. I pray that the following words cause you to rethink the evaluations people have made concerning the charismatic expression of the faith, writing off an entire move of the Holy Spirit due to the grievous error and, yes, downright heresy of a few.

Yes, there is a major difference between those who ascribe to a shallow “health and wealth” ideology (not even worthy of being called a theology or gospel) and those who hunger for a resurgence of authentic, supernatural, New Testament Christianity in a day of gimmicks and self-help sermons.

My heart burns to see all believers encounter a glorious Person—Jesus Christ. The supernatural is not about mankind simply using God to get what we want out of Him. Rather, it is about God’s character being revealed to the world, the supremacy of Jesus being displayed and the livingness of the Holy Spirit being made known to a people (and a church) who are often convinced that God is detached and disinterested. Such could not be further from the truth!

Knowing This Difference Will Transform the Way You Live

The following article gives you a clear idea of why it is absolutely vital for all Christians to know the **one fundamental difference** between those who embrace a “health and wealth” ideology and those who legitimately want to see God move with New Testament signs, wonders and miracles once

again. Merging the two perspectives is costly because it buys right into the lie that all charismatic Christianity is created equal. Not so. Discernment is not writing off an entire movement due to imbalance; it is learning to separate the authentic from the counterfeit.

I do not believe this is a trivial matter. In fact, how we respond to the topic at hand will dictate what we expect from our Christian lives. Our concept of who the Holy Spirit is and what He does actually defines what dimension of power we actually walk in. I dare say, it is not up to God. There is no outpouring left to release out of heaven. The Holy Spirit was given at Pentecost. If you are born again, congratulations—God Almighty lives inside of you! There is no upgraded Holy Spirit. I believe in fresh fillings and fresh touches (Acts 4:31, Eph. 5:18); I do not believe in asking for a new Pentecostal outpouring. We don't need God to send a new Pentecost down from heaven; instead, we need to begin living like the first one we received is a precious inheritance, sufficient for the task at hand. Stewardship is the key issue here. Unfortunately, we will neglect certain aspects of stewarding the Holy Spirit's presence and power when we believe they are heretical, fanatic and self-consumed. This is not the Holy Spirit!

If we continue to demonize all forms of supernatural activity, lumping it together as "health and wealth" or "name it, claim it" me-centric heresy, we will never place an appropriate biblical demand on the faith that has been miraculously entrusted to us by God Himself (Eph. 2:8-9). If our vision of the supernatural is tainted by the gross misrepresentations we see from certain TV preachers, we will probably ignore anything to do with the power of the Holy Spirit.

On the flip side, if we sit down and become honest—with ourselves, with the biblical text—and accurately observe these two contrasting groups in modern Christianity, we will reap a powerful reward. What is this reward? Depending on how you

respond to the challenge, it is highly likely that you will bring your Christian expression into agreement with every miraculous possibility that Scripture has made available to you. You will launch out on the greatest quest of any believer—the quest for more of God.

Remember, the Holy Spirit is living within you. You are not getting more of God out of heaven; you are experiencing more of the One who has made your body His dwelling place on earth. If Scripture says the Holy Spirit's supernatural power is legal for us to experience, steward and release, I want us to press in for everything that is available.

Open Your Mind—But Don't Throw Out Your Brain

I just ask you for one thing: an open mind. I am a student of theology, currently pursuing my Master of Divinity degree. When I say “open mind,” I am not inviting you to toss thinking out the door to embrace some flighty experiential faith. I do ask that you open your mind to the facts as they are presented clearly and contextually in Scripture. I encourage you to temporarily press “pause” on some of the prejudices you may have embraced from a denomination, church, Christian TV or theological viewpoint before you continue reading. Above all, I humbly ask that you invite the Holy Spirit to come and reveal Jesus in all of this. At the end of the day, He is what this is all about.

There is a vast chasm separating those who pervert Bible principles to simply enhance their quality of life on earth and those who desire to see Jesus' prayer fulfilled—“on earth as it is in heaven”—through the release of signs, wonders and miracles as the gospel is proclaimed (1 Cor. 2:1-5).

So, what is the one key difference between the two camps? Simple. You will know the genuine based on how they **respond to Jesus**.

Camp 1: The Health-and-Wealth Brigade

Where do we begin?

1. “Sow your seed” me-ology. “Just sow your \$1,000 seed *right now*—come on, that’s right! Run right on up here to the altar and write that check! There is a strong anointing flowing here for \$1,000 donations!” This is tame language compared to some of the gimmicks being used to manipulate people into giving money to a church or ministry. Talk about the exact opposite of the apostle Paul’s perspective on giving! He wrote, “Let each one [give] as he has made up his own mind and purposed in his heart, not reluctantly or sorrowfully or under compulsion” (2 Cor. 9:7, AMP). Compulsion and manipulation are not godly.

I am sure you may have run into some of these shenanigans while channel surfing at night. Boom! You hit a Christian TV channel where they are hosting a giving telethon or pledge drive. I do not believe fundraising is wrong or sinful, but I am strongly opposed to people using the Holy Spirit, God, Jesus or promises of blessing and anointing to hype people up to make financial contributions—often well beyond their means to give. This is not Christianity. This is the Steve Martin huckster evangelist of the film *Leap of Faith* being personified.

2. Vending machine Christianity. The “health and wealth” teachings emphasize acquiring more stuff, tithing to increase personal financial wealth, and walking in physical health while ignoring what they consider to be more elementary subjects, such as intimacy with God, sin, repentance, taking up your cross and giving all for the cause of Christ. God becomes a cosmic vending machine, and the Bible is handled like a divine blueprint for pressing the right buttons in order for heaven to deliver on mankind’s demands.

This perspective sells books, sells out conferences and peddles teaching series all while grossly misrepresenting the gospel of Jesus Christ. Are these people heretics? Some, maybe. Many do boast orthodox statements of faith and preach

an accurate salvation message.

This is not my effort to engage some type of witch-hunt, calling out who is going to heaven and who is hell-bound. Rather, this is all about helping you experience clarity on the difference between two contrasting perspectives.

3. Extreme, imbalanced and dangerous. When it comes to extremism in the area of “health and wealth,” I have seen and experienced a lot (although I am sure some of you have seen and personally experienced worse than I have). This camp promises much but delivers little. Confess it and possess it. Name it and claim it. Blab it and grab it; doubt it and live without it. If you are not part of the “confession clique,” you are basically a less-than, immature Christian who needs special enlightening. Oh, how backward this line of thinking truly is!

I ask you, please do not equate this imbalanced camp with those who are pursuing the authentic, Jesus-exalting move of the Holy Spirit. Even though the “health and wealth” group might mention the Holy Spirit, the supernatural, signs and wonders, or miraculous power, this does not confirm that they are legitimate representatives of Jesus. Remember the sobering words of our Messiah: “Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?’ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you’” (Matt. 7:22-23, NIV).

Recognize the Counterfeit

Be warned: This perspective is out there—and often in a grossly public spotlight. But also be encouraged: This fringe movement does not accurately represent the thrust of true supernatural Christianity that is making significant headway throughout the nations. For too long, we have approached counterfeits the wrong way. Counterfeits are evidence of the

genuine artifact. The devil is incapable of creating anything new; all he can do is malign and pervert what is true, pure, holy and God-originated. It is actually irresponsible for the body of Christ to respond to counterfeits by throwing out all forms of the truth.

There is nothing representative of Holy Spirit in extreme “health and wealth” ideology. I am not saying that all Word of Faith churches, teaching or preachers are bad; they are not. Also, I am not offering some blanket statement, saying that in order to be spiritual, we need to be poor and sick or healthy and wealthy. I do not believe this either. Financial prosperity, in and of itself, is not wrong. Physical health is not wrong; healing is actually an extension of the kingdom of God. These things become dangerous pursuits when they become the driving force of an entire movement.

At the end of the day, you will know a leader, church, book, teaching or televangelist is off when the road they present does not lead to Jesus Christ receiving all the glory. Jesus is not a side issue. His glorious name is not some secret code that we insert at the end of our prayers to ensure that we “signed off right.” He is the Lord of all. He is the Son of the living God. He is the worthy Lamb slain for the sins of the world.

Camp 2: Signs and Wonders That Point to Jesus

Consider the approach of pastor John Piper, who famously denounces the prosperity gospel, but also hungers for a resurgence of authentic New Testament signs and wonders in the church today.

In his sermon “Are Signs and Wonders For Today?” Piper states, “We ought to be open to the real possibility that this too might be a unique moment in history, and in this moment it may well be God’s purpose to pour out His Spirit in unprecedented revival—revival of love to Christ and zeal for worship and

compassion for lost people and a missionary thrust with signs and wonders.”

I specifically reference Piper because of my great respect for his integrity, consistent humility, spiritual hunger and unceasing devotion to the sacredness of Scripture. While he makes his disdain for the “health and wealth” perspective abundantly clear, he is likewise a proponent of the Holy Spirit’s authentic supernatural activity in the modern church. This perspective is possible! Not only is this possible, but Scripture paints a clear picture of a faith community where signs, wonders and miracles are normative elements of the Christian experience (Acts 5:12; 9:34-35, 40, 42).

Sadly, the world is often denied a church that hosts God’s presence and releases His power because of incorrect information circulating throughout the Christian community. Many have bought into the lie that you cannot walk in supernatural power and maintain your integrity. Their response to the “health and wealth” perversion is strong: “The last thing I want to do in life or ministry is be like *that* guy!” Fair enough. However, that guy or that lady who appears to be perverting the gospel for personal gain is not an accurate representative of the true supernatural New Testament community.

I could list leader after leader whom I have not only heard from the pulpit but have known behind the scenes and am absolutely convinced that they are examples of the real deal. They are not perfect, nor do they claim to be. However, they exhibit the one characteristic that definitively separates the “health and wealth” crew from those longing to walk in authentic signs and wonders: They are hungry to experience and glorify *Jesus*.

What Is Jesus’ Rightful Place?

Health and wealth ends with man, but signs and wonders end

with Jesus Christ. He receives the glory. He is where the signs are pointing. He is the One whose miracles stir us to awe. It is true foolishness for any of us to worship a sign. Such a response is downright contrary to the fundamental purpose of a sign. Signs point to something beyond them.

Think about it. Could you imagine what would happen if people all gathered around an exit sign, stared at it, but never actually followed where the sign was leading them? That area would become severely congested by a people pileup. However, the incorrect response from the people's end is not the sign's fault. The sign functions according to design; it is man who chooses whether or not he is going to respond to it appropriately.

Such was the case when Israel was miraculously delivered out of Egypt. Their eyes witnessed a consistent flow of signs and wonders, but Scripture makes it clear that, in the end, the people did not properly respond to what their eyes beheld (Ps. 78:11, 42; 106:7). They kept on complaining. There was a disconnect, and ultimately the testimony of God's mighty acts did not pass on to future generations as it should have (Judg. 2:10-15).

Likewise, this was the case when Jesus walked the earth. There were many who responded to Him because of the miraculous signs He performed, but others' hearts hardened even more. Just because people respond correctly or incorrectly to signs and wonders does not negate their purpose and value.

The basis for our faith is never signs, wonders and supernatural phenomena—it is always the Person and truth of Jesus Christ. Yes, the Bible validates the reality and availability of miracles. No question that Jesus invites all of us into a lifestyle of faith where such supernatural demonstrations should be normative, not unusual or uncommon. Nevertheless, when we start celebrating the signs for the sake of the signs instead of being rightly awestruck by the

glorious One whom every authentic sign and wonder points to, we are heading into dangerous territory. Jesus is eternally the cornerstone of our faith, our theology and our experience. Any person or any experience that does not lead me toward the truth of Jesus Christ should be avoided like the spiritual plague.

It Is Legal for You to Desire and Cry Out for Miracles!

In Acts 4, the early church actually prays for God to stretch out His hand and perform signs and wonders. Read their bold prayer:

“Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word, by stretching out Your hand to heal, and that signs and wonders may be done through the name of Your holy Servant Jesus” (Acts 4:29-30, NKJV).

I would be more apt to accept the whole “It’s not biblical to pray for signs, wonders and miracles” idea if the Holy Spirit responded to this prayer with a rebuke; He did not. On the contrary, we see that “when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness” (v. 31).

I feel like the building shaking was God’s amen to the disciples’ prayer. I am confident that almighty God is able and willing to move through His people in great power—greater than we have seen or experienced. However, He is looking for a people that He can trust with the miraculous. While this mandate does not demand absolute perfection, it does require a lifestyle of integrity and relentless commitment to make Jesus Christ front and center. The disciples were not about putting on a “miracle show” for the sake of spectacle; they were driven to see signs and wonders done through the name of Jesus. Jesus was their pursuit and delight. May the same be

said of us and our generation.

As mentioned earlier, what separates the “signs and wonders” camp from the “health and wealth” proponents is simply what they do with Jesus. “Health and wealth” ends with man; “signs and wonders” end with Jesus.

Are You Ready to Reconsider Normal?

Scripture constantly summons us to live a supernatural life. The statements made by Jesus and, later, the apostle Paul are nothing short of stunning. When responded to correctly, these ancient words call us into lives of ever-increasing hunger to experience every miraculous inheritance we have received in the Holy Spirit.

Feast on these two final truths. I know they are familiar passages, especially to those in the charismatic movement. But truly consider their radical implications. Meditate on what they are summoning you into:

“Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father” (John 14:12).

“But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you” (Rom. 8:11).

In John 14:12, Jesus describes what normal Christianity looks like, and then, in Romans 8:11, Paul explains how you can experience it. Let’s not allow the “health and wealth” abuses to distract us from pursuing the life of greater works. This is what we have been authorized and empowered to walk in through the power of the Holy Spirit, all for the glory of the name of Jesus.

For more information about how to experience and activate the

authentic power of God in your life, you can check out my new eBook, *Breakthrough Healing*.

Larry Sparks is the author of *Breakthrough Healing* (Destiny Image, 2014). He is a conference speaker, blogger, columnist and host of the weekly radio program *Voice of Destiny* (). Featured in *Charisma* magazine and on CBN's *Spiritual Gifts* webcast, Larry is also founder of *Equip Culture*—a ministry that equips believers with the tools and resources to live victoriously through the supernatural power of God. Subscribe to his blog at [. You can receive encouragement from him on Twitter @LarryVSparks.](#)