

MIRACLES ARE FOR TODAY!

A Refutation of
B. B. Warfield's Cessationism



JOHN BORUFF

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You do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed. He will also keep you firm to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.
—1 Corinthians 1:7-8—

In memory of John Wesley, and all charismatic theologians who have followed in his footsteps; and have boldly maintained that the miraculous gifts have always continued; and are available today.

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INTRODUCTION

In the year 1918, the Princeton theologian B. B. Warfield published *Counterfeit Miracles*, which has been considered by conservative evangelical theologians to be the number one argument against the miraculous gifts of the Spirit operating after the Bible was written. John MacArthur and a number of modern cessationists look back to this book as the heroic *modus operandi* for upholding the sufficiency of Scripture and slamming down all claims of charismatic and Pentecostal miracles. Chapter 6 is about the Christian Science cult; and is mainly designed to expose its strange doctrines. But as will be seen, Warfield did believe in natural or “mental” healings for mild psychosomatic illnesses: and that is all that Christian Science really taught about healing. My pro-charismatic responses below, are in reaction to quotes from Warfield that I’ve taken mainly from the first five chapters, which I have arranged under three subject headings:

- Part 1: Warfield Doubted the Scriptures
- Part 2: Warfield Rejected Historical Miracles
- Part 3: Warfield’s Cessationist Views

As it is not possible to arrive at a cessationist view without first cutting out the charismatic testimonies of Scripture and church history, it seemed reasonable for me to order my material in this way. In the evangelical and charismatic traditions of John Wesley, Thomas Church, A. J. Gordon, Donald Gee, Jack Deere, Jon Ruthven, and Michael Brown, I seek to present my humble attempt at refuting this giant of cessationism. Although all of these men have been influences, I've relied the most heavily on Jon Ruthven's *On the Cessation of the Charismata* for some of my responses to Warfield's interpretations of Scripture. His is the most thorough and academic charismatic response to *Counterfeit Miracles* to date; and I am ready to admit that it far outshines my refutation in its scholarly detail. I'm also ready to say that Jack Deere's *Surprised by the Power of the Spirit*, particularly chs. 9 and 10 and Appendices A, B, and C have helped me in this way in the past year. John MacArthur's latest cessationist publication of *Strange Fire* in 2013 and the conference that followed it; and the controversy that it caused, followed up by Michael Brown's *Authentic Fire* in 2015 as a charismatic response, is what eventually gave way to me spending some time on this. Ever since I heard of cessationism in college, roughly around 2006 or so, I have wanted to refute it on a theological level, but I didn't think I was ready. This is my second attempt at doing so. I wrote an article on wesleygospel.com back in 2016, which is ti-

tled, “Debunking Cessationism.” I plan on writing other refutations of cessationism in the future, God willing.

I’d like to mention some of the influences on Warfield’s cessationism. He quotes from many people in *Counterfeit Miracles*, and unless you are paying close attention, you might not be able to catch his main influences. But as Ruthven points out, and as Warfield makes totally clear in ch. 1, his main influence is **Conyers Middleton**’s *A Free Inquiry into the Miraculous Powers* (1749). Middleton was reputedly a Deist and definitely skeptical and rationalistic in tone. He was a contemporary of Wesley, and as such received a very thorough charismatic reply from him in “A Letter to the Reverend Dr. Conyers Middleton,” which mainly consisted of saying that Middleton only expressed a rationalistic skepticism in his book, and thoroughly lacked proof for most of his assertions. Warfield was also heavily influenced by rationalism. Ruthven shows that Princeton University had a long tradition of Presbyterian professors that were influenced by Scottish Common Sense realism,¹ something that was in one way or another influenced by the philosopher **David Hume**. For those who aren’t all that familiar with philosophy, Hume is a hero for atheists, agnostics, and skeptics; and was one of the top philosophers of Enlightenment era rationalism. He had written “Of Miracles,” ch. 10 in *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (1748),

¹ Jon Ruthven, *On the Cessation of the Charismata* (Sheffield, UK: University of Sheffield Academic Press, 2008), pp. 35-36.

which was published only one year before Middleton's work. Lastly, Warfield had positive views of many conclusions drawn by **Adolf von Harnack**, a German higher critic and total disbeliever in the miracles of the Bible. Warfield even spent a year studying theology in Germany during the higher criticism movement, so he could come back to America and refute it. But unfortunately, he came back more influenced by them than he intended. This might help to make sense of why Warfield, reputedly a "conservative" theologian, can easily explain away certain Scriptures like Mark 16:9-20 and James 5:14-15, which are essential to the charismatic position. Warfield was not as conservative as people may assume! Under close examination, we can see evidence of Deism, rationalism, skepticism, and even liberalism in his thinking. Common dictionary definitions of these words might be helpful:

- **Deism** - The belief that there is a creator God, but that God does not intervene in human affairs. The acceptance of the idea of a creator based on reason or the idea of intelligent design, but nothing more; it is not the God of the Bible.
- **Rationalism** - The belief that certainty of knowledge can only be arrived at through reasoning things out intellectually. It rejects the idea of supernatural revelation through

visions, dreams, and other paranormal or religious experiences.

- **Skepticism** - The belief that certainty of knowledge is impossible to arrive at, even with the use of intellectual reason, although it tends to favor a rationalistic approach; a skeptical attitude; always doubting the truth of something.

- **Liberalism (theology)** - Also known as liberal Christianity; it is generally the view that Christianity has to be modified by modern science and rationalism in order to be intellectually honest. The Bible is reinterpreted through these views; and usually results in a “pick and choose” approach towards Biblical doctrines, and a rejection of the miracles of the Bible. It is mainly a Protestant movement but has influenced the Catholic Church as well.

The Miraculous Gifts Defined

Before we enter into this study, it would be good to define what the miraculous gifts are. They are mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12:8-10:

To one is given *the word of wisdom* through the Spirit, to another *the word of knowledge* through the

same Spirit, to another *faith* by the same Spirit, to another *gifts of healings* by the same Spirit, to another *the working of miracles*, to another *prophecy*, to another *discerning of spirits*, to another different kinds of *tongues*, to another *the interpretation of tongues*.

I think these gifts have been adequately defined by both Donald Gee's *Concerning Spiritual Gifts* and Howard Carter's *Spiritual Gifts and Their Operation*. I side with Carter on his view of the "word of knowledge," that it is a supernatural revelation of facts. But between both Gee and Carter, you can find some very thorough definitions of the functions of these miraculous gifts. I feel that they complement one another. Smith Wigglesworth's *Ever Increasing Faith* can provide further insights as well. Wesley felt, that in his debate with Middleton, some more plainness of speech needed to be used in the definition of these gifts.² So, he broke them down another way, although he just viewed it as restating the gifts mentioned in Mark 16:17-18; Acts 2:16-17; and 1 Corinthians 12:8-10:

1. Casting out devils: 2. Speaking with new tongues:
3. Escaping dangers, in which otherwise they must

² John Wesley, "A Letter to the Reverend Dr. Conyers Middleton," *The Works of John Wesley*, vol. 10, 3rd ed., p. 16.

have perished: 4. Healing the sick: 5. Prophecy, foretelling things to come: 6. Visions: 7. Divine dreams: And, 8. Discerning of spirits.

PART 1:
WARFIELD DOUBTED
THE SCRIPTURES

**Warfield Admitted His Cessationism
Was Not Biblical**

Of this we may make sure on the ground both of principle and of fact; that is to say both under the guidance of the New Testament teaching as to their origin and nature, and on the credit of the testimony of later ages as to their cessation...It will be sufficiently intimated in the criticism which I purpose to make.³

This is an important quote to consider when examining his cessationist philosophy, because that's what it is. It's more of a philosophy than a theological exegesis of Scripture. Warfield admits that he relies on the New Testament for his understanding of miraculous gifts: so far as it pertains to "their origin and nature." But when it comes to the *cessation* of miraculous gifts, Warfield here admits that HE IS NOT RELYING ON THE BIBLE, but on his criticism of "the testimony of later ages," that is, the writings of the

³ B. B. Warfield, *Counterfeit Miracles* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1918), p. 6.

church fathers. Any of the church fathers who were charismatic, or who wrote favorably of the Desert Fathers, or other mystic saints--Athanasius, Jerome, Sulpitius Severus, Irenaeus, Tertullian, and even Augustine--had to be dismissed as "credulous" or gullible for believing in such superstitious tales of the supernatural. Warfield approaches the whole thing with a rationalistic bias, seeking a natural explanation at every corner. Warfield was like the Sadducees, to whom Jesus said, "You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God" (Matt. 22:29).

Warfield Rejected Mark 16:9-20

Christ did not utter these words...We see, however, that the belief that Christ uttered these words was a powerful cooperating cause inducing belief in the actual occurrence of the alleged marvels.⁴

Warfield admits that the early church's faith in Mark 16:9-20, and especially v. 17, where Jesus said, "These signs will follow those who believe," is what gave them reason to believe that miracles could be worked by any Christian; and not just the Biblical prophets and apostles. That is, the healing miracles witnessed by Augustine and mentioned in book

⁴ B. B. Warfield, *Counterfeit Miracles*, p. 45.

22.8 of his *City of God* and Sulpitius Severus' *Life of Martin*. This is how Warfield allows himself to continue in this line of thought throughout his whole book, by stating outright that Jesus never really said what was contained in Mark 16:17. This is a satanic maneuver. In Genesis 3:1, the devil said to Eve, "Did God really say?" That's what he does; he gets you to question the Bible; and question supernatural interventions of God. And now he would have Christians to disbelieve the miracle testimonies of Augustine. Warfield disappoints me to put such a low esteem on Augustine: he's the guy Calvinists base their theology on! Later on, he calls Augustine's belief in miracles a mark of "credulity" or gullibility.⁵ "Christ did not utter these words," he says. Well, how can he trust the rest of the Bible to be God's Word? He's picking and choosing just like a liberal! Just like John Dominic Crossan and the Jesus Seminar! And yet, most Baptists, fundamentalists, Calvinists, Presbyterians, and conservative evangelicals like John MacArthur *base* their anti-charismatic, cessationist theology on this book.

Although Princeton was his alma mater, Warfield studied theology in Germany for one year in 1876, at the University of Leipzig, so that he could be exposed to the lies of Biblical criticism and counteract them in an apologetic sense. But

⁵ B. B. Warfield, *Counterfeit Miracles*, pp. 76-77.

it's evident that the unbelief, skepticism, and anti-supernaturalism of these professors rubbed off on him in a bad way. He also adopted the views of "textual criticism," which can still cast serious doubt on the Word of God.⁶ So, he rejected the longer ending of Mark 16:9-20, stating that "Christ did not utter these words." I think that's pretty extreme, because it affects doctrine. It's one thing to accept a degree of textual criticism if it concerns a very minor variation of a single word, but if it contains a large portion of Scripture, that usually means a doctrine is badly affected. In this case, it greatly contributed to Warfield's cessationist theology. *For him, it meant that because Mark 16:17 was not said by Jesus, that average Christians have no right to expect miracles in response to their prayers.*

What is of interest to this subject of the longer ending of Mark, is that the oldest surviving manuscript that contains parts of the Gospel of Mark--called Papyrus 45 (dated to the year 250)--does not contain Mark 16, because many parts of the scroll are missing due to *damage*. Could we not conclude that this is the reason for later interpolations of Mark 16:9-20? It does not mean that Jesus didn't say the words in that text or that Mark didn't write those words originally. It wouldn't make sense otherwise, because Mark 16:8 leaves

⁶ Patrick Baskwell, *The Presbyterian Controversy* (Morrisville, NC: Lulu Press, 2009), p. 108; Robert Krapohl and Charles Lippy, *The Evangelicals: A Historical, Thematic, and Biographical Guide* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1999), p. 312.

the story hanging, with the women afraid of the angel by the tomb of Jesus. It may just mean that, over the course of time, as manuscripts were copied, that some scrolls were damaged and Mark 16:9-20 was lost to most of them, but it was eventually found on a few scrolls and “copy-and-pasted” into the popular text that we use today for the New Testament. To assume that the section was completely made up by some medieval monk is absurd. Why? What would the motivation be for that? Why would a holy monk dedicated to preserving God’s Word just make up a story? You would think that the medieval scribes had access to manuscripts that we don’t have access to today. But Warfield doesn’t entertain such thoughts; he just buys into the view of the German critics who always rejected the supernatural character of the Bible. Here’s an overview of what other evangelical theologians thought:

- In 160, Justin Martyr referred to Mark 16:20 in his *First Apology*, ch. 45.
- In 184, Irenaeus quoted Mark 16:19 in *Against Heresies* 3.10.6.
- In 1706, Matthew Henry assumed that Mark 16:9-20 was historical and really happened. He said, “We have here a very short account of two of Christ’s appearances.”

- In 1765, John Wesley assumed the same and commented without reservation.
- In 1832, Adam Clarke assumed the same, but he did show awareness of early church manuscript variations. He did not go the route of Warfield and modern scholars in their rejection of Mark 16:9-20 as inspired Scripture.
- In 1834, Albert Barnes, a Princeton man like Warfield, also assumed that Mark 16:9-20 is true and authentic Scripture.

Church fathers and evangelical Bible commentators from the past never doubted the authenticity of Mark 16:9-20: the Longer Ending. They took it at face value as the Word of God. Although Biblical criticism started among the English deists during the time of the Puritans, it eventually grew to its most developed state in German universities during the 19th century; and it is sadly this tradition of Biblical criticism, from Enlightenment era deism, rationalism, and skepticism, that influenced B. B. Warfield. He does not hide the fact that he respected the writings of Conyers Middleton and Adolf von Harnack. He is not secretive about it, but out in the open. He imported this deistic and liberal influence into his work and tried to consecrate it. What is also tragic for historians of religion, is that it was apparently Warfield's

acceptance of rationalistic Biblical criticism, which eventually turned Princeton University from an evangelical institution into a liberal one.⁷

**Warfield Cast Doubt on James 5:14-15:
He Viewed the Olive Oil as Medication**

“Anointing with oil in the name of the Lord,” is susceptible of two interpretations. The reference may be to the use of oil as a symbol the power of the Spirit to be exercised in the healing; or it may be to the use of oil as a medicinal agent...If, on the other hand, the allusion is to the use of oil as a medicinal agent, everything falls into its place. The meaning then is in effect, “giving him his medicine in the name of the Lord.”⁸...Its medicinal qualities are commended by Philo (Somn. M., I, 666), Pliny (N. H., 23: 34-50), and Galen (Med. Temp., Bk. II).

He also quotes from the Jerusalem Talmud (*Shab.*, fol. 14, col. 3).⁹ Oil was a common medicinal agent in the ancient Roman world, so he says. He dismisses the idea that oil is a symbol of the anointing of the Holy Spirit. So, since oil is

⁷ Patrick Baskwell, *The Presbyterian Controversy*, pp. 108-110.

⁸ B. B. Warfield, *Counterfeit Miracles*, p. 171.

⁹ *Ibid.*, Footnotes 5.22-23, pp. 303-304.

medicine to Warfield, he is basically saying that the combination of prayer with medicinal oil obscures the subject of whether James 5:14-15 is talking about miraculous healing at all. In fact, *he is saying that it is really talking about praying for God to bless the natural healing process derived from taking medicine.* Quite a stretch of the imagination, I think! Unless you're talking about when someone has muscle aches and they put Ben Gay on it, I can't think of how putting oil on someone could be medicinal in the same sense as taking a pharmaceutical pill. Quite a difference in use. If olive oil is so medicinally powerful, then why isn't it being sold at the drug store as an over-the-counter remedy? No, I think James 5:14-15 is definitely talking about miraculous healing. Oil, that is *olive oil*, in the Bible is a symbol of the Holy Spirit. Take for example, Samuel's anointings of Saul and David (1 Sam. 9 and 16): it was used as a symbol of the Holy Spirit: the word "anointing" is derived from the word *oil* and is used as an expression for the Holy Spirit itself, in 1 John 2:20: "You have an anointing from the Holy One."

Regular consumption of olive oil has been medically proven to improve heart health, but the external application of olive oil to the skin, as in James 5:14, has been proven to have no other medical benefits than maybe being a good massage oil for athletes. But Warfield sticks to this view that the oil in James 5:14 is so potent, so medicinal, that it might

as well have pharmaceutical properties: *an oil with a medical healing power so potent so as to remove the miraculous element from the passage and give the impression of just asking God to bless the medicine.* Warfield asks, “Where is there promise of miracle in that?”¹⁰ I think this is ridiculous. Nobody can be “raised up” by putting oil on them (James 5:15). This is referring to miraculous healing. It is talking about using the name of Jesus with the prayer of faith and using olive oil to remind us of the Holy Spirit’s role in divine healing. That sets us up for a miracle! Sorry Warfield, but you’re really wrong on this one. Warfield is apparently following suit with Middleton on this one. Wesley responded to this by saying, “Be pleased to try how many you can cure thus, that are blind, deaf, dumb, or paralytic; and experience, if not philosophy, will teach you, that oil has no such natural efficacy as this.”¹¹

“I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned and revealed them to little children” (Matt. 11:25). To reiterate, I find Warfield’s view unlikely for several reasons: 1. The passage refers to *the prayer of faith*, and the requirement that it be made fervently by a righteous man, much like when Elijah prayed for rain to stop in Israel (v. 17). The allusion to Elijah working a nature miracle, for context, makes

¹⁰ B. B. Warfield, *Counterfeit Miracles*, p. 172.

¹¹ John Wesley, “Letter to the Rev. Dr. Conyers Middleton,” p. 40.

it natural to think that James 5:14-15 is definitely referring to miraculous prayer. Using the right kind of faith was always Jesus' requirement for such prayer (Matt. 17:20). 2. The passage refers to a desperately sick person being "raised up," as if he were on a deathbed or *bedridden* and unable to get up and walk around. It is hard to imagine how any oil, however medicinal, could help a man in that condition; and thus, remove the miraculous nature of the prayer. 3. There is nothing in the passage that indicates the oil in James 5:14 is a medicinal oil. If it were, the passage would have clarified that point. Only the word "oil" is used, with no medicinal qualifiers. There is no reason to think that this is anything other than normal *anointing oil*: a symbol of the Holy Spirit, like how the Catholics use holy water, or oil in the rite of Extreme Unction. The oil was evidently being used in a mystical sense, as a prophetic symbol, a visual aid in prayer to remind those praying, that we must rely on the presence of the Holy Spirit when we pray for healing.

Warfield Believed That God Never Answers Prayer for Healing

We are all left here, like Trophimus at Miletum, sick. And if we insist upon being relieved of this sickness we can expect only the answer which was given to Paul: "My grace is sufficient for you."¹²

His use of 2 Timothy 4:20 and 2 Corinthians 12:9 here is really a shocking dismissal of other charismatic Scriptures. Both of these cases assume, based on the book of Acts, Mark 16:9-20, and James 5:14-18, that Paul would have prayed for physical healings, but received no positive answer at those times. But just because God did not heal *at those times*, it does not mean God did not heal *at other times*. Sometimes God does not heal, even when men of great faith pray; sometimes there is just no healing going to happen. There is no explanation for these times other than, "My grace is sufficient for you." But this is far different from what Warfield is asserting: he is telling us to totally give up on healing prayer, because God will always deny us healing! The spirit of infirmity always gets to win! I think this should be considered "having a form of godliness but denying the power thereof" (2 Tim. 3:5). From such turn away! Bear in mind that Warfield had a very sickly wife,

¹² B. B. Warfield, *Counterfeit Miracles*, p. 179.

but he still had no right to superimpose his negative experience into the theology of the church regarding healing prayer.

Jon Ruthven's Defense of Matthew 8:17 and John 14:12

“The verses adduced by Gordon to establish contemporary miraculous healing were: Mt. 8:17; Mk. 16:17, 18; Jas 5:14, 15; Jn. 14:12, 13; and 1 Cor. 12 in which, he held, no hint was offered there as to the cessation of the charismata.”¹³ I will only include Ruthven's responses to Warfield's views of Matthew 8:17 and John 14:12, since his view is basically the same as mine for Mark 16 and James 5. The charismatic Scriptures doubted by Warfield come from A. J. Gordon's *The Ministry of Healing*, ch. 2: “The Testimony of Scripture.” Even though Warfield never became a charismatic, he still felt that Gordon wrote in an “excellent spirit, with great skill in arranging his matter and developing his subject, and with a very persuasive and even ingenious disposition of his argument.”¹⁴ In other words, he felt that this was the best charismatic book that he had found.

¹³ Jon Ruthven, *On the Cessation of the Charismata*, p. 90.

¹⁴ B. B. Warfield, *Counterfeit Miracles*, p. 159.

Matthew 8:17: “This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah: ‘He took up our infirmities and bore our diseases.’” Ruthven said, “Warfield’s ultimate argument against this connection of healing and the atonement lay in its ‘*confusing redemption...which is objective, and takes place outside of us, with its subjective effects, which take place in us...and that these subjective effects of redemption are wrought in us gradually and in a definite order.*’...However, since this debate was framed in the absolute terms of ‘miracle,’ i.e., nothing of the provisional, partial or ambiguous, there could be no compromise on healing.”¹⁵ He also said, “*They imply further, that, this being so, the presence of sickness is not only a proof of sin but argues the absence of the faith which unites us to Christ, our Substitute, that is saving faith; so that no sick person can be a saved man.*”¹⁶ Warfield failed to make a difference between *saving faith* in the cross (Rom. 3:22) and looking to the cross as a source of *miraculous faith*, when praying for healing (Jas. 5:15; 1 Cor. 12:8). It is clear from Scripture that the cross provides for both the blessings of salvation and physical healing. Alluding to Isaiah 53:4, the apostle Matthew wrote in his gospel at 8:17: “He took up our infirmities and bore our diseases,” as a commentary on the healing ministry of Jesus exhibited in the preceding verses. That

¹⁵ Jon Ruthven, *On the Cessation of the Charismata*, p. 91.

¹⁶ B. B. Warfield, *Counterfeit Miracles*, Footnote 5.34, p. 307.

covers the issue of whether the cross should be used as an object of faith while praying for healing: yes, it should. And then, of course, the cross normally is an object of faith for our salvation from sin: “He was pierced for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities” (Isa. 53:5).

While there are some Pentecostals in the positive confession camp, who believe in “walking in divine health,” and might seem to lean in the direction that “no sick person can be a saved man,” most would consider that a heretical or extreme belief. Most Pentecostals would affirm that a general saving faith in the cross preserves the soul from damnation, but sometimes in response to prayer, the Holy Spirit can give a gift of faith for the miraculous healing of a specific sickness. But either way, the cross is the source of both blessings: salvation and physical healing. It is spiritually dangerous and erroneous to try to prove your salvation by any faith in physical healing; and much worse to try to prove God’s existence by it: this can happen when people get confused and think the word “faith” only means one thing. Miraculous physical healing is rare: especially the dramatic type. It’s a rare gift, and is only occasionally given to fervent, righteous, prophetic charismatic people who are praying for someone else’s physical healing. Even among godly charismatic people, it’s rare; and often these people don’t even have enough faith to heal their own sicknesses. To recap: salvation is a *continual blessing* of the cross, but physical healing is only an *occasional blessing*. So, there is no

contradiction when the Scripture says that Jesus both “bore our diseases” and was “pierced for our transgressions” (Isa. 53:4-5).

John 14:12: “Truly I tell you, whoever believes in Me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father.” Ruthven said, “Warfield dismisses this view quickly on two grounds: first, faith healers have yet to produce ‘*greater works*’ than Jesus’ raisings from the dead or nature miracles, and, second, that *the normative interpretation of this passage is that ‘spiritual works,’ refer to spreading the Gospel to the world...* scholarship is more nuanced, concluding generally that the evangelist’s intention was that ‘greater’ miracles were to continue among the disciples in that they were to be performed in a more eschatologically advanced era than during the earthly mission of Christ, namely that of the exalted Lord Jesus.”¹⁷

¹⁷ Jon Ruthven, *On the Cessation of the Charismata*, pp. 93-94.

PART 2:
WARFIELD REJECTED
HISTORICAL MIRACLES

Chrysostom: A Cessationist Church Father

*Chrysostom says: "Argue not because miracles do not happen now, that they did not happen then...In those times they were profitable, and now they are not."*¹⁸

Warfield quotes Chrysostom making cessationist comments, saying that miracles don't happen anymore. But just a few pages earlier, he refers to the *Life of Martin*, who was a contemporary of him, and whose life is filled with miracle stories. Chrysostom (d. 407) lived in Constantinople and Martin of Tours (d. 397) lived in Candes, France. They lived in the same time period: the fourth century. Martin was only 10 or 20 years older than Chrysostom. BUT they lived about 28 hours of driving time away from one another. Since they had no cars back then, that might as well be on the other side of the world. It's clear that Chrysostom's comments are no proof for the worldwide cessation of miracles, but proof that in the fourth century, as today, that there were different

¹⁸ B. B. Warfield, *Counterfeit Miracles*, p. 46.

kinds of pastors and churches: those that lean more in the rationalistic, theological direction and those that lean more in the mystical, charismatic direction. *A certain degree of openness is needed to experience miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit: a level of miraculous faith.* Martin apparently had that, but Chrysostom didn't. Martin was like Mike Bickle. Chrysostom was like John MacArthur. They were living at the same time, but they had different beliefs about miracles; and those beliefs determined what kinds of experiences they had. Remember that Jesus said, "According to your faith be it unto you" (Matt. 9:29). To one, miraculous faith is credulity, gullibility; to another, the window to the world of spirits.

The Lives of the Desert Fathers Rejected as Fairy Tales

As time went on...the church drew ever closer to the Encratite ideals which were glorified in the Apocryphal Acts, and it was this which gave their tendency to the new Christian romances which began to multiply in the later fourth century and are represented to us especially by Athanasius' Life of Antony, and Jerome's Lives of Paul, Hilarion, and Malchus.¹⁹

¹⁹ B. B. Warfield, *Counterfeit Miracles*, p. 61.

We find that B. B. Warfield was no more willing to accept the testimonies of St. Athanasius and St. Jerome than the words of Jesus in Mark 16:17. He keeps it no secret from his reader with whom he is aligning himself. He agreeably quotes from such men as Ernst von Dobschütz, Richard Reitzenstein, T. R. Glover, Adolf von Harnack, and Robert Rainy. All of these theologians were influenced by German higher criticism, and he relies on them throughout his whole book. He quotes from them far, far more than the Bible. In fact, it is very hard to find any Biblical references in this book! It was only Glover, who was a Harvard educated Baptist, and Rainy, a Scottish clergyman, who seemed to be men of the church. But even in Rainy's case, he had a liberalizing influence in that he introduced Biblical criticism into the Presbyterian church.

I think it's safe to say that Warfield's quotations of these authorities, to bolster his argument, betrays the fact that he really was a skeptic in spirit. One name in particular should stand out to theological students more than the rest--that of Harnack--one of the most infamous of the Bible skeptics. He is known for rejecting the historical truthfulness of the Gospel of John; and *completely rejecting* the truthfulness of *Biblical miracles*. The fact that Warfield binge drinks from this well of poison, shows me that he was a theological liberal in spirit, and should definitely *not* be considered the conservative evangelical hero that he is today. I mean, this shows that Warfield was a lot more like Bart Ehrman, and

the agnostic Bible skeptics on the History Channel. But shockingly, even while writing with this train of thought, he is characterized by people today to be like John MacArthur: a great conservative theological hero. MacArthur certainly looked up to him: he called him an “astute theologian” on page 245 of his *Charismatic Chaos*.

Following the lead of the German skeptics, Warfield uncritically accepts their statements that the lives of the Catholic saints, and particularly the Desert Fathers, were nothing more than Christian fiction novels, intended to share a moral of the story, such as William Young’s *The Shack* or Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins’ *Left Behind*. He suggests that the motive to write such superstitious Catholic folk tales was grounded in the pagan European culture that they were trying to evangelize: instead of the Greek myths from Homer’s *Iliad*, they offered them the legends of the Desert Fathers, with their miracle stories, as a Christian alternative to the pagan folk tales that glorified magic. As if to present a sensational book tagline: “What if Christian faith was pushed to such limits? Could it go so far as the Desert Fathers? Look inside and find out for yourself!” The Desert Fathers, to Warfield, may have been real men, real monks. But he believed that the miraculous elements in their biographies were complete lies, embellishments, and exaggerations intended to increase the faith of the people in the regions who were accustomed to magical folk tales, if not to only increase book sales for the corrupt Catholic Church.

This brings the writings of the church fathers down to the level of *Weekly World News*, a supermarket tabloid that used to carry outlandish articles on the paranormal. I think there is some truth in the idea that the lives of the Desert Fathers would have appealed to pagans who were accustomed to Greek myths and fairy tales. But it is not necessarily correct that the supernatural element in those stories were untrue, or were lies, any more than pagan folk tales are fictional (which they don't all claim to be). And I think it is a brazen and irreverent maneuver that Warfield made, in that he trusted more in what Middleton and Harnack said, and these liberal scholars from the 1800s, than he did in the word of the church fathers like St. Athanasius and St. Jerome. The latter, by the way, was the first man to translate the Bible from the original texts for a Western audience. Are we then to assume that he couldn't be trusted to handle the Word of God honestly? I would hope not.

Warfield Rejected the Church Fathers' Charismatic Views

With reference to prophecy he adduces the warning against false prophets in Hermas (Com. 11) and the Didaché, together with Justin's assertion that prophetic gifts continued even—the "even" is perhaps significant—to his day (Dial., 315 B). As to healing, he adduces the general assertions of Justin (Dial.,

258 A) and Origen (*Cont. Cels.*, III, 24). With respect to exorcisms, he appeals to repeated references by Justin (*Apol.*, 45 A; *Dial.*, 247 C, 302 A, 311 B, 350 B, 361 C) and Tertullian (*Apol.*, 23, 37, 43; *De Spect.*, 2; *De Test. Anim.*, 3; *Ad Scap.*, 2; *De Corona*, 11; *De Idol.*, 11). He remarks that these Fathers all believed in magic and betray a feeling that the miracles of their day were not quite the same kind of thing which happened in the New Testament times (Tertullian, *De Rud.*, c. 21; Origen, *Cont. Cels.*, I, 2).²⁰

Even in the face of overwhelming data, Warfield sides with a skeptic who has to fall on superstition and magic as an excuse for what was probably the activity of miraculous gifts in the church. To me, this looks like a Pharisaic blasphemy against the Holy Spirit! (Mark 3:28-30).

*Tertullian attributes many if not most of the conversions of his day to supernatural dreams and visions, as does also Origen, although with more caution. But in such psychological phenomena it is exceedingly difficult to draw the line of demarcation between natural and supernatural causes, and between providential interpositions and miracles proper.*²¹

²⁰ B. B. Warfield, *Counterfeit Miracles*, Footnote 1.20, p. 238.

²¹ *Ibid.*, Footnote 1.22, p. 239.

Apparently, Warfield had a difficulty with dreams and visions. When they take on a Christian and moral character, they can almost always be attributed to the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:17), but Warfield, in referring to them in this case leans on the word “psychological,” which has had an anti-supernatural and rationalized undertone ever since Freud. The evidence of post-Biblical miraculous gifts is right here, staring Warfield in the face, but he has to come up with an excuse for why they are probably not miraculous. Here again, as I have mentioned earlier, it is Warfield’s *rationalism* that shows his *cessationism* is more so influenced by Middleton, Harnack, and his skeptic friends, than it is by an honest evaluation of the similarities between Biblical and post-Biblical supernatural experiences. The information is available, showing clearly that charismatic gifts continued well after the Bible was complete, but Warfield has to explain it all away.

“Some certainly and truly drive out demons, so that those who have been cleansed from the evil spirits frequently believe and are in the church. Others have foreknowledge of things to come, and visions, and prophetic warnings. Others heal the sick by imposition of their hands, and they are restored to health. Yea, moreover, as we said, even the dead were raised and abode with us many years” (Irenaeus, Against

*Heresies 2.32.4)...in neither passage has Irenaeus recent instances in view—and there is no reason why the cases he has in mind may not have occurred during the lifetime of the Apostles or of Apostolic men.*²²

Warfield here quoted clear evidence from Irenaeus, a post-Biblical church father, testifying in the present tense to the existence of deliverance, prophecy, and healing in his times. But because resurrection is the most dramatic type of miracle, he chooses to call it a “resuscitation” in another place of the footnote; and because Irenaeus said “the dead *were* raised” in the past tense, he decides to attribute the cessation of resurrection miracles to the first century simply for that use of semantic terminology. He even tried to take the past tense verbiage for the resurrection part of the quote and stretch it to mean *all* of the miracles in the quote and suggested that it may have all happened in the first century when the apostles were still alive. There is no reason to suggest that in the text. Irenaeus was naturally speaking of his own time period, his own experiences. But even so, Warfield has to find a way to put Irenaeus’ present day testimony into a *theological time machine* and send it back to the time of the apostles, so it can fit into his cessationist theory. We’ve already mentioned that Warfield thought the church fathers were “credulous” and gullible to

²² B. B. Warfield, *Counterfeit Miracles*, Footnote 1.31, pp. 241-242.

so readily believe in present day miracles. We know that was his presupposition. So, when he finds miracle testimonies in their writings, he doesn't flinch to play around with them like this.

*I think it is not by accident, when Cassian observes that the monks of his time—he died in 435—were no longer subjected to the power of the demons as the “Fathers” were. Similarly, Gregory the Great later finds that miracles do not manifest themselves now as in the past (Dial., I, c. 12). And the same reflection is repeated dozens of times in the literature of the Middle Ages. Is there not a sufficient suggestion in this?*²³

It is not the permanent cessation of miracles, if that is what Warfield is getting at. The suggestion's meaning is simply this: that miraculous gifts increase and decrease, wax and wane, ebb and flow, with the rising and receding tides of revivals in the church. In times of mystical revivals, yes, there is an increase of miraculous gifts in the lives of certain saints: St. Francis of Assisi and the Franciscans, George Wishart and the Covenanters, John Wesley and the Methodists, the faith cure movement, William J. Seymour and the Azusa Street Revival, Smith Wigglesworth, Derek Prince,

²³ B. B. Warfield, *Counterfeit Miracles*, Footnote 2.30, pp. 250-251.

John Wimber and the Vineyard, etc. Each of these charismatic movements, and the leaders at the head of them, saw an increase and eventually a decrease of miraculous gifts, with the coming and fading out of revivals. There is an element of man seeking God through prayer and theology (Jas. 4:8); and then there is an element of God's Spirit just moving like wind in the sails of a ship. That is something that cannot be controlled: the Spirit distributes the miraculous gifts "to each one, just as He determines" (1 Cor. 12:11).

Even Augustine, an honest old man and a lover of truth, can repeat a tale as authentic which Lucian had ridiculed under other names so many years before Augustine was born. What wonder, therefore, that fools can be found to listen to the legends of the saints or to stories about Hell, such as frighten cowards or old women. There is not a martyr, there is not a virgin, whose biographies have not been disfigured by these monstrous absurdities.²⁴

Warfield is here referring to a quote from Erasmus, one of the first Bible skeptics: he refers to this quote as containing "some very sensible remarks." He should mean to say, "Some very skeptical remarks." For a Christian, there is

²⁴ B. B. Warfield, *Counterfeit Miracles*, Footnote 3.23, p. 260.

nothing all that “sensible” about such an anti-charismatic attitude. It just betrays how unexperienced and resistant the person is to the Holy Spirit; and all the more unlikely to believe the supernatural things in the Bible. Again, it astonishes me how Warfield and Erasmus, along with the German critics, can just brazenly accuse Augustine--the most revered church father--as gullible, foolish, and cowardly, simply because he believes in present day miracles and visions of Hell. Why should these be considered monstrous absurdities? Is the Holy Spirit absurd? Are the virgin birth and the resurrection absurd? There is no place to draw the line once you decide to take such a skeptical view of miracles. You can't put limits on a supernatural God, if you expect to apprehend Him with accuracy. Sure, there are rules that you should use to apply discernment between divine and demonic miracles (1 John 4), but to take an entirely anti-miraculous view like Warfield does, is to basically take sides with David Hume, and all the Enlightenment philosophers who had nothing to do with the Bible.

**Warfield Admitted to the
Miracle Testimonies of Church History,
But He Was Too Skeptical to Believe in Them**

If the evidence is worth anything at all, instead of a regularly progressing decrease, there was a steadily

*growing increase of miracle-working from the beginning on.*²⁵

Warfield admits, according to his study of the church fathers, that testimonies of miracles gradually INCREASED, especially during the era of the Desert Fathers in the fourth century and after. Most of the Puritans were cessationist: as can be seen from the Westminster Confession, ch. 1. But after that time period, up until the time of John Wesley, most of the Anglican theologians had come to believe that the miraculous gifts had continued until the time of Constantine (d. 337); and then after the Roman Empire accepted Christianity as the state religion, the gifts were withdrawn, because they were no longer necessary for evangelizing the heathens. Wesley set himself somewhat apart from that crowd, by saying the gifts may have decreased, but it was because of a decrease in faith and morals. The gifts mainly continued through the lives of certain Catholic saints, such as St. Patrick, St. Columba, St. Benedict, Hildegard of Bingen, St. Francis of Assisi, St. Dominic, St. Vincent Ferrer, St. Teresa of Avila, and finally crossed over into the Reformation through the Covenanters. If you will allow for the Quakers, Camisards, and Irvingites to be counted as

²⁵ B. B. Warfield, *Counterfeit Miracles*, p. 10.

well, you can.²⁶ By the time Wesley had arrived, he and a number of the early Methodists were having supernatural experiences and were writing about them. The supernatural element among these Methodists, led to the faith cure movement, and eventually to Pentecostals and charismatics. The miraculous gifts have consistently been reported among new religious movements and revivals, which have had one strong revivalist or spiritual leader at the head of each movement.

With these charismatic movements, and these saints, there has always been an uneasy tension with the larger, mainstream denomination from which they have come: mainly the Roman Catholic Church; but after that, in much shorter intervals, with the Church of England, the Presbyterian Church, the Methodist Episcopal Church, and eventually the Assemblies of God. Whenever a staid religious institutionalism settles in; and a financial and accounting mentality reigns over and against supernatural mysticism; an intellectual and social respectability; and a rationalism that prefers not to have its preachers be reckoned among the gullible and superstitious, then denominations can develop an *anti-charismatic majority*, and *revivals* are the only way to open the way for miraculous gifts to appear again. I've digressed here a bit, but I think it was necessary. But to come back to the

²⁶ Although I would count the Quakers and Irvingites with much more reservation than other groups. Some Quakers were universalists and nudists; and some Irvingites were vain and shallow.

original point: Warfield was aware that the writings over the ages show that miracles had increased, or at least written testimonies of miracles: Warfield admitted that. But because of his *rationalism*, he rejected those testimonies, lest he be deemed gullible and superstitious. He maintained the view that miraculous gifts ceased in the first century, not because the Bible said so, and not because there were no testimonies of miracles from the later centuries, but because he simply *refused to believe* those later testimonies.

Catholic Doctrine: Warfield's Reason for Rejecting Catholic Miracles

*The greater portion of the miracles of these later centuries were wrought in support of distinctively Romanish teaching.*²⁷

That is not true. Just because so many Catholic saints worked miracles, it does not follow that every single one of their miracles was worked to confirm a distinctively Catholic doctrine. You can't dismiss all of them so easily. Wesley replied to this concern raised by Middleton. Speaking of the Catholic Church, he said, "I will allow them, however, three ages of miracles and let them make what advantage of it they can," and speaking of the Catholic church fathers, said,

²⁷ B. B. Warfield, *Counterfeit Miracles*, p. 29.

“They are but plain men...and hold opinions which cannot be defended...I doubt not but whoever will be at the pains of reading over their writings for that poor end, will find many mistakes, many weak suppositions, and many ill-drawn conclusions...and yet I exceedingly reverence them, as well as their writings, and esteem them very highly in love...because they describe true, genuine Christianity.”²⁸ The idea that perfect doctrine is required for miracles is misguided, especially when it comes to non-essential opinions or personality quirks. However, I am in full agreement with any Protestant theologian who would reject a miracle that is specifically claiming to confirm a Catholic doctrine, such as justification by works, praying to dead saints, veneration of the Virgin Mary as a mediatrix, Purgatory, or harsh treatment of the body with ascetic practices.

²⁸ John Wesley, “Letter to the Rev. Dr. Conyers Middleton,” pp. 14, 79.

PART 3:
WARFIELD'S CESSATIONIST VIEWS

**Warfield Believed Miracles Were
All About Authenticating the Apostles**

These gifts were not the possession of the primitive Christian as such; nor for that matter of the Apostolic Church or the Apostolic age for themselves; they were distinctively the authentication of the Apostles. They were part of the credentials of the Apostles as the authoritative agents of God in founding the church. Their function thus confined them to distinctively the Apostolic Church, and they necessarily passed away with it.²⁹

This is one of the most quoted and revered statements that Warfield ever made for cessationism; and it has influenced almost every cessationist until John MacArthur. He starts by saying that in general the “primitive Christians” did not have miraculous gifts. He goes on to say that miraculous gifts were “distinctively the authentication of the Apostles.” He is referring to the twelve apostles of Christ; and possibly

²⁹ B. B. Warfield, *Counterfeit Miracles*, p. 6.

the apostle Paul. He continues, “They were part of the credentials of the Apostles as the authoritative agents of God in founding the church.” Now, this is supported by Scripture. Paul says that he had the “signs” of an apostle: signs, wonders, and miracles (2 Cor. 12:12). Instead of saying “signs,” you could say “authentications” or “credentials” if you like. There’s nothing wrong so far.

Then Warfield said this: “*Their function thus confined them to distinctively the Apostolic Church, and they necessarily passed away with it.*” Notice in the text that there is no Biblical reference or proof text to support this statement, neither are there any in the footnotes. But it was *this* statement that set the tone for the book; it was *this* statement that became the hang up for the next century, for why so many evangelical pastors had difficulty believing in present day miracles. They were told by B. B. Warfield and his followers, that the miraculous gifts were *only* given to the apostles of Christ and their friends, as authenticating signs to the church: so that they had the *authority* to speak in Christ’s place during the founding phase of the first century church; and also, that they had authority to write Scripture. In other words, *for Warfield, the miraculous gifts were all about spiritual authority*: nothing much more than that. Every charismatic in the centuries to come would have to be seen as deluded or fraudulent: an enthusiast or fanatic; and Warfield spent the rest of his book criticizing these charismatics, in order to convince you that his cessationist view is

right. But he usually does this from the scope of a *deistic rationalism* that shrinks away from supernatural views.

The Bible, however, clearly states the duration of time for the miraculous gifts: they are going to continue until the return of Christ. 1 Corinthians 13:8-12 was traditionally interpreted to mean that miraculous gifts such as tongues and prophecies would cease once the whole church would be able to see God face to face. Cessationists reinterpreted it to mean once the Bible was completely written. Acts 2:17: “IN THE LAST DAYS, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will PROPHECY, your young men will see VISIONS, your old men will dream DREAMS.” This is very clear: it says that miraculous gifts are given in the last days, not just for the days of the first century church. 1 Corinthians 1:7-8: “YOU DO NOT LACK ANY SPIRITUAL GIFT as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed. He will also keep you firm TO THE END, so that you will be blameless on THE DAY OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST.” Pretty clear here too. The apostle Paul is saying that the church is not meant to lack any spiritual gift--including the miraculous gifts in 1 Corinthians 12:8-10--and that they are meant to keep our faith firm, as we wait for the end of the age and the return of the Lord. This goes completely against Warfield’s cessationist notion that the miraculous gifts ceased in the first or second centuries.

**Warfield Believed That
Some Non-Apostles Worked Miracles,
But Only Because They Were Linked with the Apostles**

The immediate end for which they were given is not left doubtful, and that proves to be not directly the extension of the church, but the authentication of the Apostles as messengers from God. This does not mean, of course, that only the Apostles appear in the New Testament as working miracles, or that they alone are represented as recipients of the charismata. But it does mean that the charismata belonged, in a true sense, to the Apostles, and constituted one of the signs of an Apostle.³⁰

Central to Warfield's thesis is the idea that the miraculous gifts (1 Cor. 12:8-10) were really only for the authentication of the original twelve apostles of Jesus. Peter, John, Thomas, Matthew, etc. Anyone else who had received miraculous gifts, such as the Samaritans and Cornelius' household (Acts 8:4-8 and 10:24-48), or maybe even Paul (the 13th apostle), were only extensions of their true purpose: to testify that *the original twelve apostles*, with whom all these other New Testament charismatics were associated, were messengers from God; and that the Gospel of Jesus Christ,

³⁰ B. B. Warfield, *Counterfeit Miracles*, p. 21.

which they preached, was a revelation from God. Sounds like a neat theory that Warfield can use to confine miraculous gifts to the New Testament age, which limits the time of miracles to the lifespans of these men; and so, look with criticism on all other writings that came after the New Testament, but there are no internal statements within the New Testament that say this is the purpose or duration of miraculous gifts. Actually, all we really have as stated purposes, are: 1. *Prophecies* show that God desires people's faith to be strengthened, their spirits exhorted, and their hearts encouraged (1 Cor. 14:3). 2. *Healings* show that God has compassion on the sick (Matt. 14:14). 3. *Deliverances* show the compassion of God for the sick, but more clearly show the power that Jesus' name has over the devil (Luke 10:19). 4. *Nature miracles* show the power that Jesus' name has over bad weather, the natural world, etc (Matt. 8:23-27).

*John's pupil Polycarp; we may add perhaps an Ignatius, a Papias, a Clement, possibly a Hermas, or even a Leucius.*³¹

Unlike many cessationists today, which assert that the apostle John was the last person on earth with miraculous gifts, Warfield's view lined up with a man named Bishop Kaye, who had concluded that the gifts died out with men upon

³¹ B. B. Warfield, *Counterfeit Miracles*, p. 25.

whom the twelve apostles laid their hands, such as: Polycarp, Ignatius, Papias, Clement, Hermas, and Leucias. Why? 1. It glorifies the *apostles* again, even though the gifts were resident in other people. 2. It explains why reliable second century *church fathers* like Justin Martyr and Irenaeus can speak of miracles having happened fairly recently, if not in their own personal experience. How neatly this seems to fit his theory, but not entirely. Because he allows for this, he is still allowing for miraculous gifts to exist outside of the New Testament; and outside of the Twelve. He is also not considering that for every Polycarp, Ignatius, and Papias, there would have likely been dozens of other men that they would have imparted miraculous gifts to by the laying on of their hands, and so forth, and so forth, *ad infinitum* down through the ages. There is nowhere in Scripture that declares impartation ceased with the apostles; and Kaye's and Warfield's view seems to hinge on this unbiblical idea. On this line, Jack Deere, the charismatic theologian, observed:

Many people appear in the book of Acts who have the gift of prophecy, and yet there is no recorded instance of an apostle laying hands on them. I am referring to Agabus (Acts 11:28; 21:10-11), the individuals in Acts 13:1, the prophets Judas and Silas (Acts 15:32), and Philip's four unmarried daughters who prophesied (Acts 21:9)...Outside the book of

Acts we find similar evidence. Timothy, for example, is an individual who received one of the charismata through the laying on of the *elders*' hands (1 Tim. 4:14).³²

Warfield Thought of Prophecy as “Miraculous,” But That It’s Just Preaching Sermons

*Among the miraculous gifts themselves, a like distinction is made in favor of “prophecy” (that is, the gift of exhortation and teaching).*³³

Why does Warfield admit that prophecy is the greatest of the *miraculous* gifts; and then turn around and say that prophecy is the same thing as exhorting and *teaching* people? There is nothing miraculous about preaching sermons and teaching lessons: not unless God’s Spirit does something unusual to the preacher while he is speaking. With John Wesley, and all charismatics, we should be ready to say that prophecy is the reception of divine revelations through dreams, visions, and the voice of God; and can either involve knowledge about the secrets of men’s hearts or facts about the future: with the end result of encouraging

³² Jack Deere, *Surprised by the Power of the Spirit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1993), p. 236.

³³ B. B. Warfield, *Counterfeit Miracles*, p. 4.

and increasing the faith of other Christians (1 Cor. 14:3, 25; Acts 11:28).

**Warfield Believed Its
Unnecessary for God to Speak to People,
Because They Can Just Read the Bible**

God the Holy Spirit has made it His subsequent work, not to introduce new and unneeded revelations into the world, but to diffuse this one complete revelation through the world and to bring mankind into the saving knowledge of it.³⁴

By this Warfield means the Bible and the Gospel. He cannot understand why the Holy Spirit would need to speak to any person, about anything, under any circumstances, because after all, the world has already received all the information it will ever need from God: the Holy Bible and the Gospel of Jesus Christ, which it contains. So, when Christians need encouragement, or exhortation, or their faith strengthened, they are not to look for supernatural experiences, but are to firstly become *literate* and secondly to open up their Bibles and *read* them; or go to *hear a sermon*. Nevermind the Holy Spirit and the angels in the matter of personal guidance, protection, encouragement, confirmation of facts, confirmation

³⁴ B. B. Warfield, *Counterfeit Miracles*, p. 26.

of Biblical interpretation, confirmation of theology, of ideas, words, healings, and social interactions. God is not meant to be that closely involved, intervening in your life like that. God is meant to be seen as far off, like a Deist; and his Bible ever near, as the source of all the answers you could ever have about life, and especially about the subject of *salvation*. Nevermind the more specific, personal things that pertain only to you; forget the idea of private, personal revelations from the Holy Spirit just for you or someone you know. The Bible has been given as a general revelation to the world; and so, all we can hope for is a kind of *general relationship* with God through his Bible. It's not meant to get any more intimate, specific, or personalized than that.

Warfield Believed It Isn't Common Sense to Pray for Healing

When Stephen Paget in his gracious way remarks that "they who desire, extravagantly, to put 'spiritual healing' among the methods of the Christian ministry, seem to me to be losing sight of the fact that common sense is an essential trait of the Christian life," we cannot help feeling that he has said the right word in the right place.³⁵

³⁵ B. B. Warfield, *Counterfeit Miracles*, p. 205.

A smug, rationalistic way of saying that praying for physical healing is not a common sense thing to do. I can see why Warfield would say that, but as someone once said to me, "Common sense is what's common to you." An appeal to popular experience or popular opinion is no litmus test for the truth. For example, just because *most people* haven't been in outer space, it doesn't mean that astronauts are lying to us about the lack of gravity up there; and just because the Suriname toad hasn't been seen by most people, with eggs growing on its back, it doesn't mean the vile creature doesn't exist; and just because only a few healing evangelists have seen arms and feet grow out of stumps, it doesn't mean that creative miracles don't happen. Sure, dramatic physical healing is not a common experience giving rise to a common sense about it. I get that. But that is no argument against praying for physical healing; the only argument in favor for not praying for healing is a *rationalistic despair*.

Common sense? The Christian is supposed to be charismatic, and supernaturally conscious: that automatically puts him at variance with popular opinion and the "common sense" of things. What people might commonly sense to be a hallucination, the charismatic Christian might be inclined to call a vision or the voice of God. What people might commonly sense to be a harmless leisure activity, the Spirit-filled Christian might consider to be a repulsive, immoral abomination. Christians are supposed to be "not of the world," meaning that they go against the grain, they are

counterculture even towards the world's idea of counterculture, they are the ultimate non-conformists (John 15:19; 17:16).

Why then should they be subjected to the popular rules of common sense? Much less the sense of a skeptical philosopher or scientist. 2 Corinthians 5:13: "If we are 'out of our mind,' as some say, it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you." But even when we are "in our right mind" to explain the things of the Spirit, it will seem then that we are no longer in our right mind. Simply put, there are some *topics* that common people, with their common sense, are just not capable of understanding, nor are they willing to. 1 Corinthians 2:14: "The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness and cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the Spirit." Things like supernatural dreams, visions, spiritual voices, words of knowledge, signs and coincidences, answers to prayer for physical healing, sensing and casting out demons, visions of demons and angels, the presence of God, visions of Heaven and Hell, etc.

These are not common things; and so, most people have no "common sense" or popular opinion about them, other than that they must be the domain of the mentally ill. Since the devil has his version for all of these things; and since they *commonly* gain visibility among those who are so se-

verely oppressed in the mind, that they jut out into the spotlight when they seek the aid of a psychiatrist for help, mostly, this is *all the world knows* about mystical experiences: the negative, the demonic, the hallucinatory, and the schizophrenic. If they want to understand what healthier mystical experiences are like, then they will have to become Christians and get baptized in the Holy Spirit, Pentecostal style. Then they will feel, see, and hear things the way that we do. Then and only then will it feel like common sense to hear God's voice, interpret prophetic dreams, and pray for healing in the name of Jesus. But not until then. *Pentecostal common sense* is always going to be different than non-Pentecostal common sense.

Warfield Believed in Natural Psychosomatic Healings

Of all moral energies, I conceive that faith which is inspired by a religious creed to be the most powerful; and Miss Fancourt's case, there can be no doubt, was one of the many instances of sudden recovery from a passive form of nervous ailment, brought about by the powerful excitement of this extraordi-

*nary stimulus, compared to which, in her predisposed state of mind, ammonia and quinine would have been mere trifling.*³⁶

Warfield was quoting a review that he agreed with. It was about a woman who suffered from what was deemed to be “hysterical paralysis,” or a *psychosomatic* disease, what was believed to be a mentally and emotionally caused paralysis of the legs. Through sheer will power, and exercise of mental energies, and through a conscious disregard of the pain she was feeling, and of her faith in God to heal her, she recovered from the paralysis. Warfield is quick to point out that *nothing miraculous happened* here. But how can he draw the line so clearly?

She was lame and now she could walk (Matt. 15:31). Was this not the case with many in the time of Jesus? Did they draw the line back then between psychosomatic healings and power of God healings? How would they know? All glory was given to God back then. There were none of these natural explanations. I hear that when miraculous healings do occur today, like the sudden disappearance of tumors in response to prayer, that doctors tend to call them “spontaneous remissions,” rather than miracles. Everything is interpreted from a natural point of view: without the presence of the Holy Spirit acting upon the body. In the time of Jesus, it

³⁶ B. B. Warfield, *Counterfeit Miracles*, Footnote 4.26, p. 290.

was assumed that all healings were in some way related to the power of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:8-9). And any charismatic that has experience with the Holy Spirit will tell you, that there are times of a subtle influence, and times of a clear, strong, and unmistakable presence of God. Whether or not it is possible to give the central nervous system a kind of “shock” by thinking in certain ways, getting hyped up, or working up will power, I don’t know; and I can tell you that I have no clue if any such mental or emotional exertions can contribute to physical healing. But I do know that when people put their faith in Jesus to heal them, the Bible says the Holy Spirit releases healing power towards that person (Luke 6:19; 8:46). Whether it comes weakly or strongly depends on the case, but God deserves all the glory that can be given when people recover from sicknesses by faith.

**Warfield Doubted
Undramatic Healing Testimonies**

In many of them means are openly used, means which rank among the specifically best means known to medical science. This is the case, for example, with all the instances of cures made in the Faith-Houses...The very existence of Faith-Houses, indeed, is the sufficient refutation of the doctrine of Faith-Healing which seeks support from them...By hypothesis a miraculous cure should be immediate, as in

*cause so in time—without delay as without means—on the exercise of simple faith. The existence of Faith-Hospitals is a standing proof that it is not immediate, either in cause or in time.*³⁷

Warfield is referring to the “faith houses” in the late 1800s and early 1900s that were popular in the faith cure movement, which were part of the holiness movement and eventually merged with the early Pentecostal movement. These were places where people could come and receive medical treatment and repeated prayer for healing. But many of them, like those run by John G. Lake, refused to use any medical treatment. In the case of Dorothea Trüdel, where both medicine and prayer were used, Warfield raised his protest and denounced any claim to divine intervention, simply because of the presence of medicine and nursing.

I think that is rather naïve, seeing that *the medical profession has its limits*. Anyone being treated with chemo knows that. There are no guarantees with doctors and medicine. This is why prayer for healing is always a useful supplement to medicine; and may even be the one thing that makes the difference in the treatment of the patient. In fact, it is often in the midst of medical treatment, that God’s will can be discovered in their particular case, whether supernatural healing will be granted to them. Mark 5:25-29: “A woman

³⁷ B. B. Warfield, *Counterfeit Miracles*, pp. 183-184.

was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years. She had suffered a great deal *under the care of many doctors* and had spent all she had, yet instead of getting better she grew worse. When she heard about Jesus, she came up behind Him in the crowd and *touched His cloak*, because she thought, ‘If I just touch His clothes, I will be healed.’ *Immediately her bleeding stopped* and she felt in her body that she was freed from her suffering.” After twelve hours of medical care, she found divine healing to be God’s answer for her condition, in her particular case. There is nothing wrong with combining natural and supernatural methods of healing: in fact, it’s much more effective at pinpointing the answer to the problem.

One recent example in my personal life involves an elderly man who lived down the street from us. He had a fall and was taken to the hospital. Once he was examined, the doctors discovered a large hernia all throughout his insides; and they surgically removed it. After the surgery, he was greatly weakened and had no appetite; and it was looking like he was going to wither up and die. He wouldn’t eat solid foods and had to be constantly monitored by in-house nurses; and was taken back to the hospital again and again by family, friends, and nurses. He was then starting to get depressed because he was losing his independence. This went on for about two months or so. Then my wife mustered up some courage and asked if she could pray for him. I was not present for this, but she told me that she just prayed a

gentle prayer for him to be healed in the name of Jesus; and he said, "I believe in prayer."

Several days later, he was eating solid food, up and walking around, and driving his car around town by himself! After several months, he was no longer in the situation he was in. Whether or not her prayer just simply motivated him, or the Holy Spirit directly did something to his body, I can't tell. But in this man's case, *praying for healing made the difference*. It might not always be as dramatic as instantly removing a cancerous tumor by prayer for everyone to see. But in my opinion, the effect that my wife's prayer had on my elderly neighbor, was equal to that of a miracle. Years later, he was still doing fine. The doctors and nurses were doing all that they could for him, but it wasn't until my wife prayed for him, that he actually got better.

The brother of Samuel Zeller, who succeeded Dorothea Trüdel in her House in Switzerland, sought cure there for years in vain...Trüdel's own health remained throughout her life "very feeble"; she suffered from curvature of the spine from an early age and died at forty-eight of typhus fever. Zeller himself "strongly repudiated the whole system of doctrine."³⁸

³⁸ B. B. Warfield, *Counterfeit Miracles*, p. 184.

Warfield goes on to say that, because even healers sometimes don't get healed of their own sicknesses, that it proves all of their healings are fake. We could add to this the names of John Wimber and Randy Clark, both who have recently had well known healing ministries, and yet have had their bouts with cancer. Smith Wigglesworth claimed to have a bad problem with hemorrhoids that he instantly healed by prayer, but he, like everyone else, eventually died.³⁹ When a healer isn't healed, when a physician can't heal himself (Jesus on the cross!), then this only proves that God's justifying and saving "grace is sufficient" for those times, as it was when Paul asked for a healing of his problem (2 Cor. 12:9).

Warfield thinks that unanswered prayers for healing are all we can expect today. He says that all of the healing testimonies that he has found are of a *low level* and could easily be attributed to positive thinking or mind over matter. Again, was my neighbor's body healed by the Holy Spirit, or did the healing prayer give him the boost of positive motivation that he needed, to pull himself out of a funk and start eating again? God only knows. But this one experience is not the end-all. Read Roberts Liardon's collections of Smith Wigglesworth and Maria Woodworth-Etter. There is

³⁹ Smith Wigglesworth, *Ever Increasing Faith* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1971), p. 81.

an overwhelming amount of *dramatic* healing testimonies in those writings.

One thing I think Warfield erred in is the idea of *faith levels*: he seems to be completely unaware of levels of faith, and especially how levels of faith can affect healing prayer, and the potency of healing miracles. Wesley spoke of “degrees in faith,”⁴⁰ but I’ve found this concept lacking outside of Wesleyanism and Pentecostalism. I once had a conversation with a cessationist student from a Southern Baptist seminary; and he emphatically denied that there are levels of faith. To him, faith was a mental agreement with a doctrine: on or off, like a “yes” or “no” decision for the Gospel. Of course, with this view of faith, while he acknowledged that backsliders exist, he refused to admit that a backslider could get so bad that his faith may deteriorate further to the loss of his salvation. People can have such *little faith* so as to make it shipwreck (1 Tim. 1:19), but people can have such *great faith* so as to move mountains, though without love it’s meaningless (1 Cor. 13:2). We know the Bible speaks of weak faith and strong faith; and we know that the prayer of faith is necessary for healing (James 5:15). Now, if there is weak faith and strong faith (Rom. 14), then *the prayer of weak faith can cause a weak healing*, and it would mean the healing would be undramatic, slight, progressive, gradual, and hardly noticeable. But if *the prayer of strong faith can*

⁴⁰ John Wesley, *Journal*, December 31, 1739.

cause a strong healing, then it would mean the healing would be more dramatic, more like Jesus in the gospels, obvious, theatrical, visual, and instant.

A degree in miraculous faith may be the spiritual equivalent of pharmaceutical potency: a pill of 50mg is not as potent as one with 500mg. A faith accompanied by isolation in a cabin with no technology, seven days of fasting, reading nothing but the Desert Fathers and Smith Wigglesworth, and quiet contemplation of Jesus, is likely going to be more powerful than a faith that is not supplemented by those things. Jesus said to his disciples, who had already cast out demons before, but had proven themselves unsuccessful with a harder case of demon possession: “This kind goes not out but by prayer and fasting” (Matt. 17:21).

There are higher levels of faith required for harder cases of healing and deliverance; and it is just those harder cases that Warfield was looking for evidence of, because they are dramatic and undeniably miraculous. Sadly, I don’t think he found what he was looking for; or maybe he did, but his skeptical mind found reasons to disbelieve the testimonies, for fear of being “credulous” and gullible like he considered Wesley to be.⁴¹ By the way, Wesley was not as gullible and undiscerning as Warfield made him out to be. He has been called a “reasonable enthusiast” by Dr. Henry Rack. In his writings, for example, he criticized groups like the French

⁴¹ B. B. Warfield, *Counterfeit Miracles*, p. 128.

prophets for their outrageous fanatical behavior, and some of the splinter charismatic groups, who branched off of the Methodists. He viewed these wild charismatics, whose worship style was a lot like the holy laughter and Toronto Blessing revivals, with wild physical expressions, as being taken advantage of by Satan. He believed that they loved God but were misguided; and should be gently corrected.⁴²

*There are classes of sickness which Faith-Healing can cure, and there are classes of sickness which it cannot cure. In particular, for example, it is powerless to heal broken bones, to renew mutilations, to do so little a thing as to restore lost teeth.*⁴³

On the contrary, although it may be hard to believe, Tommy Welchel's *True Stories of the Miracles of Azusa Street and Beyond*, says that creative miracles just like these were reported to happen at the Azusa Street Revival. But these testimonies, I'm sure, you will have to take on faith. Scrutiny of healing testimonies is important to Warfield, but to the healing minister, a mystical apprehension of the Holy Spirit bearing witness inwardly to a testimony is all the more important. That's all the evidence you should need.

⁴² John Wesley, *Journal*, June 22, 1739; August 27, 1763; April 3, 1786.

⁴³ B. B. Warfield, *Counterfeit Miracles*, p. 191.

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