

Third, after Christ appeared to Paul on the Damascus road, Ananias healed him of his blindness (Acts 9:12, 17-18). The Messiah who had earlier miraculously blinded Paul later sent Ananias to restore his sight miraculously. God did not use any of the (earlier) 12 apostles for this task, otherwise Paul's later detractors would have claimed that he was a second-hand apostle (cf. Gal. 1-2). Instead, the Lord spoke to Ananias in a vision (Acts 9:10-16), thereby also indicating to us that he was a prophet.

So whom did God use to work miracles after the exaltation of His Son? What does the book of Acts say? It was not ordinary members in the church. The Lord empowered the 12 apostles, especially Peter, and the apostle Paul. Four other men are mentioned: the prophets Stephen, Ananias and Barnabas, and the evangelist Philip. These men were vitally connected to the apostles, as those ordained by the 12 apostles (Stephen and Philip) or working a miracle upon the apostle Paul (Ananias) or accompanying the apostle Paul on his first missionary journey (Barnabas). With the deaths of the apostles, and those who were appointed by them or laboured with them or performed a miracle upon them, the days of godly miracle workers have ended.

This explains Paul's inspired statement in II Corinthians 12:12: "Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds." After all, if in our day all or some Christians, or some pastors or elders, can perform miracles, how are such "wonders" "the signs of an apostle"?

Miracles in the apostolic age were designed to authenticate (1) Christ's apostles and/or (2) the gospel that they proclaimed. First, the New Testament speaks of miracles as validating the apostolic *messengers* of Christ, "them that heard him" (Heb. 2:3): "God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will" (4). "Wonders" also had this function with regard to the Lord Himself, as Peter declared at Pentecost, "Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know" (Acts 2:22; cf. John 3:2; 5:36; 9:16, 30-33; 10:25, 37-38).

Second, miracles validated the *message* of the 12 apostles: "they went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following" (Mark 16:20). This is also the case as regards the gospel preached by Paul the apostle and Barnabas the prophet who accompanied him: "Long time therefore abode they [in Iconium] speaking boldly in the Lord, which gave testimony unto the word of his grace, and granted signs and wonders to be done by their hands" (Acts 14:3).

Let us hold fast to the New Testament apostles and the apostolic gospel that they proclaimed: salvation is in Christ alone to God's glory alone (I Cor. 15:1-4)! *Rev. Stewart*

Covenant Protestant Reformed Church

83 Clarence Street, Ballymena, BT43 5DR • www.cprc.co.uk

Lord's Day services (11 AM & 6 PM) live video stream: www.cprc.co.uk/live-streaming

Pastor: Angus Stewart, 7 Lislunna Road, Kells, N. Ireland, BT42 3NR • (028) 25 891851

pastor@cprc.co.uk • www.youtube.com/cprcni • www.facebook.com/CovenantPRC

Covenant Reformed News

October 2022 • Volume XIX, Issue 6

The Workers of Miracles

Who are the workers of miracles after Christ's incarnation, atoning sacrifice on the cross and ascension into heaven? The biblical and Reformed answer is, "The apostles and a few others, and that only in the apostolic age." However, Pentecostals and Charismatics would respond, "The apostles and many others in the apostolic age, and many since then." Many renewalists claim that this includes apostles and prophets in the 1,900+ years since the deaths of the 12 apostles and Paul.

Let us look at the key New Testament book in this regard, Acts, beginning with two express statements that the 12 apostles wrought miracles. First, "many wonders and signs were done by the apostles" (2:43). Second, "by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people" (5:12). These miracles were not wrought by (ordinary) believers. We do not read here of a miracle-working early church but of miracle-working apostles!

Acts records several miracles performed by the apostle Peter: the healing of the man born lame (3:1-4:22), the slaying of Ananias and Sapphira (5:1-11), the curing or exorcizing of multitudes in and around Jerusalem (15-16), the raising of paralysed Aeneas (9:32-35) and the resurrecting of dead Tabitha (36-42).

A number of wonders wrought by the apostle Paul are spoken of in Acts. He blinded Elymas the sorcerer in Cyprus (13:9-12). In Iconium, he performed "signs and wonders" (14:3) with Barnabas, one of "prophets and teachers" in the church at Antioch who was sent by the Holy Spirit (13:1-2); he healed a crippled man at Lystra (14:8-10); he exorcised the female fortune-teller at Philippi (16:16-18). In Ephesus, God wrought healings and exorcisms by the unusual means of Paul's "handkerchiefs" (19:11-12). Paul raised Eutychus from the dead in Troas (20:9-12) and had no ill effects from the poisonous bite of a snake in Malta (28:3-6). On that island, he also healed Publius of dysentery and fever, and others with various diseases (7-10).

Did any others perform miracles apart from those already mentioned? Yes, three men. First, there was Stephen, who "did great wonders and miracles among the people" (6:8). He was one of the first seven deacons upon whom the 12 apostles laid their hands (1-6). Moreover, Acts 7 presents Stephen not only as the first Christian martyr but also a prophet for he received a heavenly vision of the exalted Christ (55-60).

Second, Philip wrought miracles in Samaria (8:6-7, 13). Not only was he, like Stephen, ordained a deacon by the apostles (6:1-6) but he was also, like Timothy (II Tim. 4:5), an evangelist (Acts 21:8), exercising an extraordinary temporary office, in which the person worked under and assisted the first-century apostles (Eph. 4:11).

The First Use of the Law

One of our readers asked, “Maybe Rev. Hanko can write an article on the role of the law in the conviction of sin, paving the way for the knowledge of Christ, as the *Heidelberg Catechism* teaches in the knowledge of misery. Has it such a function, and what place has it in the regeneration of a sinner and in his growth in grace?”

Identifying our misery with our sin and depravity, the *Heidelberg Catechism* speaks in Lord’s Day 2 of the function of the law in the conviction of sin: “Q. 3. Whence knowest thou thy misery? A. Out of the law of God. Q. 4. What doth the law of God require of us? A. Christ teaches us that briefly, Matthew 22:37-40, ‘Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength. This is the first and the great commandment; and the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.’ Q. 5. Canst thou keep all these things perfectly? A. In no wise; for I am prone by nature to hate God and my neighbor.”

The *Catechism* clearly teaches that we know not only our sin but also our sinfulness and depravity from the law, and especially from that most basic requirement of the law that we love God with everything we are and in all we do, and our neighbour also. This knowledge of sin is part of what we need to live and die happily (Q. & A. 2).

The *Westminster Confession* 19:6 is similar. It not only speaks of the law discovering the “sinful pollutions” of our natures, hearts and lives, but also reminds us that “conviction of” and “humiliation for” sin are not ends in themselves, but the way in which we learn our “need ... of Christ” and “the perfection of his obedience.” Following the teaching of the *Heidelberg Catechism* and the *Westminster Confession*, therefore, our answer is: “Yes, the law does have an important function in discovering our sin and sinfulness.” This, according to John Calvin, is the first use or function of the law.

That the law discovers our sin and shows us our lost condition is also the teaching of God’s Word. “Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin” (Rom. 3:20). “What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet ... For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died” (7:7, 9). The Word of God does not find fault with the law for this but rather commends it: “Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good” (12).

There are several things worth noting about these verses. Romans 7:7 teaches us that the law has this ability to show us our sin because it looks not only at our outward actions but also at our inward lives and hearts. The tenth commandment is especially important in that regard. It forbids a sin which, in itself, hurts no one, is not even discoverable by others and which has to do with our inward life. It serves as reminder that sin involves not only actions and words, but also motives, intentions and thoughts (Jer. 17:9-10).

This is fundamental to understanding the doctrine of total depravity. What the un-

believing do is never good in God’s eyes because, though they sometimes conform to the law in their outward actions, their hearts are never right with God. All the so-called “good” they do is an abomination to Him because their intentions are always wrong, for they do not do anything by way of “seeking God.” Psalm 14:2-3 says of them, “The LORD looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, and seek God. They are all gone aside, they are all together become filthy: there is none that doeth good, no, not one.”

Nor, according to these verses, is true conviction of sin only a recognition that people do bad things or that I sometimes disobey, tell lies, cheat, steal, hurt others, am not faithful to my wife or that there is a little bad in all of us, etc. True conviction means that I confess with David, “Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest. Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me” (51:4-5). When truly convicted of sin, I see that I have sinned against *God*, that I am worthy of condemnation and that I not only do sinful things but am wicked by nature.

Conviction of sin means that I come to say with Paul, “O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” (Rom. 7:24). I stop excusing myself. I cease thinking that I am, deep down, a decent person. Rather, I acknowledge that my condition is hopeless and that there is nothing I can do for myself. This, in the grace of God, is the beginning of my deliverance for, having shown me my sinfulness and misery, the Spirit turns my eyes to Jesus, in whom I find not only the possibility of deliverance but all things necessary for my salvation.

This is the great work of the Holy Spirit. The law does not truly discover sin, convict of sin and humble for sin, without the saving work of the Holy Spirit. The law shows our sinfulness, but we cannot see our sinfulness and humble ourselves for it, unless God’s grace breaks our hearts (Jer. 31:18-19). Apart from the work of the Holy Spirit, the law is powerless and useless even in showing us our sin.

Used by the Holy Spirit, the law functions as a schoolmaster or pedagogue to bring us to Christ (Gal. 3:24). By the grace of the Spirit, the law shows us the great Giver of the law, the God beside whom there is no other, the God who demands that we worship Him and worship Him as He commands, and not according to our own imaginations, the God whose name is so holy that may not be uttered without reverence and fear. A schoolmaster to bring us to Christ, indeed, but a schoolmaster we will not follow unless we are also taught of God’s Spirit.

By the teaching of the Spirit we say, “For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died. And the commandment, which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death” (Rom. 7:9-10). We add, “Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good” (12). The same grace that opens my eyes to see my lost condition brings me to the cross, where I find that the Giver of the law is not only holy and just, but also merciful and good.

The rest of this query we will answer in the next issue, DV.

Rev. Ron Hanko