

 PyroManiacs: Setting the World on fire. `Is not My word like a fire?` says the LORD (Jeremiah 23:29).

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## Cessationism again

by Phil Johnson

**H**ere are some excerpts from an e-mail exchange I had with a charismatic gentleman. I had suggested that the utter absence of any credible biblical-quality miracles is one of the reasons I'm not inclined to reconsider my cessationist stance every time charismatics claim we're seeing a new wave of Spirit-gifts. Phenomena such as holy laughter, **tricks with gold dust**, and **"prophets" whose prognostications are less than one-third accurate** don't impress me. Ditto with "tongues" that have none of the characteristics of true language.

If charismatics could produce the kind of miracles described in the Bible, or if anyone's "gift of tongues" turned out to be authentic or objectively translatable languages (like in **Acts 2:8**), I would be forced to reconsider my cessationist opinions. But (although I've heard an abundance of urban-legend-style unverifiable anecdotes) I have never encountered anyone today who is gifted to perform miracles in the same way the Apostles were.

So this man suggested (in all seriousness) that I should turn on TBN and watch **Benny Hinn** heal person after person.





The following is my reply. Actually it's compiled from a series of e-mail messages I exchanged with the fellow. His remarks are interspersed in dark red type:

I've already seen more than enough of Hinn's stuff on TV, and I grew up practically next door to Oral Roberts University. In high school, my best friend's dad was a well-known faith healer. I've seen plenty of Oral-Roberts-quality "miracles."

I suspect that you don't really understand what I mean when I say I have never seen any biblical-quality miracles. I'm talking about people born blind receiving sight, or true paraplegics instantly gaining the ability to walk.

Disappearing cancer, healed back pains, deliverance from migraines, a ringing in the ears that is suddenly "cured," eating disorders overcome, etc., may be: 1) God healing through a non-miraculous work of providence; 2) a false claim (and make no mistake: *many* modern "healings" on investigation have turned out to be demonstrably false); 3) a misdiagnosis in the first place—or any number of other non-miraculous possibilities.

The healing miracles found so frequently in the New Testament included a number of dramatic healings from long-time, notorious illnesses and irreversible conditions—undeniable miracles that even the harshest critics of the gospel could not deny. People born blind suddenly saw, paraplegics walked, and people were raised from the dead—usually with crowds of witnesses watching. Those were *not* Benny-Hinn-style healings.

Have you not noticed that Hinn's "healings" invariably involve invisible or unverifiable ailments? In fact, whenever Hinn's miracles have been investigated, **the facts simply have not born out his claims**. I watched a documentary exposé about Hinn more than a decade ago in which claims he made about healing cancer were conclusively proved false. In the case featured in the documentary, a woman he had pronounced "healed" on his television program was back in the hospital undergoing chemotherapy less than 10 days after the "healing." (In fact, as I recall, she was hospitalized and in serious condition the very



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week Hinn was touting her "healing" on TBN.)  
**Stories like that abound from Hinn's crusades.**

So if you think a Benny-Hinn-type miracle answers my challenge, you have not yet grasped what I mean by "biblical-quality miracle."



**How can you be so cynical or is it that you simply won't believe?**

I'm cynical about professional faith healers, because they tend to be transparently phony, and so many of them have been proven phony on investigation. I'm also cynical about stories of chickens raised from the dead, etc., because they trivialize true biblical miracles.

But I am **not** cynical about the Bible's claims.

**If I'm wrong forgive me, but in the last years I've seen no active search for any evidence, and a lot of criticism for those that offer it.**

I'm inviting you to supply true evidence. Anecdotes do not count.

A simple healing ministry where *truly* disabled people are routinely healed would be enough to silence my criticism on this issue. I'm talking about people with cerebral palsy, severe paralysis, congenital blindness, etc. Ever wonder why, with huge crowds of such cases in attendance, none of the really seriously disabled people ever make it to the front to be healed by Benny Hinn on live TV? Why is it that when so many quadriplegics are present at every meeting looking for healing, those cases **never** make it to the platform, much less get shown on the TV program?

Extreme gullibility is not faith. And if charismatics are going to make such outlandish claims, they should not be offended when people ask to see proof.

**And you should not be offended if a charismatic says to you that your demands of proof has the taste and feel of the devil in it. "Throw yourself down from here if you are really the son of God . . . Make these stones into bread IF you are really the Son of God . . . Go ahead and prove that you can do these things!!!!!"**

I'm not offended. I can understand how my position might come across like sheer skepticism to a devoted charismatic. It's well worth noting that Jesus did not indulge the curiosity of those

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who wanted Him to show them miracles as mere novelties. He refused to turn His ministry into a traveling show where miracles were done on stage to heighten the sensationalism. (Again, this sets him apart from Benny Hinn and friends.)

But my insistence on verification has nothing in common with the devil's dare. Try to hear what I am saying. I don't for a moment doubt God's power to do miracles or to heal. I am not asking someone to do miracles just to put on a sensational show. I don't think it would be right to do that, and in fact one of my complaints against charismatic media figures is their tendency toward sensational on-stage shows, while desperate people are suffering in real wheelchairs at the back of the auditorium. I am saying, "Come off the stage and go to the back of the auditorium and heal some truly disabled people, if you really have the power to heal."



There is no record that anyone ever made such a challenge to Jesus. There was no need to make such a challenge. He did not need to prove that His miracles were genuine; they were obviously so.

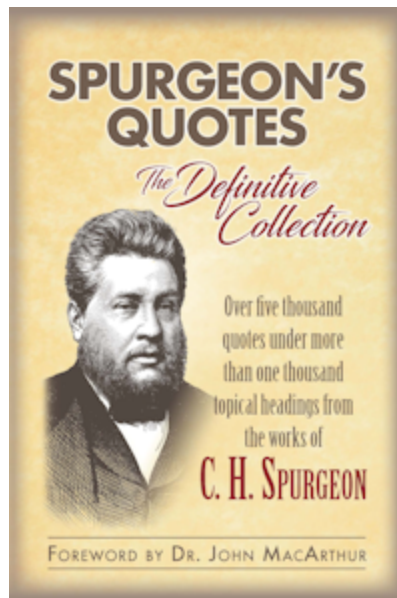
Furthermore, He healed people who were truly in hopeless straits, and He healed them ALL, with a hundred-percent success rate. Scripture repeatedly stresses this ([Matt. 4:24](#); [8:16](#); [12:15](#); [Lk. 4:40](#); [6:17-19](#)).

We are **commanded** to test ALL things ([1 Thess. 5:21](#)). The standard by which we test is Scripture. And since there is a such vast discrepancy between the kind of healings that are recorded in Scripture and the public claims of contemporary charismatic faith-healers, it seems not only *fair* to ask for proof, but also I believe it is our *duty*. In fact, too many of the best-known healers have been **proven** to be charlatans. They are a stain on the church and a reproach to the name of Christ.

**Maybe it would be wise to concern yourself with your own stuff and leave Brother Hinn alone. If he is a fake, my God is big enough to take care of him.**

God will *indeed* take care of him in His time. Meanwhile, the command to test all things is still in force.

Consider this: if Peter had taken the approach with Simon Magus that you propose taking with Hinn and his ilk, the early church would probably have been overrun with charlatans, too. Or if Paul had taken such an approach with the Galatian legalists, the church might not have endured through into the second century.



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