

Miracles Yesterday and Today (subtitled *Real and Counterfeit*), by Benjamin B. Warfield (1918; Reprinted; Unicoi, Tennessee: The Trinity Foundation, 2007). Reviewed by William R. Kane.

Originally published in 1918 under the title *Counterfeit Miracles*, the book is based on six lectures delivered in October, 1917 at Columbia Theological Seminary. It has been republished by the Trinity Foundation. One might question, why? Is it possible that lectures delivered ninety years ago are still relevant to the issues of today? And if so, what makes them relevant at the current time? We note the continued claim in the church of the miracles of healing, of tongues, and of prophecy. In light of these circumstances, the answer to the first question as to its relevance is a resounding yes. The answer to the second question of what makes it relevant is the subject of this review.

Lecture one is the foundation for the series of lectures. In this lecture, Warfield sets forth the characteristics of the apostolic church, the purpose and nature of the miraculous gifts together with their cessation following the accomplishment of their purpose. He finds that the purpose of the gifts was to authenticate the apostles and the revelation that comes from God through them. The cessation of the gifts comes at the end of the apostolic period (particularly with the death of the last disciple upon whom the gifts were conferred by an apostle. In addition, this lecture analyzes other cessation theories which acknowledge both the reality of the gifts and their cessation. The other views find the purpose to relate to the church, to protect, nurture, and extend the church in its infancy. According to this view the cessation of the gifts comes much later—in the fourth century at the time of Constantine or perhaps even later. Even though plausible in and of itself, it is shown by Warfield not to be compatible with either the scriptural or empirical data.

Lectures two through five consider the views and evidence with respect to continued ecclesiastical miracles as a permanent endowment of the church. Lecture two considers the patristic and medieval marvels mentioned in the testimony of the church fathers from the fourth century until the Reformation. Lecture three considers Roman Catholic miracles and includes material from the fourth century through the nineteenth century. Both of these lectures give us an understanding historically of the place of miracles in the life of the church.

The heathen world was full of wonder-tales. The church grew by bringing in the heathen, but they brought their superstitions with them. As the world was, so was the church. The single application of this principle by Warfield is with respect to miracles, but we are left with two questions. What else has the world brought into the church? And what is the world currently bringing into the church? Lecture four deals with the Irvingite gifts of the nineteenth century in Scotland and England. Its value is partly historical with the players and the roles they played as they exercised 'gifts' of healing, tongues, and prophecy. The Irvingite supposed gifts of prophecy were discredited by the confessions of Robert Baxter and Mary Campbell. The chief value of Warfield's discussion, however, is the understanding it gives of how these 'gifts' were developed; namely, a misconception of Scripture mixed with misplaced enthusiasm and an expectation of these 'gifts.' Lecture five deals with faith healing and is second only to lecture one in importance. Warfield analyzes the views of A. J. Gordon in his *The Ministry of Healing, or Miracles of Cure in All Ages*. The faith-healing community of today follows Gordon in its

misconceptions of Scripture and its lack of judgment with respect to the empirical evidence. The principles set forth by Warfield in his analysis of Gordon are still valid for evaluating current faith-healing movements.

Lecture six deals with mind-cure and principally the Christian Science teaching of Mary Baker Eddy. It is set apart from lectures two through five because it is not based on a continued manifestation of ecclesiastical miracles but rather on the pantheistic views of Eddy. It finds a common thread with lectures two through five in that the healings performed by its practitioners have the same characteristics as ecclesiastical healings since the apostolic church age. So then, the pagan healings, the church healings, the Christian science healings, and healings by mesmerism are not denied by Warfield as 'healings in fact,' but all have an element of means so that they are not miracles per se.

Warfield examines relevant Scripture passages which are frequently used by the faith-healing community as the basis of permanent ecclesiastical miracles. None of the passages (Mark 16:17-18; Jas 5:14-15; John 14:12; or Matt 8:17) justify that conclusion. The discussion of Matt 8:17 relates to the question of healing in the atonement as distorted by the faith-healers. Warfield acknowledges that redemption is for the body as well as for the soul; that provision is made in the atonement for the relief of man from disease and suffering. The error of the faith healers is in confusing redemption, which is objective and takes place outside of us, with the subjective effects of redemption, which take place in us and are wrought gradually. Warfield states, "Even after we have believed in Christ, and have a title as justified men to the benefits bought for us by His blood and righteousness, entrance into the actual enjoyment of these several benefits remains a process, and a long process, to be completed in a definite order."

In examining and analyzing the empirical evidence, Warfield emphasizes throughout the means God uses to perform his acts, the proper understanding of them, and their relation to the immediate acts of God. A right (biblical) view of means will enable one to distinguish between the remarkable and wonderful on the one hand and the truly miraculous on the other hand. Merely being inexplicable does not necessitate an event being miraculous. It is only the immediate works of God which deserve the name of miracles. Those things which are wrought in some part by means may be answers to prayer, wonderful and marvelous indeed, but are the result of the special providence of God. The use of means does not exclude God, but honors him who has not only appointed means but is also over all of the affairs of man. Some would look to means and disregard God; others will depend on God, and disregard all means. The biblical view is to trust God, and use all the means which he has appointed. There is a whole class of healings which have been recorded where inspection indicates the use of some means. Furthermore, healings of this type appear to be common to pre-Christian pagan cultures, the patristic and medieval church, the Roman Catholic Church, the Irvingite movement, the faith-healers, and Christian Science practitioners.

In conclusion, remember that the purpose of miracles in the apostolic age was to authenticate the apostles, that miracles are inseparable from revelation, and that miracles are different from wonderful works which use means. Test the competency of the witnesses. Scrutinize the details of the testimony. Remember that nothing, no matter how inexplicable, can be a divine act, if there is anything contrary to the nature of God or his revelation. They must

conform in all their implications to what God has revealed of himself.