

Choices / Consequences 4 - Signs and Wonders

Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' 23 And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!' Matt 7:22-23

The final section of Jesus sermon on the Mount began in 7:13 and contained a series of warnings about some serious choices confronting those who want to be His disciples. There will always be two options in all generations of people: Gates, Paths, Prophets, Fruits, Disciples and Miracles. Each of us will be forced to make these choices many times in our lives. Jesus wanted us to be prepared to make the right decision each time we are confronted. The last choice Jesus set forth centered on the mighty works, wonders and signs given by God to prove a command or doctrine came from Him. Here specifically, casting out demons, prophesying and doing many wonders.

Truth and Eternal Life	Error and Destruction
A Narrow Gate	A Wide Gate <u>7:13-14</u>
A Straited Path	A Broad Path <u>7:13-14</u>
Prophets from God	False Prophets <u>7:15</u>
Good Fruit	Evil Fruit <u>7:16-20</u>
Disciples who do God's will	Disciples Jesus never knew <u>7:21-23</u>
Miracles that confirm the Word	Miracles that deceive <u>7:22-23</u>

God first introduced signs to His people when Moses asked Him what should be done if the people didn't believe him. He gave Moses the power for to turn his staff into a serpent and allow his hand to become white and leprous.

Then Moses answered and said, "But suppose they will not believe me or listen to my voice; suppose they say, 'The Lord has not appeared to you.'" 2 So the Lord said to him, "What is that in your hand?" He said, "A rod." 3 And He said, "Cast it on the ground." So he cast it on the ground, and it became a serpent; and Moses fled from it. 4 Then the Lord said to Moses, "Reach out your hand and take it by the tail" (and he reached out his hand and caught it, and it became a rod in his hand), 5 "that they may believe that the Lord God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has appeared to you." ... "Then it will be, if they do not believe you, nor heed the message of the first sign, that they may believe the message of the latter sign. Ex 4:1-5, 8-9

The ever Present Danger of Signs/Wonders

While the Israelites were deeply moved by these signs, when Moses showed these genuine signs to Pharaoh, the magicians were able to duplicate them through stealth and craftiness.

And Aaron spoke all the words which the Lord had spoken to Moses. Then he did the signs in the sight of the people. 31 So the people believed; and when they heard that the Lord had visited the children of Israel and that He had looked on their affliction, then they bowed their heads and worshiped. Ex 4:30-31

But Pharaoh also called the wise men and the sorcerers; so the magicians of Egypt, they also did in like manner with their enchantments. 12 For every man threw down his rod, and they became serpents. But Aaron's rod swallowed up their rods. 13 And Pharaoh's heart grew hard, and he did not heed them, as the Lord had said. Ex. 7:11-13

They duplicated the serpents, water into blood and frogs, but after those things they could no longer duplicate them and recognized that it was the hand of God. Yet the skepticism created by the "easier to duplicate false signs" led to a hardening of Pharaoh's heart that would no longer be softened or moved even by much mightier and clearly from God signs.

Now the magicians so worked with their enchantments to bring forth lice, but they could not. So there were lice on man and beast. 19 Then the magicians said to Pharaoh, "This is the finger of God." But Pharaoh's heart grew hard, and he did not heed them, just as the Lord had said. Ex. 8:18-19.

An Important Template

These events form an important template that has been used over and over again since. It was the basis for Elijah's victory over the prophets of Baal, because although the prophets of Baal had convinced the people that they had power with their lesser signs, God allowed Elijah to do a sign so great that it left no doubt.

It was also the reason why Simon the sorcerer had great power over the people of Samaria. He too had found "easier to duplicate signs" and used them to convince the people of Samaria that he was a great prophet from God. Yet God once again in mercy revealed to these people that these signs were nothing compared to the might works that could be done through God.

But there was a certain man called Simon, who previously practiced sorcery in the city and astonished the people of Samaria, claiming that he was someone great, 10 to whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, "This man is the great power of God." 11 And they heeded him because he had astonished them with his sorceries for a long time. Acts 8:9-12

False prophets and false religions seek the veracity and awe that signs and wonders confer. So like Pharaoh's magicians, they choose the "easier to duplicate signs" All false prophets and those God condemned as worthy of death (sorcerers and enchanters, etc) sought to find the ways and means to convince the people that what they could do was from God. This is what Elijah and Philip confronted and destroyed. God fully showed through Moses, Elijah, and Philip that the trickery and craftiness of men is a candle compared to the full sunlight of God's power. But this was not a permanent part of God's plan. God gave a better way.

God's Solution to this Threat

This grave threat has always been a great concern to God. God sought to minimize it by giving a fruit that would always be evident to help the genuine disciple make the right choice when confronted with it.

If there arises among you a prophet or a dreamer of dreams, and he gives you a sign or a wonder, 2 and the sign or the wonder comes to pass, of which he spoke to you, saying, 'Let us go after other gods' — which you have not known — 'and let us serve them,' Deut. 13:1-2

God revealed that one thing would always identify a true sign and wonder from the false. No true prophet from the Lord would ever contradict or go against what had already been written. No matter what the wonder or sign, if the message it was to confirm was error then the signs and wonders were false.

you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams, for the Lord your God is testing you to know whether you love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul. 4 You shall walk after the Lord your God and fear Him, and keep His commandments and obey His voice; you shall serve Him and hold fast to Him. Deut. 13:3-4

All the signs and wonders that were ever performed from the giving of the Law to the death of Jesus on the cross were to be assessed for this fruit. All miracles must be assessed by what they are being used to prove. When they are used to move people from God's teaching, God called that a test to see whether or not "you love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul." All genuine servants of the Lord who "serve Him and hold fast to Him, walk after the Lord your God and fear Him, and keep His commandments and obey His voice" will be protected from the terrible skepticism or deception or false devotion created by false signs and wonders.

By testing the prophet first to see if he is pointing toward serving, holding fast to, fearing, keeping his commands and obeying His voice, the fruit is already obvious. If he is leading away from any of these things in any degree then the signs or wonders are false and no respect or fear should be given to him.

Jesus and His Apostles also used Signs and Wonders

Jesus' warning here in the Sermon on the Mount follows exactly the same course. First, as with Moses, God had sent His Christ with the power to do signs and wonders to validate His preaching was from God.

"Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know — Acts 2:22-23

There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. 2 This man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, "Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him." Jn. 3:1-2

And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; 31 but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name. Jn. 20:30-31

Second, Jesus sent out His apostles and prophets with the same promise. Just as Moses was given signs to prove he was from God so did Jesus give to His apostles and prophets.

And when He had called His twelve disciples to Him, He gave them power over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease. Matt 10:1

And these signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; 18 they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover." 19 So then, after the Lord had spoken to them, He was received up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God. 20 And they went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the word through

the accompanying signs. Amen. Mk. 16:17-20

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

And **through the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were done** among the people. Acts 5:12

Then Simon himself also believed; and when he was baptized he continued with Philip, and was amazed, **seeing the miracles and signs which were done.** Acts 8:13

Therefore they stayed there a long time, speaking boldly in **the Lord, who was bearing witness to the word of His grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands.** Acts 14:3

how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him, 4 **God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will?** Heb. 2:3-4

The Same Solution to the Problem

These signs and wonders fit into the same pattern as that of Moses and the Law. The signs and wonders of the apostles were performed by the same Holy Spirit who was giving them the inspiration to flawlessly preach and write God word.

knowing this first, that no prophecy of scripture is of private interpretation. 21 For no prophecy ever came by the will of man: but men spoke from God, being moved by the Holy Spirit. 2 Pet 1:20-21

But when they deliver you up, be not anxious how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in that hour what ye shall speak. 20 for it is not you that speak, but the Spirit of your Father that speaks in you. Mt 10:19-20

Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. 13 These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. 1 Cor 2:19-20

It was completely impossible for someone who performed genuine miracles to contradict what God had already revealed. This is why all the books of the NT with many different writers have no contradictions or variations.

So once again the sign of the genuine miracle must be in perfect alignment with the truth of God's word. Any change to the doctrine or moral standards of the gospel's perfect law of Liberty would immediately reveal it to be a false sign or wonder. It doesn't matter how amazing the sign or wonder, if it does not compel us to do the will of the Father in heaven then it is false. This truth would have saved the life of the young prophet who was deceived by the older prophets words that he had received a revelation from the Lord.

Then he said to him, "Come home with me and eat bread." 16 And he said, "I cannot return with you nor go in with you; neither can I eat bread nor drink water with you in this place. 17 For I have been told by the word of the Lord, 'You shall not eat bread nor drink water there, nor return by going the way you came.'" 18 He said to him, "I too am a prophet as you are, and an angel spoke to me by the word of the Lord, saying, 'Bring him back with you to your house, that he may eat bread and drink water.'" (He was lying to him.) 1 Kgs 13:15-18

Since the words of the older prophet contradicted the word of God given to him, he should have known immediately that they were false. This is what Jesus was warning against.

Who is Under this Indictment?

"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. 22 Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' 23 And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!' Mt. 7:21-23

With these words Jesus forced all His disciples who called him Lord to accept the truth that calling Him Lord without doing the "will of My Father in heaven" would lead to three negative outcomes.

1. You shall not enter the kingdom of heaven
2. I never knew you
3. Depart from me you who practice lawlessness

These outcomes are fixed and absolute. They will never be removed or modified and evidently even the grace and mercy of God would not alleviate them. Therefore in the context of this

command it is to “all who call Jesus Lord.” This would describe and encompass every form of Christianity that has existed from the establishment of the church to the end of the age.

Since those who do not call Jesus Lord (atheists, idolaters, and all who seek to serve God without serving Jesus) have no tie to Jesus at all, He was not speaking of them in this verse. Jesus was only speaking of those who call Him Lord and thus consider themselves His disciples. Today this would include all who fit under the “umbrella” of Christianity. Catholics, Protestants, Denominations, Evangelicals, Cults, Pentecostals and any other group who proclaim Jesus is their Lord.

Of all those people, only those who are truly “*doing the will of My Father in Heaven*” will enter the kingdom of heaven. The claim of the “*Many (who) will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’*” had no affect or impact on this at all. Nor did the absolute and complete deception that it revealed. All who are calling Jesus Lord are therefore put on notice.

“Love of the Truth” is the “Good Fruit”

One of the highest compliments in the Scripture was given to the Bereans. What they did we all must do.

Now these were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of the mind, examining the Scriptures daily, whether these things were so. Acts 17:11

All must therefore do exactly what Paul commanded Timothy to do.

Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. 2 Tim 2:15

Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. 3 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; 4 and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables. 2 Tim 4:2-5

Signs and wonders today fall into the same two categories they did in the days of Moses and in the days of Christ. Jesus warned strongly that these miracles would deceive, not save.

For false christs and false prophets will rise and show signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. 23 But take heed; see, I have told you all things beforehand. Mk. 13:22-23

In a passage the parallels Moses words to Israel about their own false prophets, Paul warns all Christians that Satan will still use “*all power, signs, and lying wonders*” to deceive and destroy those who have some desire to serve God.

The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, 10 and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. 11 And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, 12 that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness. 2Th. 2:9-12

Paul made it obvious that the “*unrighteous deception*” could only affect “*those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved.*” All who love the truth over sensationalism and excitement will avoid this terrible fate. Jesus made this very clear while He was still on this earth. Only those who abide in His word are truly His disciples. Those who abide in His word will know the truth and be made free.

Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, “If you abide in My word, you are truly My disciples; 32 And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” Jn. 8:31-32

There will always be lying signs and wonders. They are here today and will be here until the end. They will deceive only those who do not love the truth. For all who love the truth and therefore abide in His word are truly His disciples.

Those who replace respect for God’s Word with sensationalism, emotionalism and turn aside unto fables are actually practicing lawlessness.

anomia... 1. properly, the condition of one without law — either because ignorant of it, or because violating it. 2. contempt and violation of law, iniquity, wickedness: (Thayer’s NT:458)

When miracles replace law or are used to violate law, the end result is someone who is “without law” because they are violating law. When people have contempt for the law of Christ based on false wonders and signs, they are under the indictment of this passage.

We see such a surge in this type of “lawlessness” today. Multitudes of those who call Jesus Lord set aside His laws without any fear or concern because they were moved to do so by the signs and wonders they believed they and their teachers are performing. Many think that they are moved by the Holy Spirit to set aside the things written by the apostles and prophets or even by Jesus himself. The Lord revealed first through Moses and then through Jesus that this is impossible.