

No. 2, The Three Modes of Special Revelation

Throughout Church History, there is clearly documented evidence of the claims of various groups within *Christendom* with respect to the performance of miracles. Moreover, reading & study show that those who lay claim to the operation of the miraculous among them do so in order to give credence and support to many of their doctrines and beliefs.

The Church of Rome has had a major place for the presence of the miraculous in her scheme of things with regard to doctrine & belief. Her writings are replete with claims of miracles, visions and supernatural events. However, it becomes very clear that the purpose of such claims is to lend support to her unScriptural dogmas & idolatrous practices. For example, in the process of the elevation of someone to so-called "sainthood", the claim to the miraculous holds a vital place. In Rome's system, there are two stages to the creation of a "saint". First, *beatification* -- occurs at least fifty years after the death of the candidate, allows the title *Blessed* to be prefixed to the individual's name, and allows worship to be attributed to the person in some particular diocese. Second, *canonization* -- the final step in the elevation to sainthood. Canonization is an ecclesiastical decree pronounced by the Pope that the candidate has now reached the level of being a "saint" and is then worthy of public worship by all. However, the entire procedure starts and proceeds on the basis that the candidate performed the miraculous in his or her lifetime. Supposed evidence is produced that the candidate worked "miracles" and Rome then proceeds with her process of beatification and canonization.

Many other bodies have also laid claim to the presence of the miraculous; and we should note that some of the most extravagant claims of this kind are currently made in various circles, notably in the *Charismatic* realm. It is essential, therefore, that we should consider the subject of *The Miracle in Scripture* in order to determine the Biblical position with respect to this question of miracles.

Scripture records that miracles took place at various junctures in the experiences of God's people in Biblical times; thus, from the light of Scripture we are able to examine this matter of the miraculous. Last week a number of basic points were noted:

- (a) The definition of the word "miracle" -- we noted that the meaning of the word in the N.T. Scriptures indicates that a miracle is a supernatural act wrought by the power of God and signifying the authority of God.
- (b) The purpose of the miracle -- God's purpose in the use of the miracle was to impart *revelation* or *knowledge*. Under this point it was noted that the word "revelation" as used in Scripture signifies the unveiling of that which was hidden, therefore the disclosure of knowledge, especially God's disclosure and revelation of Himself to men.

Moreover, in this connection we saw that there are two types of revelation that God has made to men. There is General or Natural Revelation -- the revelation that God gives of Himself in the works of creation. This revelation was made to Adam before the Fall but continues and operates after the Fall. Moreover, one of the main points about General or Natural Revelation is that it has nothing to say about salvation, because, since it was initially given to Adam before the Fall it was given to one who had no need of salvation. Consequently, though General Revelation remains operative after the Fall, it is not adequate to save sinful men. The inadequacy is not in *Natural Revelation* itself but in man in that, due to his sin, he occupies a different position and has very different needs from unfallen man.

Therefore, if men are to be saved the Lord must intervene to disclose and reveal that way of salvation to them -- which is what takes place in Special Revelation. It is called "special" in the sense that if man is to be saved a special revelation is necessary in order to bring the message of grace that he needs. General Revelation has no reference to redemption, but Special Revelation does. It is the revelation by God of His redemptive purposes for sinful men, and, as Scripture shows, it is within this framework of Special Revelation that the miracle is to be discussed and understood. Thus, since the *miracle* belongs to the realm of Special Revelation, it is vital that we consider some important thoughts with respect to God's special & saving revelation that He has given to men.

I. THE MODES OF SPECIAL REVELATION

As noted, *Special Revelation* is the revelation by God of His redemptive purpose. Moreover, He has revealed that redemptive purpose in three ways or modes.

1. By Theophany -- the word literally means *a manifestation of God*. It is most often employed in theological studies with respect to the pre-incarnation appearances of Christ and is therefore often called *Christophany*. Scripture shows that before the Fall God walked & talked with man, but with the entrance of sin, this communion was broken.

However, in the plan of redemption, God purposed to restore this communion with man, and He revealed this purpose through these *theophanies* or *Christophanies*. Thus, *theophany* is a mode of special revelation, with O.T. Scripture containing the record of many theophanies, which were of various kinds. Some were comprised of glorious appearances of deity -- the pillar of cloud and of fire, the fire in the bush etc. These were divine appearances for the Scriptures concerned record that out of the fire & the glory the Lord spoke. In other theophanies, the Lord assumed a human form -- in His appearance to Abraham, Gen 18; to Joshua, Joshua 5; to

Gideon, Judges 6 etc. There are also many references in the O.T. to the appearance of "the angel of the Lord..." which were also theophanies.

The message of the *theophany* was that it was God's purpose to restore communion with men. The *theophany* was therefore a mode of special revelation, which reached its initial climax in the incarnation of Christ, John 1: 14. Christ is Immanuel, *God with us*, Matt 1: 23. The ultimate climax of God dwelling with men will be in the eternal state when, as John says in Rev 21: 3 "*the tabernacle of God is with men.*"

2. **By Prophecy** -- this mode of special revelation is to be defined as *God's interpretation of His own redemptive truth*. Note carefully that prophecy is essentially the declaration and telling forth of the Word of God, the central theme of which is redemption. Prophecy, therefore, is not the mere foretelling of future events, although in the special revelation that God gives to men, there is some foretelling of the future. However, even when there is any such foretelling of the future it is not divorced from the central theme of redemption.

Once again, then, *prophecy* is that mode of special revelation by which God interprets and presents redemptive truth to fallen men. As we noted, one of the effects of the Fall was man's inability to understand natural or general revelation. In addition, the Fall resulted in man's rebellious desire to set his own standards in repudiation of God as the source and interpreter of all truth. Therefore, in the special revelation of His redemptive purpose through this mode of prophecy, the Lord was reasserting that He is the ultimate interpreter of truth. This mode of special revelation -- *prophecy* -- is final & authoritative. Man is spiritually blind. He cannot read or understand natural revelation, his darkened mind cannot be trusted to discover or interpret truth, therefore God must not only give him a special revelation, He must also interpret it through the mode of prophecy.

3. **By Miracle** -- remember that the miracle is the operation of God's power in some observable fashion signifying His authority. The miracle was therefore a mode of special revelation in that it was for the purpose of bringing instruction to men with regard to the divine plan of redemption. By means of the miracle, God was demonstrating that redemption's purpose was to reverse and undo the awful effects of sin. Thus, taking Christ's own miracles, it needs to be remembered that they were symbolical of what He came to do for fallen men. The central miracle of all was, of course, the person & the work of Christ through which it is revealed that fallen men may be brought back into favour & acceptance with the living God. We may therefore put it this way -- *miracle is God in grace fulfilling His purpose to undo the curse of sin.*

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