

The Holy Spirit, Teacher's Guide

Week 7: The Age of Miracles: Confirming the Word

Hebrews 2:1-4; Acts 8:14-24

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

This lesson supplies the master key to the entire question of miracles: purpose. Hebrews 2:3-4 states it with courtroom precision: the salvation declared by the Lord and attested by those who heard Him was confirmed as God "bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will." Mark 16:20 says the same in narrative form: the Lord confirmed the message by accompanying signs. Miracles were God's evidence, His public notarization of new revelation in the decades before the New Testament stood complete. They were never ends in themselves, never a permanent feature of normal Christianity, and never primarily about the recipient's health or excitement. Once the class grasps that the gifts were scaffolding for the word, the rest follows: scaffolding is designed to come down.

Acts 8 then supplies the mechanism that guaranteed it would come down: the miraculous gifts were conveyed through the laying on of the apostles' hands. The Samaritan account is decisive because it isolates the variable: Philip, himself mighty in signs, preached, baptized, and rejoiced over a believing city, yet not one Samaritan received a miraculous gift until Peter and John traveled from Jerusalem and laid hands on them. Simon the sorcerer saw exactly what the text wants us to see, that "the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles' hands," and his attempt to buy that conferring power drew one of the New Testament's sharpest rebukes. The teacher should handle Simon as the text presents him: a baptized believer whose heart turned back to old ambitions, who was commanded to repent and pray, a sobering witness both to the possibility of a Christian falling and to the availability of forgiveness. Out of the lesson's two texts comes the simple arithmetic the class must be able to perform: gifts came through apostles' hands; apostles die; therefore the gifts were designed to die out with the apostolic age, their work finished, their purpose fulfilled. Next week's text (1 Corinthians 13:8-13) will state the same conclusion from prophecy; this week establishes it from mechanism.

Keep two pastoral notes sounding. First, this lesson is not a deflation but a promotion: the same God who once bore witness with wonders now places the fully confirmed word in the student's hands, and Hebrews draws the application before we can, "we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away." Second, charity: students have friends and family who sincerely believe in modern miraculous gifts, and the goal is equipment for gentle, scriptural conversation, not ammunition for contempt. Clear about the doctrine, kind about the people, confident in the word the miracles confirmed.

Question 1

Student Question:

According to Hebrews 2:3–4, the great salvation was “declared at first by the Lord,” “attested to us by those who heard,” while “God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit.” What does this passage say the miracles were for, and how does Mark 16:17–20 confirm that purpose?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Open the legal scene inside Hebrews 2:3–4, because the author is stacking witnesses the way a court does. First witness: the Lord Himself, “declared at first by the Lord,” the salvation announced by the Son in person (Hebrews 1:1–2). Second witness: “attested to us by those who heard,” the apostles and eyewitnesses who carried the message outward (Luke 1:2; Acts 1:21–22; 1 John 1:1–3). Third and decisive witness: “God also bore witness,” the Greek term is a strengthened compound, God joining His co-testimony, “by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.” The four nouns overlap deliberately: signs (pointing beyond themselves), wonders (arresting attention), miracles (works of power), gifts (the Spirit’s distributed endowments). The message did not circulate as rumor; it circulated under oath, with God’s own signature attached.

Define confirmation precisely, because the whole doctrine of miracles turns on this word. To confirm is to establish, validate, make legally firm, the language of guaranteeing a covenant or notarizing a document. The miracles answered the only question that mattered in a world without printed New Testaments: how do we know these men speak for God? Nicodemus articulates the logic from the observer’s side: “no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him” (John 3:2). Jesus invoked it Himself: “the works that I do in my Father’s name bear witness about me” (John 10:25, 37–38). Peter at Pentecost: Jesus was “attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs” (Acts 2:22). The miracle authenticated the messenger; the messenger delivered the message; the message saved.

Now lay Mark 16:17–20 alongside, as the question directs. Jesus promised that signs would accompany: tongues, serpents, poison, healing, and verse 20 reports the outcome in exactly Hebrews’ categories: “they went out and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by accompanying signs.” Note the grammar of accompaniment: the signs attended the preaching; the preaching was the point. The signs were the seal on the envelope, not the letter inside. John says the same about the written record: “these are written so that you may believe” (John 20:30–31), the signs preserved in Scripture continuing their evidentiary work for every later reader.

Two precision notes for the teacher. First, “distributed according to his will”: the gifts went where God willed, not where men demanded (the same point as 1 Corinthians 12:11), which already forbids the notion that any believer could claim any gift at any time. Second, the past tense matters: “was attested... God also bore witness,” the author of Hebrews, writing within the first century, already describes the confirmation as an accomplished work toward his

readers. The salvation had been declared, attested, confirmed. He does not exhort them to seek new confirmations but to attend to the confirmed word, which is precisely the posture this study commends.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The threefold witness stack: the Lord, those who heard, and God's co-testimony of power
- Confirmation defined: legal establishment of the message, not entertainment or mere compassion
- The observer's logic: John 3:2; John 10:25; Acts 2:22
- Mark 16:20: signs accompanying and confirming the preached word
- "According to his will": divine distribution, never human demand (1 Corinthians 12:11)
- The past tense of Hebrews 2:3–4: confirmation already accomplished toward the readers
- John 20:30–31: recorded signs continuing their evidentiary purpose for readers today

Discussion Prompts

- Why did first-century hearers need something more than a preacher's sincerity, and what did God supply?
- What is the difference between a miracle as a seal and a miracle as a show, and why does the difference matter?
- How do the recorded miracles still perform their confirming work when you read them today?

Question 2

Student Question:

Hebrews 2:1 warns that neglecting this confirmed word leads to drifting, an unanchored, gradual slide rather than a dramatic rebellion. Where in your life has slow neglect, of the word, of prayer, of the assembly, done what no deliberate decision would have dared? What will you do this week to pay "much closer attention"?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Set the warning in its context, because Hebrews 2:1–4 is one sentence of pastoral logic: since the word spoken through angels (the Law) proved unbreakable, and since this salvation is greater, declared by the Son, attested by witnesses, confirmed by God Himself, "therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. How shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?" The author's argument is from greater confirmation to greater accountability. The same miracles that make the word trustworthy make neglecting it inexcusable.

Dwell on the nautical image, because it diagnoses the real danger in most pews. "Drift away" pictures a boat slipping past its mooring, carried by current while the passenger does nothing at

all. Drifting requires no decision, no rebellion, no announcement; it is what happens automatically when attention fails. Notice the corresponding sin in verse 3: not “reject” but “neglect”, the same word used of the widows overlooked in the daily distribution (Acts 6:1). Few Christians are lost by storming out; many are lost by floating off, one skipped assembly, one unopened Bible, one prayerless month at a time. The author of Hebrews returns to the danger throughout the letter: “take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away” (3:12), “let us hold fast” (4:14; 10:23), “not neglecting to meet together” (10:25). The whole epistle is an anchor-resetting manual, and it is addressed to baptized believers, which settles, in passing, that Christians can indeed drift to destruction (a standing answer to “once saved, always saved”).

The remedy is stated in the same breath as the danger: “pay much closer attention to what we have heard.” Attention is the anchor. In practice that means the means of grace this study keeps returning to: the word read and heard with intent (Acts 17:11), prayer offered with regularity rather than in emergencies, the assembly attended as life support rather than obligation (10:24–25), the Lord’s table approached with focus, and honest companions who will notice our drift before we do (3:13, “exhort one another every day... that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin”). Drift is silent; therefore the church must not be.

Make the self-examination concrete and unhurried. Ask students to compare their present attention with two years ago: Bible pages per week, prayers per day, assemblies per month, spiritual conversations per season. Current direction matters more than current position; a boat near the dock but drifting outward is in more danger than one far out rowing in. Then have each student name one anchor to reset this week, specific, small, and immediate, because the question asks for it, and because in this matter, doing nothing is itself the decision.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The argument from greater confirmation to greater accountability (Hebrews 2:1–4)
- Drifting versus rebelling: neglect as the quiet road to loss
- Hebrews as an anchor-resetting letter to believers: apostasy is possible (3:12; 10:26–31)
- Attention as the anchor: word, prayer, assembly, table, companions (3:13; 10:24–25)
- Direction versus position: which way is your boat moving now?
- “How shall we escape?”: the rhetorical question that admits no answer

Discussion Prompts

- Why is drifting more dangerous than open rebellion for people who grew up in the church?
- Who has permission to tell you that you are drifting, and would they?
- What is one anchor you will reset this week, stated specifically enough that someone could check?

Question 3

Student Question:

In Acts 8:5–13, Philip preached Christ in Samaria with signs that even a professional magician recognized as real power. What was different about Philip’s miracles compared to Simon’s magic, and what did the Samaritans do when they “believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ”?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Paint Samaria before Philip arrives. Simon had “amazed” the city with magic “for a long time,” and the whole population, “from the least to the greatest,” said of him, “This man is the power of God that is called Great” (8:9–11). He was the religious celebrity of the region, self-described as “somebody great,” with a brand built on astonishment. Into that market walks Philip, one of the seven (6:5), scattered by persecution (8:1, 4), preaching Christ, and the unclean spirits came out shrieking, the paralyzed and lame were healed (8:7), real power in a city that had spent years applauding tricks.

Draw the contrast the question asks for, because it trains discernment. Simon’s magic: performed for his own glory (“saying that he himself was somebody great”), sustained by long exposure and showmanship, and producing amazement that terminated on Simon. Philip’s miracles: performed in another’s name, pointing away from himself to “the Christ” (8:5), instantly and publicly verifiable (paralytics walking are hard to stage in front of neighbors), and producing not just amazement but faith in a message and obedience to it. The tell-tale difference is direction: counterfeit power gathers attention to the performer; God’s power spends attention on the word. Even Simon could tell the difference: the career illusionist “believed... and seeing signs and great miracles performed, he was amazed” (8:13), professional testimony that what Philip did was no trick.

Then mark what the Samaritans did, because Luke states it as the pattern of conversion: “when they believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women” (8:12). Hearing, believing, baptized, the same sequence as Pentecost (2:37–41), and note that preaching “the kingdom of God” and “the name of Jesus Christ” led directly to baptism, exactly as the Great Commission designed (Mark 16:15–16). Even Simon was baptized (8:13). The signs had done their job: they confirmed Philip’s word, and the word did the saving (Romans 1:16). Samaria also fulfills the Lord’s itinerary from Acts 1:8, Jerusalem, Judea, “and Samaria”, the gospel’s first deliberate step across an ethnic-religious frontier, preparing the class for Cornelius two chapters later.

A teaching note worth making explicit: the magician’s conversion shows that genuine miracles were distinguishable from sorcery by observation, instant, complete, public, unfeigned (compare Acts 3:7–10; 4:16). God never asked the first century to believe unverifiable claims, and that evidential standard, established here by the text itself, is the measuring rod students will need in Question 9 and next week. Where claimed wonders today require dim lights,

emotional priming, and unfalsifiable conditions, they resemble Simon's craft more than Philip's gift, and the comparison is the Bible's own.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Counterfeit versus genuine power: self-glorifying amazement versus word-confirming signs
- The direction test: where does the attention land, on the performer or on Christ?
- The Samaritan conversions: hearing, believing, baptized (Acts 8:12), the standing pattern
- Acts 1:8 unfolding: the gospel's first frontier crossing into Samaria
- A professional's verdict: Simon's amazement as testimony to authenticity
- The evidential standard of true miracles: instant, public, undeniable (Acts 3:7-10; 4:16)

Discussion Prompts

- What made Philip's miracles immediately distinguishable from years of Simon's magic?
- Why is it significant that the Samaritans' faith led straight to baptism rather than to applause?
- What modern equivalents of "magic" compete with the gospel for people's amazement today?

Question 4

Student Question:

Simon had amazed Samaria for years, calling himself "somebody great," until something genuinely greater arrived. The hunger to be seen as somebody runs deep in all of us, in our work, our social media, even our service to God. Where do you most crave being thought "somebody great," and what does the gospel offer in place of that hunger?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Simon's title for himself is the question's mirror: "somebody great." He had organized an entire identity around being seen, the stage name ("the power of God that is called Great"), the long cultivation of an audience, the business model of astonishment. And the hunger did not die at his baptism; within verses it resurfaces, reaching for the apostles' conferring power as the next, bigger platform. Luke has given us a case study in the oldest appetite: the craving to be somebody, which entered the story at Eden ("you will be like God," Genesis 3:5) and built a tower at Babel ("let us make a name for ourselves," Genesis 11:4).

Help the class find the modern costumes of the same craving, and start inside the church, where the question aims. The Pharisees did their righteousness "to be seen by others," loved the best seats and the titles (Matthew 6:1-5; 23:5-7); Diotrophes "likes to put himself first" in the congregation (3 John 9); even the apostles argued about who was greatest (Luke 22:24). Today the costume might be the curated feed where every kindness is photographed, the service that quietly keeps score, the class comment designed to display rather than to build, the resentment

when work goes unthanked, that last being the most reliable diagnostic: the difference between serving and performing is revealed by how we handle being overlooked.

Then set the gospel's answer beside the hunger, because the gospel does not merely rebuke the craving; it outbids it. The desire to be known and to matter is not itself sin; it is misdirected worship. What Simon clawed for, God gives: to be known by name (Isaiah 43:1; John 10:3), loved before performance (recall Week 2), made children of God (1 John 3:1), and honored by the only audience whose verdict endures, "well done, good and faithful servant" (Matthew 25:21). Jesus' realignment stands: "whoever would be great among you must be your servant" (Mark 10:43-45), greatness redefined as usefulness, with the Son of Man as the proof. And the promised exaltation comes by the opposite road from Simon's: "humble yourselves... that at the proper time he may exalt you" (1 Peter 5:6, written by the same Peter who rebuked Simon).

Make the application a quiet audit rather than a public confession. Where do I most crave being thought somebody, work, congregation, online, family? What would I keep doing if no one ever found out, and what would I quietly drop? This week's exercise, borrowed from Matthew 6:3-4: perform one deliberate act of service arranged so that no one but the Father can know, and let the discomfort of anonymity diagnose how much of our serving has been Simon's kind.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- "Somebody great": the Eden-old craving to be seen, surviving baptism in Simon's heart
- Church costumes of the same hunger: Matthew 6:1-5; Luke 22:24; 3 John 9
- The overlooked test: resentment at unthanked service as the diagnostic
- The gospel's outbid: known, loved, named, and honored by God (1 John 3:1; Matthew 25:21)
- Greatness redefined as service (Mark 10:43-45); exaltation by humility (1 Peter 5:6)
- The secret-service exercise of Matthew 6:3-4 as this week's audit

Discussion Prompts

- Where are you most tempted to keep score of being noticed, and what does that craving actually want?
- How does being already loved and named by God change the need to perform for an audience?
- What act of completely anonymous service could you perform this week, and what might it reveal?

Question 5

Student Question:

Philip could work miracles, yet the Samaritans had to wait for Peter and John to come from Jerusalem before any of them received miraculous gifts (Acts 8:14-17). What does this account

reveal about how the miraculous gifts of the Spirit were transmitted, and why could Philip, full of the Spirit though he was, not pass them on?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Lay out the sequence with the text open, because the doctrine rests on the narrative's plain order. Philip preaches; Samaria believes and is baptized (8:12); great signs continue through Philip (8:13). Jerusalem hears, and the apostles send Peter and John (8:14), who pray for the Samaritans "that they might receive the Holy Spirit, for he had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus" (8:15–16). "Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit" (8:17). The reception in view here is the miraculous endowment, something visible enough that Simon "saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles' hands" (8:18), as the tongues at Pentecost and Caesarea were audible and visible. (Distinguish this carefully from the indwelling gift promised to every baptized believer in Acts 2:38, Week 9's subject; the Samaritans were already saved, baptized believers; what they lacked was miraculous gifts.)

Now isolate the variable, which is the account's quiet brilliance. Philip possessed miraculous power in abundance, demons fled, paralytics walked, yet in all the weeks of his Samaritan campaign, not one convert received a gift until apostles arrived. If gifts could be obtained by faith, by baptism, by prayer alone, or by contact with any Spirit-filled man, Samaria needed no delegation from Jerusalem. The journey of Peter and John is itself the proof: something was required that only apostles could supply. The conclusion is the one Simon drew on site and Luke records without correction: the Spirit's gifts "was given through the laying on of the apostles' hands" (8:18).

Corroborate the pattern across the New Testament, because a doctrine should stand on more than one text. At Ephesus, "when Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking in tongues and prophesying" (Acts 19:6), an apostle's hands again. Paul writes to Rome, "I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you" (Romans 1:11), why the longing to come in person, unless impartation required his presence? Timothy's gift came "through the laying on of my hands" (2 Timothy 1:6). And the only two endowments not through apostolic hands are the two cases of Holy Spirit baptism the class studied last week, Pentecost and Cornelius, each administered by Christ directly for its own confirmatory purpose. The system is coherent: Christ baptized in the Spirit twice; apostles conveyed gifts by hands; no other channel is ever described.

Answer the question's last clause precisely: why could Philip not pass the gifts on? Not from any deficiency of faith or fullness, Scripture calls him full of the Spirit and wisdom (6:3, 5), but because conferring gifts was an apostolic credential, part of "the signs of a true apostle" (2 Corinthians 12:12), tied to the unique office of Christ's commissioned witnesses (recall Acts 1:8; John 14–16). Authority to confer was not a higher spirituality but a distinct appointment. And here the class should already see next question's shadow and Question 9's arithmetic: a

transmission system that runs exclusively through apostles' hands has a horizon built into it, the lifespan of the apostles and of those on whom their hands were laid.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The narrative's order: believed, baptized, then gifts only after apostolic hands (Acts 8:12–17)
- The isolated variable: Philip's power could not confer; apostles had to come
- Distinguishing the miraculous endowment here from the indwelling gift of Acts 2:38
- The corroborating pattern: Acts 19:6; Romans 1:11; 2 Timothy 1:6; 2 Corinthians 12:12
- The complete system: two Spirit baptisms by Christ; all other gifts through apostles' hands
- The built-in horizon: a channel that dies with the apostolic age

Discussion Prompts

- Why did the apostles' journey to Samaria prove something about how gifts were transmitted?
- How does Romans 1:11 confirm that even Paul could not mail a spiritual gift?
- If conferring gifts was an apostolic credential, what follows once the apostles are gone?

Question 6

Student Question:

The apostles in Jerusalem sent their two most prominent men on a long journey to serve new Samaritan converts, Samaritans, whom most Jews despised. When new Christians, or Christians different from you, need help becoming established, how far out of your way are you willing to go? Name one newer or struggling member you could deliberately invest in this month.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Notice first what the Jerusalem church did when it “heard that Samaria had received the word of God” (8:14): it did not form a committee to debate whether Samaritans counted; it sent Peter and John, the two most prominent apostles in the early chapters of Acts, on a journey of several days to serve brand-new converts of a despised race. Centuries of hostility stood between Jews and Samaritans, no dealings (John 4:9), mutual contempt, rival temples, and John himself had once asked permission to call down fire on a Samaritan village (Luke 9:54). Now that same John walks to Samaria to pray that those people receive the Spirit's gifts, and the delegation “preached the gospel to many villages of the Samaritans” on the way home (8:25). Grace had rerouted an entire prejudice.

Draw out the principle: new converts are not finish lines but starting lines, and the established church's job is establishment. The pattern saturates Acts: Barnabas sent to Antioch, where he “exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose” (11:22–23); Paul and Barnabas retracing dangerous miles to strengthen souls and appoint elders (14:21–23); Paul's “let us return and visit the brothers... and see how they are” (15:36); the whole epistle ministry,

letters written to stabilize infant congregations. The New Testament knows nothing of converts abandoned at the water; it knows follow-through, teaching them “to observe all that I have commanded” (Matthew 28:20).

Now press the question’s two edges. Distance: how far out of the way, in miles, evenings, and inconvenience, will we go for someone else’s establishment? Peter and John spent days; Barnabas relocated; Paul bled. Most establishment today costs less: a ride, a shared table, a weekly study, a phone call on the hard anniversary, a seat saved. Difference: the Samaritan element asks whether our investment crosses lines, the convert from the rough background, the family unlike ours, the new member whose past is publicly known, the Christian whose race or class or politics differ from the congregation’s center of gravity. It is easy to disciple people who remind us of ourselves; Acts 8 sends the church’s best across the oldest grudge in the region.

Land the assignment literally: name one newer or struggling member to invest in this month. Not “be friendlier at services,” but a name, a plan, and a first contact this week, the model of Hebrews 10:24, “consider how to stir up one another,” where “consider” means deliberate study of particular people. Remind the class what was at stake in Samaria and is at stake in every new convert: “strengthen the things that remain” (Revelation 3:2). Most who drift away (recall Question 2) drift early, and most who stay were established by somebody who went out of the way.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Jerusalem’s response: its best men, a long journey, a despised people (Acts 8:14)
- John’s reversal: from calling down fire (Luke 9:54) to praying down blessing
- Establishment as the church’s standing work: Acts 11:22–23; 14:21–23; 15:36
- The two edges: how far (cost) and how different (crossing lines)
- New converts as starting lines: Matthew 28:20’s “teaching them” clause
- One name, one plan, one contact this week (Hebrews 10:24)

Discussion Prompts

- Why did it matter that Peter and John themselves went to Samaria rather than sending word?
- Who invested in you when you were new or struggling, and what exactly did they do?
- Which newer member of this congregation will you name, and what is your first step?

Question 7

Student Question:

When Simon offered money for the ability to confer the Spirit, Peter answered, “You have neither part nor lot in this matter, for your heart is not right before God,” and commanded him to repent and pray for forgiveness (Acts 8:18–24). What does this episode teach about the difference

between desiring God's gifts and desiring God, and what does Peter's call to repentance teach about a baptized believer who sins?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Read Peter's rebuke at full strength before softening anything: "May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money! You have neither part nor lot in this matter, for your heart is not right before God. Repent, therefore, of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that, if possible, the intent of your heart may be forgiven you. For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity" (8:20–23). Simon had not merely made a tactless offer; he had treated the gift of God as merchandise and the apostolic office as a franchise, importing his old economy (power purchased, power sold) into the kingdom. So grave was the offense that his name became the word for trafficking in sacred things: simony. God's gifts are exactly that, gifts, "distributed according to his will" (Hebrews 2:4), never according to market.

Now answer the question's first half: the difference between desiring God's gifts and desiring God. Simon wanted what God could supply without wanting God; he coveted the power while bypassing the Giver, hence Peter's diagnosis, "your heart is not right before God." The disease has milder strains that infect ordinary religion: serving God for the blessings, praying only when needing, attending for the social capital, loving the gifts (health, prosperity, reputation, even ministry success) above the Giver. Scripture's contrast figures are instructive: Balaam, who loved gain from wrongdoing (2 Peter 2:15); the crowds who followed Jesus for bread (John 6:26); and on the other side, the psalmist, "whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you" (Psalm 73:25), and Paul, counting everything loss "because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord" (Philippians 3:8). The first test of any spiritual desire: would I still want this if no one ever knew and nothing else came with it?

Then take the question's second half carefully, because it carries major doctrine. Simon was a baptized believer (8:13); his sin after baptism placed him in "the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity," with the threat of perishing; therefore baptized believers can sin so as to be lost, the text is fatal to "once saved, always saved." But equally, Peter prescribes a remedy that assumes recoverability: "repent... and pray to the Lord" for forgiveness. Note the prescription for the erring child of God: not re-baptism, but repentance and prayer, the same pattern as 1 John 1:9 and James 5:16. The "if possible" expresses the seriousness of a heart's intent, not stinginess in God; forgiveness is certain where repentance is real (1 John 1:9), and Simon's response, "pray for me to the Lord, that nothing of what you have said may come upon me" (8:24), at least begins in the right direction, asking the prayers of others, even if Luke leaves his story open.

Use the open ending pastorally. Luke does not tell us whether Simon fully recovered, and the silence is the application: every reader finishes Simon's story with his own. The class should leave with both truths in hand: sin after baptism is deadly serious, and the door of repentance

and prayer stands open. The same Peter who said “may your silver perish” also said “repent... and pray,” and the same Lord who warned the church at Ephesus to repent (Revelation 2:5) stands ready to forgive the one who does.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Simony: treating God’s gift as merchandise; the old economy imported into the kingdom
- Desiring gifts without the Giver: Balaam, the bread crowds, and the milder church strains
- The contrast desire: Psalm 73:25; Philippians 3:8
- A baptized believer in peril: Acts 8 against “once saved, always saved”
- The remedy for the erring Christian: repentance and prayer, not re-baptism (1 John 1:9)
- Luke’s open ending: every reader supplies Simon’s sequel with his own

Discussion Prompts

- What exactly was wrong with Simon’s heart, in his own words and Peter’s?
- How can a Christian today tell whether he desires God or merely God’s benefits?
- What comfort and what warning do you find in Peter’s instructions to a fallen brother?

Question 8

Student Question:

Simon wanted spiritual power for self-advancement, but God’s power had a purpose Simon never grasped: confirming the word so that others could believe and be saved. When you examine your own religious life, how much of it is about what you receive, blessing, comfort, reputation, and how much about what God accomplishes through you for others?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Simon’s error, beneath the money, was a purpose error: he thought spiritual power existed for the holder’s advancement. The whole age of miracles refutes him. Survey the inventory: tongues carried the mighty works of God to every pilgrim’s ear (Acts 2); healings opened cities to the word (3:6–12, where Peter immediately redirects the crowd’s stare: “why do you stare at us, as though by our own power... we made him walk?”); even Paul’s blinding of Elymas served the proconsul’s faith (13:11–12). The gifts existed “for the common good” (1 Corinthians 12:7) and for confirming the word (Mark 16:20; Hebrews 2:4); the holder was the courier, never the destination. Where power was treated as a possession for self, Simon here, the gift-flaunting at Corinth that Paul spends three chapters correcting, it was being held against its design.

Now let the question turn its lens on ordinary religious life, since none of us holds miraculous gifts but all of us hold something. The audit is uncomfortable in the right way: tally what proportion of my spiritual vocabulary is intake language, being fed, being blessed, getting something out of worship, my needs met, and what proportion is output language, who was served, who heard the gospel, who was strengthened through me. Both have a place; God does

bless, feed, and comfort His people, and worship rightly directed to God edifies the worshiper. But a religion that is all receiving has quietly become consumer religion, the assembly evaluated like a restaurant, the congregation chosen for amenities, membership as subscription. Jesus' word stands against the whole posture: "the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve" (Mark 10:45), and "it is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35).

Show the class the New Testament's grammar of gifts, because it generalizes beyond the miraculous: "as each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace" (1 Peter 4:10–11). Received, in order to serve. The body imagery of 1 Corinthians 12 and Romans 12:4–8 makes every member a supply line to the others, the eye for the body, the hand for the body, "that the members may have the same care for one another" (1 Corinthians 12:25). Ephesians 4:16 completes the picture: the body builds itself up "when each part is working properly." A member who only consumes is, in the body's terms, a part not working, and the whole body feels it.

Assign the rebalancing concretely. For one week, enter every assembly and every spiritual activity with an output question prepared: whom can I encourage before I leave; who is missing whom I will contact; what need did I hear that I can quietly meet (Galatians 6:10)? Let students also name their non-miraculous gifts, teaching, means, hospitality, mercy, a phone and a free hour, and attach each to a person. The cure for Simon's disease in its mild domestic form is the same as in his acute form: a heart turned from what I can get to what God, through me, can give.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The purpose error: power held for self versus gifts held for the word and the common good
- Peter's redirect at the Beautiful Gate (Acts 3:12): couriers, not destinations
- Consumer religion: intake vocabulary, assembly as restaurant, membership as subscription
- The grammar of stewardship: received in order to serve (1 Peter 4:10–11)
- Body logic: every member a supply line (1 Corinthians 12:25; Ephesians 4:16)
- The weekly output question as a discipline (Acts 20:35; Galatians 6:10)

Discussion Prompts

- How would you describe the difference between coming to worship to get and coming to give, and which dominates your week?
- What non-miraculous gift has God placed in your hands, and who is it currently serving?
- Where has consumer thinking crept into how we evaluate congregations and assemblies?

Question 9

Student Question:

If miraculous gifts were conveyed through the laying on of the apostles' hands (Acts 8:14–18; 19:6; Romans 1:11; 2 Timothy 1:6), and the miracles existed to reveal and confirm the word

before the New Testament was complete (Mark 16:20; Hebrews 2:3–4), what necessarily happened to the gifts when the last apostle died and the last person on whom apostolic hands were laid died? How does this built-in design prepare us to evaluate modern claims of miraculous gifts?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the week's summit, and the reasoning should be laid out so plainly that every student can rebuild it alone. Premise one (established in Question 5): the miraculous gifts were conveyed through the laying on of the apostles' hands, Samaria (Acts 8:14–18), Ephesus (19:6), Rome's need for Paul's presence (Romans 1:11), Timothy (2 Timothy 1:6), with the only exceptions being the two Christ-administered baptisms in the Spirit (Acts 2; 10). Premise two (established in Question 1): the gifts existed to reveal and confirm the word during the decades before the New Testament was complete (Mark 16:20; Hebrews 2:3–4). Now run the arithmetic. The apostles died, John, the last, near the end of the first century. Those on whom apostolic hands had been laid could exercise their gifts but, on the Bible's record, could not confer them (Philip proves it). Therefore, when the last apostle died, conferral ceased; when the last person who had received apostolic hands died, exercise ceased. The gifts had a built-in sunset, by design, like scaffolding erected with its removal date already implied by the architecture.

Confirm the design from the purpose side, because mechanism and purpose tell the same story. Confirmation is by nature a completable task: a deed once notarized is not notarized again every year; testimony once entered into evidence stands. By the close of the first century, the word had been fully revealed (Jude 3; recall Week 5) and fully confirmed (Hebrews 2:3–4 already speaks in past tense). The signs were preserved in writing precisely so their evidentiary force would persist: "these are written so that you may believe" (John 20:30–31). A modern reader confronting the recorded, eyewitnessed, multiply attested signs of Christ and the apostles has the confirmation God intends; repeating the scaffolding would add nothing to a finished, attested revelation. Next week the class will hear Paul say the same from prophecy, the gifts "will cease... will pass away" when "the perfect" comes (1 Corinthians 13:8–10); this week's two premises explain how that cessation was engineered into the system.

Then turn, as the question does, to evaluating modern claims, and give the class a fair, biblical procedure rather than a sneer. Test one, purpose: biblical miracles confirmed new revelation; with revelation complete (Week 5), the confirming function has no object, and claims of new revelation fall under last week's verdict (Galatians 1:8–9). Test two, transmission: no one living can trace a gift to apostolic hands, and no one today can confer gifts on others, the very power Simon coveted has no living holder. Test three, character: biblical signs were instant, complete, public, and undeniable even by enemies (Acts 3:7–10; 4:14–16); claimed modern healings are typically gradual, partial, unverifiable, or of conditions invisible to observers, and the failures are quietly buried. Mark 16's accompanying signs included drinking poison and handling serpents without harm; no modern claimant volunteers for the whole list. Where the credentials of Pentecost are claimed, the evidence of Pentecost may fairly be required.

Coach the conversation's tone with real care, because behind many modern claims stand sincere people, some of them students' relatives, whose experiences are emotionally precious to them. Do not mock what you can answer; mockery converts no one (recall 2 Timothy 2:24–25, the Lord's servant "correcting his opponents with gentleness"). Acknowledge what is true: God still acts, providence is real, prayer moves the Almighty (James 5:16), and He "is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think" (Ephesians 3:20), without working through modern miracle-workers. The denial of modern miraculous gifts is not the denial of a living, answering God; it is confidence that God's present working honors the completed word His past miracles confirmed. The student who can make that distinction warmly, here is what the gifts were for, here is how they were given, here is why they were designed to cease, and here is the God who still hears you, is equipped for the most common doctrinal conversation he will ever have.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The two premises: apostolic-hands transmission and word-confirming purpose
- The arithmetic of cessation: conferral ends with the apostles; exercise ends a generation later
- Confirmation as a completable task: past-tense attestation (Hebrews 2:3–4; John 20:30–31)
- Design, not failure: scaffolding removed when the building stands
- Three tests for modern claims: purpose, transmission, character
- Providence and answered prayer affirmed without miraculous gifts (James 5:16; Ephesians 3:20)
- Gentleness with the sincerely convinced (2 Timothy 2:24–25)

Discussion Prompts

- Can you state the two-premise argument for the cessation of the gifts in your own words?
- Why does denying modern miraculous gifts not mean denying that God answers prayer today?
- How would you talk with a relative who says she was healed at a crusade, with both honesty and love?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back across this week's passages, God bearing witness to His word with power, and that power guarded from a man who wanted it for himself. The confirmed word now sits complete in your hands, "such a great salvation." Name one specific way Jesus is forming you through this truth, and one concrete step you will take this week to give the confirmed word the attention it deserves.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Draw the week's two scenes into one final frame: God on the witness stand, bearing testimony to His word with signs, wonders, miracles, and distributed gifts; and God guarding that power from a man who wanted it for his own résumé. Between the scenes stands the lesson's single sentence: the miracles served the word. And the word they served now sits, complete and confirmed, within reach of every student's hand, which is why Hebrews frames the only question that remains: "how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?" The age of miracles asks nothing from us but the attention its finished work deserves.

Shape the formation along the week's natural lines. Confidence: the student now knows the gospel he believes was not whispered into history but notarized in public, by a God who stacked witnesses, the Lord, the hearers, and His own attesting power; faith standing on confirmed testimony can stop apologizing for itself. Contentment: the student need not envy the apostolic age or chase its repetition; he holds its product, and "these are written so that you may believe" (John 20:31) names him as the intended beneficiary. Vigilance: the drift warning of Question 2 and the Simon autopsy of Question 7 both press the same point, that possession of privileges saves no one who neglects them; great salvation, greater accountability.

Insist on the capstone's concreteness. "I will take the Bible more seriously" evaporates; durable answers sound like: "I am setting a daily reading appointment and telling my wife so she can ask me about it"; "I am writing down the three-test answer to modern miracle claims while it is fresh, because my sister will ask"; "I identified my drift this week, the assembly, and I am resetting that anchor starting Sunday"; "I found Simon's hunger in my own service, and this week one act of mine will be completely anonymous." One way Jesus is forming; one step of attention; named, dated, checkable.

Then open the door to next week, because the class is now standing exactly where Paul's argument begins. If the gifts were scaffolding, someone will ask what Scripture says about when the scaffolding came down, and whether the church lost something precious in the dismantling. Paul answers both in 1 Corinthians 13: the gifts were partial and temporary, "tongues will cease," and what remains, faith, hope, and love, is greater than what passed. The age of miracles confirmed the word; the age of the confirmed word produces the life of love. That is Week 8, and the students who mastered this week's two premises will find Paul finishing their sentence.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The week in one sentence: the miracles served the word, and the word remains
- Confidence from confirmed testimony: faith that stops apologizing for itself
- Contentment: heirs of the miracles' product, not orphans of their age (John 20:31)
- Vigilance: privileges neglected save no one (Hebrews 2:3)
- Named, dated, checkable commitments as the capstone's currency
- Bridge to Week 8: when the perfect comes, and what abides

Discussion Prompts

- What is one sentence from this week you want to be able to say from memory a year from now?
- How has this lesson changed what you feel when you read the miracle accounts in the Gospels and Acts?
- What will “paying much closer attention” cost you this week, specifically, and is the great salvation worth it?