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SIGN SEEKERS.

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“Faith cometh by hearing.”—Rom. 10:17,

In reading the Holy Scriptures one is frequently brought face to face with this stubborn fact: God’s way of accomplishing his work is not just as the carnal or natural man thinks it should be. And if this fact is more conspicuous in any one thing than it is in others, it is as to the manner in which faith in the gospel of Christ is to be created in the breast of man. Inspiration tells us that faith comes by hearing, while the world in all past ages, as well as the present, seems to think that faith in man is to be begotten

by seeing miraculous signs and wonders.

I take it for granted that you are believers (nominally at least) in the Bible, and shall therefore appeal to it for evidence in the investigation of this question, believing that it should be the end of controversy on all subjects. If Paul was correct in saying that "faith comes by hearing," then those who take the other position (that it comes by seeing) are evidently mistaken. Paul, however, is not alone, for the Apostle James says: "Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth."—James 1:18. It would have been just as easy for him to have said, "with signs and wonders," as to have said, "with the word of truth," and the only reason to be assigned for his not having said it that way is, that he did not believe it that way. And if men are really begotten with the word of truth, they are not begotten by signs and wonders.

On the day of Pentecost there was a miraculous display of God's

power, causing unlearned Galileans to speak in languages they had never learned, but the only effect it seems to have had upon the multitude of unbelievers, was to cause them to marvel, some even going so far as to accuse them of being drunken. But while they stood in this bewildered, confused state of mind, Peter stood up and preached to them the gospel of Christ, the word of truth, and "when they heard these things they were pricked in their hearts," (Acts 2: 37), and began to inquire what they should do. Hence, you see that while a miraculous display of power may beget any amount of wonder and astonishment, it takes the word of truth to beget a gospel faith in the heart of man.

Peter, speaking of the gospel going to the Gentiles, says: "God made choice among us that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel and believe."—Acts 15: 7. Here, again, it is by hearing the word that they believe. Of the Corinthians it is said:

“Many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed, and were baptized.”—Acts 18:8. Paul said to the Ephesians: “In whom ye also trusted after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation.”—Eph. 1:13. They heard the word of truth and then believed or trusted in Christ. It is the word of truth with which we are to be begotten; the Corinthians, hearing, believed; when they heard these things, faith and conviction were begotten in their hearts.

I am aware that certain texts are quoted to prove that miracles have been used in the past to beget faith in some, especially during the ministry of Christ. John tells us: “Then many of the Jews that came to Mary and had seen the things which Jesus did [raising Lazarus] believed on him” (John 11:45), and that the chief priests sought to put Lazarus to death, “because that by reason of him many of the Jews went away and believed on Jesus.”—John 12:11. “Many believed in his name when they saw the mira-

cles which he did.”—John 2:23. See also John 4:53.

Before deciding that the miracles here is the sole cause of the faith in those individuals, it will be best, perhaps, to compare the above expressions with some that were made to and of his disciples. Just before starting for the house of Mary and Martha, when Lazarus was raised, the Savior said to his disciples: “And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, to the intent that ye may believe.”—John 11:15. Are we to understand that his followers were unbelievers previous to this time? If not, then it is just possible that those Jews who believed, when they saw Lazarus raised from the dead, were not unbelievers either.

When Peter and John came to the sepulchre, after the resurrection of the Master, John went into the sepulchre and “he saw and believed” (John 20:8). But you would hardly be willing to admit that he was an infidel up to that time. Again: “When therefore he was risen from

the dead his disciples remembered that he had said this unto them and they believed the scripture, and the word which Jesus had spoken.”—John 2: 22. Were they unbelievers in the Scriptures and in the word of Christ until after his resurrection? We hardly think so. But there were some things they did not fully understand and these, of course, they could not believe intelligently even though they were firm believers in Jesus as the Christ. Now, there were many in those days who had been baptized of John, who were more than half convinced that Jesus was the one of whom John prophesied, and who, it seems, were the intimate friends and associates of those who believed on him as the Christ. Some of these, like the nobleman who believed when his son was healed (John 4: 53), had faith enough to come to the Savior for help in their afflictions, which they would never have done if they had been unbelievers. Those individuals, on seeing his power over diseases, evil spirits, and death,

having already believed his teaching and the teaching of John, were ready to come out boldly and confess him as the Christ. Hence the statement: "They believed on him." Luke confirms this view of the matter when he says: "And all the people that heard him, and the publicans, justified God, being baptized with the baptism of John. But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel of God against themselves, being not baptized of him."—Luke 7: 29, 30.

Those, then, who believed on Jesus and justified God by accepting him as the Christ, whether before or after seeing his power made manifest, were, many of them at least, those whom John had baptized, and could not, therefore, be classed as unbelievers. Hence, when we read of persons believing on Him after seeing the miracles which he did, we attach the same meaning to it that we do to the statement that John saw and believed on entering the sepulchre. We understand it in the same sense as the statement

that his disciples believed the Scriptures and the words which Jesus had spoken after he had risen from the dead. (See John 2:22, quoted above.) The infidel has had as good grounds for asserting that his disciples were unbelievers in the Scriptures, unbelievers in the words of Jesus, and unbelievers in the resurrection, until after the resurrection of the Master, as you have for saying that those Jews who believed on him, upon seeing the miracles which he did, were unbelievers in him previous to that time.

I am fully convinced that miracles will not create faith in those who disbelieve the word, and that they were never intended to do so. The Savior, in one of his parables, speaks of a certain rich man who died and "lifted up his eyes in hell." This man looked across the great gulf between himself and Father Abraham and began to pray for relief; but on being assured that there was no help for him, at that time at least, he began to pray for his brethren who were still in the land

of the living, as follows: "I pray thee therefore, Father, that thou wouldest send him [Lazarus] to my father's house, for I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment. Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them. And he said, Nay, Father Abraham, but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent. And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead."—Luke 16: 27-31.

If Father Abraham understood the situation correctly, those who would not believe the testimony of Moses and the prophets would not believe if they could see a miracle, even the resurrection of one from the dead. And you will please bear in mind that we have more evidence than those five brethren. We have as they had, Moses and the prophets; then we have in addition to that, the testimony of

Christ and the apostles. And yet we have men who will read in the word of Christ that these signs shall follow them that believe, and then ask for a miracle to make them believe, claiming at the same time that they are believers in Christ and in his word. But the Savior told the Jews that if they believed Moses they would believe in him, and so I think, now, if those sign seekers believed the words of Christ they would believe in miracles without having to see them. That Father Abraham was correct, is proven by a number of examples recorded in the New Testament. Luke records one as follows: "And he was casting out a devil, and it was dumb. And it came to pass, when the devil was gone out, the dumb spake and the people wondered. But some of them said, he casteth out devils by Beelzebub the chief of the devils. And others tempting him sought of him a sign from heaven."—Luke 11: 14-16.

Here, as on the day of Pentecost, the manifestation of God's power

caused them to wonder, while the more hardened ones declared that his work was done by the power of Satan, and demanded a sign from heaven. But it seems to have fallen far short of creating faith in them; "Faith comes by hearing."

Another case is recorded in Acts. The lame man at the gate of the temple had been healed. Peter and John had been arrested and were under trial for the same. They are told to step aside out of the council, and the authorities reason like this: "What shall we do to these men? For that indeed a notable miracle hath been done by them is manifest to all them that dwell in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it. But that it spread no further among the people, let us straitly threaten them, that they speak henceforth to no man in this name."—Acts 4: 16, 17. Here they admit the miracle, but are not convinced that those who did it were men of God.

Again it is said of the Jews: "But though he had done so many miracles before them yet they believed

not on him.”—John 12: 37.

Paul says: “The Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom. But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling block and unto the Greeks foolishness.”—1 Cor. 1: 22, 23.

The Jews required a sign, and even that had no effect on them; for they believed not on Jesus though he had done so many miracles before them. And even the preaching of Christ to them was a stumbling block. So it is today to sign seekers. Like the Jews, they demand a sign and then stumble over the preaching of the word. Hence, the more we investigate, the more thoroughly we become convinced that Abraham was right in saying that those who will not believe the word, would not be persuaded even though they should see a miracle. Also that Paul was right in saying that faith comes by hearing.

I shall not say here that all sign seekers are the children of the devil, but I will say this, All sign seekers who are not the children of

the devil have suffered themselves to be drawn into bad company. I would not feel justified in saying even this if I did not have an abundance of proof for it in the Bible. Jesus said to the Jews: "Ye do that which ye have seen with your father. * * Ye do the deeds of your father. * * Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do."—John 8: 38, 41-44. He also says in verse 39: "If ye were Abraham's children ye would do the works of Abraham." According to the foregoing, children will do something like their fathers. If they are Abraham's children they will do like him; if they are children of God they will follow his example, and if they are the children of the devil they will imitate him. Those Jews whom we have shown to have been sign seekers, are declared by the Savior to have been the children of the devil, and therefore doing as he had done before them. We would suppose, therefore, even if there was no positive evidence, that he too,

was a sign seeker. We are not left however, to mere supposition, for turning to the word, we find that after Jesus was baptized and had fasted forty days, Satan makes his appearance and begins, as in the garden of Eden, his work of temptation. And among other things, when he gets the Savior on the pinnacle of the temple, he challenges him to demonstrate that he is what he professes to be, the Son of God. And he does this in that bantering, sarcastic manner peculiar to all sign seekers: "If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down from hence, for it is written, He shall give his angels charge over thee to keep thee; and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone." —Luke 4: 9-11.

I want you to notice closely the manner in which this demand is presented. "If thou be the Son of God." As much as to say: I don't believe you are. I dare you to try to demonstrate it. Ah, ha! you're afraid to try it. You are an im-

postor. If you were what you profess to be, you could fall down without hurting yourself. You dare not attempt it. He even quotes scripture to help him out. But the Savior simply refers him to Moses and the prophets by saying, "It is written."

Now, let us notice the manner in which his children presented their temptations. When the Savior was on the cross, those who were the means of putting him there said to him: "Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save thyself. If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross. Likewise also the chief priests, mocking him, with the scribes and elders, said, He saved others, himself he cannot save. If he be the king of Israel, let him now come down from the cross and we will believe him." —Matt. 27: 40-33. The same bantering manner as their father. "If thou be the Son of God." "If he be the king of Israel." If he is what he professes to be, let him demonstrate it by coming down

from that cross. If he will do that we will believe on him. Well did the Savior say of them: "Ye do the deeds of your father." "Ye are of your father the devil, and the lust of your father ye will do."

Are there any now who are doing the deeds of his Satanic majesty? I have held three discussions with ministers who preach "a form of godliness and deny the power thereof," and every one of them demanded a sign. On two occasions I sat by and saw ministers of this same stamp fix up a dose of arsenic and offer to one of my brethren, saying: "If the signs follow the believer now, just drink this and demonstrate it. If it don't kill you, then we will believe you. If you can drink this without its killing you, it will do more toward convincing this people than all the preaching you can do." Now, if the statement of the Savior, "by their fruits ye shall know them," is still true, it certainly requires no great wisdom to see whose children these ministers are; whose deeds they are doing.

The devil said, "If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down from hence." Those who crucified the Savior said, "If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross and we will believe you." And these ministers say: "If the signs follow the believer now, just drink this poison, or restore to this blind man his sight, and we will believe you." "By their fruits ye shall know them." If these ministers who preach "a form of godliness and deny the power thereof" (2 Tim. 3: 5) are not the children of the devil, they should quit imitating him, quit asking for signs in that bantering manner that was so characteristic of him and his children eighteen centuries ago. If they do not belong to that fraternity, they should not wear the badge.

If you should be tempted to pronounce the foregoing too harsh, please withhold judgment long enough for me to call your attention to some of the compliments paid by the Savior to that class of people in his day. The first I shall notice

runs as follows: "Then certain of the scribes and of the Pharisees answered saying: Master we would see a sign from thee. But he answered and said unto them, An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas."—Matt. 12: 38, 39. What kind of people does he say it is that seek after a sign? "Evil and adulterous." Is that the class of people you like to associate with? Would you like to be one of them? You would not? Then if I were you I would not join them. At another time the Pharisees and Saducees came to him, demanding, in that same tempting, taunting manner, a sign from heaven; but he said to them: "O ye hypocrites!" Do you know what a hypocrite is? If not, just notice closely the treachery of those Pharisees and Saducees and you will soon learn. They come to the Savior in that "goody, goody," manner, pretending that they wanted to see a sign for their benefit—to convince them, as well as

for the benefit of the people standing by, but in reality they were trying to get the advantage of him. If he should show them a sign they were ready to declare it was done by Beelzebub, and if he should refuse, they were ready to say that he could not do it; that he was afraid to put the matter to the test in their presence. But he said to them: "O ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky, but ye cannot discern the signs of the times. A wicked and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign, and there shall no sign be given unto it but the sign of the prophet Jonas."—Matt. 16: 1-4. Here again it is hypocrites, wicked and adulterous persons, who are clamoring for a sign, while the Savior tells them that if they believed the teachings of Moses, whose disciples they claimed to be, they would believe in him, and that, instead of demanding signs, they should search the Scriptures, and believe them.

Mark records it, that when they came and demanded a sign, the

Savior sighed deeply in "his spirit and saith, Why doth this generation seek after a sign? Verily I say unto you, there shall no sign be given unto this generation."—Mark 8: 12. Sign seekers, then, are not to be gratified. No sign is to be given to them. Not only that, but it seems to have grieved the Master that any who professed to believe his words, given through Moses and the prophets, should suffer themselves to get down low enough to ape the adversary by asking Him to demonstrate his teachings by signs and miracles.

Luke records the teachings of Christ in regard to sign seekers like this: "And he was casting out a devil, and it was dumb. And it came to pass, when the devil was gone out, the dumb spake; and the people wondered. But some of them said, He casteth out devils through Beelzebub the chief of the devils. And others, tempting him, sought of him a sign from heaven."—Luke 11: 14-16. They saw the devils cast out, and the dumb made

to speak; but instead of being convinced, they declare that he did this through the power and influence of Beelzebub, and then demand a sign from heaven. But the Savior says to them in the 29th verse: "This is an evil generation; they seek a sign; and there shall no sign be given it, but the sign of Jonas the prophet."

We see, then, that it is recorded in four places in the New Testament, that the enemies of the Savior came to him for miracles to gratify their morbid curiosity in regard to him. But instead of gratifying them, he calls them evil, wicked, hypocritical, adulterous persons, and tells them plainly that they shall have no sign only as his death and resurrection after three days, shall be a sign unto them. It would be a hard matter to be harsher with that class of people than the Savior was. He undoubtedly had a very poor opinion of sign seekers. Satan demanded a miracle of the Savior when he began his ministry among men. Those wicked, adulterous

hypocrites kept it up during his ministry, and finally crucified him, demanding that he should come down from the cross, if he was the Son of God; declaring they were ready to believe him if he would only do so. Do you wish to become a member of that society? If you do, the first man you hear preaching as the Savior did, that the signs shall follow them that believe, just say to him: "If these signs follow the believer now, you restore to some blind man his eyesight, raise the dead, or drink a dose of poison without it hurting you, and then we will believe you." Satan will then give you the right hand of fellowship and you will be recognized as one of his own children. You will be known by your fruits. "Whomsoever ye list yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are."

Not only did the Savior refuse to gratify those who demanded signs of him, but he was very careful, on some occasions at least, to keep the matter from them. When he healed

the leper he said, "See thou tell no man, but go thy way, show thyself to the priest, and offer the gifts that Moses commanded for a testimony unto them."—Matt. 8: 11.

When he healed the two blind men, he said, "See that no man know it."

—Matt. 9: 30. When he was trans-

figured on the mountain, before

Peter, James and John, he said:

"Tell the vision to no man until after the Son of Man be risen again from the dead."—Matt. 17: 9. And

after he was risen from the dead,

Peter says of him: "Him God

raised up the third day and shewed

him openly, not to all the people;

but unto witnesses chosen before of

God, even to us, who did eat and

drink with him after he rose from

the dead."—Acts 10: 40, 41. When

he raised the daughter of Jairus he

put the unbelievers all out of the

house. See Luke 8: 51-54.

When he came into his own coun-

try, Matthew says of him: "And

he did not many mighty works

there because of their unbelief."—

Matt. 13: 58; also Mark 6: 5, 6. But

according to many ideas, there is the very place where his greatest miracles should have been performed. His own brethren entertained that opinion, before their conversion, for they said to him: "If thou do these things, show thyself to the world." See John 7: 3-5. Surely the Lord's ways are not man's ways. Man's way would be to perform the greatest miracles where there is the most unbelief; the Lord's way was to perform no mighty works in such places. Man's way would be to appoint a time and place for performing miracles and invite the unbelievers to come in and witness them; the Lord's way was to put the unbeliever out of the house and then tell those who were healed to "see that no man know it." Man's way would be for the Savior, after his resurrection, to go around and show himself to every body, to "all the people;" the Lord's way was to choose witnesses, show himself to them, and send them out to testify that he was indeed risen from the dead.

“But,” says one, “Don’t the Bible teach us that miracles will be performed in the last days to make men believe?” Yes. “Well, hasn’t the time come for that prophecy to be fulfilled?” Yes, I think it has. “Then why don’t you Latter Day Saints perform miracles to make us believe?” Because that is not our work. “Whose work is it then?” We will let the Bible answer: “And there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and they shall show great signs and wonders insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect.”—Matt. 24: 2, 11. False Christs and false prophets are to do the working of miracles to make believers. Is this to be done to make them believe the gospel? Paul answers that: “And then shall that Wicked be revealed, * * even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth that they

might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie; that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness."—2 Thes. 2: 8-12.

False Christs, false prophets, and "that wicked one," are to work miracles to make men "believe a lie;" but faith in the gospel comes by hearing the word of truth preached by those who are sent of God.

This antichrist power of the latter days is further described by John the Revelator, as a beast with two horns, having the appearance of a lamb, but speaking like a dragon; exercising all the powers of the beast with seven heads and ten horns which preceded him. John says of him: "And he doeth great wonders so that he maketh fire come down from heaven on earth in the sight of men, and he deceiveth them that dwell on the earth by the means of those miracles which he had power to do in the sight of the beast."—Rev. 13: 13, 14.

Again he tells us that he "saw the unclean spirits like frogs," that came out of the mouth of the dragon, the beast and the false prophet, and of them he says: "For they are the spirits of devils working miracles, which go forth unto the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of the great day of God Almighty."—Rev. 16: 14. First they are deceived by the miracles of this antichrist power, and then they are gathered together to fight against the Almighty by the same means. Is it any wonder? Instead of searching the Scriptures, as the Master tells us to do, and trying to follow them, men bind themselves with their creeds, deny the power of God, and if any dare to preach as the Master, they will cry out: "Just show us a sign—drink some poison—and then we will believe you." The devil "laughs in his sleeve" and say "never mind, my boy, I'll work miracles for you. I have quit number of servants out now, w special business is to work mira

They will divine, prophesy, bring up your dead friends, and even call fire down from heaven for you in order to make you believe. Those fellows who tell you that the signs are to follow the believer are impostors. The signs should precede and create the faith. I have been in the business for many centuries, and I always work the miracles first and thus create faith in those who see them. I have been very successful in making converts, too." So he has. But that he and his converts will be successful in escaping the judgments of God, I very much doubt. There has been a continual warfare from the beginning. The sign seekers have been for Satan in all this conflict and will continue to be until the last great battle is fought. There they will meet their doom. The Revelator, describing this wonderful battle, tells us that he saw one, who is called "faithful and true," sitting upon "a white horse" and making war "in righteousness." His name called "the Word of God," and "King of kings, and Lord of

lords." The armies of heaven followed him, they being also clothed in white and sitting upon white horses; a sharp sword proceeded out of his mouth, with which he is to smite the nations. Then John describes an angel, standing in the sun and inviting the fowls of the air to come to the supper of the great God, to eat the flesh of kings, captains, mighty men, bond men, and free men. Then he describes the beast and the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against him that sat on the horse and against his army. Describing the result of this conflict he says: "And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophets that wrought miracles before him, with which he deceived them that had received the mark of the beast, and them that worshipped his image. These both were cast into the lake of fire, burning with brimstone. And the remnant were slain with the sword of him that sat upon the horse, which sword proceeded out of his mouth; and all the fowls were filled with their flesh."—Rev. 19: 20, 21.

Here we see that those who are with this antichrist power in the last struggle against the Almighty, are those who have been deceived

and made to "believe a lie," by miracles wrought by false prophets. And that their leaders (the beast and the false prophets) who were so willing to gratify this morbid curiosity for the supernatural, are taken in this conflict and cast into the lake of fire, while those who were thus deceived are slain with the sword of the Master, and their carcasses given to the vultures. Rather a discouraging picture for those who say they would believe if they could only see a miracle, but it is the best that the word of God holds out for them.

"But," says one, "I thought you people believed in miracles." So we do, but we believe they are to "follow" the believer, not go before and make believers. If the Savior had said: "Go ye into all the world and work miracles in the presence of every creature, and faith in the gospel shall follow those miracles," we might possibly believe it that way; but as he says to preach the gospel to make believers, and that "faith comes by hearing," making the promise that certain signs shall follow as the result or effect of that faith, we are inclined to believe it just that way.

There is such a marked difference between God's ways and the ways

of Satan, that I see no excuse for anyone, who reads the Bible, falling into Satan's traps. Jesus and his servants preach the gospel as the means of converting man, declaring that "He that is of God heareth God's words," and that those who will not hear them "are not of God." That the gospel is hid only to "them that are lost," who have suffered themselves to be blinded by the "god of this world." On the other hand, Satan opposes the Savior, by demanding more than the preaching of the truth. He then puts it into the hearts of those who are willing to listen to him, that the preaching of the gospel is not the thing to make men believe. He tells them to follow his example, and demand of those fellows who are preaching the correct form of godliness, and who contend for the power of the same, to demonstrate their teaching by drinking poison or raising the dead. He thus blinds the minds of them that believe not, and prevents the light of the glorious gospel of Christ from shining unto them. And when they are sufficiently blinded, he sends out his false christs and shows them great signs and wonders, makes them believe a lie, by the means of those miracles, gathers them together:

against the Son of God in the last day, by the same means, and leads them on, to fight against the Almighty, as he has been doing up to that time, until the two powers meet in the last great struggle. Then his power is broken and he is cast into the lake of fire. His followers are slain and their bodies devoured by fowls of the air. They asked for miracles and the devil gave them what they wanted, and thus led them to ruin and destruction.

My friends, take warning. "Ask for the old paths where is the good way." Ask, "Lord what wilt thou have me to do?" Ask, "Sirs, what shall I do to be saved?" Ask, "Men and brethren what shall we do?" Ask for the truth. Ask for the straight and narrow way. Ask for the guiding influence of God's Holy Spirit. But don't ask for miracles; that is what the devil demanded of the Savior. That is what the evil, wicked, adulterous hypocrites among the Jews demanded of the Master. The fruit thereof is bitter; the end is death. The power of God is with his people, but he never gratifies sign seekers. The children of God are known by their fruits. The children of the devil are known the same way. They do the deeds of their fathers. May God bless you.