

A Book Study  
 “Counterfeit Miracles”  
 - By Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield  
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### Introduction to B.B. Warfield

- **Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield** (Nov 5, 1851 – Feb 16, 1921) was professor of theology at Princeton Seminary from 1887 to 1921. Some conservative Presbyterians consider him to be the last of the great Princeton theologians before the split in 1929 that formed Westminster Theological Seminary and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church
- For more information: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/B. B. Warfield](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/B._B._Warfield)

### Introduction to “Counterfeit Miracles” and this Book Study

- *Counterfeit Miracles* is actually a compilation of a series of lectures Warfield provided to students at the Columbia Theological Summary, Columbia, SC in October 1917
- Warfield addressed the historicity and the validity of many miracles, which have occurred throughout church history
- In brief, a distinction is made between the miracles of the Apostolic age, which are “beyond nature” with those of the post Apostolic era called “Ecclesiastical” miracles, which are acknowledged by Faith-Healers of all ages to be inferior to those of the Apostolic era
- Warfield makes a compelling case that supernatural Apostolic miracles ceased even before the Apostles died off, and what the church has been experiencing since are providential miracles at best, demonic miracles at worst, but not supernatural miracles
- This book study highlights numerous sections within the *Counterfeit Miracles* which supports Warfield’s position that supernatural Apostolic-age miracles from God have indeed ceased
- Many of the challenges Warfield witnessed regarding Faith-Healers of his era are the same we see in our era – subjective and incomplete healings, unsubstantiated claims, and false teachings
- Chapters:
  - ♦ Chapter 1 – The Cessation of the Charismata
  - ♦ Chapter 2 – Patristic and Medieval Marvels
  - ♦ Chapter 3 – Roman Catholic Miracles
  - ♦ Chapter 4 – Irvingite Gifts
  - ♦ Chapter 5 – Faith-Healing
  - ♦ Chapter 6 – Mind-Cure

### Chapter 1 – The Cessation of the Charismata

- Pg 3. Warfield leads off with highlighting the miracles of Christ. “The number of the miracles which He wrought may easily be underrated. It has been said that in effect He banished disease and death from Palestine for the three years of His ministry”
- Pg 6. “Theologians of the post-Reformation era...taught with great distinctness that the charismata ceased with the Apostolic age” and “The period most commonly set for their continuance is three centuries; the date of their cessation is ordinarily said to have been about the time of Constantine”
- Pg 8. Warfield recorded William Whiston’s opinion that the charismata ceased in 381 A.D., which marked the triumph of Athanasianism - the teachings of Athanasius, 4th-century bishop of Alexandria, asserting that Christ is of the same substance as God; adopted by the Council of Nicea as orthodox doctrine
- Pg 8. Warfield also quoted John Wesley’s declaration that “miracles stopped when the empire became Christian because then, ‘a general corruption both of faith and morals infected the

church – which by that revolution, as St. Jerome says, lost as much of its virtue as it had gained of wealth and power”

- Pgs 8-9. Warfield quoted popular historian, G. Uhlhorn, in his book “The Conflict of Christianity with Heathenism,” by stating that “witnesses who are above suspicion leave no room for doubt that the miraculous powers of the Apostolic age continued to operate at least into the 3<sup>rd</sup> century”
- Pg 9. Warfield quoted Bishop Mandel Creighton who stated that “The Apostles were endowed with extraordinary powers necessary for the establishment of the Church, but not necessary for its permanent maintenance”
- Pgs 15-16. Warfield sums up historical findings since the Apostolic era: “When we come to think of it, it is rather surprising that the Christians had no raisings from the dead to point to through all these years. The fact is striking testimony to the marked sobriety of their spirit. The heathen had them in plenty”
- Pg 23. Warfield records Bishop Kaye’s findings from his comparison of the statements in the Book of Acts with the writings of the Fathers of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century: “My conclusion then is, that the power of working miracles was not extended beyond the disciples upon whom the Apostles conferred it by the imposition of their hands. As the number of these disciples gradually diminished, the instances of the exercise of miraculous powers became continually less frequent, and ceased entirely at the death of the last individual on whom the hands of the Apostles had been laid.

### Chapter 2 – Patristic and Medieval Marvels

- Pg 38. Warfield had this to say about some of the post-Apostolic Church Fathers:
  - ♦ **Jerome** was the leading biblical scholar of his day (Note: Jerome rejected the Apocryphal books as canonical, yet, he believed in the perpetuity of Mary’s virginity)
  - ♦ **Augustine** was the greatest thinker (Note: He accepted 11 Apocryphal books as canonical, but rejected the perpetuity of Mary’s virginity)
  - ♦ **Chrysostom** was the greatest preacher of the day
  - ♦ **Ambrose** was the greatest ecclesiastic
- Pg 38. Warfield quotes Augustine about a “considerable number of [miracles] were wrought by the relics of the ‘most glorious martyr, Stephen’” whose bones had come to light in Jerusalem in 415. Almost 70 miracles in less than two years were ascribed to the Stephen’s shrine in Hippo, who acquired fragments in 424
- Pg 43. “It was naturally a source of embarrassment to Augustine that heretics had miracles to appeal to just like his own; and that the heathen had had something very like them from time immemorial”
- Pg 46-51. The testimony of the early church fathers convey that miracles ceased with the Apostolic age, and yet miracles of a lesser sort (“Ecclesiastical Miracles”) were still occurring during their lifetimes – but these miracles are ascribed to a saint’s tomb or relics, or even the Eucharist, in other words from worship of relics
- Pg 53. Augustine points out that the connection of alleged miracles with erroneous doctrines invalidates their claim to be genuine works of God
- Pg 53-54. 19<sup>th</sup> century theologian J.H. Newman in his book “*The Miracles Of Ecclesiastical History Compared With Those Of Scripture, As Regards Their Nature, Credibility And Evidence*” describes “Ecclesiastical miracles” as those “miracles posterior to the Apostolic age, are, on the whole different in object, character, and evidence from those of Scripture on the whole” and “the miracles of Scripture are undeniably beyond nature; those of ecclesiastical history are often scarcely more than extraordinary accidents or coincidences”

**Chapter 3 – Roman Catholic Miracles**

- Pgs 74-75. Warfield states “this great stream of miracle-working (attributed to relics of saints) which has run thus throughout the history of the church was not original to the church, but entered it from without” (via heathenism). [and] “The more miraculous a story the more readily it found believing acceptance... [and no one] no longer knew how to distinguish between truth and falsehood.
- Pg 76. Warfield states “The miracles of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (e.g., Lourdes) recall those of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century”
- Pgs 76-78. Warfield acknowledged that Augustine was incomparably the greatest man whom the Church possessed “between Paul the Apostle and Luther the reformer.” Augustine was called “Augustine the Truthful”, YET, Warfield continued, “whenever it is a case of marvelous happenings, he [Augustine] shows himself quite unreliable” believing unsubstantiated miracles and expecting his readers to do the same
- Pg 83. Warfield states “what we find, when we cast our eye over the whole body of Christian legends, growing up from the 3<sup>rd</sup> century down through the Middle Ages, is merely a reproduction, in Christian form, ...the legends of heathendom”
- Pg 93. Warfield states “The world was filled with false relics” and “they worked [miracles] as well as the true”
- Pg 98. “The great majority of the miracles of healing which have been wrought throughout the history of the church, have been wrought through the agency of relics...the actual graves of the saints...[even] fragments of their bodies, however minute...have become healing shrines”
- Pg 106. With the Catholic Church’s proclamation in 1954 of the Immaculate Conception of Mary, Lourdes, France became the greatest healing shrine in the world, counting pilgrims in the hundreds of thousands and even millions on an annual basis
- During the 20 years between 1888-1907 the number of cures recorded at Lourdes was 2,665, yielding a yearly average of 133. One cure for every 1,250 visitors was calculated – a paltry number (less than 0.1%) when you consider that Christ & His Apostles healed 100% each and every time in the Gospels and Acts
- Pg 108. Many healings at Lourdes were partial healings. Warfield recorded Bertrin’s medical findings “that it is quite common for traces of the infirmity to remain...[which supposedly keeps] the cured person in grateful memory of the benefit received.”
- Pg 110. “Why, after all, should miracles show limitations?”
- Pg 123. “Miracles should not carry the doctrine, but the doctrine the miracles”

**Chapter 4 – Irvingite Gifts**

- **Note:** Edward Irving (1792-1834) was the founder of a movement near London England labeled as “Irvingism” in the early 1800’s. [This movement eventually evolved into the Holiness movement of the mid-1800’s, which then evolved into the Pentecostal movement in the early 1900’s (1<sup>st</sup> Wave); which then evolved into the 2<sup>nd</sup> Wave by the 1970’s; which then evolved into the 3<sup>rd</sup> Wave exuding “holy laughter” in the 1980’s; which is now evolving into the 4<sup>th</sup> Wave exuding even more bizarre behavior and false teachings]
- Pg 140. Irvingites were noted for tongues speaking, prophecies, and miracle workings as early as 1831
- Pg 142. However, “contradictions began to emerge” and “spirit was arrayed against spirit.” In other words their prophecies were contradictory and false
- Pg 153. It was revealed that key leaders of the movement (2 sisters) were untrustworthy – 1 sister called the other a false prophet, and was “constrained to confess that on some occasions at least she was herself the author of her utterances”

**Chapter 5 – Faith-Healing**

- Pg 158. In 1887 there were more than 30 “Faith-Homes” based in America for the treatment of disease by prayer alone
- Pgs 159-161. Warfield presents “the most readable and the most rational presentation of the views of the Faith-Healers, is Doctor A. J. Gordon’s *The Ministry of Healing, or Miracles of Cure in All Ages* as “evading the issue” and “formally declines to define a miracle” and “this method dealing with the subject [of miracles early in their books] is not peculiar to this author, but is somewhat characteristic of the advocates of Faith-Healing” and “the only effect of their refusal of definition at the outset, therefore, is to confuse the issue. Now this confusion of the issue is a very serious matter. It has first of all the effect of permitting long lists of unsifted cases to be pleaded as proofs of the proposition defended, although a large number of these cases would be at once excluded from consideration on a closer definition of exactly what is proved.”
- Pg 165. “He who prays for a harvest, and does not plough, and sow, and reap, is a fanatic” and “He who prays for healing and does not employ all the means of healing within his reach – hygiene, nursing, medicine, surgery, - unless God has promised to heal him in the specific mode of precise miracle, is certainly a fanatic and may become also a suicide”
- Pg 169. Warfield believed that Mark 16:17-18 “bears an apocryphal appearance” and “the passage is uncanonical and of uninspired origin” [Note: Assuming Mark 16:17-18 is canonical, this passage, along with Hebrews 2:3-4, is very useful in defending the cessation of supernatural gifts, where Mark 16 depicts the miracles in present tense, and Hebrews 2:3-4 depicts the Apostolic miracles in past tense]
- Pg 174. “John 14:12 [*...he who believes in Me, the works that I do, he will do also; and greater works than these he will do...*]; is worthy of more attention. The Faith-Healers do not even profess, however, to do the great works which Christ did – and much less can they point to their healings as greater works than these. No miracles...greater than those which Christ did, have been done by any of His followers.” He goes on to state that most reputable scholars believe Christ alluded to these greater works as “spiritual works”
- Pg 179. “We cannot expect to be [supernaturally] emancipated from the laws which govern the [world]. That would be to take us out of the world”
- Pg 182. Warfield states that an appeal to “eclectic church history” shows a “sharp break at the age of Constantine” with the explicit observance that “all the miracles of ‘the Apostate Church’...are declared to be ‘the testimony of the Adversary’ working counterfeit miracles”
- Pg 184. “It is observable, further, that the cases which are successfully treated in the Faith-Houses have their natural limits. Not everyone is cured.”
- Pg 185. “It is, however, no exaggeration to say that the great mass of cures wrought by Faith-Healers are closely paralleled by some or all of these sister practitioners” [the Apostate Church, Buddhists, pantheists, atheists, and the mesmerists]
- Pg 186. Warfield presents several cases of “withered hands” being healed by several means: 1) Faith Healers; 2) Roman Catholic; 3) Mesmerism; 4) Imagination; and by 5) Deception
- Pg 188. Warfield stated that “everyone who has sought to trace up alleged cases of Faith-Healing will have felt the grave doubt which frequently rests upon the identification of the disease which is asserted to have been cured. Yet we are asked to believe in multifarious miracles on the faith of the diagnosis of this, that, or the other unknown person.”

- Pg 191. "...a sharp line is drawn between the class of cures which can be obtained and the class of cures which cannot be obtained by faith, and that this line is drawn approximately at the exact spot where the line runs which separate cures which can from those which cannot be obtained by mind-cure, mesmerism, Perkins' tractors, and other similar practices. There are classes of sickness which Faith-Healing can cure, and there are sicknesses which it cannot cure. In particular, for example, it is powerless to heal broken bones, to renew mutilations, to do so little a thing as to restore lost teeth."
- Pg 193. "If miracles are to be common, everyday occurrences, normal and not extraordinary, they cease to attract attention, and lose their very reason of existence" and Faith Healers overlook numerous important biblical facts, primarily that the miraculous gifts in the New Testament were the credentials of the Apostle
- Pg 195. "The Faith Healing practice leads to the production of "professionals" standing between the soul and God"

### Chapter 6 – Mind-Cure

- **NOTE:** What Warfield would call Mind-Cure or Suggestive healings, we would call "psychosomatic" healings – those healings which occur as a result of positive thinking or even mental trickery.
- Pg 201. Warfield states that mind-healing is historically and currently going "under the names of Animal Magnetism, Mesmerism, Spiritualism, Mental Healing, New Thought, [and] Christian Science"
- Pg 201. "Faith-Healing...that is to say, mind-cure – by virtue of the very fact that some mental act or state is held to be the producing cause at work, can make no pretense to miraculousness"
- Pg 202. "...in the action of all these varieties [of healings]...a leading part is taken by suggestion. This suggestion, when given its most scientifically developed form, is called hypnotism"
- Pgs 207-208. "In its practice Christian Science does not differ greatly from other forms of mind-cure." And "...mind-healing, which has become a religion, has in the course of a very few years overspread the earth." And "Christian Science is unquestionably a granddaughter of Mesmerism."
- **NOTE:** Kenneth Copeland, Frederick Price, and other modern day proponents of the Word of Faith movement testify to being greatly influenced by Kenneth Hagin, whose writings and teachings can be traced to E.W. Kenyon – a Baptist Preacher with Christian Science leanings who promoted "the positive confession of the Word of God" and must be recognized as the real founder of today's Positive Confession movement
- Pg 216. Warfield provides some history of the Christian Science movement and the teachings of Mary Baker Eddy – "We are sick because we think we ourselves sick; we are well whenever we change our minds and say we are well until we believe it"
- Pg 220. "...the first step in Christian Science [is] you must turn away from historical Christianity. It is the "new knowledge" that does the work"
- Pg 220 "A palsied arm [withered hand syndrome], we are told, was cured by reading a single sentence: 'All is Mind.'"
- Pg 229. Warfield quotes Sir William Osler on why Mrs. Eddy went to a dentist [why didn't she just believed her tooth didn't hurt] "Potent as is the influence of mind on body....and we know only too well that nowadays the prayer of faith neither sets a broken thigh nor checks an epidemic of typhoid fever"

### Bibliography Notes

- Pg 237-238. Warfield quoted theologian Gilles recording that charismata was still heard in the church during the time of Justin & Irenæus (200 AD). "Justin and Irenæus are probably the latest witnesses of a prophetic gift of grace in the church...It is generally wholly uncertain whether we can still really find 'gifts of grace' in the church in great amount in the time of Justin & Irenæus"
- Pg 245. Warfield quoted Charles Herman "in the early years of the Christian Church, this command to heal the sick appears to have been fulfilled to a considerable degree, and history records that Christian healing was practiced until the end of the third century. Then it appears to have been gradually discontinued, as the spiritual life of the church declined, until the power was entirely lost sight of in the gross materialism that culminated in the union of Church and State"
- Pg 268. Warfield stated that A. D. White records that Frank Buckland noted that the relics of St. Rosalia at Palermo are really the bones of a goat; and yet they still cured diseases & epidemics
- Pgs 284-285. Warfield records Jean de Bonnefon on the miracles of Lourdes – "One physician, for example, writes: "For a great number of sick people, and particularly women, Lourdes is a benefit...Another writes in a less genial spirit "The enterprise of Lourdes is useful for feeble-minded people"
- Pg 309. Warfield records Doctor A. T. Schofield on his findings at a Faith-house in Mannedorf where many grew no better while there, but rather worse – "the bulk at any rate of the cases benefited are clearly mental, nervous, and hysterical"
- Pg 209. Warfield quotes eminent physician, J. M. Charcot – "On the other hand, the domain of faith-healing is limited; to produce its effects it must be applied to those cases which demand for their cure no intervention beyond the power which the mind has over the body...For example, no instance can be found amongst the records sacred to so-called miraculous cures where the faith-cure has availed to restore an amputated limb."

### CONCLUSION

- What is interesting to note of the post-Apostolic miracles recorded in Warfield's *Counterfeit Miracles* is the inferior quality and the whimsical nature of these "Ecclesiastical" miracles
- These "Ecclesiastical" miracles, recorded earnestly as early as the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, seem to be of the same inferiority and whimsical nature we see in our time having limitations similar to miracles performed by psychics, psycho-therapy, witchdoctors, occultists, atheists, etc. – unable to heal broken bones, restore missing limbs, or repair DNA; Whereas we see Christ and His Apostles healing every one of every illness and malady
- We can only conclude from not only an historical perspective, but also from a Biblical perspective, that the so called miracles reported today are not of the supernatural quality seen in the Gospels and in Acts
- Therefore, the miracles of today are either providential in nature, coincidental, psychosomatic (suggestive), or even demonic – but none of them can be classified as supernaturally from God
- God is indeed a miracle working God since, by nature, He is outside of nature. BUT, in our post-Apostolic age He now works within the laws of nature which He purposefully established, and within the parameters of His established Word, else we would not be able to "prove all things" or to even "discern the spirits"
- We won't see supernatural miracles from God again until the world sees the 2 witnesses as recorded in Revelation 11