

# Faithfulness Or Foolishness?

## "Praise the Lord, pass the serpents in Georgia"

An article appearing in the September 29 issue of the Houston Chronicle reported on "Holiness" churches which practice handling snakes and drinking poison. The article said they do these things because of a strict interpretation of Mark 16:18, "They will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover."

The article said, "Both men ["Holiness" preachers] have fingers that are twisted grotesquely from the neuro-toxic venom" of snake bites. It also told of those who have died from snake bites, including the founder of the "Holiness" movement, George Hensley. We wonder why these things have happened? Jesus said, "It will by no means hurt them." So why were they hurt? Why have men died? The answer is, because the passage does not apply to them, or anyone else who has lived after the first century. Mark 16:18 was spoken to the apostles and it applied to them. Some of the eleven had a hardened heart of unbelief (Mark 16:14). Jesus said, if they believed in Him, they would be able to perform miracles (Mark 16:14, 17-18). He had already promised to send the Holy Spirit, but if they did not believe, they could not receive Him (John 14:16-17).

If Mark 16:18 is for all believers of all time, then why did others allow the men who were bitten by snakes to die? The passage also says that "they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover." So, why did others stand around and let them die? Where was the power to lay hands on the sick? Did every person present lack faith?

Having mentioned the injuries and deaths, one woman was quoted as saying, "God didn't say it wouldn't hurt." She has either failed to read her Bible or to believe that Mark 16:18 is a part of God's word--"It will by no means hurt them." The Bible says Paul was bitten by a viper and "suffered no harm," not even swelling (Acts 28:1-6). Compare that to the mangled and rotting flesh of modern-day "miracle-workers."

Concerning those who have died, one preacher said, "I don't believe it's God's will that people get bit. Maybe the Holy Spirit wasn't upon them at the time." Let's turn this proposition around: The Holy Spirit is upon those who are bitten and remain unhurt. Every year there are tens-of-thousands of unbelievers throughout the world are bitten by poisonous

snakes and survive. Why? Is it because the Holy Spirit is with them?

The Bible says there were a limited number of people who had miraculous gifts. The apostles had the ability to work miracles. Those upon whom the apostles laid their hands had the ability to work miracles (Acts 8:14-18). The apostles were the ONLY ones who had the power to confer these gifts (Acts 19:6). Since there are no more apostles, there are no gifts being passed on.

The age of miracles was prophesied to pass when revelation was complete (1 Corinthians 13:8-13). The miracles confirmed the word, and once that job was done, there was no longer a need for them (Mark 16:20; Hebrew 2:2-4).

Picking up poisonous snakes and drinking poison is not a sign of faithfulness, it is a sign of foolishness.

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