

Wheelersburg Baptist Church 7/10/94 PM
I Corinthians 12:9-10 "Spiritual Gifts: Healing & Miracles"

Intro: On a foggy evening in April 1906, a handful of saints gathered in a small house in Los Angeles to seek the baptism in the Holy Ghost. Before the evening was over, they were singing and shouting in strange languages. Several days later the group moved to an abandoned warehouse on Azusa Street in a run-down section of the city. Soon they were discovered by a L.A. Times reporter. He wrote, "The night is made hideous by the howlings of the worshippers. The devotees of the weird doctrine practice the most fanatical rites, preach the wildest theories and work themselves into a state of mad excitement." From these inauspicious beginnings Pentecostalism came into existence. In the past 88 years Pentecostalism has mushroomed into the largest Christian movement in the 20th century. No one knows how big it really is. David B. Barrett's "World Christian Encyclopedia" lists more than 100 million adherents worldwide. A 1979 Gallup poll revealed that in the USA alone, 19% (29 million) adult Americans considered themselves "Pentecostal or charismatic Christians."

Question: Is WBC a charismatic church?! Do you consider yourself a "charismatic" Christian?

Answer: That's somewhat of a trick question!

The answer is "Yes." We have the charismata ("grace gifts"). The NT lists some 20 various spiritual gifts which the Holy Spirit has dispersed to believers. The gifts range from speaking gifts such as teaching, exhorting, and evangelism, to serving gifts such as leadership, faith, and mercy. Every Christian possesses at least one charismata (spiritual gift). The Holy Spirit is alive and well in the Church today. He desires to exalt Jesus Christ both in and through His people. Yes, we believe that we are a charismatic church.

The answer is also "No." We are not a charismatic church, in the popular use of the term "charismatic". We are not part of the Charismatic movement. But why not? To a great degree, the issue rests upon our understanding of the scriptural teaching concerning certain spectacular gifts found in the NT.

Caution: But let me say at the outset that God has used this 20th century phenomenon called the "Charismatic Movement" to bring about a much needed awakening into the valued ministry of the Holy Spirit. If there has been an overemphasis/misemphasis of the Holy Spirit's ministry by charismatics (and I think there has), there likewise has been a great neglect of the Spirit's ministry by many Protestant churches.

J. I. Packer offers this insight in his book, Keeping in Step with the Spirit, (p. 230), "Though theologically uneven (and what spiritually significant movement has not been?) the charismatic renewal should commend itself to Christian people as a God-sent corrective of formalism, institutionalism, and intellectualism. It has creatively expressed the gospel by its music and worship style, its praise-permeated spontaneity and bold ventures into community. Charismatic renewal has forced all Christendom, including those who will not take this Evangelicals as such, to ask: What then does it mean to be a Christian and to believe in the Holy Spirit? Who is the Spirit filled? Are they? Am I?"

The presence of the charismatic movement forces us to turn to the Scriptures, for the Bible is always our final authority for both what we believe, and how we live. This evening, let's turn our attention to the subject of the spiritual gifts mentioned in I Corinthians 12.

Proposition: In order to see what God's Word has to say about this critical contemporary issue, we are going to take two messages to seek to obtain proper perspective of the four sign gifts mentioned by Paul in I Corinthians 12:9-10.

I. The Bible's Perspective concerning the Sign Gifts (9b-10)

- A. Gift of Healing
- B. Gift of Miracles
- C. Gift of Tongues
- D. Gift of Interpretation

II. Our Perspective concerning the Sign Gifts

I. The Bible's Perspective concerning the Sign Gifts (9b-10)

Context: The Church at Corinth

The apostle Paul came to the city of Corinth on his second missionary journey. He confronted a city of prosperity, sport, politics, and gross immorality. He stayed there two years. He preached Jesus. Many believed. He taught the converts, and organized a church, and moved on to Ephesus, where he stayed for three years. While in Ephesus, Paul received reports of the decaying conditions of the Corinthian church. There was controversy over the issue of eating meat that had been offered to idols. There was gross fornication in the lives of one church member. The church was tolerating immorality in its midst. There was the need for church discipline. There was heresy. There was friction between members. And so, Paul wrote the letter of I Corinthians to address these and other problems.

I Corinthians 12-14--One problem issue for the Corinthian church pertained to the matter of spiritual gifts. Paul devoted three chapters to deal with this controversial subject (I Cor 12-14). The Corinthians were spiritually immature in their understanding of spiritual gifts. So Paul brought the touchy matter out into the open.

I Corinthians 12:1--"Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I would not have you ignorant." What was the problem with the gifts at Corinth? The problem was NOT the lack of spiritual gifts. Not at all. Paul told them in I Cor 1:7, "you come behind in no gift". The problem was the abuse of gifts. They were immature in their use of gifts. Their ignorance was about the purpose of gifts, not the presence of gifts.

They elevated certain spectacular gifts--healing, miracles, tongues, interpretation of tongues. They exalted these extraordinary over the practical proclamation of the Word of God in the church. They were seeking the showy, attention-getting, ego-building gifts. Let's examine these spectacular gifts, one at a time.

A. Gift of Healing

V 9b--"But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man. . . to another, the gifts of healing by the same Spirit." Disease is a great, tragic foe of mankind.

Since the fall of man in the Garden of Eden, disease and death have been an inescapable reality. Throughout history, men have looked for cures from dreaded diseases.

Can God heal today? He certainly can. God in His grace will at times heal in answer to prayer, to bring glory to Himself. Is the gift of healing for today? That's a different issue. As we'll see in a minute, the gift of healing, along with the other sign gifts, ceased with the apostolic era.

2000 years ago, a Jewish man entered the world scene. He was no ordinary man. He astounded the crowds of Palestine. How? He healed the sick, he raised the dead, He cast out demons. No this was no ordinary man. This was the God-man, Jesus Christ.

Key Question: How did Jesus heal?

Answer: In order to make a comparison between modern "faith healers" and what the Bible teaches about "healing", let's look at how Jesus healed. {see MacArthur, 183 ff}

1. Jesus healed with a word or touch (Mt 8:5-8; Mk 5:25-34).
2. Jesus healed instantaneously (Mk 5:29).
3. Jesus healed totally (Lk 4:38).
4. Jesus healed everybody (Lk 4:40 He went TO the people).
5. Jesus healed organic disease (He healed people crippled from birth; He gave sight to the blind. He enabled the deaf and dumb to hear and speak).
6. Jesus raised the dead (Mk 5:35 ff).

Question: How did the apostles heal?

Answer: Just like Jesus healed!

1. They healed with a word or touch (Acts 9:32-35).
2. They healed instantaneously (Acts 3:4).
3. They healed totally (Acts 9:34).
4. They healed everybody (Acts 5:12, 14-16).
5. They healed organic disease (Acts 3:4).
6. They raised the dead (Acts 9:40).

Critical Question: Do those today who claim to have the gift of healing heal the same way Jesus and His apostles healed? Does the "faith-healer" on TV heal with a word or touch, instantaneously, totally, everybody, organic disease, and raise the dead?

I'm not saying that God can't heal. He does heal. And He can do anything He wants to do. He may choose to work in behalf of the prayers of His saints to heal. But let's not confuse God's healing in response to the prayer of faith with the ability to heal everyone at will, as was the case with Jesus and the apostles.

It was this gift of healing that Paul mentioned in I Corinthians 12. Some in the body possessed the ability to heal those afflicted with sickness and disease. As we'll see in a minute, the purpose of this healing gift was to verify the message of the Gospel. Healing served as a sign gift to confirm the Word of God.

B. Gift of Miracles

I Corinthians 12:10a "To another, the working of miracles. . ." The word "miracles" (dunamis) means "power", lit "being able." It refers to an ability, a power, an energy. We often misuse the term. A mother might say, "My son passed English class. It was a miracle." She might be surprised that he passed, but it was not a miracle--there are other possible explanations for the phenomena (maybe he studied!).

DEFINITION: A miracle is a supernatural intrusion into the natural law that can have no explanation other than that God is acting.

Question: Why does God do miracles? Why did He do miracles in the Bible?

Answer: MacArthur suggests that miracles are in the Bible for one basic reason, that is to prove that God is speaking; to confirm His verbal message through His servants.

Some people have the mistaken idea that miraculous, unusual events are common in the Bible. You may be surprised that miracles were the exception, not the rule. There were three periods of miracles in the Bible. And the miracles served a similar function in each situation--The miracles caught the attention of the people to prepare them to hear God's Word. The miracles were credentials for the messengers. They confirmed the message:

1. During the time of Moses (prior to revelation of the Law)
2. During the lives of Elijah and Elisha (prior to prophetic revel)
3. During the lives of Christ and His apostles (prior to NT revel)

John Peterson, composer of many well known Christian hymns and songs, wrote the song, "I believe in Miracles". His lyrics state, "I believe in miracles, for I believe in God." Our God is a powerful God. He's omnipotent. We need to be careful of putting Him in a box, and telling Him what He can or can not do. Certainly, the gift of miracles is as controversial as the gift of healing today.

But wait a minute. The question before us is not whether the God of all grace and power can do miracles. No Christian doubts that. The greatest miracle of all is the miracle of the new birth. The question is whether the gift of working miracles resides in special people who are responsible to carry out this aspect of God's work. According to the nature and purpose of miracles, the answer seems to be no.

Why not? Because miracles were used in the early church to verify the Gospel, to authenticate God's Word. The gift of miracles, like the gift of healing, was a sign gift. The spectacular gifts served a particular function.

How do we know that? We'll explore several key texts of Scripture in our next study. I challenge you to search the Scriptures on your own until then.

Next Week: The Gifts of Tongues & Interpretation of Tongues