

## “Understanding Spiritual Gifts”

(Part 5)

1 Cor. 12

- INTRO. - This is our 5<sup>th</sup> week on the subject of spiritual gifts. So far (in our study from 1 Cor. 12-14), we’ve looked at:

### I. THE IMPORTANCE OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS

### II. THE PURPOSE OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS

### III. THE DIVERSITY OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS

### IV. THE CATEGORIES OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS

#### A. The Gifted Men

#### B. The Permanent Edifying Gifts

- Now (tonight) we need to go on to the:

#### C. The Temporary Sign Gifts

- There are 4 of these (listed only in 1 Cor. 12): miracles, healings, languages and the interpretation of languages. Now, we are only going to deal with the first two tonight, because we will get to the other two when we get to 1 Cor. 13. But let’s spend a few minutes (first of all) on the gift of:

#### 1. Miracles

- Now, let me set something straight from the beginning, because I don’t want anyone to walk out of here tonight saying, “The Pastor doesn’t believe in miracles.”
- I am *not* going to say that God can’t do miracles. God can, and does, whatever He wants to do (as long as it is in keeping with His nature). I am *not* trying to put any limitations on God whatsoever.
- What I am doing is merely categorizing His operation and being fair to Scripture. Please don’t say that I don’t believe God does miracles. I believe He does. In fact, He does them every single day, and the greatest miracle of all is when He saves a sinner.
- I believe I have seen miraculous things that God has done, as His providence is at work in the lives of His people. But having said all that, the spiritual gift of miracles is a different matter.
- I don’t believe this special gift is still in operation today. It was one of the temporary sign gifts that God gave to validate the authority of the Apostles and it has now ceased.
- But let’s back up a minute and look at this more closely. *First* of all, I think it would be good for us to define what we mean by “miracle.”

- We use the word “miracle” in a lot of different ways. For example, we might say “It will be a miracle if I find a parking spot.” Now, that might be a way of expressing something that could be difficult, but that is a far cry from a divine intervention like the virgin birth of Christ.
- So, what is a miracle? A miracle is a supernatural intrusion into the natural law which can have no other explanation than that God is acting.
- ILL. - For example, suppose a man builds a model city. In this huge, model city, the cars, trains, and lights actually work. And he runs everything from a remote control electronic board.

But every once in a while, he will pick something up and move it to another place. Now, if you were alive in that model city, you would say, “What’s going on? That building used to be over here and now it’s over there.”

God created the universe, and He usually lets it run on its own. But every once in a while (in accordance with His sovereign purpose) He picks something up and moves it (so to speak).

In other words, He will raise someone from the dead, make an ax head float on the water, or part

the Red Sea, just so people don’t forget that He is running the show.

- A miracle is something that has no other explanation than that God supernaturally did it. Now, the *second* thing we need to understand is the purpose for miracles.
- I think the best place for us to go to see what God says the purpose for miracles are is John 2:11. John 2:11 says, “This beginning of *His* signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory, and His disciples believed in Him.”
- Why did Jesus do miracles? To manifest His glory. What is His glory? It is the composite of His attributes as deity. Why did He do miracles? To reveal Himself as God. Miracles are confirming signs of the revelation of God.
- Jesus never performed miracles just for miracles’ sake. And there are many passages in Scripture that bear this out:

John 5:36 – “But the testimony which I have is greater than *the testimony of* John; for the works which the Father has given Me to accomplish—the very works that I do—testify about Me, that the Father has sent Me.” In other words, Jesus is saying, “My heavenly origin and My divine commission is proven by My miracles.”

John 20:30-31 - “Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; <sup>31</sup>but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.” Jesus did miracles to prove that God was being revealed in His living Word.

This is further explained in Acts 2:22. There the Apostle Peter said, “Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know...” God wanted all men to know who Jesus was, so He approved of Him, established Him, and commended Him by miracles, wonders and signs.

- Why does God do miracles? In order to corroborate His self-disclosure and to confirm His own revelation. Miracles are in Scripture for one purpose: to prove God is speaking, whether it is in the OT written Word, the NT living Word, or the NT written Word. That’s why John never calls them “miracles;” he always calls them “signs.”
- Now, God normally operates the universe according to His created natural law. But when it comes time for God to make a self-revelation, He

will, (contrary to natural law), make things occur which have no explanation other than that God is revealing Himself to men.

- It is important for us to see that there have only been a few periods of history in which miracles were the norm. *Not all* ages have been miracle ages.
- If you study the OT, there (really) are only two periods of miracles: *one*, during the revealing of the law to Moses, and *two*, during the lives of Elijah and Elisha, when God was laying down the platform of prophetic revelation through His prophets.
- The rest of the OT contains very few miracles – and there were *none* (at all) at the end of the OT. And (here again) the purpose for those OT miracles was the same as His purpose for miracles has *always* been: to confirm what He is revealing to men with signs and wonders.
- That’s how the people knew that these men were true prophets of God. And it’s the same in the NT. Jesus lived 33 years, but for 30 of those years He did *not* do one single miracle.
- Now, there *are* some apocryphal writings that claim otherwise (expound), but we know these claims are false. How do we know? Because John

2:11 says “This *beginning* of His signs Jesus did in Cana...”

- This was the very *first* miracle Jesus performed. And this re-iterates the fact that *not all* ages, times and periods are intended by God for miracles. Only during those times when God wants to reveal Himself to man does He do miracles.
- And Jesus never revealed Himself as God until He began His public ministry (after His baptism). Jesus never did a single miracle before the hour of His revelation as God.
- And even though the Apostles were also given the ability to perform miracles (to validate their authority as Apostles), if you study the book of Acts you will notice a marked decrease in miracles. When the Apostles began to disappear, so did the miracles.
- Listen, God has designed miracles for a single purpose – to confirm His revelation. Once God has revealed Himself to men, then the miracles have no continuing purpose.
- For example, when God finished revealing Himself as God in the OT, that miracle period was ended. In the 400 year history between the OT and the NT God gave no revelation, and therefore nothing miraculous occurred.
- But *then*, (in the NT) miracles began occurring again. But *now* the NT is finished, and God’s revelation through the NT is complete, so there are no more miracles needed to confirm His revelation.
- Now, when I say “no more miracles,” I believe that we must still allow for God to do a miracle now and then as he chooses, but what we are saying is that miracles are *not* the norm.
- Some Christians today (primarily in the charismatic movement) believe that miracles should be the norm today. In fact, some even claim that they should be greater than the ones done in the days of the NT, and that evangelism is powerless without them.
- But what we need to see (from biblical history) is that *not every* age is a miracle age, because it is only during those times when God is revealing something new to men that He consistently performs miracles. And God is *not* revealing anything new to men in our day and time.
- That’s why this spiritual gift, the gift of miracles, was confined to the days of the apostles. Because there was no *written* NT to corroborate their preaching, God gave them miraculous abilities to confirm that they were speaking for Him.

- After the Spirit had come (in the NT church age), the only people (that we ever know of) who were able to do miracles, were either the Apostles or those whom the Apostles personally commissioned. Miracles never extended any further than that.
- B. B. Warfield says, “These miraculous gifts were part of the credentials of the Apostles as the authoritative agents of God in founding the church. Their function thus confined them to distinctively the Apostolic church and they necessarily passed with it.”
- So these marvelous abilities to confirm the Word occurred only when God was revealing His special revelation to men. And that revelation is now complete.
- The Charismatics have it wrong. I’ve heard people pray, “Lord, let it be like it was at Pentecost (meaning miracles, healings, etc.)” But that’s *not* God’s plan for this age.
- If we say that miracles continue to occur today, and that their only purpose is to confirm God’s revelation, then that means that God would still be revealing His Word through direct revelation today.
- And if He is still revealing His Word, then your Bible is incomplete, and Rev. 22:18-19 is a lie: “I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues which are written in this book; <sup>19</sup>and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book.”
- That divinely-revealed curse makes it clear that the canon of Scripture is closed, and that there is no more revelation coming from God.
- But, you see, if we believe that the Word of God is complete (and closed), and that revelation has ceased, then there is no reason for a continuing flow of miracles.
- It is clear (from the Gospels through Acts) that there is a progressive lessening of miracles. By the time of Paul’s epistles, miracles are gone. People become sick in Paul’s epistles and they stay sick...including Paul.
- Now, it *is* true that the Bible *does* indicate that there will be another period of miracles in the future (expound) but *not* in this present age.
- So, to summarize, what were miracles? They were signposts pointing to God’s revelation, *first* in the

Living Word and *then* in the written Word. But now that the reality has come, we don't need any more signposts.

- For example, maybe you sent your son (or daughter) to college, or he (or she) moved away. You have his (or her) picture as a reminder of him (or her). But when your son (or daughter) comes home, you don't stand around looking at their picture, you enjoy the presence of your son (or daughter).
- That's the same way it is with God's revelation. Once the revelation has come and is complete, you don't need the signs anymore. These temporary sign gifts were given only for a period of confirmation, but now their purpose is complete. Well, a second temporary sign gift is that of:

## 2. Healings

- This gift is mentioned in 1 Cor. 12:9, 28 & 30. And again, I know that this is somewhat of a controversial subject. My purpose tonight is *not* to attack anyone in any way. My purpose is to give (to the best of my ability) what God's Word teaches.
- What I say, I want to be understood in a spirit of gentleness, in a spirit of love, and in a spirit of

concern for people who have *not* understood the truth about the subject of healing.

- And again, let me make something very clear... please do *not* assume (by what I say) that I do *not* believe that God heals. God heals in answer to prayer. God can heal miraculously in answer to prayer.
- I do *not* question God's miraculous healing in response to the prayers of the saints. But what I want you to understand is the difference between the healing by God and the spiritual gift of healing.
- There is a great difference between God healing someone immediately and God healing someone through a human instrument. God choosing to heal someone, and the Apostolic gift of healing, are completely different.
- Now, I think we are aware that disease is the most tragic human reality. Disease is the number one human problem. And throughout the history of civilization, man has continually searched for cures for the terrible diseases that have plagued mankind.
- You know, if we could *choose* our gifts, many of us would choose the gift of healing. I have wished many times I had the gift of healing, as I have stood by a bedside and watched children die of leukemia or other diseases.

- I have watched people suffer and die and I have wished that I could heal them with a touch, but I can't. Every time I go to the hospital to visit someone who is sick, I have wished I could just touch them and heal them instantly.
- Wouldn't it be great if those who claim to have the gift of healing would go into the hospitals and empty them out? Why don't they do that? Why do they have to "perform" their so-called gift in an auditorium, staged their way, run by their operation, according to their own schedule?
- Why aren't they in the hospitals? Why aren't they out there in those disease-infested nations where literally thousands are dying every day? Why? I believe it is because they don't really have the gift of healing.
- How do I know? Because the spiritual gift of healing was a temporary sign gift given for the purpose of authenticating the NT Scriptures, and once the canon was closed, the gift ceased. But there are a lot of counterfeit claims being made today in this whole area of healing.
- ILL. - For example, thousands of Christians have received in the mail a special miracle prayer cloth, which says, "take this special miracle prayer cloth and put it under your pillow and sleep on it tonight.

Or you may want to place it on your body or on a loved one. Use it as a release point wherever you hurt. First thing in the morning send it back to me in the green envelope. Do not keep this prayer cloth; return it to me. I'll take it, pray over it all night. Miracle power will flow like a river. God has something better for you, a special miracle to meet your needs."

- This is just one in a long line of claims that are being made. Television is inundated with Christian programming that is, (in many ways) a misrepresentation of biblical Christianity.
- People are claiming all kinds of wild and bizarre healings and miracles of all kinds. And I believe, that the result is, that unsaved people (who see all that stuff) are really confused (or they quickly write Christianity off as some weird religion).
- *Not only* that, but immature Christians (who have *not* been well-taught by the Word of God) are easily pulled into all this fanaticism. And rather than growing into solid, mature disciples of Christ, they are enticed with an emotional, experience-oriented façade.
- Interestingly, the oldest of *all* the claims, comes out of the Roman Catholic church. They have claimed to be able to heal people with the bones of

John the Baptist, the bones of Peter, and the relics of the cross.

- They have claimed to be able to heal at the shrines where Mary has (supposedly) appeared. They have claimed to be able to heal with vials of Mary's breast milk. But it's *not* just the Catholics...
- Mary Baker Eddy claimed to be able to heal through telepathy. Today there are Charismatics who claim all kinds of healings. You can turn on your TV and they will heal you from a distance, and even on a delayed tape.
- You say, "What about people like the late Oral Roberts, the late Kathryn Kuhlman, and people like Benny Henn? What are they doing? Healings seem to happen with them." Yes, it may *seem* as if healings are taking place, but are they really?
- Again, I have never seen any of these people go and empty out the hospitals. In fact, Oral Roberts built a hospital! Some of these so-called "faith healers" can have *some* effect on *some* of the symptoms of those who are sick, because of the power of the mind to temporarily relieve certain symptoms. But *none* of them has ever been able to heal organic diseases.
- A medical doctor who did extensive research into the healing ministry of the late Kathryn Kuhlman

concluded that ultimately *not one* incident of legitimate healing occurred.

- Now, why am I saying all this? Am I trying to attack these individuals who claim to have the gift of healing? No. But I *do* want you to know that there is another way to view the claims of these faith healers.
- If you compare modern faith healers with the healing of Jesus and the Apostles, there is a stark contrast. How did Jesus heal? He healed instantly, totally, with a word or a touch. The people He healed did *not* have *relapses*, like those of faith healers today have, when they are supposedly "healed."
- Jesus and the Apostles were able to heal organic disease, broken limbs, blindness, deafness, birth defects, even raise the dead. I wish those (today who claim to have this gift would spend some time in funeral parlors raising the dead.
- So when someone says, "You have to believe their claims...look at all the evidence..." you should respond by saying, "What evidence? Where are the organic, spontaneous healings? Where are the healings of broken bones?"
- Or when someone says, "I believe it because it is based on the sound teaching of the Bible that by

His stripes we are healed.” That is a gross mis-interpretation of Is. 53:5. That is *not* talking about physical healing at all; it is talking about the spiritual healing of salvation.

- Well, let’s get back to the heart of the matter in closing. The purpose for the spiritual gift of healing was similar to that of all the temporary sign gifts. They were given to show the authority and validity of Christ’s claims and the Apostles teaching.
- I’m *not* saying that God does *not* do miracles and sometimes heal people. Sometimes He does. And God (in His sovereignty) can do anything He chooses to do in accordance with His divine attributes.
- But there is no evidence (biblically or practically) that anyone today is operating the spiritual gift of healing. If God chooses to heal someone, that is His divine providence and privilege. He may heal through the prayers of believers. But let’s *not* confuse God’s healing in response to prayer, with the ability to heal everyone at will, as was the case with Jesus and the Apostles.
- PRAYER