

## **“SPIRITUAL GIFTS: SIGN GIFTS.”**

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**Scripture Text: I Corinthians 12:8-11, 27-31; 14:1, 39**

### **Introduction.**

Last week when I preached on the nine serving gifts of the Spirit, I mentioned how I couldn't do what I do as a pastor without the helping/serving gifts of my wife. I want to add that applies also to Kara Humphreys and Susan Berendsen. They are excellent church secretaries with many gifts of serving and helping and administration and some creativity thrown in. I want to publically acknowledge my debt of gratitude and my thanks to God for their faithful service to our church.

We have talked about nine of the speaking gifts and nine of the serving gifts and this morning we come to the final group of spiritual gifts, the four sign gifts or extraordinary gifts, and therefore those controversial gifts.

[Again this week, I have pulled from several resources for the definitions, characteristics and cautions I'm about to share so there is nothing completely original here (C. Peter Wagner, *Your Spiritual Gifts*; Erik Rees, *SHAPE*; Paul Ford, *Unleash Your Church*; David Hocking, *Spiritual Gifts*; Al Vander Griend, *Discover Your Gifts*).]

### **Those controversial gifts.**

Christianity is undeniably supernatural. Our universe is an open universe, our planet is a visited planet. There are principalities and powers, there are things going on in the spiritual realm. The Bible records countless miracles and healings and supernatural happenings and angel visitations.

Within the evangelical and Reformed world there is a sizable debate about whether the sign gifts are still valid today or whether they ceased with the apostolic age around 100AD.

I know that we can fear what is unknown or unfamiliar to us. I am aware of the abuses of the sign gifts and the potential for confusion and even division.

Because a gift has been abused doesn't mean that we should prohibit the proper use of a gift. We don't want to throw the baby out with the bath water. As one pastor says, "abuse is no excuse for disuse" (Sam Storms).

### **The Sign Gifts, establishing God's authority.**

The purpose of the sign gifts is to bear witness to the presence and power of God and to confirm the authority of the message of God. The signs and wonders in the NT proved Jesus to be who He claimed to be. And confirmed the message of the apostles.

**Mark 16:20** They [apostles] went out and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by accompanying signs.

Two weeks ago when I taught on the speaking gifts I gave a warning that today the speaking gifts are not given or used by the Holy Spirit to give new revelation, new truth from God.

We want to be clear the sign gifts are never meant to replace the Word of God or even be over the Word of God. Signs and wonders don't save people, they don't change hearts without the power of the Word and the Holy Spirit.

When the early church gathered to pray in Acts 4 they prayed for both the Word to go forth and for signs and wonders to accompany it.

**Acts 4:29-30** now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness, 30 while you *stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus.*"

This need didn't end in the first century, it continues to this day. There is no clear indication in Scripture that what was happening then was only temporary.

As I go through these gifts remember that they are given for the benefit and blessing of others, not for the exaltation of the person exercising the gift. They are meant to be expressions of love, of the love of God for His church and of love for the individuals with needs these gifts can help.

### *Healings*

**Mark 16:17-18** And these signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; 18 ... they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover.

**I Corinthians 12:9** to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit.

**I Corinthians 12:28** then gifts of healing

**I Corinthians 12:30** Do all possess gifts of healing?

The Spirit-given special ability given to some to serve and strengthen the body of Christ as an instrument through whom God chooses to bring miraculous physical, emotional or spiritual healing and restored health, beyond traditional and natural means, for those who are sick, hurting, and suffering. People with this gift...

## Healing Characteristics:

- Believe firmly people can be supernaturally healed and pray specifically to be used by God to heal others.
- Fully realize healing occurs only by God's divine permission and action, and God may choose not to heal because He has a different plan.
- Know their gift is from the hand of God, and is a specific way to bring Him glory.
- View medicine as a means God may choose for healing.

## Healing Cautions:

- May become prideful and seek personal gain; may exaggerate claims of healing.
- May feel personally responsible for failure to heal; or blame the other person's lack of faith.
- May neglect other God-given means to healing such as medical help.

So why aren't there people with this gift who can go around healing at will?

In I Corinthians 12:9 healing is unique in the gift list. The gift is called gifts of healings, two plural words suggesting various gifts of healings given at various times to various people.

One person won't have a monopoly on the healing gift and a person with the gift will not always be able to heal. They shouldn't lay a guilt trip on the person not healed that they didn't have enough faith. There were times Jesus and the apostles healed people who had no faith at all. And Jesus said faith like a mustard seed could move mountains.

Jesus' healing was always automatic, He spoke a word and it was accomplished. That was not the case with the apostles. There were times when they couldn't heal or didn't heal.

Paul had the Spirit-given ability to heal people but he couldn't heal himself and he didn't heal Timothy of his stomach ailment (I Timothy 5:23) and he didn't heal Epaphroditus of his life threatening sickness (Philippians 2:26-27) or Trophimus whom he "left ill at Miletus" (2 Timothy 4:20). Sometimes Paul was given gifts of healings and sometimes he wasn't. There is nothing automatic or mechanical or magic about the gifts.

The gift can come at any moment for the moment. When we ask for the gift we are asking for a manifestation of that gift for that moment. So if your wife or child is sick and suffering, you can humbly pray and ask God to please grant this gift of healing for your wife in this time of need. Ask God boldly in faith in the name of Jesus and by the power of the Holy Spirit to enable you to minister healing and He may do it.

We can call on the elders to pray for the sick and they should ask in faith for the gift of healing in that moment.

We have the privilege of praying for each other and for healing. And when God answers He gets the glory. And when He doesn't answer He has a different purpose.

We must remember that sickness and suffering are a result of the fall and a permanent part of this earthly existence. Jesus said that in this life you will have affliction. There is no healing panacea. Sometimes we are and often times we aren't.

What about healers? People who gain personal fame and fortune from healing rob God of His glory and may be charlatans. We should avoid the term healer, only God is the healer.

### *Miracles*

**I Corinthians 12:10** to another the working of miracles.

**I Corinthians 12:28** then miracles,

**I Corinthians 12:29** Do all work miracles?

**II Corinthians 12:12** The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with utmost patience, with signs and wonders and mighty works.

The Spirit-given special ability given to some to serve and strengthen the body of Christ as an instrument through whom God chooses to divinely intervene to do supernatural acts that bring validity to God's presence and power. People with this gift...

#### Miracles Characteristics:

- Recognize prayer as a supernatural vehicle through which God acts in the lives of people on earth; and have experienced God's miraculous answers to prayer.
- Pray and look to supernatural results whenever they encounter impossible life situations.
- Fully grasp the fact that miracles only occur when God wills them to happen.
- Render credit and thanks to God alone for supernatural works.
- See themselves as instruments for God's use; usually also have the gift of faith.

#### Miracles Cautions:

- May become proud and neglect to give God all the glory.
- May make exaggerated claims or say things that can't be verified.
- May seek to produce miracles in their own strength or for their own selfish ends.

Why are there not more miracles today or did they stop after the NT time?

First, just because we don't hear much about healings and miracles doesn't mean they aren't happening. They are happening in many parts of the world today such as China, Africa and South America. Missionaries all over the world regularly see such displays of God's power.

Second, there's no question that throughout history there are seasons of greater and lesser frequency. The variation can be due to several factors: the degree to which the gifts are taught,

sought, encouraged or expected; the degree to which these gifts are discouraged or believed to be only for the NT time; and most importantly the degree to which the Holy Spirit in His sovereign wisdom chooses to distribute the gifts.

Third, hardness of heart is a factor.

**Matthew 16:1, 4** And the Pharisees and Sadducees came, and to test him they asked him to show them a sign from heaven. 2 He answered them, ... 4 “An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah.” So he left them and departed.

Jesus didn't do signs for the religious people, the proud, hardhearted self-righteous people; for the people who had heard it all before. This leads me to wonder if the reason we don't see more signs and wonders in North America is because the gospel has been preached here, there are countless opportunities to hear and believe, hundreds of thousands of churches, TV and radio and internet, evangelists, book stores, books and magazines.

We live in an evil and adulterous generation that is rejecting the Word of God and the truth of God. More signs and wonders would be rejected and treated like pearls before swine.

Fourth, some say that the miracles today seem far weaker and much less spectacular than in Bible times. But to some degree this is comparing apples and oranges. We know about a few of the miracles that the prophets and the apostles and Jesus did and many of them were remarkable. But Scripture also says that Jesus healed “every disease and every infirmity” many of which would have been fairly minor miracles by comparison. Also we don't know what miracles average church members were doing?

All the spiritual gifts can vary in strength and effectiveness, one person with the gift of evangelism begins ten to the Lord and another a hundred. One person is used to heal a person here and a person there, and another over and over again. In both cases the Holy Spirit's power is at work and the work of the Lord is being done. It's certainly appropriate to ask God for a greater release of His Holy Spirit in our midst and in our lives and to remove any barriers and hindrances in our hearts and minds and fellowship.

### *Tongues*

**Mark 16:17** And these signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues.

**I Corinthians 12:10** to another various kinds of tongues.

**I Corinthians 12:28, 30** then gifts of ... various kinds of tongues. ... 30 Do all speak with tongues?

**I Corinthians 13:1** If I speak in the tongues of men and angels.

## **I Corinthians 14:13-19, 26-28**

**I Corinthians 14:13** Therefore, one who speaks in a tongue should pray that he may interpret.

**I Corinthians 14:27-28** If any speak in a tongue, let there be only two or at most three, and each in turn, and let someone interpret. 28 But if there is no one to interpret, let each of them keep silent in church and speak to himself and to God.

The Spirit-given special ability given to some to serve and strengthen the body of Christ by praying, worshiping, giving thanks or speaking a divinely given message in a special language unknown to the speaker or the hearer. People with this gift tend to...

### Tongues Characteristics:

- Believe God is prompting them to communicate his message, often through prayer, in a specific language unknown to them.
- Intercede for others in prayer using unknown words, sounds, and utterances.
- Desire opportunities to pray, using these unknown languages for God's glory.
- Comfort or exhort others using a language inspired by God.

### Tongues Cautions:

- This is the only gift that doesn't build up the body directly, it must be accompanied with interpretation to be edifying, or it should not be used publically.
- Think tongues is a better gift when Scripture says it isn't.
- The pressure to perform can cause some to imitate this gift, or become excessively dramatic.

There is no one gift that all Christians have and that includes tongues. Every Christian is baptized in the Spirit but not every Christian speaks in tongues.

There are two kinds of ways this gift operates. For some it's like a personal prayer language that a person uses when speaking to God. It edifies himself (I Corinthians 14:4).

For others tongues is a message communicated to them from God that they speak in a language unknown to the speaker or the hearers. The meaning of the message will then be interpreted either by the speaker or by another person so the whole body can be edified.

Like all the gifts we may ask God to give us this gift and He may or may not. From Paul's warnings to the Corinthians, this gift should not become dominate or primary or a normative part of worship.

### *Interpretation of Tongues*

**I Corinthians 12:10** to another the interpretation of tongues.

**I Corinthians 12:30** Do all interpret?

## **I Corinthians 14:13-14, 26-28**

The Spirit-given special ability given to some to serve and strengthen the body of Christ by understanding and making known, at a specific time, God's message when spoken by another using a special language unknown to the others in attendance. People with this gift tend to...

### **Interpretation Characteristics:**

- Have a clear idea of what God is saying, even though the language used by the speaker is unknown to them at the specific time.
- Able to translate words and messages of God in a way that edifies, comforts, and exhorts believers. This gift often goes with the gift of discerning of spirits.

### **Interpretation Cautions:**

- The pressure to perform can cause some to imitate this gift, or become excessively dramatic.
- Give their own interpretation without being led by the Spirit, which is why elders and the spiritually mature must always test the spirits and exercise the gift of discernment.

The guidelines in I Corinthians 14 should be followed. Either the person who spoke must interpret or someone else present, otherwise they should remain silent.

### **Application and Conclusion.**

Pentecostals and Reformed types need each other. Someone once observed that the Pentecostals have the fire and the Reformed Christians have the wood. They are short on doctrine, on careful exegeses of Scripture, and the Reformed are short on the practical experience of using all the spiritual gifts and knowing and depending on the Holy Spirit. We know the Word, they know the Spirit, we need each other if we would be willing to fellowship and learn from each other.

Regarding all the spiritual gifts, God wants His blessings to come to us through prayer and through other people. He puts us in the body of Christ so that we can minister to and bless each other, giving each other blessings. He doesn't intend for us to be independent and self-sufficient, isolated Christians, needing nothing from anyone. And He doesn't intend for all our blessings to just come down from heaven, He intends for His blessings to flow horizontally, one to another.

Now that we have finished explaining the gifts it's time to see what ours are. There's an inventory in your box and more on the information table. It doesn't take long and you can score it yourself. It's one tool for getting an idea what some of your gifts might be. I encourage all of you to take this step in learning about your gifts and growing in understanding them and using them for God's glory, and the benefit and blessing of His people as He has intended.