

Sign Gifts: Life in the Spirit, 9/1/24, 1 Corinthians 14

Here we are at the end of the Summer, at the end of our series Life in the Spirit, and our 3 week focus on the Gifts of the Spirit. I've been so encouraged hearing stories of how God has used this series to help you understand the fullness of the Trinity, learn how to sense the Spirit's presence and power in facing temptation and overcoming fear. Lots of us are discovering our spiritual gifts and getting involved in serving one another in the church! Praise God. Before we leave this topic, we need to tackle a challenging, even rather divisive topic over the last 50+ years among Christians, what's typically called the charismatic gifts. We come from all kinds of spiritual and denominational backgrounds, some of come from charismatic church backgrounds (Pentecostal, Assemblies of God) and some from non-charismatic churches...and some of us have no idea what I'm talking about, and that's OK too. And if you are here today checking out Christianity, for putting up with this sermon today, I will personally buy you a Wawa gift card if you sit through this because this may feel a bit of an insider sermon. Come and see me after the sermon.

Generally, where we want to focus as a church is what makes us united as a universal body of Christ on the main and plain things, and not focus on what divides churches from one another. We need more unity not less. This is in line with one of our values- **Bible Centered, Graciously Orthodox. God's Word is our guide, authority and conscience in everything. We stand firm where it stands firm and remain flexible where it remains flexible. We value a diversity of opinions and thought on secondary theological matters.** And this topic is one of those theological subjects that is less clear and certainly is secondary. And at the same time, in a series on the Holy Spirit we have to talk about charismatic gifts of the Spirit because the Bible talks about them. And so we want to talk about this with humility and grace, you may not land where I land today and that's OK- we are still a family here. My goal is to strike the balance of the biblical clarity and biblical mystery. Because the Holy Spirit expresses both characteristics in His person and ministry.

Two other things you need to know before we jump in. There is too much to attempt to unpack on this subject in one message, and I did not want to extend this series another week...and so I prepared two sermons for today. But don't be alarmed. You can leave after the first one. But if you want to stay, at 11:45 I'm going to preach a second sermon right here. **"What's the deal with Tongues?"** Feel free to stay, or it will be on our livestream for you to watch. Also- we aren't going to get to every question you may have on this subject so send me your questions- **TEXT (302) 217-6594.**

Let me give you a road map for the message- What are Charismatic Gifts? Are they active today? Provide some Clarifying Principles. **What are Charismatic Gifts?** We need to start by saying the Bible does not use this distinction, this is a theological way of making sense of certain gifts that we come across, particularly in **1 Corinthians 12, ⁴ There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. ⁹ to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit,¹⁰ to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy,**

to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues.¹¹ All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines.

Theologian Wayne Grudem definition: charismatic gifts (also called sign gifts) are "supernatural abilities given by the Holy Spirit to believers to be used for the benefit of the Church and the advancement of the gospel." While all gifts in one sense are supernatural, because the Spirit is working through us...some gifts appear to be more supernatural than others. I would be so encouraged seeing your spiritual gift of service active if you assisted someone who is vision impaired to get into the pew. But if you said, "In the name of Jesus receive sight!" and the person began skipping down the pew able to see...I think we would all agree that appears to be more supernatural.

Blank Slide Now if you don't believe in the miraculous, you are really going to have a hard time with the Bible. Jesus performed lots of supernatural acts recorded in the 4 Gospels. In the first century church in the book of Acts, we see some of this same kind of supernatural empowerment. Having said that, almost all of charismatic displays of power in Acts were performed by the Apostles, but at times by non-Apostles like Philip, Acts 8:6-7 who healed those with physical disabilities and cast out demons. Or Agabus in Acts 11 who the Spirit gave the ability to predict a famine before it happened. Now we have to also keep in perspective that these instances of charismatic gifts occurring, while they certainly happened, are not the focus of the book of Acts. The proclamation and spread of the gospel, and gathering of believers in the local church is the focus. In fact, these charismatic gifts appear to be the opposite- rare, episodic signs and wonders performed as validation of this new explosive event of the resurrection of Jesus and salvation coming to all people.

Are Charismatic Gifts active today? Should we expect to see these kinds of supernatural healings and miracles and prophetic foretellings today among Christians?

There are two primary positions:

The Cessationist View- [one stack of books]. No charismatic gifts of the Holy Spirit today. These gifts were purposed by God only for a season as the early church was being established and the canon of Scripture completed.

Continuationist View- [another stack of books.] All the Charismatic gifts are for today. Christians should seek a "second filling" in the Holy Spirit to experience additional empowerment in the Christian life. It would be normal for believers to speak in tongues, heavenly language.

There are three factors that make clarity on these positions challenging.

Factor 1- Lack of Biblical Clarity. The New Testament writers apparently did not seem particularly concerned about giving a clear answer to the question of whether these sign gifts would continue. Now, there are some cessationists who argue that 1 Corinthians 13 says that

charismatic gifts have ceased. I had professors argue this and I've read commentaries on it, but that's just not what I see. Let's read it for ourselves.

But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. ⁹ For we know in part and we prophesy in part, ¹⁰ but when the perfect comes, what is imperfect disappears.

Some would argue that "the perfect" refers to the Bible...and so because the canon of Scripture is closed, there is no need for these charismatic gifts. And while I understand the logic of that, my issue with this interpretation is that nowhere else are the Scriptures called "the perfect." This view has been widely rejected in the last 25 years of Biblical scholarship and the plain reading of this text seems to be that Paul is referring to the return of Jesus himself or possibly the perfection that will come on us when we see Jesus face-to-face and we will be like him.

Factor 2- Historical Perspective: How do we account for the historical reality that from the 2nd century to the 20th century these charismatic gifts seemed no longer active, or extremely rare occurrences, certainly not widespread? And then suddenly, in 1906 as the Azusa Street Revival in California many began reporting a powerful manifestation of the Holy Spirit similar to Pentecost in Acts 2 and a wave of charismatic experiences and movements began. Millions of people since then claim to have experienced this manifestations and gifts of the Spirit.

Factor 3- Personal experience. We tend to elevate our personal experience, or our non-experience with charismatic or supernatural events as the standard. Because I experienced something or because I haven't experienced something, that is my definition of what is true or right. But as one pastor said, "We don't want to substitute the sand of experience for the rock of the revealed truth."

And it's why there is a third position, which is my personal position. **Open but Cautious.** I'm not fully persuaded by either position. "They are open to the possibility of miraculous gifts today, but they are concerned about the possibility of abuses that they have seen in groups that practice these gifts. ...They see many modern examples as not conforming to Scriptural guidelines;

some also are concerned that it often leads to divisiveness and negative results in churches today. They think churches should emphasize evangelism, Bible study and faithful obedience as keys to personal and church growth, rather than miraculous gifts." – Wayne Grudem.

My caution does come from experience of seeing many people damaged in their faith by the charismatic movement. Whether it some branches of the charismatic movement that prescribe blatant false teaching- that you can't be saved unless you speak in tongues, which goes directly against the New Testament's clear teaching. [Open But Cautious Slide] Or the health and wealth gospel, an off-shoot of the charismatic movement, or what seems to me the misuse and false prophesy at times to support a political candidate or the many people suffering from a physical or mental illness who were told they didn't have enough faith which is why they are suffering.

One young teenager in our church experienced this in a group who were praying over girl with disabilities in a wheelchair, having her repeat over and over again to be healed in the name of Jesus and nothing happened, and this poor, dejected girl was left to believe the problem was she didn't have enough faith.

On the other hand, I know many Christians who claim to have experienced healing, miracles, visions, or have charismatic gifting. These are not nefarious, fringe people- some of them are mature, godly people I look up to. It seems to be particularly be the case in missions context, I have heard 1st hand testimonies of missionaries who did not know the language of the tribe and were given the ability to speak the language, or heal, etc. Or what about how the Holy Spirit uses visions of Jesus in Muslim countries where it is reported in surveys that 25% of Muslim converts to Christianity claim having a vision of Jesus or experiencing some other miracle before their conversion.¹ And so my position is open but caution, leaving room for the mysterious work of the Holy Spirit, not putting what the Spirit may do into an airtight theological box. Now that is unsatisfying answer to some of us. So let me give you some principles for clarity.

Principles for Clarity on Charismatic Gifts

#1 The Holy Spirit is free to dispense or withhold miraculous gifts according to his goodwill and pleasure. (Psalm 115:3) God is sovereign! And he can use whatever means he wishes!

#2 The Holy Spirit never undermines or departs from the Scriptures.

#3 Signs and miracles are pointers, not the point. Means God has used at times, although infrequently in the Bible, in order to confirm especially among those who are hard-hearted of the validity of God's truth.

#4 No miraculous sign is of godly origin if it does not point clearly and directly to the person and work of Jesus Christ in the way that Scripture prescribes. (Hebrews 2:3-4)

#5 There are signs and miracles that can be counterfeited (Matthew 24:24, 2 Thess. 2:9).

#6 All spiritual gifts should be used in love and in service of others. (1 Corinthians 12:7, 1 Corinthians 13:1) The fruit of the Spirit are meant to operate in conjunction with the gifts of the spirit. I don't care how gifted you are, if it's without love it's nothing.

Should we seek the Miraculous?

Yes. God works miracles! Regardless of where you stand on charismatic gifts, God can heal, work a miracle in your marriage, work a miracle in your career, bring someone to faith you are praying for, God can work through dreams and visions... Pray for miracles. Pray for the Holy Spirit to work in power. Anointing mention... Leave room for the mystery of the Spirit's work!

AND we also should have healthy discernment. **1 Thess. 5:21 *But test everything; hold fast to what is good.*** If someone claimed to have the gift of healing like we see in the Bible- I would expect they could tell me about blind people who now see, disabled people who now walk, those afflicted in other ways who have been freed, and I could go talk to and verify with the Scriptures. Test everything. If I had a disease, I'm not going to stake my hopes on their gift or give lots of money for them to perform their gift. I will ask them to pray for me, anoint me, fine-

¹ From the Book *Dreams and Visions*, Tom Doyle, p.127

but I'm still going to the doctor. Generally, don't trust someone who says, "Thus says the Lord..." Or "God told me to tell you..." unless they name chapter and verse in the Bible. But if someone says they sensed the Holy Spirit telling them to say something to you, or had a vision that they think it's for you, listen intently. But I think it's also appropriate to have a healthy discernment.

1 John 4:1 *Dear friends, do not believe everyone who claims to speak by the Spirit. You must test them to see if the spirit they have comes from God. For there are many false prophets in the world.*

If you land differently on any of these topics. You are loved here and welcome here. This isn't part of our statement of faith and if you land elsewhere on this you can be a member here. Hold your views with humility and grace. Respect this house.

Remember- **What's the Deal with Tongues?**

Questions? TEXT 302-217-6594

Bottom Line: We can always expect God to do great things. Keep in mind the greatest sign and wonder and miracle God could ever do happened already at the cross of Jesus Christ, where the very Son of God submitted himself unto death to demonstrate with eternal clarity the love of God for lost sinners and to bear once and for all who trust in his saving work our sin before a holy God. And that he was raised from the dead and is seated at the right hand where he is reigning from heaven and one day he will return to make all things new and reestablish his rightful reign where we will be with him forever. So whether gifts continue until our coming King or not, those are not the point. They are just little sign post at best, and infinitely pale in comparison to the ultimate miracle of the cross of Jesus and the miracle of his return. The miracle of each of us who believe that dead people spiritually are now alive.

Communion