Disciples Church

Lesson 74: Wednesday March 15, 2017

**TEACHING NOTES**

**Q113. What is a *spiritual gift*?**

A spiritual gift is a God-given capacity through which the Holy Spirit supernaturally ministers for the good of the Church unto God’s glory.

**Spiritual Gift:** A God-given capacity through which the Holy Spirit supernaturally ministers for the good of the church unto God’s glory. The world tries to counterfeit gifts to confuse, mislead, and cause chaos; therefore, we must understand what gifts remain, distinguish real gifts, and exercise our gifts in truth. God still does miracles, but the miraculous and revelatory gifts seen in the Old and New Testaments have ceased with the completion of Scripture and the end of the office of Apostles of Christ in the first century. Remaining gifts for the church today include glorious things like service, teaching, exhortation, generosity, leadership, acts of mercy, proclamation of God's truths, and faith.

**Q114. Are all the biblical *spiritual gifts* given still?**

No, God used certain gifts for a particular purpose and time in human history. God still does miracles, but the gifts that have ceased to be given by God to individuals are the miraculous and revelatory gifts: Apostle of Christ, prophecy, speaking in tongues, interpreting tongues, and miracle worker.

**Intro**

In this lesson, we are going to learn more about spiritual gifts. This should be informative and exciting.

It also gives us the ability to clarify some common misunderstandings and recent trends that have led many churches away from the historic biblical teaching on this topic.

Before we begin, let’s talk real briefly about hermeneutics.

“Hermeneutics.” We’ve used that word a lot at Disciples Church. Hopefully you know what it means. It’s speaking to how one reads and interprets Scripture.

Having proper hermeneutics is something learned. Each of us must be taught, trained, and use biblical, tested hermeneutics.

The historic confessions of faith give some important foundations for hermeneutics.

For example, they say truths in Scripture are “either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture (necessarily contained).”

“Expressly set down in Scripture” means the truth can be understood plainly, the right interpretation is clear. There is direct teaching. Clear statements. Things like “thou shalt not commit adultery” (Exodus 20:14) or we are saved by grace through faith (Eph 2:8-9).

“Good and necessary consequence” / “necessarily contained” means the truth is taught in Scripture, but the right interpretation/understanding is not necessarily based on direct passages, rather it is contained in Scripture and taught indirectly. This would be things like the Trinity. Scripture never says the concise historic orthodox statement, “One God, three persons” but interpreting the Bible to teach this is based on the good and necessary consequence of understanding Scripture as a whole. Another example would be that we in the New Covenant do not put to death disobedient children, as was clearly commanded in the Old Testament (Deut 21:18–21). Why don’t we do this? There is no direct commandment that annuls the biblical command to put them to death.

The reason we don’t is because the good and necessary consequence of Scripture’s teaching about covenants and law require that we not obey the positive Old Covenant command we see commanded in the OT text.

This is a real quick overview and examples, but I want to help you have that historic anchor as we move into our topic tonight. There may be a temptation to say, “show me a verse that clearly says this or that.” While that’s rooted in a good desire to have Scripture be the authority, clear direct passages are only one way we learn from the Bible. We need to be informed on these things and handle God’s word rightly, carefully.

What we learn tonight, especially in our second question is what has been affirmed by the historic Christian Church, based on good hermeneutics. This topic is not about opinions or assumptions. The conclusions are based on what is taught in Scripture, using the tested and true methods of interpretation and conclusion.

So then, let’s read together our first catechism Q/A for this topic:

**Q113. What is a *spiritual gift*?**

A spiritual gift is a God-given capacity through which the Holy Spirit supernaturally ministers for the good of the Church unto God’s glory.

This answer serves as a very helpful and simple explanation for what a *spiritual gift* is.

There are many motivations for covering this topic in the catechism, but one is spelled out clearly by Paul to the church in Corinth when he says:

**1 Corinthians 12:1-2** Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be uninformed. You know that when you were pagans you were led astray to mute idols, however you were led.

We appreciate and share in this motivation. We do not want the people of God to be uninformed. Sound teaching based on a right understanding of Scripture is needed to help inform God’s people in the topic of spiritual gifts.

So let’s work through our first answer to make sure we understand what it is saying.

A spiritual gift is a God-given capacity through which the Holy Spirit supernaturally ministers for the good of the Church unto God’s glory.

First, “A spiritual gift”

Let’s begin with these three words. We need to understand that we are talking about particular kinds of gifts that God gives.

As Christians, we know that everything good we have is a gift from God--our good God.

**James 1:17** Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights…

**John 3:27** John answered, “A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven.”

Every good thing we have is a gift from God. He is the sovereign gift Giver.

But in this study, we are not focused on all the good gifts He gives, rather the ones often classified as “spiritual gifts.”

So let’s read on in our answer to understand what these are and the primary reason God gives them.

Next, “A spiritual gift is a **God-given** capacity through which the **Holy Spirit**”

Look at these passages:

**1 Corinthians 12:4-7** Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

**1 Corinthians 12:11** All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.

**Romans 12:6** Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them…

**1 Peter 4:10** As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace

There are a couple of key things to know from these passages:

1) These gifts are from God, and Scripture particularly highlights the Holy Spirit’s role in this gift giving and gift using. In 1 Corinthians 12 we saw these gifts are of “the same Spirit” and of “the same Lord.” It is “it is the same God who empowers [the spiritual gifts] in everyone.”

In verse 11, it speaks again specifically to the Holy “Spirit.”

So, it’s been understood historically that the dispensing of spiritual gifts happens by the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Godhead. So we can say they are from God, that’s true, and we can say more specifically, they are from the Holy Spirit, that’s also true. The Holy Spirit is God; He’s the third person of the triune Godhead.

2) Note next that God gives these spiritual gifts on the basis of His sovereign will alone. Look again at our passages:

**1 Corinthians 12:11** All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.

God gives these spiritual gifts on the basis of His sovereign will alone.

**Romans 12:6** Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them…

God gives these spiritual gifts on the basis of His sovereign will alone.

This point is very important. First, because we continually need to acknowledge that God is sovereign and we are not. But second, because many, especially in the last 100 years or so, have believed wrongly, **very wrongly**, that there is something they can do to draw in more spiritual gifts from God. While it’s not wrong to desire spiritual gifts for godly purposes, it is very wrong to think we affect God’s giving of them or that we could earn and or deserve them. God gives these spiritual gifts on the basis of His sovereign will alone.

Next, “A spiritual gift is a God-given **capacity** through which the Holy Spirit **supernaturally ministers** for the good of the Church unto God’s glory.”

Here we focus on the fact that these spiritual gifts are the ability to do something. In the answer, we use the word “capacity,” and you see the action in the words “supernaturally ministers.” Spiritual gifts are for an active purpose.

Look at these passages:

In speaking of spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 12:4-7, Paul says God,“empowers them all in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit.” That’s action language.

Paul says in verse **11**, **“**All these [spiritual gifts] are empowered…” That’s action language.

**Romans 12:6** “let us use them…” That’s action language.

**1 Peter 4:10** “As each has received a gift, use it…” That’s action language.

We don’t receive spiritual gifts to sit on them and do nothing; we receive them to use them, serve others with them, and do all this in the way God ordained.

Which leads us to the last highlight to see in our answer: “A spiritual gift is a God-given capacity through which the Holy Spirit supernaturally ministers **for the good of the Church unto God’s glory**.”

Two key components here:

First, we need to understand that spiritual gifts are primarily for the good of the church. Spiritual gifts are primarily for the good and service of other believers, not ourselves. Spiritual gifts are primarily for the building up, encouraging, instructing, and correcting of Christ’s body.

If we understand this, we can avoid many of the errors that exist in our day about spiritual gifts. One of these errors is the idea that persons’ spiritual gifts are first or primarily for them. They seek to primarily bless themselves in their gifting, to lift up themselves in their gifting, and to focus the gifts on themselves. That kind of self-focused approach to spiritual gifts dishonors God and negatively affects the larger body, whom the gifts are primarily designed to bless.

Look at a portion of one of our passages again; we see this other-centered focus for example in:

**1 Corinthians 12:7** To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

**1 Peter 4:10** As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace

We must know and love the fact that spiritual gifts are primarily for the good and service of other believers, not ourselves.

And the second note under this highlight (and the most important thing of all to say and know) is spiritual gifts are for God’s glory. We have them for and use them unto God’s glory. God’s name and fame must be our hearts’ motivation in all we do; so it is with spiritual gifts. Let us not forget this, as trying to move past that causes us to dishonor God.

**Romans 11:36** For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.

So hopefully you got all those points. That is the summary and foundation we need when considering the topic of spiritual gifts.

Now, at this point we need to transition to considering: **What are the spiritual gifts we see in the New Testament and are they all given in our day?**

Up until about 100 years ago, there was not much confusion here in Christianity. From the earliest theologians following the time of the New Testament all the way until the beginning of the twentieth century, there was agreement in orthodox Christianity that not all gifts we see in the New Testament continued past Bible times.

Unfortunately, the idea that contradicts that orthodox understanding has become very normal or popular in our current generation. Many churches or denominations seek to continue gifts that have ceased, and most often they are seeking to participate in these gifts in a way that Scripture does not allow for.

We will explore some of this in the remainder of our lesson. But let’s start by **recognizing many of the spiritual gifts the New Testament Scripture speaks to that remain today**.

**Administration:** is wisdom and prudence, ability to execute the plans of leadership by managing people, resources, and time for ministry.

**Service:** to take the initiative to meet the practical and physical needs of others.

**Teaching:** to understand, clearly explain, and apply the Word of God (Scripture) rightly.

**Exhortation:** to give support, admonishment, and encouragement to those who are struggling to promote growth and Christian maturity in others.

**Evangelism:** to communicate the good news of Jesus Christ, especially to unbelievers.

**Faith:** to trust in Jesus Christ alone for salvation, trust in the goodness and plan of the triune God regardless of circumstances.

**Generosity:** to cheerfully and generously contribute time, material resources, and/or money.

**Leadership:** to instill vision, make decisions, motivate, and direct people to accomplish the work of ministry.

**Acts of Mercy:**  to provide compassionate and cheerful support to those who need it, especially those experiencing crisis or pain.

**Prophecy (Proclaiming previous revelation [Scripture in our time] of God):** to proclaim and apply God’s truth and expose sin. This is not claiming to have a personal insight from God, hear from God, or speak for God; rather, in our time period, it is one who proclaims accurately truths found in Scripture alone. [[ADD comments about the word “prophecy” used in two kinds of ways, this is one.]]

This list shows *many* of the spiritual gifts the New Testament Scripture speaks to that remain today.

I want to note a few things about this list.

First, all believers have a call to do these things and have at least some level of ability to do so. Clearly all believers have the spiritual gift of faith. We are all to be generous with everything God has given us, regardless if one has the gift of generosity. We are all to communicate the good news of Jesus Christ, regardless if one has the gift of evangelism. And so on.

Therefore, the second note is, when we speak of someone having a spiritual gift in a particular area, we mean that there is an *advanced ability* that exists in the person. Sometimes this spiritual gift—advanced ability—needs to be trained, cultivated, and instructed on how to wield it most effectively. Nonetheless, God has given spiritual gifts through which the Holy Spirit supernaturally ministers for the good of the Church unto God’s glory.

We encourage you to consider what on that list you have advanced ability in and seek to use your gifts for God’s glory. This would be a good thing to talk to your table leader and/or disciple-maker about. Get their input on the things they see you gifted with and talk with them about how they think you can more specifically use things for the good of others.

Now that we have covered many of the spiritual gifts that remain today, let’s read our second Q/A for this lesson:

**Q114. Are all the biblical *spiritual gifts* given still?**

No, God used certain gifts for a particular purpose and time in human history. God still does miracles, but the gifts that have ceased to be given by God to individuals are the miraculous and revelatory gifts: Apostle of Christ, prophecy, speaking in tongues, interpreting tongues, and miracle worker.

So what is meant by this? We mean that the Holy Spirit no longer gives *individuals* the miraculous and revelatory spiritual gifts that are seen in Scripture and that were present in the first century church or prior. It is neither God’s plan, nor His normal pattern, to distribute miraculous spiritual gifts to Christians and churches today as He did in the times of the Apostles. Those gifts ceased as normative with the Apostles. Additionally, I want to be clear here, *new revelation* (something not revealed to us in Scripture already) or private revelation (“hearing” from God) does not happen through, to, or in individuals or groups any longer. God is not speaking personally to us in our heads or audibly to our ears; He is not laying down new revelation.

Now, because these particular miraculous and revelatory spiritual gifts have ceased to be given by God, this is often called the doctrine of cessationism.

While God can and still does perform miracles today, **the Holy Spirit no longer gifts individuals to perform miraculous signs and gifts**.

Let me make that very clear: it is important to recognize that this is not a question of whether God still performs miracles today. It would be foolish and unbiblical to claim God does not heal people by His sovereign power and perform other miraculous things today. **Our best and most gracious example of God performing miracles Himself in our time is every time a spiritually dead sinner is brought to life, it is a miraculous work of divine grace**. The Bible teaches very clearly that the only way a blind and spiritually dead sinner can come to savingly know and trust Jesus is if the God who said, “Let there be light,” says, “Let there be light and new life in one’s heart.” Additionally, every time someone is healed solely in answer to the prayers of God’s people--in total contradiction to what the medical community has said--it’s a divine miracle; God has intervened and healed by His power.

Therefore, the question is whether the miraculous gifts of the Spirit, as seen in the first century church or prior, are still active in the church today.

Let us also note, this also is not a question of does the Holy Spirit give the people of the Church spiritual gifts. We’ve covered already that many gifts are still given. The question is whether the Holy Spirit still dispenses the miraculous and revelatory gifts today. And the answer is no, as we’ll explore tonight.

Let’s look now at many of the spiritual gifts the New Testament Scripture speaks to that do not remain today, and why they do not remain today:

**Prophecy (Proclaiming new or personal revelation from God):** This spiritual gift has ceased with the completion of Scripture and the end of the office of the Apostles of Christ in the first century. This gift enabled those with it to have an insight from God, hear directly from God, and/or speak for God. A person with this gift proved they had it by being 100% accurate in every prophecy they spoke--no exceptions.

**Performing Miracles:** The ability to cause something supernatural (beyond scientific understanding or the laws of nature) to happen.

**Healing:** The ability to heal any kind of sickness/illness/disability in a complete, immediate, permanent, and undeniable success.

**Speaking Tongues:** The ability to speak in a real human language that was foreign/unknown to the speaker apart from the spiritual gift.

**Interpreting Tongues:** The ability to interpret a real human language that was foreign/unknown to the hearer apart from the spiritual gift.

**Discernment of Spirits:** The ability to, in some measure, discern the hearts of men, their thoughts, purposes, and designs to find out falsehood and hypocrisy.

**Apostleship:** A spiritual gift *role* of a person who was a witness of the resurrected Christ, was personally appointed to Apostleship by Christ, and was able to work miracles and other now ceased spiritual gifts such as new prophecy of special revelation.

Now that we’ve seen clearly the miraculous and revelatory gifts we are talking about, let’s consider why nobody today has them—why the miraculous gifts are no longer given by the Holy Spirit after the first century.

And let me note, in this lesson we have benefited by the work of other Bible teachers, especially Tom Pennington. We’ll quote and paraphrase some of his work through this section.

So let’s lay out six biblical arguments for this historic Christian understanding.

The **first biblical argument for cessationism is the unique role of miracles**. Many evangelicals think that miracles litter almost every year of biblical history. In reality, there were only three primary periods in which God worked miracles through uniquely gifted persons. In other words, **there were only *three primary periods* when God gave human beings miracle working power**.

The first was that of Moses and Joshua. That period lasted from about 1445 B.C. through the career of Joshua that ended in about 1380 B.C. In other words, that first period of miracles lasted about 65 years.

The second window when miracles were common was during the ministries of Elijah and Elisha, putting the biblical chronology together, they ministered from about 860 B.C. until 795 B.C. Again a period of only about 65 years.

The third time of miracles was with Christ and His Apostles. Obviously, it began with His ministry and lasted at the very longest until the death of the Apostle John, or about 70 years.

Now throughout biblical history, God Himself has at times intervened with direct miracles. **But in thousands of years of human history, there were only about two hundred years in which God empowered humans to work miracles. And even then, miracles were not accomplished every day**.

Why was that? Because **the primary purpose of miracles has always been to confirm the credentials of a divinely appointed messenger (to establish the credibility of one who speaks for God); not one who teaches or explains the Word of God as I’m doing this evening, but one in whose mouth God has put His very words.**

Think about Moses first.

Exodus 4 Moses answered, “But behold, they will not believe me or listen to my voice, for they will say, ‘The Lord did not appear to you.’” 2 The Lord said to him, “What is that in your hand?” He said, “A staff.” 3 And he said, “Throw it on the ground.” So he threw it on the ground, and it became a serpent, and Moses ran from it. 4 But the Lord said to Moses, “Put out your hand and catch it by the tail”—so he put out his hand and caught it, and it became a staff in his hand— 5 “that they may believe that the Lord, the God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has appeared to you.”

The reason God gave the capacity to work miracles was to establish the credibility of one who speaks for God.

So Moses was a prophet, and he was given miracles to authenticate that he spoke God’s own words. The prophets who were to come after him, the same would be true of them. So in the Old Testament, only prophets, only those who spoke authoritatively and infallibly for God, performed miracles, because miracles were their credentials. A famous miracle outside the Pentateuch comes in the ministry of Elijah and in 1 Kings 18, as he is calling down fire on the altar at Mount Carmel. Listen to what He says: “Elijah the prophet came near [this is 1 Kings 18:36] and said, ‘O Lord, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that you are God in Israel, and that I am your servant, and that I have done all these things at your word.’” His desire is that God authenticate him. In this He calls down a miracle. “The fire of the Lord fell and consumed the burnt offering and the wood and the stones and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. 39 And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces and said, ‘The Lord, he is God; the Lord, he is God.’” Based on what Elijah brought about by his will--his summons--the people believed him.

When we come to the New Testament, we discover the same pattern unfolding. Our Lord, of course, was the great prophet, the prophet with the greatest message and the greatest claims, and so it’s not surprising then that he performed more miracles than any miracle worker in human history. But **just as it was with Moses and the Old Testament prophets, the primary purpose of Jesus’ miracles was to confirm His credentials as God’s ultimate messenger who spoke infallibly for God**.

John the Apostle makes this point central in his gospel. In John chapter 5 verse 36, Jesus speaks, “But the testimony that I have is greater than that of John. For the works that the Father has given me to accomplish, the very works that I am doing, bear witness about me that the Father has sent me.” He’s saying, “Look at what I do, look at the healing, look at the miracles; those are God’s authentication of me as the ultimate messenger.”

In chapter 6 and verse 14, “When the people saw the sign that he had done, they said, ‘This is indeed the Prophet who is to come into the world!’” That is the feeding of the thousands which He had performed; what was it a sign to point to? To confirm He was sent from God! And what did they say? “This is indeed the Prophet who is to come into the world!”

In chapter 7 verse 31, “Yet many of the people believed in him. They said, ‘When the Christ appears, will he do more signs than this man has done?’” They knew to look for real miracles as a way to confirm one was sent from God and spoke God’s words.

You see, **Jesus’ miracles were merciful, but they were not primarily a tool for mercy. Jesus’ miracles were not even primarily about alleviating human suffering, although of course we see in His miracles His great heart of compassion. The main reason the Spirit empowered Jesus to perform miracles was to confirm that He spoke the very words of God--that He was everything He claimed to be.** On the day of Pentecost, a day of miracles, Peter reiterated that was the purpose of Jesus’ miracles.

Look at Acts 2:22, “Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know.” That was the reason for His miracles: to confirm that Jesus spoke the very words of God--that He was everything He claimed to be.

Next, we need to understand that Jesus not only performed miracles Himself, but **He also gave that same power to the Apostles, and their miracles served exactly the same purpose: to confirm they were sent by the Lord and spoke His words.** Speaking of Apostolic ministry, Acts 14:3 says “So they remained for a long time, speaking boldly for the Lord, who bore witness to the word of his grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands.”

Hebrews 2:3-4 make this same point. The writer of Hebrews says the ministry of the Apostles was confirmed by “signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.”

((3 how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard, 4 while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.))

**The miraculous gifts that accompanied the Apostles were intended to confirm that they were God’s genuine instruments of revelation, just as the gifts had been with Moses; with the Old Testament prophets, Elijah and Elisha; and with Jesus Himself**.

Now think about this for a moment: **Since this pattern is consistent throughout the Scripture, it is reasonable to expect that with the death of the Apostles, with the end of God’s revelation, with the death of those who spoke God’s own words, the human capacity to work miracles would end as well…just as it had after Moses and Joshua for hundreds of years, and just as it had after Elijah and Elisha.**

B.B. Warfield writes, “Miracles do not appear on the pages of Scripture…without any assignable reason. **They belong to revelation periods and appear only when God is speaking to His people through accredited messengers declaring His gracious purposes.** **Their abundant display in the apostolic church is the mark of the richness of the Apostolic age in Revelation**. And when this Revelation period closed, the period of miracle working had passed by also as a mere matter of course.” **Scripture leads us to expect the end of the miraculous gifts because of the unique role that miracles have always played, as the validation of someone who spoke God’s own words.**

**A second related argument to that is the end of the gift of Apostleship**. At the outset, we should note that by “apostles” we do not simply mean “sent ones” in the general sense. Rather, we are speaking of those select individuals directly appointed and authorized by Jesus Christ to be His immediate representatives on earth, speaking new revelation--being the infallible mouth piece of God. In this sense, we are speaking of “capital A” apostles–such as the Twelve and the Apostle Paul. In the New Testament, Paul refers to the Apostles as one of the gifts that Christ gave His Church. For example, Ephesians 4:11 says, “[God] gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers.” These are roles--gifted roles--God gave the Church.

But the Apostles were a temporary gift. These are capital “A” Apostles; those in a unique role. There are no more Apostles like the Twelve or like Paul. Why is that? Because an Apostle, to be a true Apostle, you had to meet three qualifications.

You had to be a witness of the resurrected Christ. In Acts chapter 1, after the suicide of Judas, they’re sorting through who’s going to take his place. Acts 1:22, “beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us—one of these men must become with us a witness to his resurrection.” Also see Acts 10:39–41; 1 Cor. 9:1; 15:7–8; 1 Cor 15:8–9. You had to be a witness of the life of Christ, and of His resurrection, to be qualified to be an Apostle.

Secondly, to be an Apostle, you had to be personally appointed by the sovereign Christ. In Acts 1:2, the Apostles are referred to as those “whom He had chosen.” And even at the end of chapter 1 of Acts, when they’re seeking to replace Judas, in their prayer they say to our Lord, “show which one of these two you have chosen.” Also see Acts 9:15; Acts 10:39–41; 1 Cor. 15:7–8.

Thirdly, to be an Apostle, you had to be able to work miracles. In Matthew 10:1–2, Jesus “called to him his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every disease and every affliction.” This true miracle working was complete, immediate, permanent, undeniable, every kind of sickness, every kind of illness.

Look at 2 Corinthians 12:12, “The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with utmost patience, with signs and wonders and mighty works.” To be an Apostle, you had to be able to work miracles. Also see Acts 2:43; Acts 4:33; Acts 5:12.

Look at those three qualifications and you realize immediately that there is no one alive today who meets those three qualifications. **So this proves at least one New Testament gift, the gift of Apostleship, has ceased. The Lord is no longer giving the gift of Apostleship. This a significant difference in the work of the Spirit between the time of the Apostles and today, because one of the most miraculous displays of the Spirit, the gift of Apostleship, ended with the Apostolic age**.

It’s also significant that **the gift of Apostleship ceased without a crystal-clear New Testament statement that it would. That means it is neither impossible nor is it unlikely that other significant changes happened with the passing of the Apostles as well without being expressly stated. You see, once you rightly identify that there are no Apostles today at the same level as Peter and Paul, then you have admitted that there was a major change in the gifting of the Spirit between the Apostolic and the post-apostolic age**. The one New Testament gift most frequently connected to miracles, the gift of Apostleship, ceased.

**The third argument for cessationism is the foundational nature of the New Testament Apostles and prophets.** You see, the New Testament identifies the Apostles and prophets as the foundation on which the church was built.

In Ephesians 2:19-20, Paul lays a foundational understanding of the Church. He says, “So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone.”

Now, don’t miss this: he said the church is built on the foundation of the Apostles and prophets.

This is the image of the finished foundation of a building. And now the superstructure is being built on that already completed foundation. The elect are being called and are making up the household.

The foundation was laid by the Apostles and the prophets and the revelation—prophecy--from God that came through them. **Once the revelation God gave to the Apostles and the New Testament prophets was complete, the foundation was finished. Their work was completed. Their role was done. That’s clearly true of the Apostles, as we’ve already seen. They no longer exist. And now here in Ephesians 2, Paul says that the role of the prophets was also foundational, and it is complete as well**.

**We should not expect any more Apostles. We should not expect any more prophets. The foundation has been laid in the first century. We should not expect any more new revelation**.

**A fourth argument for cessationism is the nature of the New Testament miraculous gifts compared to the charismatic gifts claimed today**.

If the Spirit were still gifting believers today with the miraculous gifts, they would be the same gifts that we find in the New Testament; however, **the gifts claimed today bear almost no resemblance to what’s seen in the New Testament**.

Consider, for example, the gift of tongues. According to Luke in Acts 2, **the New Testament gift was the capacity as manifest at Pentecost to speak in a real human language. Listen to Acts 2:7-8: “And they were amazed and astonished, saying, ‘Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language?’” Each of them heard in their own native language**. These were actual languages, known languages. That is very different than most of those who claim tongues today. The common practice today is to speak in odd sounds, gibberish, or other forms of non-language. That doesn’t match the real New Testament gift of tongues.

Consider the nature of **the gift of prophecy**. This too is different; the New Testament gift and today’s manifestation are two different things. Contrary to modern practice, **nowhere does the Scripture allow for prophecy to be anything but 100% correct--no exceptions**. **For those claiming to hear from God or speak prophecy, their words were to be evaluated against previous revelation, but once it was approved, their prophecies were added to the teaching of the Apostles to form the foundation of the church.**

**Prophecy then is direct, infallible revelation. That is not what is called prophecy in the twentieth and twenty-first century. Some wrongly teaching that prophecy still exists suggest that prophecies today should begin with, quote: “I think this is what the Spirit might be saying.” That is not the New Testament gift of prophecy. In the Bible, it was, “Thus says the Lord.” And it was ALWAYS correct.**

**As Peter wrote in 2 Peter 1:21** For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

Consider another example: **the gift of healing**. In the New Testament **when someone with the New Testament gift of healing used his gifts, the results were complete, immediate, permanent, and undeniable for every kind of sickness, every kind of illness. We can see that clearly in the Gospels and Acts for example. The purported healings of today’s faith healers are the antithesis of those biblical miracles. They are incomplete. And they are unverifiable**. That is not the spiritual gift of healing.

So the displays of **what are today called the miraculous (or charismatic) gifts are just not the same as the New Testament gifts**. **When someone claims that their miracles are on the same level as the New Testament gifts, and there are those--such as the wild claims of limbs restored or of resurrections, for example--they are almost always hearsay, and if they’re not hearsay, they’ve not been verified**. So the nature of the so-called miraculous gifts practiced today is simply not the same as that of the New Testament gifts, and that’s because **they are not the New Testament gifts**.

**An additional point to be made is about the New Testament rules laid down for the miraculous gifts.** In 1 Corinthians 14, Paul lays out specific guidelines for how two of the miraculous biblical gifts were to be practiced in the church. First of all, in verses 27 and 28, he addresses speaking in tongues. **Whenever the biblical New Testament gifts of tongues was to be practiced, there were specific rules to be followed**. First of all, two or at the most three were to speak in **tongues** in a given service. Look at verse 27: “If any speak in a tongue, let there be only two or at most three.” Secondly, they were to speak one at a time. Verse 27 goes on to say, “And each in turn.” There had to be order, there had to be structure because that’s like God. Thirdly, there had to be someone to interpret. Verse 27 goes on to say, “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.” No one was allowed to speak in tongues in the corporate worship of the church unless there was someone else who understood that language and could interpret what had been said.

Why is that? Because how would anyone know if he was telling the truth or not? In the mouth of two or three witnesses a manner is established. Fourthly, women were not allowed to speak in tongues in the corporate worship, as he puts that all-encompassing command at the end in verse 34: “the women should keep silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be in submission, as the Law also says.” That’s how the gifts, the New Testament gifts of tongues and interpretation, were to be exercised.

In verses 29 to 34 Paul goes on to regulate the practice of the New Testament gift of **prophecy.** Rule number one: two or at the most three were to prophesy at a church service. Notice verse 29, “Let two or three prophets speak.” Secondly, other prophets and the congregation were to evaluate those prophecies against previous revelation. Verse 29 says, “let the others weigh what is said.” They were to speak one at a time. Verse 30 says, “If a revelation is made to another sitting there, let the first be silent. 31 For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all be encouraged, 32 and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets. 33 For God is not a God of confusion but of peace. As in all the churches of the saints.” Fourthly, women are not allowed to prophesy in the corporate worship, as again is encompassed in verse 34.

Now I want you to look at those verses; I want you to **think about those guidelines. Tragically, most who attempt to practice these ceased gifts today completely disregard those clear biblical commands. So not only are today’s so-called gifts not the New Testament gifts, but the clear directives the Apostle laid down for the practice of the New Testament gifts are largely ignored. In this, the Holy Spirit is not honored. Instead, He is routinely disobeyed. The result is not the work of the Spirit, but it is a work of the flesh, and it is clear rebellion even if it were the New Testament gifts.**

**A fifth argument for cessationism is the orthodox belief of church history.**

It was not until the early 20th century (only around 100 years ago!) that now common ideas about “charismatic gifts” came about. There is history on what happened at that time--unbiblical things--that brought about the trend we find ourselves in in our day…but we don’t have time to discuss all that. There are resources available if you’d like to become aware of that history.

But let’s go back to see what orthodox church history taught on this. Let’s start with New Testament church history. If you align the New Testament letters chronologically, 1 Corinthians was only the fourth inspired letter that Paul wrote, following Galatians and 1 and 2 Thessalonians. **Paul would write nine other canonical letters after 1 Corinthians to six different churches. There is never a mention of the gift of tongues again.**

**In the pastoral epistles in 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus, the books written near the end of Paul’s ministry as permanent directives for the post-apostolic ministry of the church, there is no mention of the miraculous gifts**. This is very telling; the gifts were not a key part of the instruction as time went on and especially as the Apostolic period was coming to an end.

When we leave New Testament history, **we discover that the testimony of the church after the New Testament era was exactly the same, in both what was taught and practiced. It was that the miraculous gifts ceased with the Apostles.** Here are just a couple of examples from different periods of church history.

**Augustine**, writing in the late 300’s and early 400’s, said, “In the earliest times, the Holy Spirit fell upon them that believed and they spoke with tongues which they had not learned as the Spirit gave them utterance. That thing was done for a sign and it passed away.”

Fast forward to the Reformation, when **Martin Luther** writes, “This visible outpouring of the Holy Spirit was necessary to the establishment of the early church as were also the miracles that accompanied the gift of the Holy Ghost. Once the church had been established and properly advertised by these miracles, the visible appearance of the Holy Ghost ceased.”

**John Calvin said**, “The gift of healing, like the rest of the miracles which the Lord willed to be brought forth for a time, has vanished away in order to make the preaching of the gospel marvelous forever.”

**Jonathan Edwards** writes, “Of the extraordinary gifts, they were given in order to the founding and establishing of the church in the world, but since the canon of the Scriptures has been completed, and the Christian church fully founded and established, these extraordinary gifts have ceased.

The great Baptist preacher, **Charles Haden Spurgeon,** says, “Those earlier miraculous gifts have departed from us.”

**B.B. Warfield** writes, “These gifts were distinctly the authentication of the Apostles. They 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 away with it. The miraculous working which is but the sign of God’s revealing power cannot be expected to continue and in point of fact, does not continue after the revelation of which it is the accompaniment had been completed.”

And note that the best **confessions in the historic Church** affirm this; such as the Baptist Confession of 1689, which says, the “former ways of God's revealing His will unto His people being now ceased.”

Now that’s just a sampling. You can find others in other resources as well. Although it is true that there were scattered reports of the miraculous throughout church history, there is the consistent testimony of the church’s key leaders that the miraculous and revelatory spiritual gifts ended with the Apostolic age.

**The sixth argument for cessationism is the sufficiency of Scripture**. This is so critical. Sola Scriptura.

The canon of Scripture closed with the writings of the Apostles and their authorized companions. **The New Testament teaches that the result of God’s completed revelation is an all-sufficient Scripture in many places**.

**2 Timothy 3:16-17** says, “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.**” There’s nothing left that’s needed for us. The man of God needs no additional revelation from God; he has all God has given for the post-Apostolic period in the Bible.** **The Spirit speaks only in and through the inspired Word…the words found in Scripture**.

In 1539, Luther commenting on Psalm 119 wrote this: “God wants to give you His Spirit only through the external Word.” Luther loved that expression, “the external Word.” **God gave us a book; it’s not subjective, it’s outside of us, it’s in words and sentences and paragraphs that we can analyze and read and study. It’s external to us. We don’t have to wonder if that message in our mind is from God or not; we have a message from God. Luther also wrote, “Let the man who would hear God speak, read holy Scripture.”**

Closing/Application:

In all of this it is also important to realize that the early church did not have the completed Bible, as we do today. Therefore, the gift of prophecy was necessary in order for the early Christians to know what God would have them do. The gift of prophecy enabled believers to communicate new truth and revelation from God. Now that God’s revelation is complete in the Bible, the “revelatory” gifts are no longer needed, as they were in the New Testament times.

Therefore, we, with those most consistent in Church history, see that these miraculous and revelatory spiritual gifts are no longer given by the Holy Spirit. As we said, God miraculously heals people still today. God still does amazing miracles today and sometimes performs those miracles in direct response to the prayers of His people. However, these things are not the miraculous gifts of the Spirit given to individuals. The primary purpose of the miraculous gifts in New Testament time was to prove that the Apostles’ testimony was true--that they were truly God’s messengers and to get the gospel to explode across the outside lands as it hadn’t done before.

Now, you have heard from our Pastor and all of us on the teaching team in different ways at different times about each one of us in the church needing to be discerning in the resources we are reading and listening to.

For example, Scott said in one of his lessons, “Stop seeking out extra words from God that aren’t in Scripture. Many of you have heard of Jesus Calling by Sarah Young. Stop reading these types of books. Why? Because she claims to hear from God.”

Sarah Young is in direct conflict with church history and Scripture when she claims to hear privately from God. Because of this, she is not to be trusted, learned from, or studied from. And there are many others to avoid in our day. There are many televangelists, for example, who deny what we have seen tonight as they deceive people by claiming things regarding the miraculous and revelatory gifts that are not true. Hopefully you have already made changes in what you are watching or reading to not include such persons.

Now, while we believe what we have discussed tonight on this topic to be what the Bible teaches, there are some respected Bible teachers and pastors whom we love and appreciate who hold a different view regarding this area of doctrine. For example John Piper, Matt Chandler, and Wayne Grudem. The majority of what they teach is sound and can be a blessing, but to various degrees **on this topic (miraculous gifts)** they have departed from orthodox church history. We believe that they have been influenced by the pervasive modern phenomena of the charismatic movement within the church and have let experience trump the Scripture. Now, we still love these men, and count them brothers, and recommend much of their work.

But, what this means is that we must use discernment when reading even some of our favorites to be sure that what is being taught is truly biblical and in line with the orthodox historical theology that has stood the test of time and not get caught up in more modern ideas.

It’s good to know these two categories, so you are equipped to guard your heart and mind when you hear someone teaching the miraculous and revelatory gifts are still active today.

Practically, we all must vet all resources we are interested in against Scripture. Test everything against the standard of Scripture. And then lean only on solid resources to help you know God more biblically and love Him more truly.

Additionally, teaching sound doctrine and refuting those who are teaching what is contrary to Scripture is one of the primary roles of your pastors and teachers. Please allow us to fulfill this by helping you vet the resources you’re considering, so we may help you be mindful and have good discernment for where problems may arise or come into play. It is our joy to do this with you.

As we have been doing in this Word of Truth catechism midweek, we want to rightly understand Scripture and the teaching of Church history so that we cannot be misled by unbiblical trends or ideas.

Ultimately, it’s Scripture we look to to “hear” from God; as Romans 15:4 says, “For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.”

So, God still gives MANY good spiritual gifts today:

Administration

Service

Teaching

Exhortation

Evangelism

Faith

Generosity

Leadership

Acts of Mercy

Prophecy (Proclaiming previous revelation [Scripture in our time] of God)

We have these gifts and Scripture, so we are not lacking anything He wants us to have in this time. As we said earlier, we encourage you to consider what on the list you have advanced ability in and seek to use your gifts for God’s glory. This would be a good thing to talk to your table leader or disciple-maker about. Get their input on the things they see you gifted with and talk with them about how they think you can more specifically use them for the good of others.

Let’s pray.