Section: Doctrine of the Church (Ecclesiology)

Wednesday, April 14, 2021

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**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, believers must understand what gifts remain, distinguish real gifts, and exercise their 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 have clarity in some common misunderstandings and recent trends that have led many churches away from the historic biblical teaching on this topic.

We know well that many here have backgrounds that include things related to this topic. Things like, teachings you’ve heard, practices you been encouraged in or seen, perhaps even memories you are fond of. I bring tonight’s teaching to you well aware of those realities. It’s been a joy to work through this topic with many of you who’ve been with us for some time—to see the fruit of you putting off what’s behind and putting on the sufficiency of Scripture.

So, if you are newer to DC or the teaching tonight hits on sensitive things for you, I encourage you to patiently consider what is being said…I encourage you to ask your group leader any questions you have…I encourage you to test all things against Scripture.

* **Hermeneutics**

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

We’ve used the word “hermeneutics” a lot at Disciples Church. **It’s speaking to how one reads and interprets Scripture.**

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

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

For example, they say truths in Scripture are “either explicitly stated in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture” or “by necessary inference contained in the Holy Scriptures.”

“Explicitly stated” 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” and “by necessary inference contained” means the truth is taught in Scripture, but the right interpretation/understanding is not necessarily based on didactic 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. The truth of the Trinity is *necessarily contained* in Scripture.

In this quick point, 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—very good—desire to have Scripture be the authority……direct/didactic 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 or each’s personal experience. 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.

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** Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be uninformed.

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**

First in our answer it says, “A spiritual gift”

Let’s begin with these three words. We need to understand **that** we are studying a particular kind 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…

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.

* **A spiritual gift is a *God-given* capacity through which the *Holy Spirit***

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

* Spiritual 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 see 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.”

**1 Corinthians 12:4-6**

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

It’s been understood historically that the dispensing of spiritual gifts is credited to the work of the Holy Spirit, the third person of the triune God.

So, we can say they are from God, that’s true, and we can say, they are from the Holy Spirit, that’s also true. The Holy Spirit is God; He’s the third person of the Trinity.

* Note next that God gives these spiritual gifts on the basis of His sovereign will alone.

Look at:

**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

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 produce more spiritual gifts in themselves.

It is good and biblical to desire spiritual gifts for godly purposes, *and*, it **is** very wrong to think that we can earn and/or produce them or that we can draw them out of God.

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

* **A spiritual gift is a God-given *capacity* through which the Holy Spirit *supernaturally ministers***

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

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 see

**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 spiritual gifts to use them—to serve others with them and to do so in the way God ordained.

* **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.***

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:

* **primarily for the good of others**

First, we need to understand that spiritual gifts, on the horizontal level, are primarily for the good of the elect. Spiritual gifts are primarily for the good and service of others, 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. If your use of spiritual gifts are primarily about you, then repentance needs to happen—adjustment is order.

Look at Scripture with me again; we see this other-centered focus for example in:

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

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

We must know and love the fact that spiritual gifts, on the horizontal level, are *primarily* for the good and service of others, not ourselves.

* **spiritual gifts are ultimately for God’s glory**

And the second note under this highlight (and the most important thing of all to say and know) is spiritual gifts are ultimately 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 and best 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 God has ceased to give, 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**.

* **Spiritual gifts that remain in our time**

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

**Service:** *[[this gift]]* to take the initiative to meet the practical and physical needs of others.

**Teaching:** *[[this gift]]* to understand, clearly explain, and apply the Word of God (Scripture in our time) rightly.

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

**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, often done in a way that encourages others.

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

**Leadership:** to instill vision, make decisions, motivate, discipline, 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.

**Existing Revelation Prophecy** [[Now, the word “prophecy” is used in two kinds of ways, this is one, we’ll get to the other in a bit, this one is the:]] **(Proclaiming previous revelation, which is Scripture in our time):** *[[with this gift the person is able]]* 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.

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 all 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. Everything on that list, we all must do.

Now, 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—this advanced ability—needs to be trained, cultivated, and instructed on how to wield it most effectively. ((think for example about **Evangelism…..**))

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 in our time, let’s consider 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.

This answer is saying that the God 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 **not** God’s will to distribute miraculous spiritual gifts to Christians and churches today as He did in the times of the Apostles. Those gifts ceased with the Apostles.

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 himself *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 cannot do miracles by His sovereign power if/when He wills. **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 God through His 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 does the miraculous work of giving new life (regeneration) to him/her and gifts saving faith. 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 and irrespective of human effort—it’s a divine miracle; God alone has 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.

… 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 see tonight.

* **Spiritual gifts that do not remain in our time**

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

**New Revelation Prophecy** [[this is the other way the word is used, perhaps the more common way. This is:]] **(Hearing new, special revelation from God and/or Proclaiming new or personal revelation from God):** This gift enabled those with it to have personal insight from God, hear directly from God, and/or speak for God, all with 100% accuracy.

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

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

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

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

**Discernment of Spirits:** The definitive ability to 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. I’ll quote and paraphrase much of his work through this section. If you check out the resources we are offering after this lesson, you hear that much of this content is directly from one of those items.

So, let’s lay out six biblical reasons for this historic Christian understanding of cessationism.

* **Six biblical reasons for this historic Christian understanding of cessationism**

The **first biblical reason 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 timeline 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 total) in which God **empowered humans to work miracles. And even then, miracles were not accomplished every day**.

Why was that? This is so key. 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. In Exodus 4 we can see that Moses was concerned that people wouldn’t listen to him as He spoke for God, but God replied by telling Moses that signs and miracles would be worked through him to establish Moses’ credibility as one who speaks for God. That’s Exodus 4.

Moses was a prophet, and he was given miracles to prove that he spoke God’s own words. The prophets who were to come after him, the same would be true of them. In the Old Testament, God’s prophets, (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. Based on what Elijah brought about by his request--his summons--his gift--the people believed him.

When we come to the New Testament, we discover the same pattern unfolding.

Our Lord, 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 show humans His credentials as God’s Messenger---- one 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; they are God proving to you that I am the messenger I claim to be.”

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 thing He did was the feeding of the thousands; it was a sign to point to—to confirm—He was sent from God!

They said it, they said, “This is indeed the Prophet who is to come into the world!”

**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 said that was in fact accomplished by 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.”

Next, we need to understand that Jesus not only performed miracles Himself, but **He also gave that same power to specific people—the Apostles—and their miracles served exactly the same purpose: to prove to others 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.”

**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 (and proper hermeneutics) 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 “…~~**~~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.”~~

**Therefore, the** “Good and necessary consequence” of these things from Scripture **is to expect that since there is no longer anyone who speaks God’s own words, there is then an end of the miraculous gifts because of the unique role that miraculous gifts played.**

**A second related reason 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 mouthpiece 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. How do we know that? Because an Apostle, to be a true Apostle, you had to meet three qualifications.

First, you had to be a witness of the resurrected Christ. ((There are verses listed there for you to reference for this point.))

Secondly, to be an Apostle, you had to be personally appointed by the sovereign Christ. ((Again, verses listed there for you.))

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.”

To be an Apostle, you had to be able to work miracles.

When you look at those three qualifications you realize immediately that there is no one alive today who meets those three qualifications. **So, this proves so far that one New Testament gift, the gift of Apostleship, has ceased.**

**The Lord is no longer giving the gift of Apostleship.**

**This is a significant difference in the work of the Spirit between the time of the Apostles and today—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 related to the office of Apostle happened with the passing of the Apostles as well without being expressly stated.**

**You see, once you rightly identify that there are no capital “A” Apostles today, then you have concluded that there was a major change in the gifting of the Spirit between the Apostolic and the post-apostolic periods**. The one New Testament gift most frequently connected to miracles, the gift of Apostleship, ceased.

**The third reason 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. The New Testament church has been established—the work of the apostles and prophets is complete.

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 was laid in the first century. We should not expect any more new revelation**.

**A fourth reason 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 meet the standards and examples 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 to speak in a real human language. Listen to Acts 2:7-8: “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. The modern thing called “tongues” doesn’t match the real New Testament gift of tongues.

Also consider the nature of **the gift of new revelation 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.**

**New revelation prophecy then is direct, infallible revelation.**

**That is not what is called prophecy in the twentieth and twenty-first century. Some wrongly teaching that new revelation 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 new revelation 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.

I want to be clear here, this means that 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 unique things personally to us in our heads or audibly to our ears; He is not laying down new revelation. The Spirit of God certainly reminds us of, presses upon us, *Scripture*, no doubt. But, God is not speaking unique things personally to us in our heads or audibly to our ears.

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 illness or disability. We can see that clearly in the Gospels and Acts for example. The claimed healings of today’s “faith healers” are the antithesis of those biblical miracles. What modern day “faith healers” do is incomplete**. They do not have the spiritual gift of healing.

See clearly tonight that the displays of **what are today called the “charismatic gifts” are simply NOT real New Testament gifts**. **Those that claim they have the miraculous gifts of the Spirit are lying. It’s as simple as that. What they do is not what we see in Scripture. And there is no biblical consistency in their acts or claims.**

* **the New Testament rules laid down for the miraculous gifts**

**An additional point to be made here is about the New Testament rules laid down for the miraculous gifts.** In 1 Corinthians 14, Paul lays out specific guidelines for how the miraculous biblical gifts were to be practiced in the church.

In verses 27 and 28, he addresses speaking in tongues. **Whenever the gifts of tongues was to be practiced, there were specific rules to be followed**.

First of all, God limited how many could 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.

Thirdly, there had to be someone to interpret. “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 gathering of the saints unless there was someone else who understood that language and could interpret what had been said.

Why is that? Because there is *no benefit* to others in the use of tongues if no one there understands the language being spoken. And, how would anyone know if he was telling the truth or not if no one even understands what is being uttered?

**1 Corinthians 14:27-28**

Fourthly, women were not allowed to speak in tongues in the corporate worship gathering, 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.”

**1 Corinthians 14:34**

This passage speaks to the authority that comes with proclaiming God’s truth to a mixed group of men and women. God has declared that such roles in that setting are only for men. That’s God’s will. (See also 1 Timothy 2:12.)

Therefore, that certainly applies to the revelatory, proclaiming gifts like tongues and prophecy.

Those four directives are how the New Testament gifts of tongues and interpretation were to be exercised. Based on the Bible, not opinion or preference or experience.

**~~For the gifts of prophecy, there are specific rules to be followed:~~**

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.”

Thirdly, they were to speak one at a time. Verse 31 says, “you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all be encouraged.”

Fourthly, women are not allowed to prophesy in the corporate worship, as again is encompassed in verse 34 as we saw earlier.

**1 Corinthians 14:29-34**

Now I want you to look at those points from 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, 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—they are not gifts from God**.

**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 reason 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 that. There are resources available if you’d like to become aware of that history.

**New Testament flow.**

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 the time-period of the writing of the New Testament, **we discover that the testimony of the orthodox Christian church after the New Testament era was that the miraculous gifts ceased previously 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.”

See of 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.”

**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.”

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 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 reason for cessationism is**

* **the sufficiency of Scripture**.

This is so critical. The canon of Scripture closed with the writings of the Apostles and their authorized companions. **The result of God’s completed revelation is an all-sufficient Scripture**.

**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 to be complete, equipped for every good work. 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, Reformer Martin Luther wrote: “God wants to give you His Spirit only through the external Word.”

**God gave us a book; it’s not subjective. It’s outside of us, it’s in words and sentences that we can read, analyze, study. It is external to us.**

**We don’t have to wonder if that little voice in our mind telling what color shirt to wear today or that little voice in our mind telling to go a different route to the store today *is from God or not*; it’s not—*because (listen carefully here)* that is not how He has determined to communicate to us in the here and now.**

**…This may be the point in the study that makes some of you uncomfortable.**

**Maybe you’ve been taught the opposite to this before.**

**Maybe you are fond of the idea that God would privately and customized speak to you.**

**Maybe you have an experience or multiple where you followed an inner-thought or what seemed like an audible voice and it went well for you….and you love to credit that to God speaking directly to you.**

**I understand that those ideas or experiences are powerful and persuasive. But, please, remember, that our feelings and experiences don’t define or trump Scripture. Instead,** **we must interpret our feelings and experiences BY Scripture.**

**God has not told us that He will give us customized additional revelation, private or not.**

**Rather, He has told us that *in Scripture* are the words of life—He has told us that *Scripture* is complete and sufficient for us. You are not a prophet—He has not given any more prophets after the Apostles and it’s His good will that we are satisfied with His Bible.**

**As the historic confession says, “The Holy Scriptures are the only sufficient, certain, and infallible standard of all saving knowledge, faith, and obedience." In Scripture is "everything essential for his own glory and man’s salvation, faith, and life." Martin Luther also wrote, “Let the man who would hear God speak, read holy Scripture.”**

**So, it is right and good to know and affirm that God is not speaking unique things personally to us in our heads or audibly to our ears; He is not laying down new revelation. The Spirit of God certainly reminds us of, presses upon us, Scripture, no doubt. But God is not speaking unique things personally to us in our heads or audibly to our ears.**

**We have Scripture from God to read and study and know.**

* **To sum it up**

In all of this it is also important to realize that the early church forming and living right after Christ’s ascension 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 and needed truth/commands/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, know that the miraculous and revelatory spiritual gifts are no longer given by the Holy Spirit.

As we said, 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 move the gospel across the outside lands in increased and more rapid ways.

* **Some Application**

Now, you have heard from the elders and the rest of 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.

There are even some respected modern Bible teachers and pastors whom who hold a different view regarding this area of doctrine. For example, John Piper 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. Therefore, we should not learn from them *on this topic.* Now, we still love these men, and count them brothers, and recommend much of their work.

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, so to not get caught up in more modern, unbiblical 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 through this Word of Truth Catechism midweek series, 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.

**More resources**: www.discipleschurch.com/MiraculousGifts