

## Jason Upchurch - 1 Corinthians 12:9-10 - The Spirit's Gift of Healing and Exorcism

Well we are back at it this morning in **1 Cor. 12** working through these spiritual gifts that the Holy Spirit has blessed the church with. These gifts are given primary for the purpose of building up the Church of God for the glory of God. These are all awesome and amazing and powered by the Holy Spirit.

This is not an exhaustive list, but a list that seems somewhat tailored to the Corinthians given the difficulties they're having.

So what we have here is a list of 9 gifts that the Holy Spirit gives to individual believers for the upbuilding of the church. There's some discussion as to whether or not the Spirit still gives these gifts. Some say not at all, some say he still does regularly. My own position, as I've mentioned, is that I think he still could and probably does from time to time, but nowhere near as often as he did in the very early days of the church. I'm what the cool kids in the reformed world call open but cautious. I'm open to the Holy Spirit working in these ways but cautious because I want to discern that it truly is him at work.

And just to be clear: this morning you're going to see the more cautious side of the open-but-cautious.

On the one hand we don't want to attribute things to God that are not from God. There're plenty of deceivers out there who claim they are doing the work of God when in fact they're not doing the work of God. Pretty much any TV preacher you see is a liar. They're often selling miracles and healing and telling your future. When I was a kid you could call the Psychic hotline for that; now you can just watch TBN.

On the other hand, we don't want to insult the Holy Spirit if he chooses to work in a way that we're maybe uncomfortable with. God has chosen to work in these ways for his glory and if a gift builds up the church and brings glory to Jesus we should celebrate that.

These gifts are given by the Spirit to bring unity to the body of Christ by building us up in holiness and the faith.

We saw the first 3 gifts last week:

### **1-3) A Word of Wisdom, a Word of Knowledge, Faith - Read 8**

Remember that no one is 100% sure what a word of wisdom or a word of knowledge are with any certainty. Most folks believe that this is a spontaneous work of God to give someone incredible wisdom about how to act in a situation. And word of knowledge is probably a spontaneous act of God to give knowledge about someone or something that they didn't find out through natural means.

And faith is just that - someone who has a superabundance of trust in the Lord to provide and act.

### **4) Gifts of Healing. Read 9**

Before I dive into what Paul is talking about with healing, let me start by saying that God is a healer. Healing is on God's mind and something that God desires to do.

We see all through the Bible that people miraculously healed. Who heals them? God heals them.

God healed Abraham and Sarah's broken bodies from barrenness.

God healed Abimelech from disease and his town from barrenness.

God healed Moses's sister, Miriam, after she attempt to usurp Moses's authority.

God healed Naaman the Syrian general from his leprosy.

God healed Nebuchadnezzar from his crazy goat condition and restored him to mental health.

God raised the widow's son to life through Elisha.

God healed Hezekiah from his death bed and gave him 15 more years of life.

Jesus comes on the scene and his ministry is one of nonstop healing.

**Matt. 4:23:** he preached the gospel and healed every disease and every affliction.

**Matt 9:35:** Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages...proclaiming the gospel of the Kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction.

**Matt. 14:14:** There was a great crowd and he healed them all.

The gospels report that Jesus healed all kinds of things: withered hands, blindness, muteness, lameness, demon possessed people, chronic menstrual bleeding, scoliosis, fever, generic sickness, **Luke 7:21** says plagues, leprosy, paralysis, and of course he raised people from the dead.

Matthew says Jesus's healing ministry fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy in **Isa. 53:4** that Messiah would take our illness and bear our diseases.

Many times we want to relegate that simply to meaning spiritual healing, but it's hard to escape that Matthew makes the connection clear: the work of Jesus was to alleviate physical illness as well as spiritual damnation.

During the time of Jesus and even afterward, the apostles were also able to heal in great ways. How did they do this? Through the power of God.

**Deut. 32:39:** See now, that I, even I, and he, and there is no god besides me; I kill and make alive, I wound and I heal; and there is none that can deliver out of my hand.

And we know that in the New Heavens and New Earth there is no more death or dying.

**Rev 21:4:** he will wipe away every tear, death shall be no more, no more mourning or crying or pain.

God's eternal plan of redemption isn't just saving your soul through the gospel, though that's true. It also includes the final, eternal glorification of your body. No more aches, no more pains, no more 15 prescriptions, no more doctors, no more undiagnosed diseases, no chronic thorns in the flesh.

I say all that because we need to understand that God has a heart to heal people. Believers and even unbelievers experience the precious grace of healing from Jesus. Jesus healed 10 lepers, how many actually came back to praise him? Just one. I wonder how many people Jesus healed were shouting for his crucifixion. The mercy of God is often expressed through healing.

And because of that, Jesus never rebuked anyone for coming to him for healing. He always showed compassion, always stayed up late to lay hands on people to heal them. He was so committed to healing people he often had to sneak away just to be alone because the work of healing was physically exhausting to his human body - but he delighted to do it.

I can't recall any time in Jesus's life where Jesus actually turned away someone who asked for healing. He healed everyone who came; and he healed many who didn't even come.

So get this: when we ask for God to heal, God isn't up in heaven rolling his eyes thinking we're ignorant of more mature things. This was the bane of his earthy ministry and it is eternally on his mind.

But that brings us to the gift of healing now. Does this exist? I have to tell you that I think it's safe to say that the vast, vast majority of what is called healing is not healing at all. The faith healers: Benny Hinn, Kenneth & Gloria Copeland, Jessie Duplantis, TD Jakes - most of the people you see on TV are all liars. They're all fakes. They're all heretical anyway, so God is not going to bless their ministries with healing power.

Now, let me just say: when we're talking about the **gift of healing** we need to be specific.

We're not talking about praying for healing. We all pray for healing but that is different than the spiritual gift we see in the Bible. I 100% believe that God has and does heal people as a result of prayer - I believe that for sure. But I don't think that's the same thing as the **gifts** we see in the NT.

This is important because a lot of people want to say the gift of healing to simply praying for healing. But I think when we look at the Bible and how people heal and are healed, that's just not the case.

There are times when prayer is needed for healing. There's an instance in Luke where the disciples can't cast a demon out of a young man to heal him and Jesus says prayer is required. But first of all, that's for casting out a demon. And, second, the expectation is that most of the time prayer is not necessarily needed for such a work when someone has this gift.

So I don't think this is just praying for healing.

We're also not talking about natural healing like a doctor or nurse or vitamins or essential oils. Doctor's and nurses can heal people, but it's through natural means, usually.

So what we're talking about is a miraculous work of the Spirit to use someone to physically heal another person instantly of some disease.

I told you my position on the more miraculous gifts is open but cautious. I think it's safe to say that I'm very, very cautious about someone claiming they have this gift mostly because we simply don't see this happening anywhere near like what we see in the early days of the church. Even my friends who are on the more charismatic end of the spiritual gifts spectrum readily admit that healing like what Jesus and the apostles did doesn't happen now anywhere near like what the apostles did.

So I am open, but cautious. Could the Spirit still work in these ways? Sure. There is real evidence that occasionally throughout the world the Spirit gifts people with this service.

But I have never witnessed anyone heal in any kind of similar way as what we see in the Bible. Maybe you have, and I'd believe you. But I think it's safe to say that we see the gift of mercy and generosity and teaching and administration literally thousands of times more often than healing.

Now, let me make a couple observations here. My definition for healing used to be something like: The ability for someone to heal anyone at any time from any disease."

The problem with that is that's not what the text says. Look at what the text says. **Read 9, 28-29**

Does Paul say "gift of healing?" No. He says **gifts** of healing. It's plural - so God gives different capacities within the gift of healing.

And, to be honest, that's not even what he says. The ESV and the NIV actually miss the original Greek grammar. I don't often give a shout out to the New American Standard or NKJV but they nail it: it's gifts (plural) of healings (plural).

What differences does that make? The difference it makes is that there is no one uniform gift of healing. Except for Jesus - and maybe some of the apostles - no where do we have record of any of the apostles healing every single possible disease on command all their lives. It just doesn't exist.

Even the apostles - though they had some amazing abilities - were limited in their scope of healing.

Paul couldn't heal Timothy from his stomach ailments or Epaphroditus from being near death. Yet, at the end of Acts - likely after those occasions - he clears out the whole island of Malta. So it seems that his abilities came and went.

And here it seems clear that we have a plurality of gifts within the broader category of healing. So, just to give you a feel: maybe you go to John if you've got eye problems. And you go to Jane if you've back aches. Mary handles headaches and muteness. Silas used to heal deafness, but it seems as though God hasn't worked through him in a while. And we're all waiting on the apostle Peter to come visit because he seems to be able to heal more often than Paul.

That seems to be the feel of the New Testament. No one person could heal all things even though some people could heal many things.

And it also appears that local church elder teams often had the ability to heal. **James 5:13-18** talks about people who are sick in the congregation calling for the elders of the church to pray for them. And if they've sinned God will forgive them and heal their body.

Two things on that. First, there seems to be a connection between their ailment and sin. Second, James never says the elders or the elder team has the gift of healing, it just says they pray for it. But it does seem as though when the elders come to pray for a sick, sinning person God seems to work in more obvious ways.

So I want to be really clear here: we can and should pray for healing. And pray for it, you guys, like we really mean it. Like we really, really believe the God of the universe who raised his Son Jesus from the dead and will raise our mortal bodies from the dead can heal cancer and tumors and diseases. We should pray like he can do that and wants to do that.

But to be clear: praying for healing doesn't seem to be the same as the gift of healing. It's just not the gift we see in Scripture.

So my position used to be that healing no longer exists because if it did that person could just go down to Sacred Heart and clear the place out. Now, I'm not sure that's really a fair statement. But if someone had the gift of healing I think we'd know it and we should know it because it would be a tremendous gift to the body of Christ that often suffers ailments.

### **5) Working of Miracles. Read 9, 28-29**

Okay, what is a miracle? I want to take us on a little adventure through the NT in a few minutes to answer that question. We often use the word miracle in a very loose way.

Let me describe two ways that Paul is not using the word: providence and what I'm going to call non-repeating miracles.

Providence. Usually when we use the term we use it in a non-technical sense. Someone was in an accident and it was a miracle they didn't get hurt. My flight got delayed and by some miracle we got to the gate in time and I made my connecting flight. The Seahawks aren't getting to the post season except for some kind of miracle. And let me tell you, Russell Wilson doesn't have that kind of spiritual gifting.

What we're actually describing there is not what Paul has in mind. That's not the gift. Those examples are examples of God's good providence. Providence comes from the word to provide. God can provide things that are good and favorable in ways that seem out of the ordinary.

You're behind on your water bill and a check comes in for just the amount you need. Technically speaking that's God's good providence.

The second type of miracle that is often described in the Bible that I'll call a non-repeating miracle. Jesus first miracle: turning water into wine is non-repeating. We never see anyone else doing that. Jesus walking on water is a miracle. Jesus calming the wind and sea is a miracle. Jesus cursing the fig tree and it completely dries up instantly is a miracle. Feeding massive groups of people. The mass of resurrections that happened after Jesus died in Jerusalem is a miracle. Stephen in Acts 7 calls the 10 plagues of Moses miracles. Elijah calling down fire from heaven. Those are miracles in a proper sense. They are massive demonstrations of God's power.

But - and this is super important - they are not repeated by anyone else. What I mean by that is that we never see the apostles or Christians repeat those kinds of miracles. No where in Acts is it recorded that other Christians walked on water or turned water to wine or calmed weather. About the closest we see is Peter and Paul raising someone from the dead. But outside of that.

So, again, when we're talking about the gift of miracles that might be common in the church, we're not talking about favorable situations or even the miracles that Jesus did that no one else does.

Now, I don't know what comes to your mind when you think of miracles.

The word here literally dunamewn: powers (plural). And just like miracles, it's: workings of powers. So there's variety when it comes to this gift.

And by the way, that shouldn't surprise us. When we see the gift of tongues in the next section, we'll look at Acts 2 and the gift of tongues is manifested in various languages. Some people get one language, some people get another. Some people get multiple.

Same thing with teaching: I teach differently than John Piper or John MacArthur or RC Sproul or Charles Spurgeon. Some people express mercy differently. You get the idea. So there's some variety.

As I was studying this passage I was kind of surprised how little information people give about this gift. The commentators either gloss over it or define it in vague ways.

So let me tip my hand and then try to show you why I believe it. I think the gift of miracles is the gift of exorcism. It's the ability to exert power over demons and demonic activity. Usually casting out demons. Let me show you why.

**Turn to Mark 6:7-14.** When you start looking at these events you'll see 3 words often used together.

Miracle - indicates that it is not natural, it's God breaking in to the world.

Wonder - indicates it's effect on the people. It's not a magic trick, it's not just interesting. It's jaw-dropping amazing.

Sign - indicates it's purpose to point to a greater reality. Usually the greater reality is that the one who does miracles is working on God's behalf. **Read 7-13**

Two things to keep in mind here. First, this was amazing power. They have been given extraordinary power over the spiritual world. This is a battle of powers. In fact, in the NT one of the ways that the demonic and satanic world is described is "powers." So there is a cosmic battle of powers going on. And part of the power of the Spirit showing that Christ has come to conquer is by having power over the powers.

And, here's an interesting tidbit: according to **Luke 10**, there were 72 who went out total. So this ability to cast out demons was not just an apostolic thing. Other believers could do it too.

But here's the gravy. Here's the connection to **1 Cor. 12. Read 14**

This is where the precise word is used. Herod had put John the Baptist to death and then he's hearing Jesus casting out demons as well as healing and he says "that is why these miraculous powers (dunamewn) are at work in him. He says what Jesus is doing is powers - same word. Even the unbelieving world recognizes that this is power over spiritual forces.

**Turn to Mark 9:38-41.** Again, this is the link. **Read**

**Turn to Luke 6:17-19.** Here we see the emphasis on power. **Read**

Power went out of him. It's not just authority that casts these demons out, it's power. Power given by the Holy Spirit to do this work. To have ability over demonic forces.

Here's the interesting thing, sometimes healing physically and demonic activity are linked. So that exorcism can often look like miraculous healing.

**Luke 13:10-17.** Here we see Jesus cast out a demon but the language that is used is "healing." Why is the term healing used rather than powers or miracle? I think the reason is that the presenting symptom is a medical one. But the underlying cause is a spiritual one. **Read**

We'd say she needs back surgery or a chiropractor or a back brace. No, she needed an exorcism This is why healing and exorcism are often linked.

Now, **look at Acts 4:30** how this is transferred to the church. This is the prayer of the early church as persecution is mounting. **Read 29-31**

These wonders are being performed in the whole church. It seems like mostly through the apostles. **Look at 5:12. Read**

It seems as though the apostles were primary, but look at **6:8. Read**

**14:3** - Iconium - Paul did signs and wonders

**15:12** - Barnabas & Paul relaying signs and wonders

It seems that a lot of what the apostles did was cast out demons. There's this invasion of God into the pagan world through ministers of the gospel. And demons just come out. **Acts 16** there's the demon possessed girl in Philippi who can tell fortunes - Paul is annoyed by the demon and commands the demon out.

**Romans 15:19** power of signs and wonders have authenticated the gospel message everywhere Paul has gone.

**2 Cor. 12:12** - signs of apostles: signs and wonders and mighty works.

**Turn to Acts 19:11-20.** Check this out. Again, notice the connection between miracle (power) and demon possession. **Read**

Do you realize the Paul was famous among demons? They all knew who he was. They knew Jesus, too, of course. But this was how prevalent this ministry was. In the spiritual underworld they all knew Paul. And it was actually the testimony of the demons and the power of the demons over a false exorcist that caused people to believe in Jesus because they realized this whole spiritual warfare thing was legit and this guy was a faker.

Speaking of fakers, **Turn** to one last passage in **2 Thess. 2**. And this is where the warning comes in. This is where discernment needs to enter in. Does the Holy Spirit still give this gift today? Well, let me tell you I've seen some pretty crazy stuff in my life. I've seen demon possession for sure. I've seen people controlled by demonic power.

The question is can we have power over it. Two thoughts: First, it doesn't appear that even in the early church every person had this gift. Only some. And in different measures.

Second, we need to be very careful about who might claim to have this power because it seems as though this power is something that Satan can falsify for his own advantage. **Read 7-12**

How does the Man of Lawlessness deceive people? By false miracles, false powers and false signs. By false exorcisms. Aside from the Holy Spirit, only Satan can command his own army. And it seems as though he could even fake exorcisms to lead people astray.

But notice why people are led astray in **Vs. 10. Read**

They refuse to love the truth. How do we know if the exorcism is real or not? Because the person doing it will be speaking what? Truth. You know how you're not duped by the enemy? Fill yourself with truth.

Does God still gift people with this? I don't know for sure; I haven't seen it. I hope so, that would be an amazing gift. But more important is that we love the truth and so be saved.

**Pray**