

THE GIFTS OF FAITH, HEALINGS, AND MIRACLES

1 Corinthians 12:9–10

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1 Corinthians 12:9 and the first part of verse 10. We're continuing in our series in the Corinthian letter. Especially now, looking at the gifts of the Spirit. "Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good... To another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers" (1 Corinthians 12:7,9–10, NIV).

Today, we look at the gifts of faith, healings, and miracles. As we do, we will look at four questions together. What is the relationship of these gifts to our Lord Jesus Christ? What is the relationship of these gifts to the faith that every believer is to have, even if that believer does not have these special gifts? How do these gifts function, or what are their purposes? And how are these gifts put into operation in our lives or in the body of Christ?

I. First, "What is the relationship of these gifts to Jesus?"

These gifts, like all the other gifts, are simply the extension of the ministry of Jesus on earth through His body. We know that the gifts of Jesus, in His earthly ministry, were primarily twofold. They were gifts of speaking, and they were gifts of doing or working or acting. Last week, we looked at two speaking gifts: the utterance of wisdom and the utterance of knowledge. We noted that these gifts functioned freely in our Lord. But if the Lord spoke, He also acted. At Capernaum they said, "What is this? A new teaching—and with authority! He even gives orders to evil spirits and they obey him!" (Mark 1:27, NIV). Wisdom and works.

Peter, when he described the Lord Jesus to Cornelius in Acts 10, described Jesus as one who came preaching and as one who went about doing good. And His doing good is described as healing all who were sick and all those who were oppressed. Mark 16:20 says that the disciples

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themselves, when they went forth to preach the gospel after Jesus' ascension into heaven, "went out and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with them and confirmed his word by the signs that accompanied it." They preached or spoke, and they worked. But yet, it was not them speaking or working. It was the Lord speaking and working through them. As Luke says in the first verse of Acts, when he describes the ministry of Jesus prior to His ascension into heaven, the ministry of Jesus kept on going after He ascended into heaven. Because in the first book, he only wrote of the things Jesus began to do and teach. The understanding is that all of Acts, which is the history of the church, simply describes what Jesus continues to do and what Jesus continues to teach.

In John 14:12 Jesus said of His works, "Truly, truly I say to you, he who believes in me will also do the works that I do, and greater works than these shall ye do." He promised that not only would His teaching ministry go on in the church, but His miraculous ministry of works would continue in His people as well. That phrase, by the way, "greater works than these shall ye do," has troubled many Christians because they have thought of it as being something which describes quality. Greater works—qualitatively—shall ye do. It's kind of tough to top the raising of Lazarus. When someone's been dead four days, how are you going to top a miracle like that? Does Jesus mean greater in terms of quality? I don't think so at all. He means greater in terms of extensiveness or quantity. Jesus' miracles were done in Galilee. A few in the south of Judea, one or two outside of Galilee in the north. But His disciples' miracles, working in His name, had been done in the whole world; in every country and place where the gospel has gone—greater in terms of His extensiveness. The continuing works of Jesus is promise to His body and these, therefore, form a conditional understanding of the gifts. That is, Jesus continuing to minister among His Holy Spirit-gifted people.

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II. The second question we ought to raise is: “What is the relationship of these gifts to the faith that every believer is to have, to the privilege every believer has to ask for healing, to ask, from time to time, for a special providence of God or a miracle?”

I think it’s important to note that these three gifts of the Spirit are not to be confused with our common faith or with ordinary faith, if there is anything such as an ordinary answer to prayer for healing or divine intervention. When we look at these—faith and healing and miracles—we see that, whether or not we have these gifts in operation in our lives, all of us are privileged to ask for faith, to ask for healing, and from time to time, to expect the Lord’s intervention in some miraculous way.

In terms of faith. We’re all to have faith. It’s not just the people in the congregation that have the gift of faith. All believers are to have faith. There is such a thing as foundational faith or saving faith. Hebrews talks about that. “Without faith it is impossible to please God.” That means all of us must have faith. Romans 1:17, “The just shall live by faith.” Ephesians 2:8, “For by grace have you been saved, through faith. And this is not of yourselves. It is the gift of God. Not of works, lest any man should boast.” Saving faith itself is a gift of God. That you became a Christian is a result of the fact that God has given you faith to believe. Paul says, in Romans 10, that faith comes from what is heard and what is heard comes from the preaching of Christ. It’s how we respond to the Lord—hearing and then believing. So there is such a thing as common faith, saving faith or foundational faith, that’s a part of every Christian’s life.

Faith is also described in the New Testament as the fruit of the Spirit. Faith is the only characteristic that belongs both to the gifts and to the fruit. Love is described as a fruit, but not as a gift, in the list of the gifts. But faith is described both as a gift and as a fruit. As a gift, it is

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uniquely given to some and not to others, as we will describe it later. But as a fruit, it is meant for all.

What then separates faith as a special gift of God from the faith that all of us are called to have? Probably this: The Weymouth translation puts this well; he calls this “special faith.” I think that is what is meant by the gift of faith. It is extraordinary faith. It is (to use the words of Paul in Romans 12:3) “a greater measure of faith which God has assigned” separated from common faith. We’ll look more at the function of faith in just a moment, as a gift.

What about healing? We don’t have to be under the ministry of someone who has the gift of healings in order to be healed. We have the privilege of personal prayer, for example. “Ask, seek, knock.” We have the privilege of laying hands or coming to the elders of the church and having hands laid on us, and being anointed with oil and being prayed for. James 5:14–15 says, “Is any of you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church.” It does not say, “Let him call for those who have the gifts of healing.” It doesn’t follow automatically that an elder has the gift of healing. Part of the office of an elder or spiritual leader of the body of Christ is to anoint with oil the sick and pray for them. And ask the Lord to heal.

We are also told, in James 5:16, that we may have healing by praying for one another. But beyond all of this—prayer which we may pray ourselves, prayer in which we may be anointed and prayed for—is a special gift of healing. How does this function? And how may it be practiced in the body?

And what about miracles? Miracles are special providences of God which are given to us on our behalf. There are supernatural providences that occur that are not necessarily a manifestation of the gift of miracles. For example, in Acts 12, Peter was supernaturally released from prison. He didn’t have a chance to exercise the gift of miracles because he was sound asleep. It’s kind of

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hard to exercise a gift when you're sound asleep. It was freely bestowed on him by God sending an angel, waking him up and leading him out.

There are times, as we follow Christ, in which we may enjoy some extraordinary providence of God. It's a miracle. It may not be the gift of miracles that's given to us. But it may, nevertheless, be something special.

I was recalling when I was finishing up my third year in seminary. I was really scraping the ground financially. I had a '54 Pontiac, eleven years old, a good car—I got about 16 miles a gallon. I kept very close records of what gas I put in and what gas was. Gas then was only about thirty cents a gallon. I was a youth minister in a church in L.A., which meant I had to drive, on a regular basis, roundtrip to L.A.. Many times, I got on the freeway with my tank on empty. I'd just get a buck at a time. That's all I had to keep it going. But I'd always keep records. January was 16 miles a gallon, February, March. I came to May, and May's miles per gallon were thirty miles a gallon! Either somebody was slipping gas in that I wasn't aware of, and didn't see it reflected on the needle, or the Lord made me go double mileage. I've always got a reason for everything. But I've never had an intellectual reason for that. To this day, I don't know what happened, except that the Lord especially provided.

Ordinary faith, common healings, special providences. How do these differ from the gifts of faith, healings, and miracles?

III. Let's talk about the functions of these gifts.

A. Faith. We've identified the gift of faith as special faith, or extraordinary faith, or what might be called "mountain-moving faith." What is the function of this gift? Not everybody in the body of Christ has this gift. What is the function of this gift when it occurs?

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There are several functions this gift can perform. This is not an exhaustive list, by the way, of any of the gifts today, but rather a suggested list. One of the functions of the special gift of faith is to recognize and to call forth the potentiality in persons or a whole group of people. I think one of the mistakes we do in respect to the gift of faith, we often think of it just in terms of physical objects—move that mountain, so to speak. But we have to think, first of all, of faith as it is applied to people—extraordinary faith given to call forth the potentiality in persons or in a group of people. Look at how Jesus used the gift of faith in relation to people.

The first time He met Simon, He exercised the gift of faith. He said, “I call you Peter, a rock” (Matthew 16:18). No one in their right mind would have ever seen that kind of potential on an ordinary level in Simon. He was not a rock kind of person. But the Lord rearranged his whole identity from the moment He saw him and started moving him up to a level of existence that no one dreamed possible for that simple fisherman from Galilee.

In regard to a whole group, at the beginning of His ministry, Jesus says to His disciples one day, “You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world” (Matthew 5:13–14). These are just plain folk from Galilee. Salting the earth? Lighting the world? How audacious! To think that this common, ordinary group of people could ever be that magnificent in their influence. But Jesus knew. He called it forth. He saw the potentiality. He says that to us today as well.

Barnabas was a person in the New Testament who exercised the gift of faith as it applied to persons. He is a man described as being full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. In other words, faith as a gift was a special quality operating in his life and people recognized it. When you think of Barnabas, you think of a man full of the Spirit and of faith. He is the only one of the early Christians that wanted to intervene on behalf of Saul after he became a Christian. Twice he intervened because he believed that Saul had potential as a Christian. So in Jerusalem he

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introduced him to the Christian elders. And when Barnabas was in Antioch, he said, “I’ve got to have someone here who has a ministry that is more substantially in the Word than mine.” So he went north to Tarsus to get Saul. He had faith in this man. And out of Barnabas’ faith came Paul, the apostle.

Barnabas had the same faith in respect to John Mark. Paul, in respect to John Mark, did not have the gift of faith operating. He said, “The guy bombed out on the last missionary tour, and I’m not taking any quitter with me when I go back on another missionary trip. Leave him home.”

Barnabas believed something about John Mark. And Barnabas’ faith called John Mark forth. Out of that faith, I believe we have the Gospel of Mark today—as the result of the active gift of faith in Barnabas.

We need gifts of faith as it pertains to the potentiality in people. There are sometimes situations where an ordinary Christian with ordinary faith would sort of write a believer off, write someone or a whole group off, but someone operating with a gift of faith would seize it and see what God might really bring forth. It’s especially important in developing ministries and developing people.

Another function of the gift of faith is to grasp a vision of what God wants to accomplish, and to constantly live and work, that it might come to pass. In the Old Testament, Abraham is such a person. The Lord takes him out of his tent one night, shows him the stars of the heavens and thereby shows Abraham his own unlimited potential in telling him, “As are these stars in their innumerable, so will your descendants be” (Genesis 15:5). He gives Abraham the ability to see, through faith, what God might accomplish in him.

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There are moments in life when God gives us a special faith to see something brought into existence. Sometimes, it may be a vision. Often it's a vision of faith or gift of faith that God gives us for bringing His work into existence in a given area.

Many examples could be used. I like one example of the life of Adoniram Judson, the great missionary to Burma in the eighteen hundreds, a forefather of the modern missionary movement. He was a man of strong faith in God. He felt called of God to go to Burma. Seven years after arriving, he saw his first convert won to the Lord. Seven years!

It takes a special gift of faith to stay in another culture without the benefit of anyone's support or help for seven years and not see a single result, but believe that God has called you there for that purpose and stay until He has brought the work into existence. Judson was criticized by some of his colleagues, because he was staying in an area too long and not having any results. They didn't think one convert after seven years was a just compensation for missionary support. What missionary could survive after being on the field for seven years and come back and say, "I've had one convert"? We'd say, "You must not have been working. Something must be wrong in your life." Adoniram Judson said, "If they ask what success I had again, tell them as much as there is in the almighty faithfulness of God who will fulfill His promises." In other words, here's my success—the almighty faithfulness of God. The place where he was was filthy and wretched, and he said, "If a ship was lying in the harbor, ready to convey me to any part of the world, I should choose, with the approval of all my Christian friends, that I would prefer staying here to sailing." At the time of his death, he had translated the whole Bible into the Burmese language. He had seen the church grow to seven thousand. And he had established sixty-three churches. He had a special gift of faith in operation, to see the work of God develop.

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There are times when we may have a special gift of faith operating, as it pertains to something God has called us to do as an individual. There's a difference between faith and presumption, by the way. The gift of faith easily slides over into presumption.

Some of you are in that situation, right here, today. You do not know, in the next week or two, where it's coming from to keep you going. God can give you a gift of faith to believe, "Yes, it's going to be there."

Another purpose of the gift of faith is to undergird the body of Christ with perseverance, while waiting for a breakthrough. Faith is different from healings or miracles. You see healings and miracles. They are concrete things that occur. But faith is within. It's interior. It's more subjective. It's more on the passive side than the active side, in the sense that it must wait for something to happen. But it goes on having faith, even if nothing has happened yet. Hebrews 11 gives us a whole roll call of people who had the gift of faith, but who died before they saw their faith actualized. Before they saw their faith come to pass. These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what was promised. It might simply be something active within us that we may not see come to pass for a period of time. The gift of faith, therefore, will give us the power to endure.

Several things about faith. Faith obviously supports the gifts of healings and miracles. Those can't be done without faith as a base. The working of the gift of faith may have an immediate effect, such as Peter's coming into the little girl's room and raising her immediately from the dead. Or it may involve a process—these all died in faith. Faith, on the one hand, may triumph or, on the other hand, it may endure. But as a gift, these are its special purposes in the body of Christ.

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B. A second gift here before us in 1 Corinthians 12 is the “gifts of healings.” I use the “gifts of healings” because that’s the way it was in the original, the words are plural—“gifts of healings”. Not the “gift of healing” but the “gifts of healings.” The reason why it is in the plural is that there is a tremendous variety of healing that’s possible, for there are tremendous diversities in sicknesses. Philip had a special gift of healing, it seemed, for those who were lame and demon possessed (Acts 8:7). We’re told that the apostles did all manner of miracles and healings, but Philip’s is uniquely described as healing those who were lame and paralyzed and those who were possessed. He had a special gift of healing in operation, out of the gifts of healing. That would be suggested.

There are varying kinds of illnesses, such as acute illnesses which arise suddenly, or chronic illnesses which are long term. There are needs for healing in the body as well as in the human spirit. Therefore, we have gifts related to inner healing. The practice for praying for the sick with divine healing is prevalent in the New Testament. But the gifts of healing appear more especially operating with apostolic ministries. For example, the first five chapters of Acts, all the healings occur through the hands of the apostles. Not that every believer didn’t have the privilege to pray, but the gifts of healing were especially operative in the apostles. When I say “the gifts of healing are especially operative in apostolic ministries” today, I mean to say those ministries which are on the cutting edge of bringing the Gospels into new territories or domains. There especially we see gifts of healing in operation.

What is the function of the gifts of healing? Their function, first of all, is to deliver the sick. That’s obvious. Jesus doesn’t do healings, nor do his apostles, in order to manipulate people into believing. Jesus doesn’t hang a banner over His tent and say, “Signs and wonders being done here tonight. Come and find out!” His concern is not PR, although publicity naturally follows.

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It's not how big the offerings are going to get because He's healing people. It's not how many more radio and television stations He's going to get on because He's healing people. It is because there is, first of all, His concern for the infirm. Healings are given, first of all, because the Lord is moved with compassion for human suffering. That's the number one reason.

The number two reason is that healings establish the astounding claims of Jesus. Jesus himself said, in John 10:38, "Even though you do not believe Me, believe the miracles, that you may learn and understand that the Father is in Me." Healings also bring praise to God. Whenever we see healing, we do like those did in Matthew 15:31, "The people were amazed when they saw the dumb speaking, the crippled made well, the lame walking and the blind seeing, and they praised the God of Israel." Healings are to establish the outstanding claims of Jesus to actually care for human need and bring praise to God.

C. The workings of miracles. Here again the plural words are used. Healings can be included in miracles. But miracles have a wider sphere of operation than healing. For example, miracles, as a purpose, can come as a gift to vindicate the name of the Lord.

Elijah, in 1 Kings 18, the contest with the prophets at Mount Carmel, the prophets of Baal. Elijah says, "The God who answers by fire, He is God." Elijah has the gift of miracles. If he didn't, both sides would still be looking for God. The gift of miracles was given to vindicate the name of God, as opposed the Baal worship and the "backsliddedness" of Israel.

There is another purpose of the gift of miracles: to deliver God's people out of the hands of an enemy. The most classic illustration of the gifts of miracles occurring in the Old Testament, where this is the purpose, is in the deliverance of the children of Israel from Egypt, where the gifts of miracles freely flow from Moses and Aaron's hands and rod. God is bringing His people out. Daniel has the same experience in the lion's den, and his three friends in the fiery furnace.

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Jesus has that experience with His disciples in the storm at sea. The miracle of the calming is meant to deliver the people of God out of the hands of an enemy or danger. God is at work delivering His people out of the hands of an enemy.

Miracles, as a gift, can also come to provide for those who are in need. The widow of Zarephath in 1 Kings 17, an Old Testament example of a widow that's in need. She's out of flour and she's out of oil. Elijah, the prophet, comes and says, "Your jar of flour and your jug of oil will not give out all the time there is famine." There is a miracle that provides for her need.

Jesus has a miracle of this fashion in the feeding of the five thousand and the feeding of the four thousand. To provide for those in need.

IV. I hope you're saying by now, "You've really got me interested in these gifts. How can I exercise them? How can the body of Christ exercise these gifts?"

Let me give you two suggestions I believe are out of Scripture. And I believe, as well, that they're corroborated by gifts of healings and miracles and faith that are operating in persons today that have identified with these gifts. Two steps, and they're hand in hand. And, by the way, there's a two-sidedness here—the Godward side says that the gifts can only be given sovereignly by the Lord. The manward side is, we can earnestly desire spiritual gifts.

I can speak of what we do on the human side to realize the potentiality of these gifts. The steps are not meant to guarantee these gifts. But as I look at Scripture and human experience today, I don't find these gifts operating unless these two things are present.

Dare to step out into a ministry or responsibility where you will fail, unless God will come through. Get in something that is bigger than your power, that you need the power of God to come through. That's not to say, "Go presumptuously." But it is to say that gifts of faith and healings and miracles will not occur unless you're in water way over your head. Philip, as long

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as he was a deacon in Jerusalem, never had the gift of healing. But when he went to Samaria and began preaching, because there was nobody else around that could preach and he'd just been a deacon before then, all of a sudden he's preaching and gifts of healing are occurring. He stepped out. We never read of Saul the apostle doing a miracle before his first missionary journey. Never do we read of a healing occurring in his ministry. But suddenly, when he's thrust forth on the missionary expansion of the church, we begin to find that miracles and healings attend his ministry. He was simply in new territory and new demands were placed upon him.

A second thing that goes with these gifts is that they operate in persons who are profoundly moved with human need. The gifts are not a charismatic or a Pentecostal side show. They are not a carnival atmosphere, where persons are to come under the flap and see the things the Lord is doing, so to speak. They are not given to titillate us. The gifts are in operation because the Lord is concerned with human need. And where there is a profound compassion motivated by a concern to address human needs, coupled with a stepping out beyond your own resources, these gifts seem to flourish in that kind of a climate. This is the climate that builds those kinds of gifts. Where that climate is not present, I think, to that degree these gifts are absent. Not to say, on the other hand, that if you always have these two things, you will automatically have the gifts functioning, but simply to say this is the climate where these gifts function.

I pray that, as a church, we will be that kind of people as an entire body. To not be content with the status quo or with things as they are. A concern to catch the Lord's vision for our own area. A concern to dare to believe God that He can use us in a way that none of us now even see on the horizon. And to encourage those within our body, who will arise from time to time with gifts of faith for us as a people. We might be tempted to look at that gift of faith and judge it as some presumptuous kind of scheme. But it may very well be the Word of the Lord to launch us into an

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horizon of ministry that is beyond our power to bring off. A charismatic church, a Spirit-filled church, is one in which these gifts are in operation, because God's people are moving out and they're being moved upon with compassion.

Closing Prayer

You're alive! And You want Your ministry to go on in the church undiminished from its New Testament vigor and power. Not only in teaching, but with confirming signs which establish Your Word. I pray, Lord Jesus, that as a result of this message today our own hearts will be enlarged and awakened and made thirsty to trust You for more. That we could even look at the borders of expectations that we have established in our own lives, the kind of living that we have settled down to, that maybe has precluded You from speaking some new word to us. Some word that would move us from where we are now to a greater sphere of involvement in Your work and Your kingdom. As we wait before You, Lord, You are quickening in our hearts that awakening to You, which will bring into existence a greater thrust in our life. Bring greater meaning and wholeness and spiritual power. So often, Lord, we are absent of spiritual power because we are simply longing for it and not placed in a position of exposure where we must have it, because we are ministering to need. Lord, You've caused us to understand these things today and we're grateful. Now, Lord, we pray that You would do in us the exceeding, the abundant, above our power to ask or think. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.