

1Corinthians 12:10a "The Gift of Miracles"

Whenever it comes to the gifts of the Spirit it seems there is no middle ground when it comes to the ones which are considered the "sign" gifts; tongues, prophecy, healings and miracles. You're either against such expressions of God in the church today, on the basis that they no longer exist, or you're wanting every experience without limits.

In the latter case the experience often times takes precedence over a balanced biblical approach and unfortunately Jesus Christ is often pushed to the side in favor of what is regarded as a "work of the Spirit".

And yet the work of the Spirit in the form of the gifts of the Spirit are never to be an end in themselves. The Spirit of God has been given to us to empower us to be those witnesses for Jesus Christ so that many may come to Him for salvation and enter into an eternal relationship with the living God.

The Gifts of the Spirit are also for the edification of the Body and to be used in the Body of Christ so that we may grow and demonstrate the reality of Christ in our lives. These gifts are not to bring attention to ourselves or to be substituted for real Christian maturity, which is actually seen in the fruit of the Spirit in our lives.

Though the gifts of the Spirit are essential in the Body of Christ they are not the litmus test for how close our relationship is with God. The Corinthian church was practicing many of the gifts and yet they are rebuked because of their preoccupation and misuse of the gifts over their relationship with Christ, which was to show itself with His love in their lives.

This is why Paul wrote in 1Co 13:1-3 "If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. 2 If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. 3 If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing."

And so, as we come to our study in the gifts of the Spirit today I want you to be ever aware that the Spirit of God desires to move among us and gift us with these gifts, but not at the expense of

down-playing Jesus Christ and His gospel. They must always work to promote Christ and His salvation for us.

The gift of miracles is what we're going to look at this morning which is found in 1Co.12:10.

Miracle is one of those words which has been used to describe amazing discoveries as well as unexplained phenomena. We're all familiar with expressions like, "the miracle of modern medicine", or "the miracle of science".

And yet, when the Bible addresses miracles it is the furthest thing from science or medicine. Even to use the expression "the miracle of childbirth" does not explain what a miracle is, as wonderful as childbirth is.

Essentially a miracle is something which is counter to science or medicine or even the natural process of the human conception of a child. A miracle is something which involves a personal spiritual power which enters our experience and contradicts the normal or natural ways in which something takes place as God designed it.

For example: God designed that a man and a woman would partake in the reproduction process. That's not a miracle, as the Bible would describe it, unless you would include in that definition that only God could have originally created the reproduction of men.

But that's not what God has in mind when He describes a miracle. What would constitute a miracle would be to have a birth without the natural process taking place. For example, to have a baby without any aid of a man would certainly be a miracle.

And of course we happen to have such a miracle in the case of Jesus who had no earthly biological father. He was conceived by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit implanted the life in the womb of Mary. That's a miracle.

In fact, when we look at the word used for miracle in the Greek, and contained in our text, we find the word *dunamis* which can be defined as force, but is more accurately explained in our text as miraculous power.

This miraculous power comes from God and defies any natural explanation precisely because it's supernatural. We have many many examples in the Scriptures. We find one such incident in the book of Acts.

ACT 9:36-40 "In Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (which, when translated, is Dorcas), who was always doing good and helping the poor. 37 About that time she became sick and died, and her body was washed and placed in an upstairs room. 38 Lydda was near Joppa; so when the disciples heard that Peter was in Lydda, they sent two men to him and urged him, "Please come at once!" 39 Peter went with them, and when he arrived he was taken upstairs to the room. All the widows stood around him, crying and showing him the robes and other clothing that Dorcas had made while she was still with them. 40 Peter sent them all out of the room; then he got down on his knees and prayed. Turning toward the dead woman, he said, "Tabitha, get up." She opened her eyes, and seeing Peter she sat up."

This is one of the most dramatic kinds of miracles in the Bible. Not that it's harder for God to raise the dead than it is for Him to conceive a child without a man, it just seems more awesome to us.

And yet, there are a variety of miracles which could only be explained by a personal spiritual power which is outside of our normal experience. The instantaneous cure of a leper by Jesus Christ. Or what about when our Lord reattached the ear of Malchus when Peter cut it off as Jesus was being arrested?

What about the first recorded instance in the N.T. which brings into focus the expression, "Beam me up Scotty"? You might remember the Ethiopian Eunuch.

Act 8:38-40 "And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him. 39 When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing. 40 Philip, however, appeared at Azotus and traveled about, preaching the gospel in all the towns until he reached Caesarea."

From where Philip was located it was probably 50 to 60 miles to Azotus. In the blink of an eye the Spirit of God transported Philip to this city and from there Philip goes on to bring the Gospel of Jesus Christ to Caesarea.

The phrase "suddenly took" is the Greek word *harpazo* which is to seize, and the NASB translates it, snatch.

This Greek word is the exact word used in 1Th 4:17 "After that, we who are still alive and are left will be **caught up** (*harpazo*)

together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever."

Now, we usually connect instantaneous healings with miracles. And so we should, but as you can see miracles come in a variety of forms. By the way, some would suggest that miracles only took place among the apostles because the sign of an apostle was to demonstrate miracles and signs and wonders.

This is true. We read in 2Co 12:12 "The things that mark an apostle--signs, wonders and miracles--were done among you with great perseverance."

But, the apostles were not the only ones who were used by God in this way. Philip, whom we just saw beamed to Azotus, was not one of the 12 apostles. We are told in Act 8:6 "When the crowds heard Philip and saw the miraculous signs he did, they all paid close attention to what he said."

Notice the miracle was to draw attention to what he would say which would have been the things of God and the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Stephen a man full of the Holy Spirit, also not one of the 12 Apostles, is spoken of in Act 6:8 "Now Stephen, a man full of God's grace and power, did great wonders and miraculous signs among the people."

The gift of miracles among God's people today may not seem to be as common place as we see in the ministry of Jesus or Paul and the apostles, but it does not mean that the Spirit of God is not doing miraculous signs.

We seem to think that if it's not happening in the U.S. it's simply not happening. The fact is there are probably more miraculous signs and wonders taking place in third world countries, where the Gospel is going for the first time, than anywhere else.

Part of the reason for that is that there are counterfeit miracles in these places which the Lord is showing to be counterfeit, as the power of God is demonstrated. We'll talk about these counterfeit miracles in a moment.

There are other reasons for these miracles in far-away places, which would include the reality that the Gospel is going into many of these places for the first time, and the Spirit of God is working

wonders and miracles as He did in the first century to verify the power of God at work in the world.

I've heard of stories coming out of Africa and South America of people being raised from the dead; of diseases being instantly healed and miracles where God is glorified and in the process people are being saved. I don't doubt that such things may happen, but they ought to be able to be verified.

Anecdotal descriptions of God working must not be the only basis by which we determine if God can do something. They must be the kinds of things that can be verified according to the word of God and with others who can give reliable testimony to the working of God in such cases.

Of course, in this country where everything is neatly packaged and processed we think that if we take the show on the road God will certainly bless with miracles. He may or may not, but one thing is sure, we can't dictate to God and then use His power to promote our ministry.

We're always hearing of miracle meetings and services. But again, if the Spirit of God is involved, then the miracles themselves will not be taking center stage at the expense of the Gospel of Jesus Christ being proclaimed and people receiving the Savior.

Do miracles take place in some of these meetings? They certainly may. But I'm just as convinced that more times than not what is billed as an opportunity to come get your miracle, as if God can be turned on and off like a spigot, is really an opportunity for the promoter of such meetings to further his ministry rather than furthering the Kingdom of God through the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

That may sound like an over-exaggeration but I have only one question for these miracle workers. Why is your ministry not taking you to the hospitals and nursing homes which are scattered everywhere throughout the United States and ministering to those people who are sick and without hope?

Why is your ministry only limited to people you can cram into an auditorium after having pumped up the community with promises which may or may not come to pass? Well, we wouldn't be allowed in the hospitals and nursing homes, is their response.

That's right and you know why? Because you can't ask for money from the patrons you have come to minister to, that's why. Any Christian can have access to these people and many do precisely

because they are there for one reason, and that's to minister to them in the name of Christ.

They may not have the gift of miracles but they have Jesus and His love and the Gospel He commanded them to take. I'm not suggesting that if someone has the gift of miracles they shouldn't give a community the opportunity to come out and be ministered to, but I would question the tactics and the central focus of their ministry which is more often the alleged miracle rather than the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Let me also say that when we hear of miracles in many of these "faith healers" ministries we should not be so quick to accept them as miracles unless they can be verified. It's interesting that most of the miracles you hear about in these meetings have more to do with things which can't be measured.

Someone might say they've been healed of recurring headaches, or someone else has complained of backaches which have now been taken away through a miracle of God. Can God accomplish these things? Of course. But in the many instances where there has been follow up to these "miracles" it has often been discovered that the malady returned.

Peer pressure and suggestibility often play a major role in people thinking they've been healed at one of these meetings only to find that as the "healer" left town the affliction jumped back on them.

In other more egregious cases it has been discovered that people were planted in the audience to "play" the role of one being healed as they leapt up from their wheel chairs.

Where are the people who once were blind, but now can truly see? Where are the people who were supposedly lame but now are able to walk and leap and praise God?

When Jesus Christ or the apostles, or any true saint who truly possessed the gift of miracles, was used of God the miracle was instantaneous and complete. They weren't told to go home and see how God would gradually give the healing over the next few weeks.

This is the testimony we see time and time again of Jesus in the Scriptures as it relates to Him performing miracles which were instantaneous; or in the span of moments rather than days and weeks.

MAT 15:30-31 "Great crowds came to him, bringing the lame, the blind, the crippled, the mute and many others, and laid them at his feet; and he healed them. 31 The people were amazed when they saw the mute speaking, the crippled made well, the lame walking and the blind seeing. And they praised the God of Israel."

The same can be said of the ministries of Peter and the apostles, as well as Paul.

ACT 14:8-10 "In Lystra there sat a man crippled in his feet, who was lame from birth and had never walked. 9 He listened to Paul as he was speaking. Paul looked directly at him, saw that he had faith to be healed 10 and called out, "Stand up on your feet!" At that, the man jumped up and began to walk."

There was no doubt what had happened. There was no sleight of hand or emotional appeals which fooled people into thinking they had been healed. It was the real thing. We need to be discerning about those in the church who use the church as a platform for deception.

They may appear to be quite religious and they may even say all the right things when it comes to the faith, but you will know them by their fruit, not necessarily by their claims of the miraculous. Be discerning and seek the truth in the word of God which is the only reliable source for the ways in which God works.

But what about the legitimate use of the gift of miracles? Could anyone here have the gift of miracles? Sure, if God decided to give it to you. But He will only give it if He has a particular work for you to do. He doesn't give it so, like a toy, we can play with it and toss it around at our own discretion just for the fun of it.

God will let you know if He decides to let you share in this gift. It will not be a secret. But as with any gift it should be used with great awe of who the One is who does miracles and that's God working through you.

The writer of Hebrews speaks of the ministry of the Holy Spirit as it relates to miracles and the Gospel.

Heb 2:3-4 ..."how shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation? This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him. 4 God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will."

Never forget that. It is according to the will of the Spirit of God who gets what gifts and how those gifts should be used, and in many cases, when they will be used.

One other note about miraculous power. As I mentioned in the beginning a miracle is a personal spiritual power at work which defies all natural powers and works in spite of scientific explanations. However, all spiritual power may not be the power of God in use.

We know that Satan is a personal spiritual being. He was created by God; therefore, He is not a god, but a person, who is hell-bent on destroying the work of God among people as he deceives and distorts the truth. This is what his life is devoted to. Paul touches on this when he writes to the Corinthians, as he metaphorically refers to Satan as a type of god.

2Co 4:4 "The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God."

He is a being whom we do not need to fear but who must be given a great deal of respect as to his power and the abilities he's been given by God, and yet who has abused those powers by desiring to be like God Himself.

It was because of Lucifer's plan to try and usurp the authority of God that he was cast down to earth by God and given the promise of an eternal punishment in the lake of fire which will be fully realized at the end of time.

We're told that part of the host of heaven rebelled against God and followed Lucifer who is now known as Satan. Since that time he has used his power to deceive and destroy. We see a picture of this in Revelation.

Rev 12:7-9 "And there was war in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. 8 But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven. 9 The great dragon was hurled down--that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him."

Now the reason I bring up this aspect of Satan's power is because it relates to our topic of miracles. If there is a legitimate expression of God's power in miracles then you can be assured that there will

be counterfeit miracles to deceive many into thinking that the counterfeit miracle is the real thing.

Now why would Satan do this? Primarily to keep our eyes off of God or to confuse and deceive people into thinking that God is at work in their lives when in fact He is not.

In the last days there will be an acceleration of apparent miracles and wonders which Satan will be behind to deceive people which will be in conjunction with the apostasy of the church.

2Th 2:9-10 "The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, 10 and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved."

Rev 16:14 "They are spirits of demons performing miraculous signs, and they go out to the kings of the whole world, to gather them for the battle on the great day of God Almighty."

"Well, sure Satan could deceive unbelievers with his signs and wonders, but I'm a Christian with the Spirit of God indwelling me, I can't be deceived."

Listen to Jesus. "For false Christ's and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect--if that were possible." (Mat 24:24)

The elect can be deceived if the elect are not willing to have ears to hear and eyes to see as they submit to God, and stay in His word so that they may have discernment. This is why James writes in Jam 1:22 "Do not merely listen to the word, *and so deceive yourselves*. Do what it says."

This doesn't mean that the elect will be lost, but it does mean that even Christians are not exempt from going after false things in the guise of truth. Satan is very good at his craft.

And he will use even counterfeit miracles to deceive. Case in point. Have any of you ever heard of the appearing of Mary to the children of Fatima? In recent years Mary, the mother of Jesus, has supposedly appeared to many people and has given instruction to people to pray the rosary or to set up shrines to her and to encourage people to pray to her for peace in this world.

She has reportedly appeared to thousands of people over the last 100 years and has established places throughout the world so that

people may come to experience miracles of all kinds. You can imagine what kind of an impact this would have if a person suddenly appeared to you out of nowhere touting power to help you and the world.

Dave Hunt in his book, "A woman rides the Beast" quotes Catholicism's most authoritative book written on Mary. This book was written by Cardinal Alphonsus de Liguori. He says and I quote, "Sinners receive pardon by ...Mary alone. He falls and is lost who has not recourse to Mary. Mary is called ...the gate of heaven because no one can enter that blessed kingdom without passing through her. The way of salvation is open to none otherwise than through Mary... the salvation of all depends on thee... God will not save us without the intercession of Mary... who would receive any were it not for thee, O Mother of God?"

It is this kind of unbiblical exaltation of a human being which sets the stage for the kinds of appearances of Mary which will be readily accepted by Roman Catholics. Yes, these apparitions produce some apparent miracles and yes people are sometimes seemingly healed of diseases, as they make pilgrimages to these places of veneration, but simply because there appears to be a miracle does not make it from God.

And again, as I touched on earlier, this does raise the question. If legitimate miracles, signs and wonders are not being used by God through His people in the body of Christ today and at the time when the apostasy begins to take place within the church, then how could a counterfeit miracle be measured unless there were true miracles?

How do we test? We go back to the word of God when there is any question. Can God sanction an unbiblical approach to the throne of God through Mary? Or is there only one way to heaven through Christ alone?

You see what some fail to realize is that Satan has the ability to appear as an angel of light. He was created as an angel of light and can certainly disguise himself as one even though he is fallen.

Paul even equates the works of deceitful men and women in the Kingdom of God, that is in the church, to how Satan can certainly do the same and more.

2Co 11:12-15 "And I will keep on doing what I am doing in order to cut the ground from under those who want an opportunity to be

considered equal with us in the things they boast about. 13 For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of Christ. 14 And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. 15 It is not surprising, then, if his servants masquerade as servants of righteousness. Their end will be what their actions deserve."

You mean like Satan, people can pose as Christians in the church? It's been happening since Paul's day. Can these kinds of people perform miracles? As Satan may use them, of course. But their actions will ultimately reveal them for what they are and who is behind their supposed miracles.

Miracles do not necessarily determine what is true and what is not. Now there are obvious forms of miracles and wonders being performed by Pagans worldwide. The more obvious would be Satan worshippers which could come in the form of Pagan religions.

Those religions would include voodoo, Shamanism found among the traditional religions of native Americans, and the myriad of similar religions found in Buddhism, New Age practices, witchcraft and so on.

There are people down in South America who combine pagan practices with their own brand of Roman Catholicism who seemingly have the ability to heal people and perform miracles.

But, if the gospel and Jesus Christ is not the One who is lifted up and glorified through such power then they must be suspect, even if they take place in the church. And simply naming the name of Jesus may still bring practices which are suspect.

If this were not so then Jesus could not have said what He did in Mat 7:21-23 "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. 22 Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons *and perform many miracles*?' 23 Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'

Does this mean that true believers could find themselves on the end of this rebuke? No. This speaks of people who find it convenient to be religious and to profit from being so. They are not truly followers of Jesus Christ only hangers-on who try to enjoy the best of both worlds.

They sound religious and do religious things but they are not truly followers and people who have placed their faith in the One true Messiah. Any cult naming the name of Jesus would certainly fit this description: Jehovah's witnesses; Mormons; Christian Science and so on. And alleged miracles are reported among these groups.

The gift of miracles can be a wonderful blessing from God and we should pray and trust that God is not only capable of working miraculously in our midst, but will actually do so. But again, it will be according to His will in His way.

Let me end by saying that every believer in Christ Jesus has experienced a miracle of sorts with eternal ramifications. Once you were darkness, but now you are light in Christ. Being a new creation, given a new nature, is a miracle of God in our lives. Nothing short of being born again, being born from above, would bring this new life in Christ.

God may miraculously heal your body, He may miraculously deliver you from harm's way; He may have miraculously delivered you from a demon prior to you coming to Christ. Maybe He's done none of these things for you.

But don't ever relegate your salvation to anything less than a miracle as He has taken your heart of stone and replaced it with heart flesh. And rejoice in that miracle of life in Christ everyday of your life.

God has given you life in Christ and has gifted you to love and serve Him, to serve in the Body of Christ. Just seek Him continually and His power and He will use you. And He may even use you as an instrument through which a miracle, as the Spirit empowers you, may come to another. Maybe even the miracle of salvation in Christ as you bring His message to a lost and dying world.