

1 Peter 4:10

1Pe 4:10 (NKJV) As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.

Now, as I am trying to do each week, I want to also address some varying aspects and controversies surrounding spiritual gifts that I believe to be very important. The aspect that I want to address in this study is the issue of what are often called the “sign gifts” or “miracle gifts”, neither term of which is found in the Scriptures. They are terms that categorize certain gifts as they are perceived to function in the New Testament. That is very critical to understand. If you have ever studied the subject of spiritual gifts, it should have been immediately clear that teachers are constantly dividing what they consider to be “**gifts**” into various categories, and the way that people do this is endless. For instance, I have one book where the author categorizes them into “*gifts of service, equipping gifts, and prayer and worship gifts*”.¹ The different categories that people divide spiritual gifts into are so numerous and varied, and in my opinion, are not actually supported from Scripture as a category. The category is simply a means of an individual identifying the gifts in a particular way (which is not necessarily wrong), but the problem is that they generally call certain things gifts that are not called gifts in the New Testament. One example of this would be when people use the terms “the gift of tongues” and the “gift of the interpretation of tongues”. However, those terms simply do not exist in the New Testament. Relative to this discussion, the word “**tongues**” exists and the term “**interpretation of tongues**” (1x) exists, but they are never once called gifts – not one time. The point is that if someone believes that what they possess is a gift, but in reality it is not a gift, then most likely both confusion and error will prevail.

We have previously addressed this, but the one place where a listing of categories is actually provided is in [1 Corinthians 12:4-7](#) which says,

1Co 12:4 (NKJV) There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. ⁵ There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. ⁶ And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all. ⁷ But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all:

The reason that this passage is so often used is because of [1 Corinthians 12:1](#) which says,

1Co 12:1 (NKJV) Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be ignorant:

Now, what we have previously seen is that word “*gifts*” in this verse is in italics because it is not in the original Greek text. It has been added by the translators as “interpreting” what they believe that Paul is saying. The two major Greek Interlinears that I use actually seem to be much more correct in that they both translate the single Greek word “*pneumatikos*” as “**spiritual things**” (or as things pertaining to the Spirit). One of the best translations is the HCSB which says “**Now concerning what comes from the Spirit...**” YLT says “**And concerning spiritual things...**” I believe these to be much better translations, and one reason is because they do not convey that everything listed is an actual spiritual gift.

¹ Ford, 10-11.

So, in [1 Corinthians 12:4](#), Paul has delineated four distinct divisions – “**diversities of gifts, differences of ministries, diversities of activities**”, and the “**manifestation of the Spirit**”. So Paul says that there are “**gifts, ministries, activities** (effects - NASB)”, and “**manifestations**”. We previously studied each one of those in detail and saw the differences. Each of these four terms are both distinct and different from the other three, and they cannot and should not be referred to as the same – but that is what happens all of the time. These terms are NOT synonymous. I.e., what the Scriptures define as a “**manifestation**” should not be called a “**gift**”. For instance, in v8 it speaks of a “**word of wisdom**”. That is not a spiritual gift, but a unique manifestation of the Spirit for a specific application. The “**word of knowledge**” is not a spiritual gift, but a distinct outworking the Holy Spirit for a specific moment.

Now, someone like John MacArthur (who I deeply respect) divides all of these elements mentioned in [1 Corinthians 12 and 14](#) into three specific categories – what he calls “*sign gifts, speaking gifts, and serving gifts*”.² For him, and I think this is accurate, he says that his category of so-called “*sign gifts*” only occur in [1 Corinthians 12 and 14](#). The issue, however, is that the actual Scriptures do not call them “*sign gifts*”, and if we do, in my mind that immediately impacts how these four categories are handled. MacArthur is also known as a “cessationist” which means that he believes all of what he calls the “*sign gifts*” are no longer operative. If they are not actually called “gifts” per se, then what MacArthur may be actually trying to say is that they are no longer being “manifested” as they were in the New Testament. My personal opinion, and you may certainly disagree, is that healings, miracles, and wonders are not being manifested to the same degree that they were being manifested in the days of Christ and the apostles – a period of only about 35 years or so. I do agree heartily agree with MacArthur that during the era of the development of the New Testament that there was no way to judge the truthfulness of what anyone actually taught.³ Even at that time, there were many false teachers and false prophets. So, what God did was that he authenticated the revelation of His Word through the apostles with what are called “**signs and wonders and mighty deeds**”. For instance, [2 Corinthians 12:12](#) validates this and says,

2Co 12:12 (NKJV) **Truly the signs of an apostle were accomplished among you with all perseverance, in signs and wonders and mighty deeds.**

This was God’s way of authenticating and validating the ministry of the “**apostles**” in writing the New Testament. One problem that exists today is that we have an entire generation of preachers who are calling themselves apostles, and apostles in the same way as was the New Testament pattern. I.e., they claim to be constantly receiving new revelation and performing signs, miracles, and wonders. However, they are NOT apostles as were the New Testament men who were called. They are actually impostors. I do believe that there are men who have an apostolic type calling on their life to take the gospel to places where no one else wants to go, but they are not men concentrating on new revelation, signs, wonders, and miracles, but rather the spreading of the gospel to the unreached people groups of the world. In [Acts 2:22](#), Peter said this about Christ,

Ac 2:22 (NKJV) **“Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know--**

² MacArthur, Romans, 168.

³ MacArthur, Romans, 168.

This was how God validated and authenticated the ministry of Christ. It was not that He was just a good teacher and had good things to say, but that He actually authenticated Himself as being God through the “**miracles, wonders, and signs**” that He performed, through healing people, by walking on water, and through raising people from the dead. Then it refers to the apostles after the Day of Pentecost in [Acts 2:43](#) when it says,

Ac 2:43 (NKJV) **Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles.**

Please appreciate that this is referring specifically to the 12 apostles and not just anyone. Once again, God was validating and authenticating their ministry. Please appreciate that in the context of this verse, this is well before any of the New Testament was even written. The New Testament church was just a fledgling new start with no written direction. [Acts 5:12](#) says,

Ac 5:12 (NKJV) **And through the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were done among the people. And they were all with one accord in Solomon's Porch.**

Speaking of Stephen in [Acts 6:8](#) it says,

Ac 6:8 (NKJV) **And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and signs among the people.**

The ministry of Paul was validated in the same way. [Romans 15:19](#) says,

Ro 15:19 (NKJV) **in mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God, so that from Jerusalem and round about to Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ.**

These “**signs, wonders, miracles**”, and “**mighty deeds**” were God’s way at that moment in history of validating and authenticating Paul’s apostleship so that what he wrote would be accepted by the early church as being genuine. Even during the ministry of Christ, he sent the disciples out and gave them special powers. [Mark 16:20](#) says,

Mk 16:20 (NKJV) **And they went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with *them* and confirming the word through the accompanying signs. Amen.**

Now, no matter what position anyone may take on this issue of “sign gifts” or “miracle gifts”, it is obvious that what God was doing during the ministry of Christ and the ongoing ministry of the apostles was unique to Christian history. There has never been another time in all of history that has witnessed such an outpouring of what God was doing under the heading of the supernatural. We might could include the deliverance of God’s people out of Egypt, but still that does not actually compare to this prolonged period of supernatural miracles, healings, and wonders. Since that New Testament time, there has never been another time in history that has seen such an outpouring as was during 30 AD – 65 AD. There have been great revivals during specific times that observed supernatural things happening, but nothing like what happened during the time of Christ and the apostles.

None of these verses that we have just read speak of what was being done as “spiritual gifts”. That is critical to notice. Please take a look at [1 Corinthians 12:9-10](#) which says,

1Co 12:9 (NKJV) **to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healings by the same Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another *different* kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues.**

What MacArthur does is that he refers to v9-10 as the “*sign gifts*”, and especially “**gifts of healings, working of miracles, discerning of spirits, interpretation of tongues**”, and “**tongues**”. However, it is critical to recognize that each of these are listed under the “**manifestation of the Spirit**” in v7, and none are ever specifically called a “**gift**” except for “**gifts of healings**” (which we will address separately). I would say that they indeed **were** “**signs**” and evidences of God’s work at that time, but not “**gifts**” – and that makes a critical difference. As stated earlier, the term “*sign gifts*” does not exist in the New Testament as a description.

One of the reasons that MacArthur believes that these “*sign gifts*” are no longer valid is because when they were mentioned in [1 Corinthians 12](#) and [14](#), they were written around 54 AD. However, in the other three places where “**gifts**” are mentioned in [Romans 12:6-8](#), [Ephesians 4](#) and [1 Peter 4](#), none of the so called “*sign gifts*” are even mentioned. [Romans](#) was written around 58 AD and [Ephesians](#) and [1 Peter](#) were written several years after [Romans](#). The last living apostle was John, but there are no recorded miracles, signs, or wonders being done by him.

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