History of the Miraculous/Sign Gifts

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We begin now with our second lecture on the history of the charismatic movements. Let me begin by rehearsing briefly the points of our last time together. Part of beginning a course like this is to lay out some fundamental things that may be superficial but will be useful in defining the perimeters of our study together. Last time, I tried to do two things. One, I tried to first speak of the segmentation within Christianity, that we are subdivided into various groups within the Christian faith and one of those subdivisions or areas of which there is legitimate disagreement is over the use of and place of and purpose of the charismatic gifts. So frequently we talk today about charismatic believers and non-charismatic believers. This course is obviously an attempt to draw some broad guidelines and tell the story of the history of the charismatic movements both in America and abroad.

The second thing we tried to do briefly was to raise and answer the question, What is the issue that divides charismatic and non-charismatic believers, or perhaps better put, what is the question that the charismatic believer is raising? And I tried to argue that it's not so much about the doctrine of God's salvation, but it's about the doctrine of sanctification or how do we walk with God? How do we walk with God in wisdom and power, in strength, and victory? It seems to be fundamentally that the charismatic movement is seeking for us to grapple with a serious and important issue that is germane to everybody's experience. As it boils down, it boils down to subjects like the baptism of the Spirit. Is there a single baptism of the Spirit, or is there more than one? The distinction between being baptized in the Spirit and with the Spirit or by the Spirit.

Another issue is the place of the spiritual gifts, saying have some ceased, have all of them ceased, have none of them ceased, and how do they relate to the vitality of the Christian church? The third question dealt with a simple insight that we need, and that is this: there's a huge diversity today within the charismatic movements,

and that's why I have made the word plural. It's not a history of the Pentecostal movement. It's not a history of the charismatic movement. It's a history of a very diverse movement called the charismatic movements. So there are classical Pentecostals, there are Protestant mainline renewalists, there are Roman Catholic renewalists, there are neo-classical expressions of Pentecostalism, and there are restoration expressions of Pentecostalism, such as the faith movement, the prophetic movement, the Vineyard movement, sometimes called the fivefold ministry.

And last, I tried to give you a brief overview of the course with its origins in the Wesleyan movement, its origins in Dr. Finney, its rise in Methodism in America, the advent of the Holiness Movement, and out of the Holiness Movement came classical Pentecostalism. And then from then on to renewalism and into the restoration movement today.

What I would like to do in our few moments at this time is to survey the history of the predecessors of the modern-day charismatic movement. I'd like to go back and raise and answer some fundamental questions about the history of the charismatic movement before the late nineteenth century. So this is simply a time devoted to a broad survey. And I'd like to raise some questions and answer those questions, and the first is this: The charismatic movement, as well as the non-charismatics, raise the issue of the spiritual gifts. Have they ceased? Did they cease in the first c\Century? Or did they cease later? So what we're talking about are those miraculous gifts that Paul lists in 1 Corinthians 12–14, Romans 12, and Ephesians 4. If you take those three passages together, they make up our list of the gifts of the Spirit that are described in the first century.

Now, the question to be asked that's fundamental is this one: Did those gifts cease in the beginning of the second century? Or normally non-charismatic people will say that with the closure of the canon, and they take that from that passage in 1 Corinthians 13 where Paul is said to say, "When that which is perfect is come, that which is in part shall be done away." They interpret that to mean the completion of the canon, so they will argue that at the end of the first century, the miraculous gifts ceased, meaning healings, glossolalia, and other gifts of that nature.

I must hasten to add before we get into our study that non-charismatic people are people who believe in the charismatic gifts. It is not that charismatic people believe in the charismatic

gifts and non-charismatic people do not. The issue is this: how many of those gifts are extant today? What I have found in my study is that charismatic people differ on the number of extant ministries or gifts of the Spirit today, so it's not a case that non-charismatic people believe that they have all ceased, for as far as I can tell, most charismatic people believe that some of the gifts are certainly with us today. Evangelists, for instance, pastor teachers, healing, and so on. And it's also true that among charismatic people they will argue that some gifts have ceased while others would say all of them are extant today, like in the current fivefold ministry emphasis among some.

Having said that qualification, my point is this. What do we do with this question: When did the gifts that are alluded to in Ephesians 4, Corinthians, Romans 12 seem to come to an end? Charismatic as well as non-charismatic writers seem to indicate that indeed they did come to an end, so the issue is not did they, but when did they seem to be diminished in the church? For instance, Damboriena in his book *Tongues as of Fire* says that the "charismatic gifts seem to be evidenced in sub-Apostolic times and very often the laity more specifically favored with them." From his study, he would say that the gifts, some of them at least, did not cease in the first century. Nichol in his *History of Pentecostalism* says this, slightly different:

> Whatever the reason it is quite clear that the spontaneous ministry of prophecy, tongues, and signs regarded by the early Christians as immediately authorized by the divine action of the Holy Spirit, the bestower of these gifts was being superseded by a permanent appointed official ministry of the presbyters, bishops of apostolic appointment, and having essentially sacramental and disciplinary ministration.

In short he says, "While the charismatic gifts did not disappear entirely, they were incompatible with the regular order of a liturgical service; therefore, they soon dropped out of it." What these two writers are saying is that while the charismatic gifts did not end with the first century, they seemed to end or diminish in the second century.

At this point of my time, I'm dependent on a very fine work that was written by Stanley M. Burgess, who has done a very detailed study of the issue of the gifts in the second and third centuries. His book is called *The Spirit and the Church: Antiquity*, and I am

dependent upon his work. My feeling from reading him and his sources is that the spiritual gifts did gradually decline in the church, but they did continue into the second century. And if you compare, for instance, the writings of an early father like Justin Martyr in his book *The Dialogue with Trypho*, it is fairly clear that he understood that there were spiritual gifts such as wisdom and understanding and knowledge and healing and foreknowledge and prophecy, teaching, the fear of God, and of strength.

So what I am saying is that I do not think that the evidence indicates that the spiritual gifts ceased with the coming of the canon, or what we call the end of the canon, but they continued into the second century and even into the third. For instance, when you come to the mid-second-century scholar Origen, Origen seems to indicate in his writings that the miraculous gifts are still present, but they have diminished in their number. He says, for instance, in his writing *Against Celcus* that "there are still preserved among Christians traces of that Holy Spirit which appeared in the form of a dove. They expel evil spirit and perform many cures and foresee certain events according to the will of the Logos." So Origen seems to indicate from his vantage point that the gifts are still present, but they are in decline.

He says in his book *The First Principles*,

> Moreover, the Holy Spirit gave signs of His presence at the beginning of Christ's ministry and after his ascension, he gave still more, but since that time, these signs have diminished, although there are still traces of His presence in a few who have their souls purified by the gospel and their actions regulated by its influence.

So what I am saying in answer to the question, When did the miraculous gifts, if they did cease, when did they cease? I do not think that we can argue that they ceased in the first century. That's not certainly the view of Justin Martyr; it is certainly not the view of Origen; but when you come to later writers such as Augustine in the West, who is in the fifth century, and Chrysostom of the East, they indicate in no uncertain terms that the spiritual gifts have ceased in the church.

For instance, I'll read to you from Augustine's work *Against the Donatists*.

> For the Holy Spirit is not only given by the laying on of hands amid the testimony of temporal sensible miracles as He was given in former times to be the credentials of a rudimentary faith and for the extension of the first beginnings of the church. For who expects in these days that those on whom hands are laid that they should receive the Holy Spirit? Should henceforth begin to speak with tongues. But it is understood that invisibly and imperceptibly on the account of the bond of peace, divine love is breathed into their hearts so that they may be able to say, "Because of the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given to us."

For again he says,

> 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. These were signs adopted to the time, for there behooved to be that tokening of the Holy Spirit in all tongues to show that the gospel of God was to run through all tongues over the whole earth. That thing was done for a betokening and it passed away, in the laying on of hands now that persons may receive the Holy Ghost do we look that they may speak with tongues?

And, of course, his implication is no.

I could quote from others. Burgess lists them faithfully in his book, but I'll read to you just one or two from Chrysostom, the great patriarch of Constantinople. He says this in his homily on Matthew, "For since then, that is, the founding of the church, we have no need of sensible vision, faith sufficing instead of all, for signs are not for them that believe, but for them that believe not." Commenting on Romans 8:26, Chrysostom says, "This statement is not clear, owing to the cessation of many of the wonders which then used to take place." Or commenting on 1 Corinthians 12:1–2, he says this "whole place is very obscure, but the obscurity produced by our ignorance is produced by our ignorance of the facts referred to and by their cessation, being such as then used to occur, but now no longer occur."

We can multiply these instances, but I think my point is clear, and my point is very simply this, that while I cannot go along with earlier writers who suggested that the miraculous gifts were confined simply to the first century, I must say with what the

scholars have rendered, that the miraculous gifts continued into the second century and into the third. Origen noticed that they were waning. Augustine and John Chrysostom in the fifth century said that they have come to an end, and they list various reasons for that. So I think it's fair to say that the gifts continued into the early church era. Now that raises some questions.

It would seem to me first we need to answer this question, Sure, the spiritual gifts did continue on into the early church. One question is from the evidence in those writings: Was a spiritual gift ever attached to a method of sanctification? Was a spiritual gift an important ingredient in walking with God? And as far as I can tell by the evidence that is there, while the spiritual gifts continued in the church, they were not attached to a victorious living motif.

A second question that could be asked is this one: Why did they cease? If you listen to those who've said they have ceased, they will argue that the Lord had a purpose for the miraculous gifts in the infancy of the church, and as the church matured, they found that those gifts which had continued were no longer important, and they began to wane. That I would say is the view of Augustine. Other scholars, particularly charismatic scholars, offer another explanation that I think is valuable, and that is they will say that the church left its holy, pristine position in the first century and degenerated with the rise of the bishop's office and simultaneously with the decline of the laity, and that the bishops took the miraculous gifts from the laity and kept them in church office, and that is how I have read fine charismatic commentators have argued for the progressive waning of the miraculous gifts. Now that is a subject of interpretation as to why. But the point is that charismatic and non-charismatic scholars are agreed on the point that the spiritual gifts declined in their prevalence for whatever reason in the early centuries of the church.

Before we pass on to a survey of the occurrence of the miraculous gifts from the fifth century down to the nineteenth century, there is another issue that I would like to raise, and that is this issue: How did the early church understand the person of the Holy Spirit? How did they understand Him, and I think my reply to that question is that if you study the role of the Holy Spirit in the early centuries, something interesting is occurring, and that is the church only progressively understood the person of the Holy Spirit and His work. What I'm saying is something that has troubled me as I've listened to non-charismatic as well as

charismatic scholars, many of whom I've trained under, and they said something like this: "The key to spirituality is being rightly related to the Holy Spirit." That we need to walk with Him and there are various methods for doing it, some of which are called the Keswick method or methods, some of it's called the victorious Christian life, some of it's called classical Pentecostalism, and others in which they earnestly try to help us to be rightly related to the Spirit.

When I studied the early church, however, I find something amazing. I find the church growing in power, in strength, and bringing the Roman Empire to its knees, and yet at the same time, I find no discussions of how to walk with the Holy Spirit. In fact, what I do find is that they are confused as to the Holy Spirit and seemingly do not assign to Him the insight of the Bible that He is God. So what I'm saying is that in the early centuries, I find a diminutive understanding of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. And what's strange to me is that as the church's understanding of the Holy Spirit becomes clearer, simultaneously the miraculous gifts of the Spirit seem to diminish.

That's all that I'm saying at that point, but if you do a study of the Holy Spirit in the early centuries, my point is that ofttimes they don't see a distinct role between the mercy of Christ and the mercy of the Spirit. They don't separate the two;, they confuse them. You sometimes find them confusing the Holy Spirit with a human spirit. You find them placing the Holy Spirit in priority under the role or under angels. They are not clear on His person, and when you read in the early centuries, you have to search hard to find a description of His work that seems as though the church very slowly came to understand the work of the Holy Spirit. Why is that? If the Holy Spirit is the central person for spiritual life, and I say that both to non-charismatic friends, as well as to my charismatic friends, both of which I revere very highly, there is an exception in the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, His description, and that's found in the third-century presbyter in the West called Novatian. He wrote a book called *On the Holy Spirit*, and in it he speaks as clearly on the Holy Spirit as any writer I have ever seen of that period. I do not find references to the miraculous gifts but to the presence of the Spirit.

I do not find references to baptism as a key to the spiritual life, but I find very marvelous insights in his understanding of John 14, 15, and 16. And I thought it might be fun to read a couple of his insights. For instance, in his book *On the Trinity* in chapter 29 he

says, and I have to skip for brevity of time, he says of the Spirit,

> *He was indeed promised by the prophet Joel but bestowed through Christ. "In the last days," says the prophet, "I will pour out my Spirit upon my servants and handmaids," and the Lord said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you shall retain, they are retained."*

Point three,

> Now the Lord sometimes calls the Holy Spirit the Paraclete and at other times proclaims Him to be the Spirit of truth. He is not new in the gospels, nor has He been given in a novel way, for it was He who in the prophets reproved the people and in the apostles gave an invitation to the Gentiles; therefore, it is one and the same Spirit who was in the prophets and in the apostles. He was, however, in the former only for a while, whereas He abides in the latter forever. He has been a portion to the former in moderation. To the latter, He has been wholly poured out. He was sparingly given to the one; upon the other, lavishly bestowed. He was not, however, manifest before the Lord's resurrection but conferred by Christ's resurrection. In fact, Christ said, "I will ask the Father and He will send another advocate that He may be with you forever, the Spirit of truth. And when the Advocate has come whom I will send from my Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, and so on. Since the Lord was about to go to heaven, He had to give the Paraclete to the disciples, that He might not leave them as orphans as it were and abandon them without a defender or some sort of guardian.

What I find in Novatian and his work on the Trinity is the fullest explanation of the Holy Spirit that I found in the early writers, and yet there are remarkable things that are missing. So I raise the question, Why would it be that the church so slowly came to an understanding of what we in the twentieth century are impressed to believe is a central thing in the spiritual life?

Let me review what I've done, and then we'll proceed. I've raised this question: Did the miraculous gifts cease in the first century? And my answer to that is no. Second, when did they cease? The answer to that question is scholars of both charismatic and non-charismatic background argue that they did cease, that they progressively ceased in the early centuries, and by the time of

Augustine and Chrysostom they could not find them. I raised this question: Was there ever a gift of the Spirit that was attached to walking with God? Is there a key to walking with God? Is it related as a manifestation in a single gift? The writers are silent on that issue. When you postulate why did the gifts gradually cease in the church, there are various explanations, and I will have to leave that to your judgment. Was it that we did not need them? Was it that the bishops stole the gifts to protect the church and took them away from the laity? I would say that the doctrine of the Holy Spirit and an understanding of Him, His person, and His work, was a very slow process in the early church.

In the few moments that I have remaining on this tape, what I would like to do is go through the annals of the pages of history, highlighting those movements that were what we would call proto-charismatic or perhaps charismatic and comment upon them. Usually in the older histories of the charismatic movement they will skip usually from the first century to the Montanists. The Montanists are a second/third-century sect that eventually was removed from orthodoxy. Whether that was justifiable or not is another issue. But in that group, they did practice in their followers and others, Montanists, to be specific, certain charismatic gifts. Unfortunately, when you come to the second/third-century Montanists, it's sad because the only account we have of them is by prejudiced adversaries and because they are prejudiced and so extremely hostile, you do not have a fair description of them. So what I find is that more recent charismatic scholars are more tenuous in their evaluation of the Montanists, but I'll read you a description of Eusebius and his fourth-century history. It is not at all flattering.

He says,

> So that he was carried away in spirit and wrought up in a kind of frenzy and irregular ecstasy, raving and speaking and uttering strange things, proclaiming what was contrary to the constitutions that had prevailed in the church as handed down and preserved in succession from the earliest times, but of those who happen then to be present and to hear these spurious articles, some being indignant rebuked him as one under the influence of demons and the spirit of delusion and who was only exciting disturbances among the multitude.

I think that is a very unfair evaluation of Montanists because the great Tertullian of North Africa was a Montanist and saw it as a positive group. And it would seem to me that not everyone who falls or is in a frenzy of ecstasy is demonic. So I would rather say that the Montanists were a serious, Puritan, pietistical group that sought to walk with God. I do not find in them any statement of a spiritual gift as a sign of a second baptism, though there were gifts there.

When you leave the Montanists and come to, for instance, Tertullian, we've already commented on Justin Martyr, or Irenaeus, Irenaeus, for instance, clearly sees, he lists extant miracles as occurring. He lists exorcism as occurring. He lists words of knowledge as occurring, as well as visions and prophetic utterances and healing of the sick, and he even mentions raising the dead. So I would have to say that they continued, though he later states that they have begun to diminish.

When you come into the medieval period and try to find charismatic groups, it gets harder. In fact, one has written,

> From patristic times until the power of the Reformation had made itself distinctly felt, the gift of tongues is almost a forgotten phenomenon. The attention which the Reformation drew to the Scriptures is the reason for the reappearance of the gift. Men do not usually have the gift of tongues unless they know there is a gift of tongues.

That might be a slight overstatement, but the point is that from the fifth century through the medieval period until the time of the Reformation, there does not seem to be any major movement that emphasized as a central core the so-called miraculous gifts. I do know there was some miraculous gifting among the Franciscans of the late medieval period, but when you come to a group and say, "This group is it," I think you have to come to the Reformation era and to a group of French Christians called Camisards, founded in the sixteenth century, sometimes called French Prophets. And among the Camisards you have a—obviously in the context of the Reformation and the rediscovery of the Bible—you have an emphasis on the charismatic miraculous gifts once again.

You also find it among pietistical Roman Catholics called Jansenists in France, sometimes called Convulsionaries. The spoke in tongues. What I find, though, is that the issue is not so much can you find evidences of miraculous gifts. I think you can.

The evidence is terribly tantalizingly meager, but the question to me is, When is a spiritual gift a sign to an evidence of one's postconversion Spirit baptism? When does it become integral to spirituality? When is it is thoroughly stated and enunciated? And until the era of the Reformation, I do not find that in the material, so the issue is not did this or that cease? The issue is what's the meaning of this material. You find speaking in tongues certainly among the eighteenth-century movement in England called the Shakers. How far to push that, I am not certain. There were also miraculous gifts among some Anabaptists in the Reformation era, some Quakers, some Zwingfelders. You'll find it later obviously in other groups such as the Mormons.

I do not think that that is fundamentally the essential question. I think the question is this: Miraculous gifts did continue and continue to continue in the church. God grants the miracles of healing. I have argued that the issue is not have gifts continued or not continued. I think the issue is all of us would say that gifts continued. The issue is, Is your list short or is your list long? Some charismatic people will say they're all here, including apostleship and prophecy. Others will say, no, they list some of them, although some continue, which non-charismatics will say ceased. Nonetheless, their list is shorter than the list in the writings of the apostles. But the question is this, not so much the question of could they have continued in the church suppressed perhaps by the episcopal hierarchy of the third century, but the question is, When was a spiritual gift seen as integral to the spiritual life? Not the spiritual vitality of the church and the progress of the gospel, but when was it seen as vital to my individual, spiritual progress?

When I pursue that question, it seems to me that when you come to the Irvingite church of the nineteenth century, you come to the first instance in which baptism is seen as a second subsequent work of the Spirit, so there are now two baptisms—one in the Spirit, one by or with the Spirit—and a miraculous gift is seen as the evidential sign of that elevation to spirituality. I find it among a very famous and very powerful Scottish preacher by the name of Edward Irving, who founded the Apostolic Christian Church in the 1830s.

Although Irving did not speak in tongues and was demoted for that, nonetheless, in his church, in the London church in the 1830s, there was speaking in tongues, which I do not think was unusual or precedent setting. What was unusual is that it was tied to a second baptism of the Spirit and was the evidential sign of

one's postconversion reality.

So it's not so much did tongues continue or miraculous gifts. That is a question I think could be argued persuasively that at least until Augustine and Cyprian they were extant. The question is when do they become a sign of individual, spiritual unction and power and filling and anointing; that is, a second work of grace that comes upon you after you are saved? And the pattern is Acts 2, saved Peter—who was weak and anemic—getting empowered for successful ministry.

I think the first time I see it with this full-blown theory of walking with God is in the Irvingite church and the Irvingite movement, the Apostolic Christian Church of the nineteenth century.

As I come to conclude this lecture, I want to add an addendum, and that is this: In the current literature that is being put forth by many in the charismatic movement, particularly the Vineyard movement, there are a lot of references to Jonathan Edwards and his ministry as an eighteenth-century pastor, and it seems to me that they're using Edwards to suggest that he countenanced the continuation of the miraculous gifts. I'm not saying did the gifts continue or not? I'm only raising the question, Is it legitimate to just justify their continuance by using Jonathan Edwards and *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God* that he preached on July 8, 1741? I would recommend that you read his series of sermons on the Corinthians passage, 12–14, mostly 13, entitled *Charity and Its Fruits*. In that series of sermons, Edwards was clearly a cessationist. Edwards believed, whether it is true or not, that the miraculous gifts ceased with the canon (he has the old canon deal) at the end of the first century, so I only say that the use of Jonathan Edwards by modern-day charismatics to justify the continuation of the gifts is probably inappropriate.

So this is what I have argued. I cannot argue that the gifts ceased in the first century. They continued in the church. The issue is when does a gift become the sign of a second baptism of which there is an evidential sign? This concludes our second lecture.