

Sign Gifts

I. CONTEXT:

Because of the controversial nature of this issue in recent church history, it is important to set the appropriate context before stating a specific teaching position on sign gifts.

Several principles set the framework for our understanding of this, and for that matter, most other controversial issues:

- A. **We must stand firm on what the Bible teaches.** At the same time, we must discern the difference between what the Bible teaches and what men teach about the Bible. The Word of God is infallible. The teaching of godly men is profitable but is not infallible and does not carry the same authority as the Bible itself. God has made many things clear beyond question in His Word. On these issues we stand firm. Yet on other issues, God has chosen not to execute the few strokes of a pen that would have removed all doubt and created a common understanding. God uses these issues to cause us to seek Him personally (rather than relying on someone else's understanding) and as opportunities to demonstrate His character in our lives as we interact with those who carry a different understanding.
- B. **God places a very high value on the coexistence of unity and diversity.** That is the context of the teaching in I Corinthians 12-14 (the primary biblical passage related to sign gifts) and other related passages (Acts 2:41-47, Acts 5:12). He has desired for His people to demonstrate unity in the face of diversity. Unity, and not necessarily agreement on non-essential issues, is the overriding principle that God desires to see demonstrated in His body on earth. We are committed to unity and are willing to accept that "agreement" is not a necessary component of that unity.
- C. **While it is not necessary that we all have complete agreement in our doctrine, it is necessary that we agree on what we teach and practice within our local fellowship.** God does not endorse confusion, and so we have sought to articulate a position that clarifies how Grace Church of Orange understands the issues at hand. This position governs our teaching and our practices. Individuals within our fellowship may differ in their personal understanding of these issues, but practices and teaching that do not align with this position will not be a part of the ministries of Grace Church.

II. THE BIBLE SAYS:

- A. God has used signs and wonders as a confirming witness through Moses, Daniel, Jesus, the apostles, Paul, Barnabas, Stephen, and others, including unidentified sources.

Acts 7:36 He (Moses) brought them out, after he had shown wonders and signs in the land of Egypt, and in the Red Sea, and in the wilderness forty years.

I Kings 13:3-6 Then he ["a man of God from Judah"] gave a sign the same day, saying, "This is the sign which the Lord has spoken, 'Behold, the altar shall be split apart and the ashes which are on it shall be poured out.'" Now when the king heard the saying of the man of God, which he cried against the altar in Bethel, Jeroboam stretched out his hand from the altar, saying, "Seize him." But his hand which he stretched out against him dried up, so that he could not draw it back to himself. The altar also was split apart and the ashes were poured out from the altar, according to the sign which the man of God had given by the word of the Lord. The king said to the man of God, "Please entreat the Lord your God, and pray for me,

that my hand may be restored to me.” So the man of God entreated the Lord, and the king’s hand was restored to him, and it became as it was before.

Daniel 6:27 He delivers and rescues and performs signs and wonders in heaven and on earth, Who also delivered Daniel from the power of the lions.

Acts 2:22 ...Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst...

Acts 2:43 ...and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles.

Acts 5:12 And at the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were taking place among the people.

Acts 6:8 And Stephen, full of grace and power, was performing great wonders and signs among the people.

Acts 14:3 ...granting signs and wonders to be done by their (Paul and Barnabas) hands.

Acts 14:8-10 Now at Lystra there was a man sitting who could not use his feet. He was crippled from birth and had never walked. He listened to Paul speaking. And Paul, looking intently at him and seeing that he had faith to be made well, said in a loud voice, “Stand upright on your feet.” And he sprang up and began walking.

Acts 15:12 ...listening to Barnabas and Paul as they were relating what signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles.

Romans 15:18-19 I (Paul) will not presume to speak of anything except what Christ accomplished through me, resulting in the obedience of the Gentiles by word and deed, in the power of signs and wonders, in the power of the Spirit...

2 Corinthians 12:12 The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with all perseverance, by signs and wonders and miracles.

Hebrews 2:4 God also bearing witness with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will.

We believe that these passages clearly teach that God used supernatural events through many godly people to demonstrate His power and confirm authority to speak for Him. While many of these supernatural events seem to be limited to specific times and for specific purposes in the Old Testament period and in the early church, we believe the Lord can and does perform various miracles today at His choosing.

- B. Peter and John and their companions prayed that signs and wonders would be done through Jesus’ name.

Acts 4:30 ...that signs and wonders may be done through the name of Your holy Servant Jesus.

- C. False prophets and Satan will also show signs and wonders

Mark 13:22 *for false Christs and prophets will arise, and will show signs and wonders, in order, if possible to lead the elect astray.*

2 Thessalonians 2:9 *that is, the one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders.*

- D. The signs of casting out demons and speaking with new tongues will follow those who believe:

Mark 16:15-17 *Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues.*

- E. Believers were filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke in tongues at Pentecost.

Acts 2:4 *And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance.*

- F. At Pentecost, others heard them speaking in the languages of the hearers.

Acts 2:6, 11 *And when this sound occurred, the multitude came together, and were confused, because everyone heard them speak in his own language. (v11) Cretans and Arabs – we hear them speaking in our own tongues the wonderful works of God.*

- G. The gift of the Holy Spirit fell on the Gentiles and they spoke in tongues.

Acts 10:45-46 *And those of the circumcision who believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also. For they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God.*

- H. The Holy Spirit came upon the believers in Ephesus and they spoke with tongues and prophesied.

Acts 19:6 *And when Paul had laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke with tongues and prophesied.*

- I. God gives various gifts to various people as He wills for the common good.

1 Corinthians 12:4-11 *Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are varieties of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all persons. But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good...But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills.*

1 Corinthians 12:28-31 *And God has appointed in the church, first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, various kinds of tongues. All are not...But earnestly desire the greater gifts. And I show you a still more excellent way.*

- J. Love is more important than tongues, and will exist after tongues, prophecy, and knowledge have stopped.

I Corinthians 13:1 If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.

I Corinthians 13:8-12 Love never fails; but if there are gifts of prophecy, they will be done away; if there are tongues, they will cease; if there is knowledge, it will be done away. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part; but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away...

- K. Spiritual gifts are desirable, especially those that edify the church.

I Corinthians 14:1 Pursue love, yet desire earnestly spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy.

I Corinthians 14:5 Now I wish that you all spoke in tongues, but even more that you would prophesy; and greater is one who prophesies than one who speaks in tongues, unless he interprets, so that the church may receive edifying.

I Corinthians 14:12 So also you, since you are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek to abound for the edification of the church.

I Cor. 14:39 Therefore, my brethren, desire earnestly to prophesy, and do not forbid to speak in tongues.

I Corinthians 14:18-19 I thank God, I speak in tongues more than you all; however, in the church I desire to speak five words with my mind, that I may instruct others also, rather than ten thousand words in a tongue.

I Corinthians 14: 26 What is the outcome then, brethren? When you assemble, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification.

- L. Speaking in tongues is addressed to God, not to man, and it edifies the speaker, not others.

I Corinthians 14:2 For one who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men, but to God; for no one understands, but in his spirit he speaks mysteries.

I Corinthians 14:4 One who speaks in a tongue edifies himself...

I Corinthians 14:5 But now, brethren, if I come to you speaking in tongues, what shall I profit you, unless I speak to you either by way of revelation or of knowledge or of prophecy or of teaching?

I Corinthians 14:16-17 Otherwise if you bless in the spirit only, how will the one who fills the place of the ungifted say the "Amen" at your giving of thanks, since he does not know what you are saying? For you are giving thanks well enough, but the other man is not edified.

I Corinthians 14:28 ...but if there is no interpreter, let him keep silent in the church; and let him speak to himself and to God.

- M. Prophecy is addressed to men, and edifies the church.

I Corinthians 14:3 *But one who prophesies speaks to men for edification and exhortation and consolation.*

I Corinthians 14:4 *...but one who prophesies edifies the church.*

I Corinthians 14:5 *...and greater is one who prophesies than one who speaks in tongues, unless he interprets, so that the church may receive edifying.*

N. Tongues can edify the church if there is an interpretation.

I Corinthians 14:5 *...and greater is one who prophesies than one who speaks in tongues, unless he interprets, so that the church may receive edifying.*

O. Praying in tongues is an act of the spirit, not of the mind.

I Corinthians 14:14 *For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful. What is the outcome then? I shall pray with the spirit and I shall pray with the mind also; I shall sing with the spirit and I shall sing with the mind also.*

P. God used tongues as a sign to unbelievers.

I Corinthians 14:21-22 *In the Law it is written, "By men of strange tongues and by the lips of strangers I will speak to this people, and even so they will not listen to Me," says the Lord. So then tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe, but to unbelievers...*

We believe that God now works through the complete revelation of scripture to believers and unbelievers – the gospel message contained in scripture is sufficient to save.

Q. God used prophecy as a sign to believers.

I Corinthians 14:22 *...but prophecy is a sign, not to unbelievers, but to those who believe.*

R. Unbelievers will think that tongue speakers in church are mad.

I Corinthians 14:23 *If therefore the whole church should assemble together and all speak in tongues, and ungifted men or unbelievers enter, will they not say that you are mad?*

S. Unbelievers will be convicted by prophecy in church.

I Corinthians 14:24 *But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or an ungifted man enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all; the secrets of his heart are disclosed; and so he will fall on his face and worship God, declaring that God is certainly among you.*

T. Gifts are to be expressed in the assembly in an edifying, non-confusing, peaceful manner.

I Corinthians 14:26-33 *What is the outcome then, brethren? When you assemble, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification. If anyone speaks in a tongue, it should be by two or at the most three, and each in turn, and let one interpret; but if there is no interpreter, let him keep silent in the church; and let him speak to himself and to God. And let two or three prophets speak, and*

let the others pass judgment. But if a revelation is made to another who is seated, let the first keep silent. For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all may be exhorted; and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets; for God is not a God of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints.

III. OUR POSITION:

- A. We believe and teach that as the church was established and revelation of scripture was complete, God no longer gifted individuals to perform miracles, prophecy and tongues speaking as a means to authenticate the ministry and authority of those individuals. (I Corinthians 12, Hebrews 2:2-4)
- B. We believe and teach that God's revelation to man was completed with the completion of the canon of scripture. God is not disclosing new revelation today. (Revelation 22:18-19)
- C. We believe and teach that the "perfect" referred to in I Corinthians 13:10 refers to the eternal state of the believer. This passage (v8-10) teaches that prophecy, knowledge, and tongues will not last forever, but love will. Our belief in the discontinuation of sign gifts is based on their purpose having been fulfilled in the apostolic age.
- D. Based on the conclusions above, we believe that the best interpretation of Scripture is that the gifts of miracles, prophecy, and speaking in tongues are not normative practices today.

IV. RECOMMENDED RESOURCES:

Book: To Be Continued: Are the Miraculous Gifts for Today? (2007) By Samuel E. Waldron.

Book: Satisfied by the Promise of the Spirit: Affirming the Fullness of God's Provision for Spiritual Living. (1996) By Thomas R. Edgar.

A brief explanation of the gift of tongues and its cessation. *Adapted from John MacArthur, Charismatic Chaos (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992).* <https://www.gracechurch.org/about/distinctives/gift-of-tongues>

Article by Dr. Nathan Busenitz "THE GIFT OF TONGUES: COMPARING THE CHURCH FATHERS WITH CONTEMPORARY PENTECOSTALISM"
<https://mariancatechist.com/files/documents/3PentecostalismGiftOfTonguesBusenitz.pdf>

Article by Dr. Richard Gaffin Jr. "What about Tongues and Prophecy Today."
http://www.newhopefairfax.org/files/Gaffin_What_about_Prophecy_and_Tongues_Today.pdf

An extensive treatment and exposition of all Biblical passages relating to the Spiritual gifts in The Masters Seminary Journal Fall of 2003. (Multiple articles) <https://www.tms.edu/m/msj14.2.pdf>

Article by Dr. F. David Farnell "FALLIBLE NEW TESTAMENT PROPHECY/PROPHETS? A CRITIQUE OF WAYNE GRUDEM'S HYPOTHESIS". Associate Professor of Biblical Studies Southeastern Bible College. <https://www.tms.edu/m/tmsj2h.pdf>

Sermon: Tom Pennington, "A Case for Cessationism" Online
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9o0z-J4RnwE>