

Introduction

In order to get the most out of what God wants to teach you and I through the material of this and next week, we should engage in an exercise of sorts with the Lord. In fact, regardless of what material we study -- in a class, personal time with the Lord, at a teaching, or wherever -- we will get NOTHING out of it if we are not able to see ourselves as God does. So tonight let's prepare our own spiritual soil for the Lord to plant seeds by first reminding ourselves of the need to be self-aware and secondly to consider what we expect and pursue from God.

1) Self-Awareness

Too many Christians do not take the time to examine themselves. They examine the situation or circumstances they are in but not their character and motives that underly and actually drive their actions, words, attitudes, and thought-life. Do we take the time to look deeper at ourselves? EG. - When we taught on "appropriating our new identity" in week 3, if you found it difficult to understand the *necessity of or how to* examine your self on the level of false beliefs about your identity, then you probably need to develop more in this area.

Socrates says, "An unexamined life is not worth living."

We should resolve to want to see ourselves as God does. That under grace we want him to reveal things about us that we know under grace he will grow us through. David has the courage to pray in Ps. 139:23,24 (read) - we should as well.

2) What do we expect from our relationship with God? And similarly, What do we pursue in our relationship with God?

Do we primarily follow God because we expect and pursue the benefits to ourselves? Or to bear fruit which brings glory to God?

If we PRIMARILY expect "the blessed life" we might dabble in God's purposes (ministry), or even do a fair amount...for a while. But when the benefits don't come our way, we fold (EG. don't feel a real closeness with God, don't bear fruit in leading people to Christ or discipleship, tough circumstances in life continue, financial setbacks still happen, relationships are still difficult to maintain).

Our expectations have been dashed upon the rocks. Do we secretly, down deep primarily pursue God because of what we believe is in it for us?

If we PRIMARILY are driven by a desire to bear fruit in God's purposes then we understand that the personal benefits (growing experience of depth with God, diminishing anxieties in areas of bad circumstances, experience of fulfillment, etc.) will occur but what really consumes our thinking and prayer is a desire to bring him glory by being used by him in the Great Commission - reaching the lost and discipling Christians.

One of the best ways to self-examine here is to ask "what do I pursue?" Where are my energies spent?

Also, what causes me the most distress? Lack of comfort, pleasure, & secure living, lack of close experience with God - or lack of bearing fruit for the Lord?

Consider Paul: Look at his description of his "joy" and note what it is inevitably associated with (Phil. 1:3-5,7; 2:2,17-18). Note his joy is always associated with the Gospel being furthered - fruit being born.

Our "expectations" of how God works in the life of the Christian has a direct bearing on our susceptibility to the topic of this and next week.

Definition of Restorationism: A movement emphasizing the belief that God's miraculous working in the gospels, Acts (and Corinth?) describes the *normal* Christian life (individually and corporately). Restorationists therefore seek to *restore today's church* to reflect that perspective. Third wave charismatics don't normally use "restorationism" to refer to themselves.

History: Three "waves" of restorationism have occurred during the 20th century; all 3 are still present today.

1. *Pentecostalism* (started early 20th cent.): Many believe speaking in tongues is a necessary evidence of personal salvation (Apostolic Church) and that physical healing can always be appropriated by faith

(healing in the atonement). They tend to be concerned about doctrine, and are somewhat sectarian.

2. *Charismatic Movement* (started mid 20th cent.): They believe a second act of grace of being "Spirit-filled" or Spirit-baptized" is necessary after conversion, and tongues are evidence of this; more focused on experience than doctrine, so it spread through Catholic and dead, ritualistic, liberal Protestant denominations (Episcopalians).
3. *"Third Wave"* (started late 20th cent.): "Signs and Wonders" movement (e.g., Vineyard); goal is to bring the full power of the Spirit as they see him working in the Gospels and Acts of the Apostles, into mainstream evangelical churches. They don't hold to a second act of grace, tongues as evidence of salvation, or healing in the atonement.

There is a wide range of perspectives and practices among restorationists. We agree with their desire to restore a New Testament style Christianity, enthusiasm for the things of God, an expectation of God's supernatural involvement, and focus on evangelism and missions. We disagree with some features of restorationism and find that many in this camp have serious problems in their interpretation of scripture and practical application of scripture. This week we will deal with scripture interpretation and next week we will address issues of practice.

Factors Leading To Spiritual Imbalance: If you don't know how to respond to this issue, you will be especially vulnerable during your times of dryness, discouragement, confusion, etc.--and you won't be able to help younger Christians who are vulnerable in this area.

Other areas that leave us open for imbalance: previous experiences, passivity, peer pressure, temperamental inclinations, desiring a quick fix, reluctance to judge the validity of someone else's spiritual experience, etc.

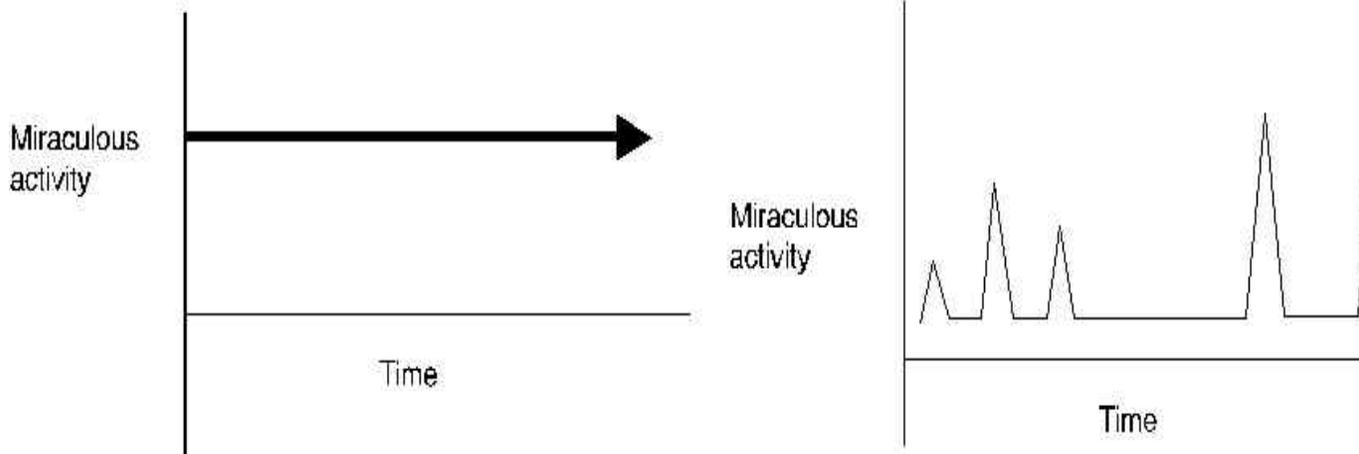
Therefore, while this area is doctrinally non-essential (*not* heretics like Jehovah's Witnesses), it is very important because it sets the *tone* of what we expect and how we define spiritual vitality and maturity. It is not enough to teach proper view of spiritual growth--we also need to be able to discern and reject aberrant views!

Hermeneutical Problems with Restorationism

"Hermeneutics" is the study of interpretation of the Bible.

1. Miracles are not normative in biblical history.

How frequent are miracles in the Bible? Christians commonly assume that people living in biblical times experienced overt miracles as a normal state of affairs. But this is not the case. When we look at the entire biblical record (which covers over 2200 years), we discover that there are a few periods of concentrated miraculous activity. These periods usually correspond to crucial junctures in God's redemptive plan (e.g., Abraham; the Exodus & Conquest; Elijah & Elishah; Jesus & the Apostles; the end of the age).



The Old Testament psalmists frequently look back on the Exodus as special because of the outpouring of miracles (Psalm 105:27ff), and Old Testament prophets look forward to the coming

of Messiah as a period of special miraculous activity (see Isa. 35,61). This clearly implies that they were not experiencing a lot of miraculous activity in their own days.

"The popular notion that Bible abounds with miracles, so that they are present on practically every page, is refuted by a simple reading of the Scriptures. As Sir Robert Anderson showed in his volume *The Silence of God*, miracles have generally occurred in periods, the great ones being the creation, the exodus, the age of Elijah and Elisha, the time of Daniel, and the days of Christ and the apostles. That we should be living in a period of the silence of God (so far as miracle is concerned) should not trouble us unduly, seeing there have been other times when this was true." Everett F. Harrison, *A Short Life of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co.:1997), p. 112.

2. Biblical descriptions of miracles are not prescriptions for all Christians to do.

Define the difference between *descriptive* and *prescriptive* biblical text.

Restorationists see the New Testament narrative (gospels and Acts) as a paradigm for normal Christianity. Since these passages seemingly describe frequent miracles, they conclude that signs and wonders should be normative for spiritual Christians.

But this is improper interpretation, because there are *unique features* in these accounts that *should not be factored* into our general conclusions about spirituality (see below). Instead, we should look primarily to the didactic (teaching) portions of the New Testament which refer to all Christians.

There are many things described in the Bible that we don't feel compelled to imitate (dress, diet, Paul cutting his hair to take a nazirite vow, the apostles' lifestyle as itinerant missionaries, Paul's celibacy, Peter striking Ananias and Saphira dead, Paul striking Elymas blind).

How, then, do we decide what examples we should follow?

(Stott) "*What is described* in Scripture as having happened to others *is not necessarily intended for us*, whereas what is promised to us we should appropriate, and what is commanded us we are to obey . . . What is descriptive is valuable (in determining what God intends for all Christians) only in so far as it is interpreted by what is didactic . . . *We must derive our standards of belief and behavior from the teaching of the New Testament* . . . rather than from the practices and experiences which it portrays." (John R. W. Stott, *Baptism and Fullness* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1975), pp. 15-17).

"Didactic" (same as *prescriptive*) is from the Greek word *didaskos* in the Bible, translated: "teach", "preach", etc. - it is text which teaches what we should do, not text which describes what happened. Webster's College Dictionary defines it as "intended for instruction". You can see this form of Biblical text would have a very different intent and obligation to the reader, than text that simply describes what was occurring.

The main body of material for the didactic would be the epistles written to whole churches or groups of churches. It would also include those portions of Jesus' teaching which concern the church, the apostles' teaching in Acts, and most of the pastoral epistles.

The point: we interpret the *descriptive* in light of the *prescriptive*. Maxim: We interpret the descriptions in the Gospels and Acts in light of what the epistles teach.

And what do the Epistles emphasize? We discover that signs and wonders are neither prescribed (instructed to do) nor emphasized. Rather, the emphasis is on spiritual maturity defined as doctrinal fidelity, biblical love, and moral transformation--through walking in the Spirit. This is the way God has designed the sanctification process according to the New Testament. "If miracles aren't normative, why are they so prevalent in the gospels and Acts?"...

3. God used many miracles for unique reasons in the Gospels.

Jesus was the Messiah, and therefore he did some special things! Certainly we cannot make everything he said and did the norm for all Christians! There were at least two reasons for Jesus' miracles:

- Evidence for his identity: His miracle ministry was one fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy (Mt. 11:3-5). He cited his unique miracle ministry as one of the lines of evidence for his Messiahship (Matt. 11:3-5; Jn. 5:36; 10:37,38).

- Illustrated and validated Jesus' claims: They were also "signs" (*sumeia*) that revealed his identity (when explained by his words). In other words, his miracles were preceded or followed by teaching in which he explained his unique spiritual provision for people (5000 FED >> "I AM THE BREAD OF LIFE;" PARALYTIC HEALED >> "I HAVE THE AUTHORITY TO FORGIVE SINS;" RAISED LAZARUS >> "I AM THE RESURRECTION & THE LIFE"; HEALS BLIND MAN >> "I AM THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD")

The point is: Because Jesus was the unique Messiah, we would expect him to do unique miracles. Even then, the miracles did not take center stage, but drew people to the truth of the message. . .

"Once again the wrong inference must not be drawn. The point is not that signs and wonders are inevitably bad, but that they are never of first importance." (D.A. Carson, "Power Religion" ed. by Michael Horton (Chicago: Moody Press, 1992) p. 98.

"What about Jn. 14:12? Doesn't Jesus promise that all Christians should be able to do the same kinds of miracles--and more of them?"

(John 14:12) "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go to the Father.

- Greater in number
(D. A. Carson) This promise was evidently spoken to all Christians ("he who believes in me"). The term "greater" evidently refers not to qualitatively greater miracles (how could you do something greater than raising people from the dead?), but quantitatively greater. Whereas Jesus was limited to one body and a three year ministry, the body of Christ is composed of many people over a long period of time. So, Jesus predicts that the church (by the power of the Holy Spirit) will do even more miracles than Jesus did. "Might 'greater' mean 'more numerous' or 'more widely dispersed?' In that sense, Christians have indeed done 'greater' things than Jesus did. We have preached all over the world, seen millions of men and women converted, dispensed aid, education, and food to still more millions. The 'greater' works may therefore be the gathering of converts into the church through the witness of the disciples (cf. 17:20; 20:29), and the overflow of kindness that stems from transformed lives." (D. A. Carson, *The Farewell Discourse and Final Prayer of Jesus* [Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980], p. 41.)

4. God used many miracles for unique reasons in Acts.

Like the miracles performed by Jesus in the gospels, the miracles we read about in Acts are performed by unique people (the Apostles) during a unique time (the beginning of the church).

- The Apostles were unique in certain important ways:

a. They were authorized to write scripture (see Matthew 10:40; John 14:26; 15:26,27; 16:13)

b. They were authorized to perform miracles like Jesus' to validate their message

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

Heb. 2:1-4 For this reason we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. (2) For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense, (3) how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard, (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.

c. There are no apostles today in the sense of Christ's authorized Apostles.

"But there are probably apostles today." Probably not. The New Testament says that witnessing the resurrected Christ was a requirement for being an Apostle (1 Cor. 9:1; Acts 1:22). Paul says in 1 Cor. 15:8 that he was the "last of all" to witness the resurrected Christ. Therefore, there are no more Apostles after Paul.

The New Testament seems to make a distinction between "Apostles" and "apostles." "Apostles" are the ones described above and ended in the first century (contra Roman Catholic doctrine of papal authority through Apostolic succession). Small "a" "apostles" is used more generically to describe appointed messengers (2 Cor. 8:23 "messengers") or perhaps itinerant church-planters (Rom. 16:7).

Important Qualification: One need not conclude from this that God never performs miracles through the church today, but one would conclude that such working is probably not as frequent as it was during Jesus' and the Apostles' ministries.

- Acts describes a unique period in history. Acts was a transitional stage from the Old to the New Covenant--and therefore a unique period in church history, never again to be repeated. This explains why there was a delay in some cases between people believing and receiving the Holy Spirit, and why tongues were used in a special way. Therefore, it is a mistake to claim (as some restorationists do) that these two phenomena (receiving the Holy Spirit at a separate moment from conversion and speaking in tongues) should be normative for the church today. NOTE: There is more to the tongues issue, and we will address it soon. First of all, remember that we should interpret descriptive in light of didactic passages. Paul makes it clear that the norm is for Christians to receive the Spirit at the moment of belief (Eph. 1:13,14). He also makes it clear that while all Christians have been baptized by the Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13), not all Christians speak in tongues (1 Cor. 12:30). Also bear in mind that apart from these passages, there is no evidence that the thousands of other converts in Acts spoke in tongues or experienced a delay between belief and receiving the Holy Spirit.

With this in view, how might we understand the deviation from the norm in Acts 2,8,10,19**?

Acts 2:1-12

There was delay between believing in Christ and receiving the Spirit, because they were Old Covenant believers and the New Covenant didn't start until Pentecost.

Tongues given to validate Jesus' promise (Acts 1:5), to provide with preaching opportunity and (for later reference) to prove that non-Jewish believers were now equal members of God's people.

Acts 8:14-24

Delay either because Peter had "keys of the kingdom" (Matt. 16:18,19), or to prevent a Samaritan Christian faction by consolidating the apostles' authority.

Tongues (maybe) to show that Samaritan believers were equally saved.

Acts 10:44-46

No delay.

Tongues to prove that Gentile believers were equally saved (Acts 11:15-18).

Acts 19:1-7

Delay because they were Old Covenant believers.

Tongues probably to prove to them that Jesus was indeed the Messiah, and to confirm Paul's apostolic authority.

Therefore, while there is no evidence that the gift of tongues has been withdrawn (see below), it is unbiblical to teach that we must speak in tongues to be saved (old line Pentecostalism) or to be Spirit-filled (charismatics and more recent pentacostals).

It is also unbiblical to assume that there is normally a delay between belief in the gospel and receiving the Holy Spirit.

Summary of the Acts accounts:

(D. A. Carson) "Acts provides not a paradigm for individual Christian experience, but the account of the gospel's outward movement, geographically, racially, and above all theologically." (D.A. Carson, *Showing the Spirit*, p. 150.)

Luke was narrating a "highlights film" of a unique period in church history led by unique spokesmen. His purpose was to narrate the expansion of the gospel in fulfillment of Acts 1:8. There is no evidence that Luke intended his record to serve as a paradigm for all churches or individuals, because we do not see some of the extraordinary events and practices described in Acts (e.g. Acts 19:11,12) reiterated in the epistles. However, the early church as described in Acts does serve as a model for us in whatever areas *are also mandated in the didactic portions* of the New Testament (e.g., evangelism and missions; prayer; sacrificial giving; etc.).

Conclusion

Summarize each of the four main hermeneutical problems.

- Miracles are not normative in biblical history.
- Biblical descriptions of miracles are not prescriptions for all Christians to do.
- God used many miracles for unique reasons in the Gospels.
- God used many miracles for unique reasons in Acts.

Memory Verses

2 Cor. 12:12* - the apostles were uniquely authorized to perform signs and wonders and miracles

Acts 2,8,10,19** - instances of delay between belief in Christ and receiving the Holy Spirit; also instances of speaking in tongues