

Sign Gifts Distinctive

Introduction

Each time the church gathers together in fellowship and worship, we are reminded of the fullness of God's grace and the depth of His love for His people. It is within these moments we embark on a journey of exploration and understanding regarding the role of sign gifts within our church family. In our pursuit to honor God and faithfully follow His Word, we are confronted with the nuanced issue of sign gifts—those extraordinary manifestations of the Holy Spirit that have captivated hearts and minds throughout Christian history. At Village Bible Church, we approach this topic with humility, recognizing the diversity of perspectives and the complexity of theological interpretation. Yet, anchored in our commitment to the authority of Scripture and guided by the Holy Spirit, we seek to discern God's will for our congregation with grace and compassion.

Sign gifts, which include miraculous acts such as **miracles/healings, prophecy, and speaking in tongues**, have been a source of both inspiration and contention within the broader body of Christ. While some communities emphasize their ongoing relevance and significance, others approach them with caution, mindful of the need for discernment and biblical fidelity. To fully understand the great spectrum of positions within evangelicalism we are indebted to C. Michael Patton who aptly categorizes the various positions regarding this area of theology:¹

- 1. Hard Cessationist:** The term “cessationist” is taken from the word “cease.” The hard cessationist believes that particular gifts, such as tongues, prophecy, miracles, healings, and the like, necessarily ceased in the first century due to an exhaustion of purpose. The hard cessationist would distinguish between what are called “sign gifts” and all other gifts. “Sign gifts” are the gifts that are evidently miraculous, and therefore provide a sign to the witnesses that the message of the one who performed these gifts was truly from God. According to the hard cessationist, once the New Testament was completed, there was no longer a need for these gifts to be given to the church since the Gospel message had been firmly established. They would be considered “hard” cessationists since they believe that both the Bible and biblical theology necessitate their cessation.
- 2. Soft Cessationist:** The soft cessationist would agree with most of the arguments of the hard cessationist, except they would be open to God’s use of the sign gifts in unevangelized areas. Therefore, the “ceasing” of the gifts has less to do with the completion of the Bible and more to do with God’s missional purpose. For the soft cessationist, it may very well be that God continues to use these gifts to establish the Gospel message in areas of the world that have yet to be penetrated with the Gospel. Once the Gospel is established, the gifts would cease. As well, soft cessationists are open to a new movement of the Spirit. In short, soft cessationists are open to legitimate expressions of these gifts, even if they have never seen them expressed in any normative way.
- 3. Continuationist:** The term “continuationist” is taken from the word “continue.” Continuationists, simply put, believe that all the gifts of the Spirit have continued throughout the church age. For the continuationist, while many of these gifts would have indeed served as signs to the outside world, their primary function is not to evangelize the lost but to ensure the health of the church. In other words, God gives them out of his benevolence. The continuationist sees no biblical evidence that these gifts would ever cease; on the contrary, the continuationist believes the Bible teaches that these gifts are normative for the church age.
- 4. Charismatic:** Every charismatic is a continuationist, but not every continuationist is a charismatic. I think this is an important distinction to make. The charismatic would agree with all of the continuationist’s positions; the primary difference is in their pursuit of all the gifts for the church. I would like to propose this as a formal working definition of a

¹ C. Michael Patton found @ <https://credohouse.org/blog/what-does-it-mean-to-be-charismatic>

charismatic for our purposes: A charismatic believes that all of the gifts of the Spirit 1) have continued, 2) are normative, and 3) should be sought out by individual believers and the Church.

At Village Bible Church, we embrace a moderate posture—a soft cessationist stance. This position seeks to navigate all of this with wisdom and compassion. Central to our approach is the recognition of God's sovereignty and His unchanging character. We affirm the biblical precedent for the operation of sign gifts, acknowledging their role in authenticating the gospel message during the formative years of the early church (Hebrews 2:3–4). Yet, we also recognize the need for discernment and humility as we seek to discern God's will for our church community in the present day.

We desire to create this document to create space for theological reflection and spiritual growth, where members of Village Bible Church can engage with sincerity and openness. Through prayerful study of Scripture and guided by the leading of the Holy Spirit, we endeavor to discern God's purposes for our congregation about these gifts. As we embark on this journey together, let us do so with hearts filled with reverence and minds open to God's leading. In the coming sections of this distinctive, we will delve into the biblical foundations for our position, explore key passages that describe the nature and purpose of sign gifts, and offer pastoral insights for our church family. The elders desire that this paper be marked by a spirit of unity, humility, and above all, a deep abiding love for our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Miracles And Healings

Miracles and Healings in The Old Testament

In the Old Testament, miracles serve as powerful displays of God's sovereignty and compassion, affirming His divine presence and authority in the lives of His people. The Old Testament abounds with miraculous events that underscore God's intervention in human affairs, demonstrating His power to deliver, protect, and guide His chosen ones. One of the most renowned displays of divine power in the Old Testament is the Exodus narrative, where God performs a series of miracles through Moses to deliver the Israelites from slavery in Egypt. From the plagues upon Egypt (Exodus 7–11) to the parting of the Red Sea (Exodus 14), these miracles attest to God's faithfulness in fulfilling His promises and His ability to overcome seemingly insurmountable obstacles. Furthermore, throughout the Old Testament, prophets like Elijah and Elisha are depicted as conduits of God's miraculous power. In 1 Kings 17, Elijah provides for a widow and her son by miraculously multiplying their meager food supplies, while in 2 Kings 4, Elisha raises a Shunammite woman's son from the dead. These miracles not only demonstrate God's care for His people but also authenticate the authority of His chosen messengers.

Miracles and Healings During the Ministry of Jesus

During the earthly ministry of Jesus Christ, miracles served as vivid demonstrations of His divine identity and the inauguration of God's kingdom on earth. Jesus' miracles could be placed in various categories, including healings, exorcisms, miracles involving nature, and even raising the dead, each revealing His authority over creation and His compassion for humanity. Healings were a prominent aspect of Jesus' miraculous ministry. Countless accounts in the Gospels depict Jesus curing the sick and disabled, often with just a touch or a word.

In Matthew 9:20–22, a woman suffering from a hemorrhage for twelve years is healed by touching the fringe of Jesus' cloak, while in Mark 2:1–12, a paralytic is restored to health after Jesus forgives his sins and commands him to walk. These healings not only alleviated physical suffering but also symbolized Jesus' power to bring about spiritual wholeness and restoration. Jesus also demonstrated authority over evil spirits through exorcisms. In Mark 5:1–20, Jesus frees a man possessed by a legion of demons, restoring him to sanity and dignity. Through these exorcisms, Jesus displayed His power over the forces of darkness, liberating individuals from bondage and oppression.

Likewise, Jesus performed miracles that displayed His control over nature. In Mark 4:35–41, Jesus calms a raging storm with a simple command, revealing His mastery over the weather. Similarly, in John 6:5–14, Jesus miraculously multiplies a small amount of bread and fish to feed a multitude, showcasing His ability to provide abundantly for the needs of His followers. Perhaps the most profound of Jesus' miracles was His raising of the dead. In John 11:1–44, Jesus raises Lazarus from the tomb after he had been dead for four days, demonstrating His power over death itself and foreshadowing His own resurrection. Overall, the miracles of Jesus during His earthly ministry served as tangible manifestations of God's presence and power among humanity. They testified to His divine identity as the Son of God and affirmed the truth of His message, inviting people to believe in Him and experience the abundant life He offers.

Miracles and Healings During the First Century

In the aftermath of Jesus Christ's resurrection and ascension, the early Church emerged as a vibrant and dynamic community empowered by the Holy Spirit. Miracles continued to be a significant aspect of the Church's life, serving as signs of God's presence and confirmation of the Gospel message preached by the apostles.

The Book of Acts provides a glimpse into the miraculous workings of the early Church. Acts 2:1–13 describes the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, enabling the disciples to speak in different languages and proclaim the wonders of God to people from various nations. This miraculous event marked the birth of the Church and empowered believers to boldly testify to the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Throughout Acts, we see miraculous healings and deliverances performed by the apostles. In Acts 3:1–10, Peter heals a lame beggar at the Beautiful Gate of the temple, attracting attention and providing an opportunity to preach the Gospel to the crowds. Acts 9:32–42 recounts how Peter raises a woman named Dorcas from the dead in Joppa, leading to many in the city believing in the Lord.

The early Church experienced divine interventions in times of crisis and persecution. Acts 12:1–17 narrates Peter's miraculous escape from prison, where an angel of the Lord frees him from his chains and leads him out of the jail, demonstrating God's protection over His servants. In Acts 16:16–40, Paul and Silas are miraculously freed from prison after an earthquake shakes the foundations of the jail, prompting the jailer and his household to believe in Jesus. These miracles served to authenticate the message of salvation preached by the early Church and to demonstrate the power of God at work in the lives of believers. They not only provided tangible help and relief but also drew attention to the transformative power of the Gospel and sparked conversions and growth within the early Christian community. Overall, the early Church was characterized by a reliance on the Holy Spirit and a commitment to proclaiming the Gospel with signs and wonders following. Miracles played a vital role in establishing the credibility of the Christian message and in building up the body of believers as they navigated the challenges of spreading the Good News in the midst of opposition and persecution.

Miracles and Healings at Village Bible Church

In light of the numerous passages of God's power and might seen in His use of miracles and healings it is the elders' belief that God's power to heal and perform miraculous acts persists today, and they should earnestly seek such interventions through prayer. While the Scriptures do not offer unequivocal clarity on the continuation of these gifts, the possibility remains open. Historically, these gifts served to authenticate the gospel message, affirming Jesus' identity as both Lord and Christ. However, skepticism arises regarding the prevalence of such gifts in contemporary church communities, as the evident absence of individuals endowed with these abilities raises questions. Claims of miraculous healings warrant scrutiny, akin to the thorough verification process witnessed in John 9 following the blind man's healing.

Yet, in missionary contexts, where the gospel's credibility requires reinforcement, it is plausible that God might bestow miracles, signs, and wonders as He did in the apostolic era. However, this differs from the regular manifestation of such

gifts within the ongoing life of the church. If the miraculous signs of the apostles have indeed resurged, the elders expect to witness the blind gaining sight, the lame walking, and the dead being raised. While God undoubtedly continues to heal today, often in striking ways, distinctions must be made. Healings of common ailments like colds, the flu, and various physical discomforts do not align with the extraordinary healings depicted in Scripture. Those who claim to possess the gift of healing and miracles must substantiate their assertions by performing the caliber of miracles and healings documented in the Bible. While we believe that miracles can still happen, it is the perspective of the elders that instead of focusing on these ecstatic moments, we should be a church that prioritizes sharing the gospel over healings and miracles. While the latter serves the world by addressing temporal needs and troubles, the former addresses the greatest need for all humanity: eternal salvation. We resonate and agree with Pastor Chuck Swindoll who said:

"I believe in divine healing. I do not believe in divine healers. I believe in faith healing. I do not believe in faith healers. There is a great difference. I believe that God in His sovereign grace and power will in fact reach down in some cases and change a condition . . . And I am of the conviction that God does that apart from any individual who claims to have certain powers" ²

Prophecy

What does the New Testament gift of prophecy look like when it's being exercised today? This is the sincere question of many evangelicals. Some are exploring the possibility that this gift continues in the church, and others have become convinced exegetically that it does, but would be helped by some examples. But others have different questions. Why do we even need the gift of prophecy now that we have the Bible, the closed canon of the Old and New Testament Scriptures? Why would we "earnestly desire" fallibly-delivered "prophetic words" when we have the infallible word of God at our fingertips? Aren't the Scriptures enough for us? These are sincere questions for many evangelicals who either believe prophecy has ceased or that the Bible just reduces its importance.³

To prophesy is simply to speak prophecy. Prophecy is the noun, and prophesy is the verb. Prophecy at its most basic definition is "a message from God." So, to prophesy is to proclaim a message from God. The one who does this is, therefore, a prophet. Although foretelling is often associated with prophecy, revealing the future is not a necessary element of prophecy; however, since only God knows the future, any authoritative word about the future must of necessity be a prophecy, that is, a message from God.⁴

Prophecy in The Old Testament:

Prophecy in the Old Testament stands as a cornerstone of divine communication between God and His people, offering profound insights into His character, will, and plan for humanity. Throughout the pages of the Hebrew Scriptures, we encounter a diverse array of prophets, each uniquely called and empowered by God to convey His messages to the nation of Israel and beyond.

At its core, prophecy in the Old Testament serves as a conduit for God's revelation, encompassing a range of functions and expressions. Prophets were called to speak forth God's word with authority, addressing various issues such as social injustice, moral corruption, religious apostasy, and the future destiny of nations. They served as intermediaries between God and His people, delivering messages of judgment, repentance, consolation, and hope.

The prophetic ministry in the Old Testament was characterized by its dynamic and multifaceted nature. Prophets often employed a variety of methods to convey their messages, including oracles, visions, dreams, symbolic actions, and direct

² Chuck Swindoll: James, Practical and Authentic Living, p. 194.

³ <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/what-does-prophecy-look-like-today>

⁴ <https://www.gotquestions.org/prophecy-prophesy.html>

proclamation. Their words were frequently accompanied by signs and wonders, intended to authenticate their divine commission and underscore the urgency of their message.

Prophets...declare what God will do and what God requires. They speak the truth that people often do not want to hear. This rubs against the grain of a culture that treats religion as a consumer item.⁵

Prophecy In The New Testament

In the New Testament, the tradition of prophecy continues, with some distinctions from its Old Testament counterpart. The ministry of prophecy in the New Testament is closely associated with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, particularly as described in Acts chapter 2 on the day of Pentecost.

One significant aspect of New Testament prophecy is its emphasis on edification, exhortation, and consolation within the Christian community (1 Corinthians 14:3). The apostle Paul, in his first letter to the Corinthians, provides valuable insights into the practice of prophecy within the early church. He encourages believers to eagerly desire the gift of prophecy, highlighting its ability to strengthen, encourage, and build up the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 14:1–5).

The book of Acts provides numerous examples of prophetic activity among the early Christians. Agabus, for instance, is described as a prophet who accurately foretold a famine that would occur during the reign of Claudius Caesar (Acts 11:28). Additionally, the daughters of Philip are mentioned as prophesying (Acts 21:9), indicating the inclusive nature of prophetic ministry in the New Testament era.

While prophecy in the New Testament shares certain continuities with its Old Testament counterpart, it also exhibits distinct features shaped by the unique context of the early church and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. The ministry of prophecy in the New Testament serves to edify and strengthen the Christian community, bearing witness to the ongoing work of God in the world and pointing believers to the person and work of Jesus Christ.

God gave the prophecies, not to gratify men's curiosity by enabling them to foreknow things, but that after they were fulfilled they might be interpreted by the event, and His own providence, not the interpreters, be thereby manifested to the world.—Isaac Newton⁶

Prophecy Today:

In contemporary times, there exists a spectrum of beliefs and practices regarding the exercise of prophecy, wherein individuals claim to speak on behalf of God. For some, this phenomenon represents a deep spiritual encounter. These individuals often testify to receiving insights, messages, or visions they attribute to the voice of God, which they then share with others as prophetic utterances. Those who engage in prophetic ministry today often perceive themselves as vessels chosen by God to deliver His messages to His people. They may speak forth declarations of encouragement, exhortation, or warning, believing they are guided by the Holy Spirit. Such expressions of prophecy are viewed as a continuation of the prophetic tradition witnessed throughout biblical history, where God communicated His will and purpose through chosen individuals.

Proponents of contemporary prophecy emphasize the dynamic and living nature of God's communication with humanity. They argue that just as God spoke through prophets in ancient times, He continues to speak today, addressing the spiritual needs and challenges of the modern world. As such, they believe in the relevance and importance of prophetic ministry for guiding, edifying, and convicting believers in their faith journey. In practice, these prophetic

⁵ <https://gracequotes.org/topic/prophecy/>

⁶ *ibid*

expressions vary widely, ranging from spontaneous utterances during worship gatherings to more structured settings where individuals are specifically designated as prophets or prophetic voices within their communities.

However, it is essential to recognize that the perception and practice of prophecy in modern times are not without controversy and critique. Skeptics and critics often raise concerns about the authenticity and reliability of prophetic claims, highlighting the potential for error, manipulation, or misinterpretation. They caution against uncritical acceptance of prophetic messages and advocate for discernment grounded in biblical truth and theological soundness.

Prophecy at Village Bible Church:

The perspective of Village Bible Church on the contemporary gift of Prophecy aligns with a cautious approach that emphasizes discernment, accountability, and theological grounding. While acknowledging the diversity of beliefs and practices surrounding prophecy, our church community places a strong emphasis on the primacy of Scripture as the authoritative source of divine revelation.

At Village Bible Church, prophetic claims are subject to rigorous evaluation in light of biblical truth and doctrinal integrity. The church encourages believers to exercise discernment and humility in assessing prophetic messages, recognizing the potential for error, manipulation, or misinterpretation. Moreover, accountability checkpoints are in place to ensure that any prophetic statements remain aligned with the teachings of Scripture and the overall mission of the church.

While affirming the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit in guiding and illuminating believers, Village Bible Church emphasizes the importance of testing prophetic claims against the clear teachings of Scripture. This approach fosters a balanced perspective that upholds the dynamic nature of God's communication with humanity while safeguarding against the dangers of theological drift or spiritual deception. In addition, Village Bible Church holds the conviction that any prophetic message should not be associated with the notion of an exclusive "office of prophecy" where individuals claim a monopoly on prophetic messages. Instead, the church emphasizes the priesthood of all believers and the communal nature of spiritual gifts, including prophecy.

The Gift of Tongues

The emphasis on "Charismatic Gifts" and the pursuit of a "deeper spiritual life" has also been amplified in recent days. Modern day Charismatics have used their platforms to showcase and promote the practice of speaking in tongues as a key aspect of their ministry. This widespread exposure further contributes to the confusion surrounding the role of tongues in the Christian life.

Television ministries, with their wide reach and influence, frequently portray speaking in tongues as a sign of spiritual power and connection with God. However, the scriptural context and interpretation of tongues as outlined in passages like Isaiah 28:11 and 1 Corinthians 14 challenge the popular notions propagated by some of these ministries.

Therefore, amidst the proliferation of such messages on television, it becomes even more crucial for believers to carefully evaluate and discern the biblical foundation and theological implications of the teachings presented. This underscores the importance of grounding one's faith and practice in the authoritative Word of God rather than solely relying on charismatic personalities or sensationalized presentations.

Tongues in Acts

"In the law it is written, 'Through men of strange tongues and through the lips of foreigners I will speak to this people, but even then they will not listen to me,' says the Lord.

The gift of tongues, then, is a sign, not for believers but for unbelievers; prophecy, however, is for believers, not for unbelievers” (1 Corinthians 14:21–22). It can be effectively argued that tongues were given as a sign to Israel and not primarily for Gentiles. The audience in Acts 2 was entirely Jewish, and the languages spoken were common languages of the day.

In Acts 10:44–47, while Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit came upon all who heard the message, including Gentiles. The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles, evidenced by their speaking in tongues and praising God. This experience of tongues served as a sign to the Jewish Christians that Gentiles could indeed receive salvation without becoming Jewish proselytes.

In Acts 11, Peter further explains how the gift of tongues convinced him that Gentiles had the right to hear the gospel. Although there is no direct reference to the exercise of tongues in Acts 11:15–17, the recounting of the events of Chapter 10 implies their presence. If tongues are indicated in this text, their purpose is to be a sign to the unbelieving Jews.

Lastly, in Acts 19, the Jewish followers of John were led to Christ by Paul. To prove that this conversion was a true act of God and superior to John’s message and baptism, God caused them to speak in tongues when the Holy Spirit came upon them. Once again, tongues were used by God as a sign to the unbelieving Jews. Each time tongues appear in Acts, they occur in a Jewish context, and the experience is related in type and purpose to the known languages spoken at Pentecost in Acts 2.

In the first days the Holy Spirit fell upon the believers, and they spoke in tongues that they hadn’t learned, as the Spirit gave them to speak. These signs were appropriate for the time. For it was necessary that the Holy Spirit be signified thus in all tongues, because the gospel of God was going to traverse all tongues throughout the earth. That was the sign that was given, and it passed.⁷

Tongues in 1 Corinthians

First Corinthians 12:7—“Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.”

Paul clearly states in 1 Corinthians 12:7 that spiritual gifts were given to “profit” the church, not to divide it. Spiritual experiences and the exercise of spiritual gifts must benefit the Christian community and avoid bringing disorder to the body of Christ. 1 Corinthians 14:26 emphasizes this, stating, “What then shall we say, brothers? When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church.”

The rise of the tongues movement in evangelical circles today has led to significant division, casting doubt upon the validity of its exercise compared to the clear benefits brought about by the exercise of other gifts listed in 1 Corinthians 14:28–31. This passage dictates that without an interpreter, speakers should keep quiet in the church, and prophets should speak in turn to allow for careful consideration of each message.

The grammar of 1 Corinthians 12:31 raises questions about the modern practice of speaking in tongues. The Greek term *zelute*, meaning to covet or earnestly seek, can be understood as either a command (“you should seek the greater gifts”) or a statement of fact (“you are seeking the greater gifts”). Paul likely intended to correct the improper emphasis on tongues, which some considered to be the greater gift. This interpretation aligns with the context, as 1 Corinthians 12:31

⁷ Augustine: Homilies on 1 John, 6:10.

begins with the adversative word “BUT” and discounts the importance of tongues in 13:1 by contrasting it with love as the “better way.”

By understanding *zelute* as indicative, Paul emphasizes the need for love to accompany the use of any spiritual gift. The pursuit of showy or greater gifts undermines the central message of love in Chapter 13. Love must underpin the use of every gift, regardless of its popularity or power, or else it amounts to nothing.

Tongues and Spiritual Gifts in Paul’s Other Letters

Upon close examination of Paul’s letter to the Corinthians, it becomes apparent that he was addressing carnal Christians who regarded tongues as a symbol of spiritual superiority. He vehemently opposed this viewpoint and sought to redirect their focus toward desiring the “greater gifts,” as emphasized in Chapter 13. This sentiment is reiterated in Ephesians 4, where Paul outlines the gifts necessary for the edification and growth of the church, conspicuously omitting tongues from the list.

The absence of tongues is even more conspicuous when considering the spiritual maturity of the Ephesian Christians. If speaking in tongues were indeed a sign of spiritual maturity, one would expect the Ephesians, among the most mature believers, to exhibit this gift prominently. Additionally, the book of Romans, which offers a comprehensive exposition of Christian truths, does not mention tongues. Despite its detailed exploration of the Christian life and service in chapters 12–16, tongues are notably absent.

While it could be argued that this silence constitutes an argument from silence, the nature and purpose of both Ephesians and Romans suggest that tongues would not have been excluded if they were deemed essential to mature Christian experience or worship.

Rules that Govern the Use of Tongues

One more issue is important to consider. The modern tongues movement often violates the Scriptural conditions under which tongues may be exercised. First Corinthians 14:3–40 sets forth conditions under which tongues may be used in the church:

- Prophecy, or preaching, is the most important gift.
- No more than 3 are to speak in tongues in a church.
- Tongues must be interpreted or not used in public.
- Women may not exercise these gifts in the church.
- All is to be done decently and in order.

When we consider: the original purpose for tongues was a sign to the Jews that the Messiah was offered, the spiritual condition of the Corinthian church, the absence of tongues in the mainstream of the Christian church from the end of the first century until today, and the violation of Scriptural guidelines by the modern tongues movement, it seems unlikely that the use of tongues, as it is practiced today, can be considered to be the exercise of the same gift of the Holy Spirit which is mentioned in Acts.

Summary on the Gift of Tongues

In summary we should keep in mind the following issues:

- **Christ did not speak in tongues**—since our highest calling is to be like Him we must conclude that speaking in tongues is not important for every generation of believers.
- **Tongues are not a sign of spiritual maturity according to 1 Cor. 12:13, 27–30.** The Corinthians had the gifts but Paul considered them spiritual babies (see: 1 Cor. 3:3–4; 14:20).
- **Tongues are not a sign of the Baptism of the Holy Spirit.** 1 Cor. 12:13, 30 makes it clear that all Christians are baptized in the Holy Spirit.
- **Tongues are not given to edify individual Christians.** 1 Cor. 14:4 would indicate that edification may be a by-product of the exercise of tongues, but not its purpose (Isaiah 28; Acts 2; 10:1–19; 1 Cor. 14).
- **Tongues are not to be sought after.** According to 1 Cor. 12, the Spirit gives to whomsoever He wills. Gifts should not separate the church into groups that compete for prominence based upon giftedness.
- **Ecstatic utterances are common in witchcraft, pagan religions, and cults.** The experience of “tongues” is not necessarily a biblically sanctioned experience or evidence of a spiritual gift.

Spiritual Gifts are given by God to edify and build up the Church in unity unto Christ likeness (Eph. 4:11–16). Any activity which brings pride and division to the Body of Christ can not be considered an honorable exercise of a “spiritual gift.”

The Positions on the Use of Tongues Within Evangelicalism

There are at least **six positions** regarding tongues which are taken by Christians today:

Position 1 — *Believes tongues to be the sign of the baptism of the Holy Spirit and important for spiritual growth and power, personally practices speaking in tongues and encourages others to do so as well.*

Position 2 — *Believes in and personally practices speaking in tongues but may or may not see tongues as a sign of the baptism of the Holy Spirit and does not feel it necessary to encourage others to seek the gift.*

Position 3 — *Believes tongues are a legitimate gift for today but does not see tongues as a sign of the baptism of the Holy Spirit and does not personally practice speaking in tongues.*

Position 4 — *Is not sure whether or not tongues are a legitimate gift for today.*

Position 5 — *Believes that the gift of tongues is not normative (intended to be common practice) in the church today or a sign of the baptism of the Holy Spirit but is open to their possible use by God for special occasions or in unique circumstances, yet is opposed to the practice of tongues in the ministries of their own local church.*

Position 6 — *Believes that tongues is not normative or a legitimate spiritual gift today and is opposed to the practice in any Christian context today.*

What is the position of Village Bible Church?

Village Bible Church is a “non-charismatic” church. While we recognize the importance of the gift of tongues in the early days of the New Testament Church (i.e. speaking the Gospel in languages which had not been learned by the speakers), we do not believe that the gift is normative in the life of the church today. Furthermore, much of what is called “speaking in tongues” today does not resemble the experiences described in Acts. This does not mean that they are demonic or evil, but it certainly calls into question their legitimacy as expressions of the gift of tongues as described in Acts and 1 Corinthians.

Those who hold positions 2-5 may become members and should teach in accordance with this position. Those who hold to positions 2 or 3 must agree to pursue the unity of the body and not attempt to proselytize others to the practice of speaking in tongues.

For the sake of doctrinal unity in spirit and practice, those who hold to position #1 above may not become members of VBC. Any member whose beliefs change to reflect position #1 should discuss the issue with the Elders with a view to understanding the possible impact upon themselves and the body at VBC. Because the Scriptures call us to unity in Christ and to manifest the Fruit of the Spirit, and since 1 Corinthians places tongues on the bottom of the list of gifts, we have chosen to de-emphasize this controversial practice.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, our church holds a position on miracles, healing, prophecy, and the gift of tongues that seeks to faithfully align with the teachings of Scripture while acknowledging the diversity of perspectives within the body of Christ. We recognize that sincere believers may hold differing views, and we respect the freedom of conscience in interpreting and applying biblical principles. Our aim is to adhere as closely as possible to the example and admonition of Scriptures, guided by the Holy Spirit, without imposing rigid theological constructs that limit God's sovereign work.

Furthermore, we ask all our members and regular attenders to honor these positions to ensure greater unity and cohesion in our times of gathering, whether in large worship services or within small groups. While we value the diversity of opinions and experiences among our congregation, we believe that unity in faith and practice strengthens our community and bears witness to the love and truth of Christ. Therefore, we encourage respectful dialogue and mutual edification, trusting in the guidance of the Holy Spirit to lead us into deeper understanding and fellowship. Together, let us embrace our shared commitment to following Christ and serving His kingdom with humility, grace, and love.