

Does the Spirit Still Give the Gifts of Prophecy, Tongues, and Healings?

A Case for Cessationism, Part 2

I. Introduction

- A. **Cessationism** is the view that the gifts of prophecy, tongues, and miracles/healings were given only during the apostolic time, prior to the completion of the New Testament writings.
- B. **Continuationism** is the view that all the gifts are still given to the church today.
- C. **We teach** that sign gifts (apostle, prophet, healing, miracles, and tongues) authenticated the ministry and message of the apostles (Ephesians 2:20; Hebrews 2:1-4; 2 Corinthians 12:12) and served in the establishment of the church (Acts 2:41-47; 9:31-42). We teach that God continues to demonstrate His miraculous power and ability to heal; but the sign gifts, as given to the early church, are not in effect today.
- D. **What I see as the strongest argument or the main issue for each side of the debate**
 - 1. For Cessationism – “The gifts labeled by continuationists as ‘prophecy, tongues, and healing/miracles’ do not match up with the biblical examples and definitions of those gifts.”
 - 2. For Continuationist – “Where in the NT does it tell us these gifts will cease? If the Spirit gives gifts, why would he stop giving these three gifts and not the others?”

II. A Case for Cessationism

A. **Definitional and empirical evidence:**

The gifts that continuationists claim are not the gifts we see exemplified in the NT, but a redefinition of them.

- 1. If you say you have the gift, then it must be the gift.
 - a. You can't redefine it and then claim you have it.
 - b. I can't say I am a millionaire by redefining what “millionaire” means... “it means to have a million paper clips rather than dollars.”
- 2. **Prophecy**
 - a. **Definition:** Prophecy is when a person spontaneously receives a revelation from God and communicates it to other people without error (1 Cor. 14:29-30, Acts 13:1-2, OT prophets).
 - b. A version of prophesy that allows for error sometimes is different than the biblical definition of prophecy (1 John 4:1, Deut. 18:20-22).
- 3. **Tongues...**
 - a. **Definition:** When a person is enabled to speak a human language that he or she did not learn and does not know in order to tell the mighty works of God to those of different languages (Acts 2:1-11, 1 Cor. 14:10-13).
 - a. As practiced today, it is ecstatic utterances which can't be interpreted.
- 2. **Healing / Miracles**
 - a. **Definition:** Healing is the regular ability to enact miraculous and obvious healings of physical ailments by a word or touch (Acts 3:1-10). The gift of miracles is the ability to cast out demons or perform miracles related to natural laws by word or touch.
 - b. Those with the gift of healing did things that were obvious to all and clearly miraculous (Acts 3:1-10, Acts 16:18).

B. Theological inference:

The roles of Apostle and Prophet have ceased; thus we can conclude that at least the gift of prophecy served its purpose and is no longer given.

1. The first step in this argument is to establish the unique role of Apostles and Prophets and that those roles have come to an end (Eph. 2:19-20).
2. Second step: Are there other gifts that were tied in with the role of Apostle or Prophet that might have ceased? Yes, “signs and wonders” (Heb. 2:3-4, 2 Cor. 12:11-12).

C. Historical observation:

We only see limited appearances of miraculous activity in the Bible and suspect claims in church history.

1. In the OT, we see God working signs through individuals mainly at the Exodus [Moses] and at the time of Elijah and Elisha.
2. We see a lot during the inauguration of the New Covenant.
 - a. There are a lot of miracles during Jesus’s ministry and in Acts.
 - b. But even Paul does not heal a traveling companion nearer the end of the NT (2 Tim 4:20).
3. In church history:

“In each instance [where these gifts were claimed], the group involved was small and generally on the fringe of Christianity. . . . very often the groups that did emphasize what today would be called charismatic gifts were either heretical or quickly pushed their “gifts” to such extremes that their praxis proved dangerous to the church.”¹

III. Some FAQs

A. How should we engage continuationist friends and family (or you)?

1. We shouldn’t assume evil motives of friends (but we realize there are false teachers who do have such motives and must be condemned).
2. However, we reject any claims to new revelation because that claim has significant ramifications – it undermines the authority of Scripture.
3. We can gently ask questions about why gifts like prophecy, tongues, and miracles/healings don’t seem to look like they did in the NT when they were clearly given.

B. Does being a cessationist mean we don’t think God does miracles and healings?

1. Cessationist are not (and should be careful of accidentally thinking like) anti-supernaturalists.
 - a. We must remind ourselves that God can and does heal, even in response to our prayers.
 - b. Psalm 103 says we should bless the Lord who heals all our diseases.
2. But is praying and finding God answers that the GIFT of healing? (no, see point II.A.3).

C. Does the Spirit prompt us or lead us to do things? If so, is that the gift of prophecy?

1. We are not anti-supernatural – the Holy Spirit really indwells his people.
2. But we must be careful not to talk as if we are getting authoritative revelation from the Spirit (i.e., “the Spirit told me...”).

¹ Carson, D. A. 1987. [*Showing the Spirit: A Theological Exposition of 1 Corinthians 12–14*](#). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House.