

Miraculous Sign Gifts

With the arrival of the modern Pentecostal movement in 1901, the charismatic movement of the early sixties, and the Third Wave movement of the 1980's the subject of whether or not miraculous sign gifts are a legitimate aspect of the Church's profile today has been a major concern among Evangelicals (and subsequently many Catholics). It has often been a divisive subject that has been used to measure one's orthodoxy. We believe it does not need to be so. However, a church's position on this subject is of great importance for unity and functionality as a body.

Four orthodox views:

Cessationism: This view argues miraculous gifts of the HS such as prophecy, tongues, and healing ceased at one point in church history. This view does not deny that miracles still happen or that God could at any time employ any means he wishes to achieve his ends. This view simply states that the purposes for these sign gifts were fulfilled and that they are not being distributed to believers today in the church.

Pentecostal/ Charismatic: The Pentecostal movement and the charismatic movement are technically two different things with enough similarity to fold them into one category.

Pentecostal: Pentecostals trace their beginnings back to New Year's Day 1901 at Bethel Bible College in Topeka, Kansas. This group teaches:

1. All the gifts of the HS mentioned in the NT are intended for today.
2. The baptism in the HS is an empowering experience subsequent to conversion and should be sought by Christians today.
3. When baptism in the HS occurs, people will speak in tongues as a "sign" that they have received this experience.

Charismatic: This term refers to any groups (or people) that trace their historical origin to the charismatic renewal movement of the 1960's and 70's. They seek to practice all the spiritual gifts mentioned in the NT. So, what distinguishes them from Pentecostals?

1. Among Charismatics there are differing viewpoints on whether baptism in the HS is subsequent to conversion and whether speaking in tongues is a sign of baptism in the Spirit.
2. Charismaticism is a movement rather than a denominational designation.
3. Charismaticism is focused on a "*powerful manifestation of the Spirit*" for various reasons (such as evangelism and worship) whereas Pentecostals saw the miraculous baptism of the HS to be for the purpose of full sanctification.

Third Wave: In the 1980's a third renewal movement arose called "*The Third Wave*" appeared. The first wave was Pentecostalism, the second wave the Charismatic movement; hence, the third wave. They differ from Pentecostal/Charismatic in:

1. They encourage the equipping of all believers to use NT spiritual gifts today. This is to say that part of the equipping of the believer is to have these gifts. We are in some way deficient to do ministry without them.
2. The proclamation of the gospel should ordinarily be accompanied by "*signs, wonders, and miracles*" according to NT pattern. Personal and church growth should be, at least in part, due to miraculous gifts.
3. They teach that baptism of the HS happens to all Christians at conversion. Subsequent to salvation there are "*fillings*" or "*empowerments*" from time to time.

4. They believe the gift of tongues exist but do not emphasize them as Pentecostals or Charismatics do.

Open but cautious: A vast number of people in Evangelicalism do not fit exactly into any of the three aforementioned categories. They have not been fully convinced by the cessationist arguments that relegate certain gifts to the first century, but they are not really convinced by the doctrine or practice of those who emphasize such gifts today either. Thus, they are open to the possibility of miraculous gifts while being cautious of abuses. Their position is that churches should emphasize evangelism, Bible study, and faithful obedience as keys to personal and church growth rather than miraculous gifts.

Our Position: (Elders: This assumes cessationism is our position)

The Elders recognize the viability of all these positions. We understand that men of good character, knowledge, and wisdom hold to any one of the four. However, the position we teach is the Cessationist position for the following reasons:

1. Pentecost is not intended to be a repeatable power experience meant to be normative to all believers at all times. Rather, it is intended to be a part of the history of redemption which is a once for all thing. We see that redemptive history was concluded with the ministry of the Apostles who were the witnesses of Christ, the capstone of redemptive history. As such, the Pentecost experience and manifestation are limited to redemptive history.

2. The revelatory nature of some of these miraculous gifts tends to place **in question** our faith in the **Word alone as our sole authority** for faith and practice. If new revelation is coming from God after the final speaking through “his son” (Heb. 1:1, 2) then the Word becomes less than sufficient.

3. We have a concern that certain miraculous gifts such as tongues and prophecy leave the **Cannon of Scripture** in question with continuing revelation. We understand the Apostles were appointed by Christ to oversee the completion of the cannon and did so within their lifetimes and ministries.

4 Continuationism (the view that these gifts “continue”) creates a **“two-tiered” system of revelation**. Continuationist’s positions usually allow for “fallible” prophecy which in essence gives the church two levels of revelation...that which infallible and that which is not

5. Historically **Berean Baptist has been cessationist in its position**. While not an absolute reason to maintain a cessationist position, great care should be taken in overthrowing a so long held tenant of our faith and practice. Accordingly, the rational and biblical evidence for any of the other three positions would have to be so overwhelmingly strong that said new position would compel us to shift our teaching in this area. We have sensed no overwhelmingly strong biblical argumentation.

We respect all those holding non-cessationist positions. Continuationists make cogent arguments in answer to all the above-mentioned rationale for our retention of a cessationist position. Nevertheless, the Elder’s teaching position is one of cessationism.

Note: Full class notes on this subject are available from the Elders