

Cessationism: The Sign Gifts Have Ceased

Some thoughts & reasons supporting this perspective
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1. The exact nature identical characteristics of tongues, prophecy, and healing is different today than it was in the biblical period.
2. It seems that God sovereignly willed to have particular eras where miraculous gifts occurred:
 - a. The Time of Moses & the Exodus (1st 15th c BC)
 - b. The Time of Elijah & Elisha (2nd 8th c BC)
 - c. The Time of Jesus & the Apostles (3rd 1st c AD)
 - d. (According to Revelation, another time will come during the Tribulation where miracles will occur)
3. The sign gifts are commonly seen as “signs of an apostle” (2 Cor 12.12). Since all the apostles have died it logically follows that their gifts have ceased.
4. Many wonders and signs were done in the early Church by the/through the apostles (Acts 2.43; 5.12)
5. The Scriptures unambiguously reveal that prophecies, tongues, and knowledge will pass away (1 Cor 13.8)
6. It appears that tongues is associated with revelation, knowledge, prophecy, and teaching (1 Cor 14.6).
7. Tongues were a sign for unbelievers. Prophecy was a sign for believers (1 Cor 14.22).
8. Paul tells the church to desire to prophesy (1 Cor 14.39).
9. Paul and Barnabas did signs and recounted what had happened on their missionary journey (Acts 15.12)
10. In Acts 8, Philip the evangelist (a deacon) did signs, wonders, and miracles as he took the gospel to Samaria (Acts 8.6, 12). Note the people heard him preach and then saw the signs and *then* they paid attention to what he said when they saw the signs. The signs were to validate the messenger and the message.
11. Stephen did miracles before the Jewish people in Jerusalem (presumably there were apostles still present as well) in Acts 6.8 (cf. 6.6).
12. Paul says that he did signs and wonders by the power of the Spirit of God from Jerusalem all the way round to Illyricum as he preached the gospel of Christ to new areas – virgin territory (Rom 15.19).
13. Hebrews 2 declares a very important progression of the teaching on salvation:
 - a. **First**, the salvation was declared by the Lord (Heb 2.3a)
 - b. **Second**, those who heard the Lord speak attested to His teaching by passing on to “us” (Heb 2.3b)
 - c. **Third**, God bore witness by signs and wonders and miracles (as the salvation was declared) to *those who heard* the Lord speak (Heb 2.4).
14. If we believe that the Bible is complete (that is, the canon of Scripture is closed) then we *must* declare that prophecy as defined as imparting specific, divine revelation from God has also ceased. If that is true, then we are forced to “redefine” what prophecy is. (How could modern day prophecy be accurate sometimes and *not* accurate at other times?)
15. The overwhelming attestation of church history is that the sign gifts have ceased.
16. There is an overwhelming desire to worship God the Holy Spirit and see His ministry rightly.
17. Jesus and the Apostles did miracles to *validate* the gospel message that went forth (cf. Luke 9:1-2).

Phil Johnson writes:

“... notice this: if you acknowledge that the canon is closed and the gift of apostleship has ceased, you have already conceded the heart of the cessationist argument.”

Scripture says the miracles were apostolic signs (2 Cor 12.12) and therefore by definition they pertained specifically and uniquely to the apostolic era.

So then,

The apostolic age was marvelously unique and it ended. And what happened then is not the normal thing for every Christian. The normal thing for every Christian is to study the Word of God, which is able to make us wise and perfect. [It] is to live by faith and not by sight (MacArthur).

Concerning the pure and elevated worship of God the Spirit:

Cessationists are motivated by a desire to see the Holy Spirit glorified. They are concerned that, by redefining the gifts, the continuationist position cheapens the remarkable nature of those gifts, lessening the truly miraculous working of the Spirit in the earliest stages of the church.

Cessationists are convinced that, by redefining healing, the charismatic position presents a bad testimony to the watching world when the sick are not healed. By redefining tongues, the charismatic position promotes a type of nonsensical gibberish that runs contrary to anything we know about the biblical gift. By redefining prophecy, the charismatic position lends credence to those who would claim to speak the very words of God and yet speak error (Nathan Busenitz).

Puritan Matthew Henry writes:

The gift of tongues was one new product of the spirit of prophecy and given for a particular reason, that, the Jewish pale being taken down, all nations might be brought into the church. These and other gifts of prophecy, being a sign, have long since ceased and been laid aside, and we have no encouragement to expect the revival of them; but, on the contrary, are directed to call the scriptures the more sure word of prophecy, more sure than voices from heaven; and to them we are directed to take heed, to search them, and to hold them fast, 2 Peter 1:29.

Jonathan Edwards, theologian and pastor:

In the days of his [Jesus'] flesh, his disciples had a measure of the miraculous gifts of the Spirit, being enabled thus to teach and to work miracles. But after the resurrection and ascension, was the most full and remarkable effusion of the Spirit in his miraculous gifts that ever took place, beginning with the day of Pentecost, after Christ had risen and ascended to heaven. And in consequence of this, not only here and there an extraordinary person was endowed with these extraordinary gifts, but they were common in the church, and so continued during the lifetime of the apostles, or till the death of the last of them, even the apostle John, which took place about a hundred years from the birth of Christ; so that the first hundred years of the Christian era, or the first century, was the era of miracles.

But soon after that, the canon of Scripture being completed when the apostle John had written the book of Revelation, which he wrote not long before his death, these miraculous gifts were no longer continued in the church. For there was now completed an established written revelation of the mind and will of God, wherein God had fully recorded a standing and all-sufficient rule for his church in all ages. And the Jewish church and nation being overthrown, and the Christian church

and the last dispensation of the church of God being established, the miraculous gifts of the Spirit were no longer needed, and therefore they ceased; for though they had been continued in the church for so many ages, yet then they failed, and God caused them to fail because there was no further occasion for them. And so was fulfilled the saying of the text, "Whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away." And now there seems to be an end to all such fruits of the Spirit as these, and we have no reason to expect them any more.