

CESSATIONISM AND SIGN GIFTS

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I enjoy the teaching ministries of a wide variety of teachers, some of whom are products of the charismatic movement. These well-educated, godly individuals contribute to the kingdom of God and are our brothers. So, why do we not endorse their teachings on the spiritual gifts? Why have we committed to denying our church what appears to be a vibrant part of these ministries?

Below is a list of our positive and negative affirmations on the various charismatic issues. This is meant to be a summary for your information, not a defense. Please see us for more material on any of these topics or if you have questions.

THE PURPOSE OF THE GIFTS

- We believe God gave all the spiritual gifts to build up or edify Christ's church.
- We do not believe that He continued to give the foundational gifts (prophecy, tongues-speaking, and signs and wonders) past the first century of the building process.

We can all agree that Holy Spirit is in complete control of the spatial distribution (the who and where) of the gifts (1 Cor 12:4-11). If that is the case, then He is also responsible for their temporal distribution (the when). Certain gifts served a temporary purpose—the foundation of the church (cf. Eph 2:20). We still benefit from those gifts in the Spirit-inspired Scripture, but we do not believe God continues to distribute those gifts today.

BAPTISM OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

- We believe that God baptizes an individual into spiritual life and sanctifying experiences at salvation that will enable the believer to pursue holiness.
- We do not believe that there remains a second blessing or baptism that God calls believers to seek, that awakens a new category of holiness, that enables the Christian to live sinlessly, or that is marked by signs and wonders.

God calls believers to continue to grow in their Christian walks. The Holy Spirit is indispensable in this regard. He not only gave us Scripture to be a light unto our paths (Ps 119:105), He empowers us to live holy lives (cf. Ps 18:28; Eph 3:16; Col 1:11).

When we first confess our sins and repent, the wonderful reality is that the Holy Spirit awakens us to new life in Christ—we are born again (Jn 3:1-15). We do not need to seek a new experience or blessing beyond this, though the Spirit may suddenly reveal new areas in which we need to mature. Phenomena like tongues-speaking, so-called holy laughter, trances, loss of bodily control, or the like are not experiences the Holy Spirit calls believers to seek.

A good pattern we encourage is that of the Bereans – study Scripture daily (Acts 17:11). We also encourage believers to rejoice, pray, and give thanks without ceasing (1 Th 5:16–18). However, believers should, in keeping with the prayerful spirit of study, test all things (v. 21). Our conviction based on our study is that the Holy Spirit gives believers all things they need for life and godliness through knowing Christ (2 Pt 1:3), not through seeking a second experience or blessing.

HEALING MINISTRIES

- We believe that God can heal miraculously or providentially through knowledgeable practitioners of medicine.
- We do not believe divine healing is necessarily reliant upon an individual's faith not on particular healers.

Charlatans have plagued the church for decades, preying on the hurting and the wounded for financial gain (cf. 2 Pt 2:3). Their words poison impressionable believers, equating healing and health to a sign of one's faith. Twisting spiritual language, they cast doubt on legitimate healing centers (e.g., hospitals) and give the desperate false hope. We reject all this with this exception – God does answer prayer through miraculous means and through mundane means (such as medicine), should it be according to His good and holy will.

PROPHETIC UTTERANCES

- We believe that NT prophets must be 100% accurate and authoritative.
- We do not believe that subjective feelings or even providential guidance equals the gift of prophecy.

God speaks clearly through His word (2 Tm 3:16; cf. Is 55:11). He also guides us providentially on the paths He's laid for us (Ps 23:3; Prv 16:9; Jas 1:2–9). Despite this, it is unwise for a believer to use phrases like "God is telling me" or "God is leading me" unless that person is receiving a direct revelation from the Lord. However, because we believe prophecy to be one of the foundational gifts the Spirit used to build the church, we should treat any modern claims of prophetic insight with extreme prejudice.

TONGUES

- We believe tongues were human languages that revealed prophetic truth and thus functioned in the same category as did the Apostolic and prophetic ministries.
- We do not believe that tongues were ever a prayer language for believers to receive individual benefits.

One of the most divisive issues in the modern church has been whether Christians should speak in tongues. On one side, Christians condemn tongue-speakers of being demoniacs, and on the other Christians condemn non-tongue-speakers of fearing the Holy Spirit. Our position is not to cast off Charismatics as reprobates, but we do also not accept the premise that there is an otherworldly language that Christians must seek.

The Holy Spirit granted the gift of tongues so the early church could evangelize the lost (1 Cor 14:22) in previously unlearned languages (Acts 2:5-11). Since tongues-speaking served as both a sign confirming the New Covenant inclusion of the Gentiles and as well as a providing a conduit for revelation, and because we see no evidence that the Holy Spirit refers to tongues as a prayer language, we see tongues-speaking as a foundation-level gift that does not continue today. As such, our services do not include tongues and interpretations, nor do we encourage our members to pray with guttural cadences or any form of non-cognitive language.

SIGNS AND WONDERS

- We believe that God is able to work miracles today.
- We do not believe that the miracle-workers we read about in the NT continued past their foundational role in the church.

Simply defined, a miracle is God suspending the natural laws and order of the universe to intervene. For instance, a miracle would be Jesus walking on water or producing enough food for several thousand people from a single-person meal. Jesus gave His Apostles the ability to work miracles (Mt 10:1), and they did so in the Gospels and in the Book of Acts. God continues to work miracles: anytime He takes a person who is spiritually dead and gives them new life, He alters their natural course from Hell to Heaven. However, we must take care not to call all fortuitous circumstances “miracles,” for we will rob the word of the meaning.

Moreover, we would be mistaken to believe that God still chooses particular individuals to work wonders in the name of evangelism or Christian edification. Just like with the other gifts, God may choose to do the spectacular, but he will not endow an individual today with a miraculous anointing as He did with His Apostles. There are therefore no such “power” services at our church.

CONCLUSION

Our main goal is to glorify God and to enjoy what He has for us, and that includes the full operation of the spiritual gifts within the body. We still benefit from the above gifts through the study of God’s Word, and we benefit one another with the other gifts not mentioned above. Even so, it would be foolish to accept the teaching of others on this issue without comparing it to the truth the Holy Spirit is giving us today in the Bible, even if we do not seek to separate from brothers and sisters who do not share all our conclusions and convictions. Though there are godly men and women who belong to the Charismatic movements, we do not. This does not mean that we cannot benefit from the written or audio/visual ministries of other churches, but our teaching ministry is unified in its conviction that the revelatory and sign gifts did not continue past the first century.