

Introduction

- Speaking in tongues, miracles, prophecy, and healing are sometimes referred to as “sign gifts” or the charismatic gifts.
- The main question is: have these gifts continued?
- This is different than asking “can God still work miracles?”
- There are three primary camps on how Christians should think about these gifts: Cessationist, Charismatic/Continuationist, or Open but Cautious.
- There is no single Bible passage that can answer this question satisfactorily.
- This is the kind of question that requires working through the whole Bible theologically and systematically.

Gifts Have Ceased

- This view is typically held by Reformed traditions, Presbyterians, dispensational Baptists, and is popular in the West.
- This view sees the sign gifts as a particular work of the apostles to authenticate the message of the gospel.
- It views the gifts as having died out when the Bible was finished.
- The primary passage to appeal to is 1 Cor 13:8-10, which says that the miraculous gifts will one day cease.
- It views miracles as primarily being “signs” which authenticate God’s message, especially the apostles (2 Cor 12:12).
- These signs are primarily towards unbelievers (1 Cor 14:22).
- It views miracles as happening primarily in several epochs, or eras (Moses and Joshua, Elijah and Elisha, Daniel, and Jesus).
- The later epistles do not address the spiritual gifts.
- There is an appeal to history where the miraculous gifts, particularly tongues, seem to have disappeared for a long time.
- A strong appeal is made off of the abuses and misuse of Scripture that can happen from the Charismatic camp.
- There is nothing in the Scripture that clearly states when this age has finished.
- This view arose during the Reformation and especially the 1700s as a reaction against the many claimed miracles of Roman Catholicism.

Gifts Are Normative

- This view is typically held by Charismatics, Pentecostals, Methodists, the Roman Catholic church, and is popular in Africa and the East.
- There is a strong emphasis on the Biblical text, especially the book of Acts.
- The main argument is that the average believer who reads the New Testament would assume the sign gifts are normative.

- The Scriptures do not differentiate between different kinds of spiritual gifts (1 Cor 12:4).
- The Scripture commands that we cannot forbid speaking in tongues (1 Cor 14:39).
- Prophecy, healing, and miracles continue throughout all of church history.
- Counterfeit and false signs do not disprove the Spirit's work.
- A significant weakness of this view is the overstatement that every believer should experience the sign gifts.
- There is plenty of spiritual fraud in this camp (fake healings and other miracles).
- This manifests in every believer feeling pressure to speak in tongues.
- This view can overemphasize and overhonor the sign gifts.
- The passages affirming tongues can be adopted, while the guidelines are ignored.

Gifts Are Possible

- This view is typically described as "open but cautious."
- This view leaves the possibility of sign gifts but still sees them as unusual.
- It is usually more open to them manifesting in unreached people groups or other parts of the world where the gospel needs to be authenticated.
- It would place a stronger emphasis on the Biblical boundaries of the sign gifts.
- This camp is broad and can include those who think there should never be sign gifts, and those who themselves use them.

Conclusion

- Christians can disagree in good faith and still remain orthodox.
- This is the entry point for further questions. What is speaking in tongues? What is the baptism of the Holy Spirit? Can people still prophesy? Do people have gifts of healing today?
- This is an area that shows the need for systematic theology not just Bible study.