

Puzzled about Miraculous Spiritual Gifts? (Part 2)

The title of this message is, “Puzzled about Miraculous Spiritual Gifts? (Part 2).” Since it is part 2, let me briefly review part 1, which I preached two Sundays ago.

- I. Spiritual gifts are debated by Christians.**
- II. Spiritual gifts are God’s to give as he wills to give them.**
- III. Big Idea: Let our Sovereign God rule in the matter of spiritual gifts.**

Here we begin part 2 of “Puzzled about miraculous spiritual gifts.”

A. The miraculous spiritual gifts are:

- 1. Speaking in tongues
- 2. Healing diseases and disabilities
- 3. Divine revelation—prophecy, “word of knowledge,” “word of wisdom”
- 4. Casting out demons and defeating demonic powers
- 5. Raising the dead
- 6. The office of apostle

B. Here are two helpful articles:

- 1. Sam Storms: “Why I am a Continuationist.” <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/continuationist/>
- 2. Thomas Schreiner: “Why I am a Cessationist.” <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/cessationist/>

C. There are three different beliefs about miraculous gifts in the church today:

- 1. Continuationism:
 - a. Miraculous spiritual gifts certainly continue today.
 - b. Some well-known advocates of continuationism are:
 - 1) People: John Piper, Wayne Grudem, Sam Storms, Mark Driscoll, Benny Hinn, Pat Robertson, Joyce Meyer, and many, many others.

- 2) Churches / Denominations: Assembly of God churches, Sovereign Grace churches, Vineyard churches, Church of God, Calvary Chapel and others.

c. Arguments for continuationism:

- 1) Scripture teaches that miraculous power would be abundant and widely-distributed in this age.
 - a) Joel 2:28-32 [quoted below in Acts 2]
 - b) Acts 2:14-18: “Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: ‘Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say. 15 These people are not drunk, as you suppose. It’s only nine in the morning! 16 No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: 17 ‘In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. 18 Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy....”
- 2) Scripture describes an abundance of miraculous powers at work in the New Testament era.
 - a) Miraculous powers were at work in churches:
 - (1) Sam Storms: “Christians in Rome (Rom. 12), Corinth (1 Cor. 12-14), Samaria (Acts 8), Caesarea (Acts 10), Antioch (Acts 13), Ephesus (Acts 19), Thessalonica (1 Thess. 5), and Galatia (Gal. 3) experience the miraculous and revelatory gifts”¹
 - b) Miraculous powers were also at work in individual people:
 - (1) Sam Storms: “Others aside from the apostles who exercised miraculous gifts include (1) the 70 who were commissioned in Luke 10:9, 19-20; (2) at least 108 people among the 120 who were gathered in the upper room on the day of Pentecost; (3) Stephen (Acts 6-7); (4) Philip (Acts 8); (5) Ananias (Acts 9); (6) church members in Antioch (Acts 13); (7) anonymous converts in Ephesus

¹ <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/continuationist/> by Sam Storms

(Acts 19:6); (8) women at Caesarea (Acts 21:8-9); (9) the unnamed brethren of Galatians 3:5; (10) believers in Rome (Rom. 12:6-8); (11) believers in Corinth (1 Cor. 12-14); and (12) Christians in Thessalonica (1 Thess. 5:19-20).”

3) Scripture does not directly teach that any spiritual gift will cease before Christ comes.

a) Sam Storms: “I’d also point to the absence of any explicit or implicit notion that we should view spiritual gifts any differently than we do other NT practices and ministries portrayed as essential for the life and wellbeing of the church. When we read the NT, it seems evident that church discipline should be practiced in our assemblies today and that we should celebrate the Lord’s Table and water baptism, and that the requirements for the office of elder as set forth in the pastoral epistles still determine how life in the church should be pursued, just to mention a few.”²

d. Problems with continuationism:

- 1) The New Testament teaches that the office of apostle ceased with the first generation of apostles.
- 2) The New Testament teaches that miracles are signs that authenticate Christianity.
- 3) Some of the miraculous gifts that are claimed to be in use today have been re-defined from what they were in the New Testament.
- 4) Claims of modern miracles are suspicious and difficult to corroborate.
- 5) Continuationists have a high tolerance for false doctrine and bizarre claims.

2. Cessationism:

- a. Miraculous spiritual gifts absolutely do not continue today.
- b. Adherents:

² <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/continuationist/>

- 1) Persons: John Calvin, John MacArthur, R. C. Sproul, Thomas Schreiner, B. B. Warfield, and many, many others.
- 2) Churches / Denominations: Most Presbyterian and Reformed churches, most Baptist churches, many non-denominational churches.

c. Arguments for cessationism:

- 1) Christ said that the church would be founded on the apostles and prophets.
 - a) Matthew 16:18: “And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.”
 - b) Ephesians 2:19-22: “Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God’s people and also members of his household, 20 built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. 21 In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. 22 And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.”
- 2) Miraculous works of God accompanied and authenticated the ministry of the apostles.
 - a) Acts 2:43: “Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles.”
 - b) 2 Corinthians 12:12: “I persevered in demonstrating among you the marks of a true apostle, including signs, wonders and miracles.”
- 3) The office of apostle ceased in the first century.
 - a) 1 Corinthians 15:7-8: “Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, 8 and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.”
 - b) Thomas Schreiner: “We know that new apostles won’t appear since Paul specifically says he was the last apostle (1 Cor.

15:8). And when James the brother of John died (Acts 12:2), he wasn't replaced."³

- 4) Because the apostles and prophets established the church and completed the scriptures, there is no need for miracles today.

3. Cautiously openism: Miraculous spiritual gifts might continue today.

- a. We agree with continuationists that the New Testament does not definitively state that miracles will cease when the apostles die.
- b. We agree with cessationists that God used miraculous gifts and the gift of apostles and prophets to establish the church in the first century.
- c. We agree with cessationists that many of the signs and wonders claimed today are not as obvious and compelling as those in the first century.
- d. We agree with cessationists that the modern charismatic movement is weak in doctrine and vulnerable to false doctrine.

D. Conclusion:

1. God is Sovereign over everything and everyone, so he has the power and the right to do whatever he wills to do.
2. The Holy Spirit can empower any believer whenever he chooses to do so. A true believer does not have to join a continuationist church or denomination for the Holy Spirit to work.
3. In the Old Testament, God did miracles often during some periods of time, but not in others.
 - a. God empowered Moses and Joshua to release Israel from Egypt and establish them in the promised land. But, once they were established in the promised land, there is far less
 - b. 1 Samuel 3:1: "The boy Samuel ministered before the Lord under Eli. In those days the word of the Lord was rare; there were not many visions."
4. We have the completed word of God and the church has been established, so miraculous gifts seem to have fulfilled their purpose.

³ <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/cessationist/>

5. But, in other cultures where the church has not yet been established and there is no copy of scripture available, the Lord may choose to use miraculous gifts until the church is established there
 - a. Hebrews 2:3-4: “how shall we escape if we ignore so great a salvation? This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him. 4 God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.”