

TNT - Miraculous Gifts - Do they continue or cease?

Introduction

Those who hold to the Continuationist View of the miraculous gifts are not necessarily part of the charismatic movement. In fact, those like John Piper and Wayne Grudem denounce the charismatic movement as an abuse of the spiritual gifts. Continuationist actually agree with Cessationists in regard to the Sufficiency and Canon of Scripture. Continuationists also agree that the apostles like Paul, Peter and John have ceased. So there is some agreement on at least a partial cessation.

For myself, I would side with the Cessationist's view over the Continuationist view based on what I have read on both sides and read the various texts of Scripture for myself. But given the fact that there are great theologians like John Piper, Wayne Grudem and D.A. Carson holds to the Continuationist's view. I have to be humble and say that I could be wrong as both views have different interpretations of the same passages to arrive at their point of view, which makes it very difficult to decipher through. I did my best to offer you in this short time the best of what I could find on both sides and present it to you, but I encourage you to do your own reading and study.

Thomas Scheiner's definition of spiritual gifts:

"I would define spiritual gifts as gifts of grace granted by the Holy Spirit which are designed for the **edification of the church.**"

What are the miraculous or sign gifts?

Some say all the gifts are miraculous, but the most have a narrow view of miraculous gifts, which are: miracles, tongues, healings (not continuous, only given this gift at certain occasions like Paul raised Eutychus in Acts 20, but could not save Epaphroditus), and prophecy (narrow view of revelation, which could be for infallible revelation of the word of God - NT or special revelation like Agabus had warning Paul and Barnabas, Continuationists believe that the gift of prophecy includes fallible prophecies).

Rom. 12:6-8 - **Prophecy**, Teaching, Exhorting, Service, Leading, Giving, Mercy

1 Cor. 12:7-10 - **Prophecy**, Ability to distinguish between spirits, Word of wisdom & knowledge, **Working of miracles, Gifts of healing, Various kinds of tongues, Interpretation of tongues**, faith

1 Cor. 12:28 - **Apostles, Prophets**, Teachers, **Miracles, Gifts of healing**, Helping, Administrating, **Various kinds of tongues**

Eph. 4:11 - **Apostles, Prophets**, Evangelists, Pastors, Teachers

Continuationist's view - view held by John Piper, Wayne Grudem, D.A. Carson and Martyn Lloyd Jones

Quotes from John Piper -

“I want to argue in this section that the New Testament teaches that spiritual gifts (including the more obviously supernatural or revelatory ones like prophecy and tongues) will continue until Jesus comes. The use of such gifts (miracles, faith, healings, prophecy, etc.) give rise to what may sometimes be called “signs and wonders.” Therefore, signs and wonders are part of the blessing we should pray for today.”

“There is no text in the New Testament that teaches the cessation of these gifts. But more important than this silence is the text that explicitly teaches their continuance until Jesus comes, namely, 1 Corinthians 13:8-12 . . .”

*Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. 9 For we know in part and we prophesy in part, 10 but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away. 11 When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways. 12 **For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.***

“Both of these phrases (“seeing face to face” and “understanding as we have been understood”) are stretched beyond the breaking point if we say that they refer to the closing of the New Testament canon or the close of the apostolic age. Rather, they refer to our experience at the second coming of Jesus”

Wayne Grudem - “So 1 Corinthians 13:10 could be paraphrased, “When the perfect is come, prophecy and tongues and other imperfect gifts will pass away”

John Piper - “Much of my experience disciplines me to “earnestly desire spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 12:31, 14:1),” especially the gift of prophecy. However, I do not base my prayer for such spiritual empowering on experience, but on the Bible. The Scripture is sufficient for all circumstances by teaching us the means of grace to be used in all circumstances. And I agree with Martyn Lloyd-Jones that one of the means of grace needed in our day is the extraordinary demonstration of power by signs and wonders. Here is what he said:

“What is needed is some mighty demonstration of the power of God, some enactment of the Almighty, that will compel people to pay attention, and to look, and to listen. . . . When God acts, he can do more in a minute than man with his organizing can do in fifty years.”

Cessationist View - view held by John MacArthur and Thomas Schreiner

The miraculous gifts or Signs and Wonders were given to authenticate or validate that Jesus and the Apostles were God’s messengers:

Acts 2:22 “Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know”

Acts 2:43 “And awe[d] came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles.”

2 Cor. 12:12 “The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with utmost patience, with signs and wonders and mighty works.”

Rom. 15:18-19 “For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me to bring the Gentiles to obedience—by word and deed, 19 by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God—so that from Jerusalem and all the way around to Illyricum I have fulfilled the ministry of the gospel of Christ;”

As mentioned previously, Continuationists agree with Cessationists on the New Testament Canon that closed the apostolic age. So if the signs and wonders mentioned in these passages authenticated true apostles, then why would the signs and wonders need to continue if the apostles and the canon of the New Testament has already been authenticated and therefore has ceased? This is why we see early in Paul’s ministry that he had the power of miracles or healing when he raised Eutychus in Acts 20, but he did not have the gift when writing Philippians when he thanked God for sparing Epaphroditus’ life in Phil. 2.

In response to this, the Continuationists say that there were others besides the apostles that performed signs and wonders like Stephen and Philip and some others. In Acts 2:17-21, Peter quotes the Prophet Joel that God’s Spirit will be poured out on “all flesh”, which is different from the OT when the Holy Spirit came upon only certain individuals. So when others under the teaching of the apostles, performed signs and wonders besides the apostles, it only further authenticated the apostles as proof they were God’s messengers.

Meaning of 1 Cor. 13:8-12, particularly the meaning of “the perfect”

This passage of Scripture is the main text Continuationists like John Piper use to argue the miraculous or sign gifts continue to this day. It is ironic that 1 Cor. 13 is a chapter that Paul is clearly trying to show the excellency of love compared to the spiritual gifts in response to the Corinthians abuse of the gifts stated in 1 Cor. 12, yet the Charismatic Movement and Continuationists use this text in 1 Cor. 13 to emphasize and uplift the spiritual gifts. Let’s take a look at this important text:

1 Cor. 13:8-12 - “Love never ends. As for **prophecies**, they will **pass away**; as for **tongues**, they will **cease**; as for **knowledge**, it will **pass away**. 9 For we **know in part** and we **prophesy in part**, 10 but when **the perfect comes**, the **partial will pass away**. 11 When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child.

When I became a man, I gave up childish ways. 12 For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known."

I am going to share with you John MacArthur's interpretation of this text, which I found was the most technically sound and thorough. Instead of quoting him, I thought it would be easier to give you a synopsis of his interpretation.

First notice the difference between the verbs used for prophecies and knowledge is different from the verb used for tongues. For prophecies and knowledge, the verb "pass away" is used, which is the Greek word *katargēthēsetai* which is a passive verb. In other words, it will pass away or end when something else happens, namely when "the perfect comes". Whereas, the verb "cease" used for tongues is the Greek word *pausontai* is an active verb that means tongues will cease on its own or not dependent on "the perfect" to come, which is why the gift of tongues is not mentioned in v. 9-10 in reference to "the perfect".

V. 9 states that "we know in part and prophesy in part" instead of "know fully" in v. 12. We know in part and prophesy in part, because even though revealed Word of God is sufficient and infallible, but it is still not complete or tells us everything or exhaustively about God or we are unable to fully know God until the "the perfect comes" when we shall know fully. What is "the perfect"? "The perfect" is tied to v. 12 when "the perfect" happens we will be "face to face...then we shall fully know", which is in reference to when we get to heaven and come face to face with Christ - 1 Jn. 3:2b *"but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is."* On a personal level the spiritual gifts, except the miraculous gifts will happen when a believer passes away, but in redemptive history, this will be either at the second coming of Christ if you are an amillennialist, but if you believe in a literal millennium, then this will be the eternal state after the millennium, which MacArthur believes.

Gift of Prophecy

So both Continuationists and some Cessationists agree on the meaning of "the perfect", but they do not agree on the meaning of the gift of "prophecy" that has continued past the apostolic age. Both agree that this gift that continues is not the infallible revelation that the 40 authors wrote when writing the 66 books of the Bible. Both John Piper and Wayne Grudem believe that the gift of prophecy is an imperfect (partial) gift of prophecy or a gift of fallible prophecy or prophecies that may contain some error, not infallible. This interpretation goes against the standard for determining a true prophet in Deut. 18:20 that if a prophet tells a prophecy that is false, that prophet is to be put to death.

Thomas Schreiner believes Prophecy is "spontaneous revelations that are communicated to God's people." - like Agabus in Acts 11:27-28. John MacArthur believes Prophecy is simply speaking or repeating or reiterating the already revealed Word of God in Scripture. In 2 Tim. 3:16-17 "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, 17

that **the man of God** may be complete, equipped for every good work.” Man of God is referring to Timothy, which is an OT reference to a prophet. Moses was first called a “man of God” and Elijah was also given this title.

Gift of Tongues

The Charismatic movement (not sure if Continuationists too) has this belief that the gift of tongues involves some ecstatic unintelligible babble or gibberish, but this is not consistent with Scripture. They use verses like 1 Cor. 14:2 “For one who speaks in a tongue speaks not to men but to God, for no one understands him, but utters mysteries in the Spirit.” Which is ironic again because in 1 Cor. 14, Paul specifically denounces speaking in an unknown tongue that is unintelligible or cannot be understood.

Thomas Schreiner in regards to the gift of tongues:

“In Acts 2, the gift of tongues is clearly human languages, because people from all over the world “speaking in their own languages” (2:6) and “each one” heard them “in their own language” (2:8). The apostles were declaring the works of God “in our own tongues” (2:11). A longer citation in Acts 2:6-11 clarifies here that the gift here was speaking in other languages.”

Since the gift of tongues in Acts 2 is human languages, then why does it seem to change to a tongue that “no one understands” in 1 Cor. 14:2? I will give you John MacArthur’s interpretation of this verse, because again the most technically sound that I read. So let’s look at the verse again, but let’s look at more of the text to understand the meaning:

1 Cor. 14:2-5 “2 For one who speaks in **a tongue speaks not to men but to God; for no one understands him**, but he utters mysteries **in the Spirit**. 3 On the other hand, the one who prophesies speaks to people for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation. 4 The one who speaks in **a tongue builds up himself**, but the one who prophesies builds up the church. 5 Now I **want you all to speak in tongues**, but even more to prophesy. The one who prophesies is greater than the **one who speaks in tongues, unless someone interprets, so that the church may be built up.**”

Notice in v. 2 that Paul states about “one who speaks in a tongue” This “tongue” here is singular, but if you look at the name of this gift it is always plural - “various kinds of tongues” and in this passage “speaks in tongues”. So this singular “a tongue” is not referring to a counterfeit or false gift. What makes v. 2 confusing is that the text states the one who “speaks in a tongue not to men but to God” If this is a counterfeit gift, then how can he speak to God? The definite article is missing from the Greek word, so it should be translated “a god” instead of “God”. The Greek word used here is “*Theo*”, *but the word for God is “Theon” or “Theos”*. Also the word “Spirit” should be translated as “spirit” - this was an interpretive decision by the translators. Paul uses the same Greek word *pneuma* in v.14 in reference to praying in *a tongue* and the same word and it is lower case “spirit” **“For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays but my mind is unfruitful.”**

See the contrast;

- one who speaks a tongue (v. 2) - no one understands (v. 2) - builds up himself (v. 4)
- In v. 5 Paul wants all to speak in tongues (instead of a tongue) - greater is the one who prophesies, unless someone interprets (v. 5) - so that the church may be built up (v. 5)

In v. 5, Paul is saying the purpose for the spiritual gifts is to build up the church, so praying or using a tongue that has no meaning or cannot be interpreted is not a gift of the Spirit, because it does not build up the church. Paul emphasizes this further in this chapter.

1 Cor. 14:9-12

9 So with yourselves, if with your tongue you utter speech that is not intelligible, how will anyone know what is said? For you will be speaking into the air. 10 There are doubtless many different languages in the world, and none is without meaning, 11 but if I do not know the meaning of the language, I will be a foreigner to the speaker and the speaker a foreigner to me. 12 So with yourselves, since you are eager for manifestations of the Spirit, strive to excel in building up the church.

In v. 9, praying in an unknown tongue is not praying to God, but praying “into the air”. It is useless and most of all it does not build up the church. Paul is commanding the Corinthians not to do this, but instead “strive in building up the church” in v. 12.