

Why We Believe Sign Gifts Are No Longer To Be the Practice of the Church

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1. The function of these gifts—to authenticate the message and the messenger—is clearly stated in the New Testament. Consider the following passages:

Acts 2:22

Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know.

Peter spoke these words on the Day of Pentecost. He says clearly that God used the “miracles, wonders and signs” to authenticate (accredit, approve, endorse) Jesus to the people who saw Him and listened to His words.

Acts 14:3

So Paul and Barnabas spent considerable time there, speaking boldly for the Lord, who confirmed the message of his grace by enabling them to do miraculous signs and wonders.

Again, the purpose of the signs and wonders are clear: to confirm the message of Christ.

2 Corinthians 12:12

The things that mark an apostle— signs, wonders and miracles— were done among you with great perseverance.

Sign, wonders and miracles mark a New Testament apostle. These sign gifts are conspicuously absent from the evidence of the Spirit’s work in the life of the believer. Note what Paul says in his letter to the Galatians:

Galatians 5:22-23

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.

If the sign gifts are still in use and as important in the life of the believer as some teach, how could they be left out of the Galatians passage that describes what the Holy Spirit produces in the life of the believer?

Hebrews 2:3-4

How shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation? This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him. God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.

Again, the purpose of the sign gifts—to authenticate the message and the messenger—is stated in this passage. God “testified to” the message of salvation by “by signs, wonders and various miracles.” These sign gifts of the Spirit were distributed by God in keeping with his purpose and will.

2. The history of the New Testament suggests that by the close of the apostolic age (ending with the death of the last apostle), the role of the sign gifts were superseded by the completion of the New Testament. This is demonstrated in the Pastoral Letters (1 & 2 Timothy and Titus). These were among the last letters Paul wrote (all written not long after the events of Acts 28). Yet, there is no mention of the existence or the regulation of sign gifts in these letters. One would think that if sign gifts were as central as some present day teachers say they are, Paul would have at least mentioned them and given instruction for their use in his last letters.

In declaring that sign gifts are no longer in use today, we in no way diminish the work of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit identifies the believer with Christ, seals our salvation, convicts, encourages, and enables us to obey. The Spirit enlightens our minds enabling us to see, understand, and apply the will of God (see 1 Corinthians 2:6-16). During the period of sign gifts there was “immediate illumination.” The Spirit taught the apostles “all things” (John 14:26) and led them into “all truth” (John 16:13). In John 14-16, called the Farewell Discourse, Jesus makes it clear that the writing of Scripture would be one of the central ministries of the Holy Spirit in the lives of the apostles. Jesus told them that the Holy Spirit would not only be with them and comfort them but would also remind them of the things he (Jesus) had said (the Gospels), lead them into the truth (the epistles), and show them the things to come (e.g. Revelation). The Holy Spirit enabled the apostles to record the things Jesus said, the truth of the Christian faith, and the coming events that will complete temporal history and begin eternity with God. Now, however, the Spirit continues his ministry of illumination by working in us through the Scriptures He enabled the apostles to write for us. For the present day believer one of the major ongoing works of the Spirit is to open our understanding (illumination) of who God is and how He wants us to live through the reading and study of inspired Word of God.