A History and Critical Evaluation of

Charismatic Theology

THE MASTER'S SEMINARY
Professor Nathan Busenitz

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Preliminary Considerations: Before We Begin

Ten introductory thoughts:

1. **When discussing this issue in the context of conservative continuationists (e.g. Reformed Charismatics) it is helpful to remember that although this is a very important issue, it is not a first-level doctrine.**

   - The continuationist debate is not inherently a first-level doctrinal issue (like the essence of the gospel or the deity of Christ). In other words, one's position regarding the continuation or discontinuation of the sign gifts is not ultimately determinative of his or her standing before God.

   - **BUT** that does not mean that this issue is unimportant. It is very important because it has significant implications for both one's private devotional life and the corporate body life of the local assembly.

   - Broader charismatic and Pentecostal groups in many cases *do* violate first-level doctrines (such as Prosperity preachers and Oneness Pentecostals) — and thus should be confronted with boldness and directness.

   - Sadly, the global charismatic movement is largely made up of those who hold to false forms of the gospel. In addition to 120 million Charismatic Catholics, and 25 million Oneness Pentecostals, high percentages of Charismatics worldwide hold to forms of the Prosperity Gospel.

     John T. Allen: "Some analysts distinguish between 'neo-Pentecostal,' which they see as focused on the prosperity gospel, and classic Pentecostalism, oriented toward the gifts of the Spirit such as healings and tongues. Yet the Pew Forum data suggests that the prosperity gospel is actually a defining feature of all Pentecostalism; majorities of Pentecostals exceeding 90 percent in most countries hold to these beliefs" (John T. Allen, *The Future Church*, 382–83).

     Paul Alexander: "Over 90 percent of Pentecostals and Charismatics in Nigeria, South Africa, India, and the Philippines believe that 'God will grant material prosperity to all believers who have enough faith'" (Paul Alexander, *Signs and Wonders*, 63–64).

     - Because the charismatic movement in general thrives on experientialism, it is more prone to the presence of false teachers, especially in the realm of broader

> Pentecostalism. In those cases, this *does* become a first-level doctrinal issue. The New Testament does not mince words in denouncing false teachers.

- By contrast, conservative evangelical continuationists represent a small minority. Even so, when it comes to the way we speak about evangelical continuationists—men who are genuinely our brothers in Christ—we ought to be careful not to violate the fruit of the Spirit while debating the gifts of the Spirit.

- Dr. MacArthur modeled this very approach in *Strange Fire*. In chapters 1–11, he directly confronted the flagrant errors of the broader movement. But in chapter 12, when addressing evangelical continuationists, his tone was much softer.

2. The point of 1 Corinthians 12–14 is love, and a major purpose of the gifts is the edification of fellow believers (1 Cor. 12:7).

- The most hotly-contested passage of Scripture regarding the charismatic gifts is 1 Cor. 12–14. It is important to remember that, in those chapters, Paul is emphasizing love for fellow Christians and unity within the body of Christ. We need to keep that theme in mind as we discuss this issue.

- Doing so does not mean that we quietly ignore the issue or shirk back from confronting error. After all, love rejoices *in the truth* (1 Cor. 13:6), which means that true love and real unity is built upon the bedrock of biblical truth. Superficial unity is no real unity at all.

- This issue is especially urgent because the broader charismatic movement is so rife with serious forms of doctrinal error. We are right to condemn false teachers in the same way that the New Testament condemns them.

- Nonetheless, with those who affirm the first-level doctrines of the gospel, we ought to approach the issue in the spirit of Paul's overarching instruction to the Corinthians. We go awry, I believe, if we interpret 1 Cor. 12–14 correctly (regarding the gifts) but subsequently miss Paul's entire point in those chapters (regarding love).

- Citing again the example of Dr. MacArthur, here is what he said about John Piper at the Strange Fire Conference:

> I do know the great body of work that John Piper has done is true to the faith. John is a friend not only whom I admire but whom I love. I don't know why on this front he has that open idea, but it's not an advocacy position for the

> movement and he would join us in decrying the excesses of that movement for sure, and even the theology of it. […] I have no fear that John would ever tamper with anything that is essential to the Christian faith, starting from theology proper all the way through to the return of Christ. He's going to be faithful to the Word as he understands it.

- Though Dr. MacArthur strongly disagrees with John Piper on this issue, he publicly affirmed his love for him as a brother in Christ and fellow worker for the gospel.

- I hope that you leave this class not only convinced about the cessation of the sign gifts, but also with a heart for local church ministry. First Cor. 12–14 specifically deals with edification in the body of Christ; if you study those chapters and fail to glean that lesson, you have missed the entire point.

3. It is possible to be confused about spiritual gifts. But the Spirit-inspired Scriptures provide us with clarity.

- The Corinthian situation highlights the fact that, even in apostolic times (when all agree the gifts were in operation), it was possible to be confused about the miraculous gifts. Our contemporary situation underscores this point.

- How can we sort through the confusion?

- The Scriptures must be our authority in sorting through any such confusion. And we must be willing to reconsider our position (and the presuppositions that undergird our position) if the Scripture shows us areas in which our thinking needs to change.

    - Questions about spiritual gifts are ultimately questions about the Holy Spirit and His work in the church today. Thus, the continuationist- cessationist discussion is ultimately a discussion about the Holy Spirit. *Does He still impart the same miraculous gifts in the same way as He did during the time of the apostles?* The continuationist says Yes. The cessationist says No.

    - When we go to the Word of God for our instruction on this subject, we are going to the Spirit Himself, since He is the One who has inspired every word of this wonderful and all-sufficient revelation from God. In other words, when we look to the Scriptures regarding the work of the Holy Spirit, we are in essence asking the Spirit about Himself.

- Before we can turn to any personal experience (which may or may not have come from the Holy Spirit), we must first turn to His Word (which unquestionably comes from Him). If our experience coincides with Scripture, we can be encouraged that it meets with His approval. But if it does not, we must be willing to reconsider and repent.

- In the end, only the Word of God, inspired by the Spirit of God, can be our final authority on these matters.

- The primary goal of this class is to investigate the evidence from Scripture regarding the charismatic gifts. If we cannot build a strong biblical case for our cessationism, we really have no case at all.

4. Not every continuationist is the same. As such, we need to be careful not to over-generalize our critique.

- In fact, there are over 20,000 distinct continuationist groups in the world — ranging from Pentecostal to Charismatic to Third Wave. Because of this vast spectrum, it is impossible to address the theological nuances of each group. The common link that these groups share is a belief in the continued operation of the miraculous sign gifts throughout the entire church age.

- As noted above, our *target audience* is the "Reformed Charismatic" camp. However, because they represent the "best" argument for the continuation of the charismatic gifts, studying their position will be helpful for responding to any charismatic or Pentecostal group.

- By focusing on the biblical arguments, rather than trying to focus on every distinct charismatic group, we can successfully equip ourselves to address any segment of the modern charismatic movement.

5. Not every cessationist is the same.

- Some have suggested that there are at least four types of cessationists: Concentric, Classical, Complete (or Full), and Consistent. Our ministry here at Grace Church would generally fall into the Classical category.

  - <u>Concentric Cessationism</u> is similar to the "Open but Cautious" Movement. This view teaches that the miraculous gifts have ceased in places where the gospel has

been established; but that the gifts can still occur in unreached areas as an aid to evangelism.

- Classical Cessationism teaches that the sign gifts have ceased since the apostolic age and the completion of the biblical canon. While God can still do miracles today in a general sense, the *miraculous gifts* are no longer in operation.

- Complete Cessationism teaches that, along with the miraculous gifts, there is no possibility of miracles today. (B. B. Warfield espoused such a view.)

- Consistent Cessationism asserts that, in addition to the miraculous gifts, the non-miraculous gifts also ceased. Thus, there are no longer any spiritual gifts available in the modern church age.

6. There Is a Difference Between Miracles and the Miraculous Gifts.

- Classical Cessationism is not anti-supernatural, nor does it deny the fact that God can still work in extraordinary ways. When it comes to understanding the cessationist position, the question is not: *Can God still do miracles in the world today?* Cessationists would be quick to acknowledge that God can act at any time in any way He chooses. Along these lines, John MacArthur explains:

> Miracles in the Bible [primarily] occurred in three major periods of time. The time of Moses and Joshua, the time of Elijah and Elisha, and the time of Christ and the apostles. . . . And it is during those three brief periods of time and those alone that miracles proliferated; that miracles were the norm; that miracles were in abundance. Now God can interject Himself into the human stream supernaturally anytime He wants. We're not limiting Him. We're simply saying that He has chosen to limit Himself to a great degree to those three periods of time. (Source: http://www.gty.org/resources/sermons/1368/Is-This-the-Age-of-Miracles)

- Cessationism then does not deny the reality that God can do whatever He wants whenever He wants (Psalm 115:3). It does not put God into a box or limit His sovereign prerogative.

- But it does acknowledge that there was something unique and special about the age of miracles and miracle-workers that defined the ministries of Moses and Joshua, Elijah and Elisha, and Christ and His apostles. Moreover, it recognizes the seemingly obvious fact that those kinds of miracles (like parting the sea, stopping the rain, raising the dead, walking on water, or instantly healing the lame and the blind) are not occurring today.

- Thus, cessationists conclude that:

> The apostolic age was marvelously unique and it ended. And what happened then is not the normal thing for every Christian. The normal thing for every Christian is to study the Word of God, which is able to make us wise and perfect. [It] is to live by faith and not by sight. (Ibid.)

- But can God still do extraordinary things in the world today? Certainly He can, if He chooses to do so. In fact, every time a sinner's eyes are opened to the gospel, and a new life in Christ is created, it is nothing short of a miracle.

- In his helpful book, *To Be Continued?*, Samuel Waldron aptly expresses the cessationist position this way (on p. 102):

> I am not denying by all this that there are miracles in the world today in the broader sense of supernatural occurrences and extraordinary providences. I am only saying that there are no miracles in the stricter sense [of] miracle-workers performing miraculous signs to attest the redemptive revelation they bring from God. Though God has never locked Himself out of His world and is still at liberty to do as He pleases, when He pleases, how He pleases, and where He pleases, He has made it clear that the progress of redemptive revelation attested by miraculous signs done by miracle-workers has been brought to conclusion in the revelation embodied in our New Testaments.

- So, the question is not: *Can God still do miracles?*

- Rather, the definitive question is this: *Are the miraculous gifts of the New Testament still in operation in the church today – such that what was the norm in the days of Christ and the apostles ought to be expected today?* To that, all cessationists would answer "no."

7. I have been greatly blessed by some continuationist leaders (and so have you).

- This list would not be complete without noting the profound positive impact that some continuationist authors and church leaders have had in my life. This would include men like **John Piper**, whose passion for the supremacy of God and the enjoyment of God has been infectious in my own heart; **D. A. Carson**, who is one of the premier evangelical scholars alive today; **Wayne Grudem**, whose *Systematic Theology* and other academic works have both instructed and inspired me; and **C. J. Mahaney**, whose humility and Christ-centeredness continues to convict me and to motivate me to greater godliness. I am

deeply indebted to these men, as are many others. They are a treasure to the American church in the twenty-first century.

8. In spite of my appreciation for those men, I am strongly convinced that cessationism is the correct position.

- I would not be teaching this class if I was not absolutely convinced that a compelling, biblical case for the cessationist position can be made.

- I do not think it will surprise anyone, but just to be clear, I am trying to convince you of that same position. I hope to treat the continuationist literature in a way that is fair and responsible. But I also plan to refute their arguments.

9. Despite the claims of some charismatics, cessationism is not the result of the Enlightenment (or modernistic thinking).

- The emphasis in this class will be on Scripture, not church history. The Bible should be our focus, because it is our final authority. However, in response to the accusation that cessationism is a product of the Enlightenment, here is a brief list of quotes from ten of church history's great heroes who lived before the Enlightenment. After their own study of the issue, here is the conclusion that they reached:

(1) John Chrysostom (c. 344–407):

> "This whole place [speaking about 1 Corinthians 12] is very obscure: but the obscurity is produced by our ignorance of the facts referred to and by their cessation, being such as then used to occur but now no longer take place."
>
> (Source: John Chrysostom, *Homilies on 1 Corinthians*, 36.7. Chrysostom is commenting on 1 Cor 12:1–2 and introducing the entire chapter. Cited from 1–*2 Corinthians*, in the Ancient Christian Commentary Series, 146.)

(2) Augustine (354–430):

> "In the earliest times, the Holy Spirit fell upon them that believe and they spoke with tongues, which they had not learned, as the Spirit gave them utterance. These were signs adapted to the time. For there was this betokening of the Holy Spirit in

> all tongues [languages] to show that the gospel of God was to run through all tongues over the whole earth. That thing was done for a sign, and it passed away."
>
> (Source: Augustine, *Homilies on the First Epistle of John*, 6.10. Cf. Schaff, NPNF, First Series, 7:497–98.)

(3) Theodoret of Cyrus (c. 393–c. 466):

> "In former times those who accepted the divine preaching and who were baptized for their salvation were given visible signs of the grace of the Holy Spirit at work in them. Some spoke in tongues which they did not know and which nobody had taught them, while others performed miracles or prophesied. The Corinthians also did these things, but they did not use the gifts as they should have done. They were more interested in showing off than in using them for the edification of the church. . . . Even in our time grace is given to those who are deemed worthy of holy baptism, but it may not take the same form as it did in those days."
>
> (Source: Theodoret of Cyrus, Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians, 240, 43; in reference to 1 Cor 12:1, 7. Cited from 1–2 Corinthians, ACCS, 117).

- Note: Proponents of continuationism, like Jon Ruthven (in his work, On the Cessation of the Charismata), also acknowledge cessationist views in other church fathers (like Origen in the 3rd century, and Ambrosiaster in the 4th century).

- Additionally, to this list, we could include the most well-known name of the Middle Ages, the 13th-century scholastic, Thomas Aquinas. But let's jump ahead to the Reformation and Puritan eras.

(4) Martin Luther (1483–1546)

> "In the early Church the Holy Spirit was sent forth in visible form. He descended upon Christ in the form of a dove (Matt. 3:16), and in the likeness of fire upon the apostles and other believers. (Acts 2:3.) This visible outpouring of the Holy Spirit was necessary to the establishment of the early Church, as were also the miracles that accompanied the gift of the Holy Ghost. Paul explained the purpose of these miraculous gifts of the Spirit in I Corinthians 14:22, "Tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not." Once the Church had been established and properly advertised by these miracles, the visible appearance of the Holy Ghost ceased."

(Source: Martin Luther, Commentary on Galatians 4, Trans. by Theodore Graebner [Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1949], pp. 150-172. This is from Luther's comment on Gal. 4:6.)

(5) John Calvin (1509–1564):

"Though Christ does not expressly state whether he intends this gift [of miracles] to be temporary, or to remain perpetually in the Church, yet it is more probable that miracles were promised only for a time, in order to give lustre to the gospel while it was new or in a state of obscurity."

(Source: John Calvin, *Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels*, III:389.)

"The gift of healing, like the rest of the miracles, which the Lord willed to be brought forth for a time, has vanished away in order to make the preaching of the Gospel marvelous forever."

(Source: John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, IV:19, 18.)

(6) John Owen (1616–1683):

"Gifts which in their own nature exceed the whole power of all our faculties, that dispensation of the Spirit is long since ceased and where it is now pretended unto by any, it may justly be suspected as an enthusiastic delusion."

(Source: John Owen, *Works*, IV:518.)

(7) Thomas Watson (1620–1686):

"Sure, there is as much need of ordination now as in Christ's time and in the time of the apostles, there being then extraordinary gifts in the church which are now ceased."

(Source: Thomas Watson, *The Beatitudes*, 140.)

(8) Matthew Henry (1662–1714):

"What these gifts were is at large told us in the body of the chapter [1 Corinthians 12]; namely, extraordinary offices and powers, bestowed on ministers and

Christians in the first ages, for conviction of unbelievers, and propagation of the gospel."

(Source: Matthew Henry, *Complete Commentary*, in reference to 1 Corinthians 12.)

"The gift of tongues was one new product of the spirit of prophecy and given for a particular reason, that, the Jewish pale being taken down, all nations might be brought into the church. These and other gifts of prophecy, being a sign, have long since ceased and been laid aside, and we have no encouragement to expect the revival of them; but, on the contrary, are directed to call the scriptures the more sure word of prophecy, more sure than voices from heaven; and to them we are directed to take heed, to search them, and to hold them fast, 2 Peter 1:29."

(Source: Matthew Henry, Preface to Vol. IV of his Exposition of OT & NT, vii.)

(9) John Gill (1697–1771):

[Commenting on 1 Corinthians 12:9 and 30]

"Now these gifts were bestowed in common, by the Spirit, on apostles, prophets, and pastors, or elders of the church, in those early times: the Alexandrian copy, and the Vulgate Latin version, read, 'by one Spirit.'"

(Source: John Gill's commentary on 1 Corinthians 12:9.)

"No; when these gifts were in being, all had them not. When anointing with oil, in order to heal the sick, was in use, it was only performed by the elders of the church, not by the common members of it, who were to be sent for by the sick on this occasion."

(Source: John Gill's commentary on 1 Corinthians 12:30.)

(10) Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758):

"In the days of his [Jesus'] flesh, his disciples had a measure of the miraculous gifts of the Spirit, being enabled thus to teach and to work miracles. But after the resurrection and ascension, was the most full and remarkable effusion of the Spirit in his miraculous gifts that ever took place, beginning with the day of Pentecost, after Christ had risen and ascended to heaven. And in consequence of this, not

only here and there an extraordinary person was endowed with these extraordinary gifts, but they were common in the church, and so continued during the lifetime of the apostles, or till the death of the last of them, even the apostle John, which took place about a hundred years from the birth of Christ; so that the first hundred years of the Christian era, or the first century, was the era of miracles.

"But soon after that, the canon of Scripture being completed when the apostle John had written the book of Revelation, which he wrote not long before his death, these miraculous gifts were no longer continued in the church. For there was now completed an established written revelation of the mind and will of God, wherein God had fully recorded a standing and all-sufficient rule for his church in all ages. And the Jewish church and nation being overthrown, and the Christian church and the last dispensation of the church of God being established, the miraculous gifts of the Spirit were no longer needed, and therefore they ceased; for though they had been continued in the church for so many ages, yet then they failed, and God caused them to fail because there was no further occasion for them. And so was fulfilled the saying of the text, 'Whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away.' And now there seems to be an end to all such fruits of the Spirit as these, and we have no reason to expect them anymore."

(Source: Jonathan Edwards, Sermon entitled, "The Holy Spirit Forever To Be Communicated To The Saints, In The Grace Of Charity, Or Divine Love" on 1 Corinthians 13:8.)

"Of the extraordinary gifts, they were given 'in order to the founding and establishing of the church in the world. But since the canon of Scriptures has been completed, and the Christian church fully founded and established, these extraordinary gifts have ceased."

(Source: Jonathan Edwards, Charity and its Fruits, 29.)

- To this list, we could add other names, including post-Enlightenment thinkers like James Buchanan, R. L. Dabney, Charles Spurgeon, George Smeaton, Abraham Kuyper, William G. T. Shedd, B. B. Warfield, A. W. Pink, and so on. (See the Appendix in *Strange Fire* for additional quotes from these men.)

- Again, church history is *not* our authority. However, it is encouraging to know that, as cessationists, we are in good company.

10. In spite of some charismatic claims, cessationists *do* love the Holy Spirit.

- Though it should be an obvious characteristic of any true Christian, I feel the need, as a cessationist, to establish a simple point from the beginning: *I love the Holy Spirit.* I would never want to do anything to discredit His work, diminish His attributes, or downplay His ministry. Nor would I ever want to miss out on anything He is doing in the church today. And I know I'm not the only cessationist who feels this way.

- Because we love the Holy Spirit we are thankful to God for the Spirit's amazing and ongoing work in the body of Christ. His works of regenerating, indwelling, baptizing, sealing, assuring, illuminating, convicting, comforting, confirming, filling, and enabling are all indispensable aspects of His ministry.

- Because we love the Holy Spirit we are motivated to study the Scriptures that He inspired to learn how to walk in a manner worthy, being characterized by His fruit. We long to be filled by Him (Eph. 5:18), which begins by being indwelt with His Word, which is the Word of Christ (Col. 3:16–17), and being equipped with His sword, which is the Word of God (Eph. 6:17).

- Because we love the Holy Spirit that we long to rightly represent Him, to understand and appreciate His purposes (as He has revealed them in His Word), and to align ourselves with what He is doing in this world. This more than anything else gives us reason to study the issue of charismatic gifts (cf. 1 Cor. 12:7-11). Our goal in this study has to be more than mere doctrinal correctness. Our motivation must be to gain a more accurate understanding of the Spirit's work – such that we might better yield ourselves to Him in service to Christ for the glory of God.

- Cessationists are motivated by a desire to see the Holy Spirit glorified. They are concerned that, by redefining the gifts, the continuationist position cheapens the remarkable nature of those gifts, lessening the truly miraculous working of the Spirit in the earliest stages of the church.

- Cessationists are convinced that, by redefining *healing*, the charismatic position presents a bad testimony to the watching world when the sick are not healed. By redefining *tongues*, the charismatic position promotes a type of nonsensical gibberish that runs contrary to anything we know about the biblical gift. By redefining *prophecy*, the charismatic position lends credence to those who would claim to speak the very words of God and yet speak error.

- This, then, is the primary concern of cessationists: *that the honor of the Triune God and His Word be exalted—and that it not be cheapened by watered-down substitutes*.

- Again, how do we know if something is authentic or not? By comparing it to the written testimony of Scripture. Does going to the Bible to define the gifts mean that we are bypassing the Holy Spirit? Quite the contrary. When we search the Scriptures, we are going to the testimony of the Holy Spirit Himself to discover what He has revealed about the gifts that He bestowed.

Concluding Thoughts:

- In light of all of the above, our goal for this class is to approach the charismatic issue in humility and charity, yet with absolute confidence in the sufficiency and authority of Scripture.

- We wish to honor the Holy Spirit in both our attitude and in our approach—by exhibiting the fruits of the Spirit in how we treat others, while also resting our case fully and finally in the Spirit-inspired Scriptures.

- As we do, our prayer is that this class would not become a dry, academic exercise (as though we were merely hoping to win a debate); but that it would be an opportunity for us to grow in our appreciation and reverence for the Spirit of God.

The Pentecostal & Charismatic Movements

A Brief History[1]

* * * * *

INTRODUCTION

- By the end of the 20th century, there were over 520 million Pentecostals worldwide, equaling approximately 27% of organized global Christianity, making it the largest family of Protestants

- Because of its widespread influence internationally, the Pentecostal Movement has evolved to become the fastest growing Christian trend and will no doubt impact the future development of the worldwide church.

THE ROOTS OF PENTECOSTALISM (1738–1900)

Although the Pentecostal movement seemed to have begun as a largely American phenomenon, the beginning influences of its basic theology can be traced back to similar charismatic movements earlier in British church history.

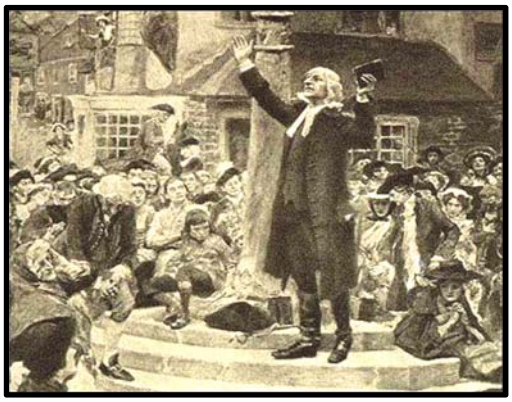
1. **Methodist Holiness Influence**

- John Wesley, the British founder of Methodism who was converted in 1738, taught that it was possible for believers to have a post-conversion "second blessing" experience, which he associated with Christian perfection.

Timothy C. Tennet: Wesley advocated several positions crucial to Pentecostal pneumatology today. He emphasized the Spirit's role in the sanctification of believers and accepted the idea of a "second" crisis experience subsequent to justification, a key feature in later Pentecostal pneumatology. He referred to this experience in various ways, including "perfect love," "eradication of inbred sin," and "entire sanctification," all of which influenced the theology of the Holiness tradition. Wesley insisted that the reason the supernatural gifts of the Spirit were not active in the churches of his day was because of spiritual deadness, not God's plan. While he was more interested in the fruit of the Spirit than the gifts of the Spirit, Wesley was still derided as an "enthusiast" by his critics because of the

[1] Special thanks to Beland Huang for his help on this section of the lecture notes.

emotional and exuberant nature of the early Methodist meetings. (*Theology in the Context of World Christianity*, electronic edition)

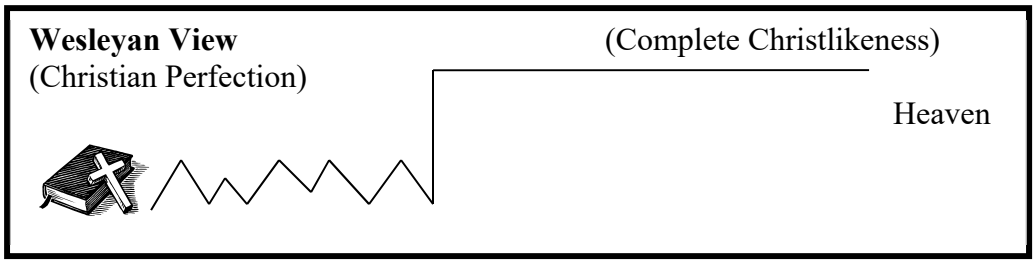


Michael Haykin: For all the good that John Wesley did, he was a lightning-rod for controversy. His propagation of evangelical Arminianism, for example, did much to antagonize [George] Whitefield and other key evangelical leaders.

Equally serious an error was his commitment to the doctrine of Christian perfection. . . . Convinced that Scripture taught this doctrine, though, John Wesley was determined to publish it to the world. Yet, unlike his clear presentation of the heart of the gospel, his teaching about perfection is somewhat murky and at times difficult to pin down.

He always contended that he was not advocating "sinless perfection." Yet he could talk about the one who experienced this blessing as having "sin . . . separated from his soul" and having a "full deliverance from sin." Such perfection freed the person from evil thoughts and evil tempers. As he wrote to the Baptist authoress Ann Dutton (1692–1765), this blessing brings freedom from "all faintness, coldness, and unevenness of love, both towards God and our neighbor. And hence from wandering of heart in duty and from every motion and affection that is contrary to the law of love." All this sounds very much like sinless perfection despite Wesley's protest, "we do not say that we have no sin in us, but that we do not commit sin."

It is curious that Wesley himself never claimed to have experienced what he sometimes called "the second blessing." . . . [But] Wesley's teaching carried enormous weight in the century after his death in 1791. It formed the heart and substance of the transantlantic holiness movement of the nineteenth century [and using the terminology of] "the baptism of the Holy Spirit," Wesleyan perfectionism prepared the soil for the emergence of Pentecostalism in this century. (*The Revived Puritan*, 53–58)



- Wesley‘s successor, John Fletcher was the first to term the higher Christian experience, **“the baptism in the Holy Spirit”** (based on Acts 11:16), during which a believer is empowered by the Spirit, much like the believers during Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4), to be a witness for Christ.

- Fletcher’s version of Methodism had a major impact on American Methodism in the decades that followed.

> **Donald Dayton:** By mid-century [the 1850s] the weight [within American Methodism] was beginning to shift towards Fletcher and motifs rooted in the images of Pentecost. In 1856 Irish Methodist and Conference President William Arthur published *The Tongue of Fire* which climaxed in a prayer:
>
> > And now, adorable Spirit, proceeding from the Father and the Son, descend upon all the Churches, renew the Pentecost in this our age, and Baptize thy people generally—O, baptize them yet again with tongues of fire! Crown this nineteenth century with a revival of ‘pure and undefiled religion’ greater than that of the last century, greater than that of the first, greater than any ‘demonstration of the Spirit’ ever yet vouchsafed to men.
>
> … By February of 1874, Daniel Steele, two years after leaving the presidency of Syracuse University, would testify in Phoebe Palmer's *The Guide to Holiness* to his own experience of ‘entire sanctification’ as a ‘baptism of the Holy Spirit.’ He advised Methodists to ‘cease to discuss the subtleties and endless questions arising from entire sanctification or Christian perfection.’ He urged all to ‘cry mightily to God for the Baptism of the Holy Spirit ... promised to all believers in Jesus.’ Such tendencies and rhetoric snowballed through the rest of the century and contributed to growing tensions within Methodism. (*The Oxford Handbook of Methodist Studies*, 181–2)

- The Methodist ideas of “the baptism of the Holy Spirit,” a “second blessing” subsequent to salvation, “perfect love,” and “Christian perfection” were embraced by evangelists and theologians of the American Holiness Movement such as Asa Mahan, T.C. Upham, etc.

- Certain aspects of Pentecostal theology and practice were also derived from the Second Great Awakening and the birth of American revivalism.

> **Donald Dayton:** The doctrine of the 'baptism of the Holy Spirit' also found wide acceptance outside the Holiness Movement, especially in the tradition of 'modern revivalism' with its roots in the work of Charles Grandison Finney, who late in his

life explicitly taught the doctrine with an emphasis on 'empowerment' of the experience. The revivalist tradition generally suppressed the elements of 'purity' in favor of 'power.' (*The Oxford Handbook of Methodist Studies*, 183)

Iain Murray: [Regarding the Methodist camp meetings of the Second Great Awakening] – "Of the physical phenomena attending the revival that of 'falling' became the most common. People dropped 'as if shot dead' and they might lie, unable to rise, conscious, or unconscious, for an hour or for much longer. Some fell who had previously been skeptical of everything. Many—150, 250, even 800—were recorded as falling during camp meetings. . . . The potential for disorder increased when the numbers assembling necessitated open-air gatherings and camp meetings" (*Revival and Revivalism*, 164–65).]

- Murray goes on to show that it was during the Second Great Awakening that mechanisms were introduced which could guarantee "revival" through the manipulation of people's emotions.

Iain Murray: "The encouragement of physical responses to preaching (such as falling to the floor); women speaking in worship; meetings carried on through long hours and on successive days (protracted meetings); and, above all, inviting individuals to 'submit to God' and to prove it by a 'humbling' action such as standing up, kneeling down, or coming forward to 'the anxious seat'—all came straight from the procedures that some Methodists had been popularizing for a quarter of a century. 'The anxious seat' was only the altar call and the mourner's bench under another name" (*Revival and Revivalism*, 242).

- The Holiness emphasis that pervaded Wesleyan Methodism became the primary basis for the birth of Pentecostalism.

David Martin: … Pentecostalism is an extension of Methodism and of the Evangelical Revivals (or Awakenings) accompanying Anglo-American modernization. … Methodism used to be unacceptable just as Pentecostalism is now unacceptable, in particular through loud singing, groaning, bounding, and sighing. It appealed to aspiring upstarts making up the first wave of competitive religious entrepreneurship. Yet the self-limitation which it eventually encountered even in the USA came about as it began to build Gothic churches and to create universities, one of whose objects was to train its professional ministers in the old east-coast manner. By 1900 it had become the largest and wealthiest Protestant denomination, and the time was ripe for Pentecostalism to pick up Methodism's "unfinished task." (*Pentecostalism: The World Their Parish*, 7-8)

> **Donald W. Dayton:** [It is not possible] to detach Pentecostalism from its Holiness antecedents. In Chile, for example, Pentecostalism is intensely Methodist in character, though it is often offered as an illustration of an 'indigenous' (i.e. not missionary) Pentecostalism. Chilean Methodism has its roots in the work of William Taylor, a maverick Methodist Missionary Bishop identified with the Holiness movement. … In Chile over 90 per cent of Protestantism is Pentecostal, and the Roman Catholic Church is increasingly nervous about the fact that on a given Sunday there may be as many Pentecostals in church as Catholics. (*The Oxford Handbook of Methodist Studies*, 186)

- The beginnings of the 20th century Pentecostal movement are directly linked to Wesleyan Holiness roots.

> **Donald Dayton:** The formal emergence of Pentecostalism took place at the turn of the twentieth century in Topeka, Kansas, at a Bible school founded by Charles Parham, an independent Methodist evangelist in the Holiness tradition. . . .
>
> It is no accident that the Azusa Street revival took place in Los Angeles. The city is often interpreted through its Spanish/Mexican Catholic heritage, but in the early years of the twentieth century, it was a hotbed of the Holiness currents that prospered at the time. ... When Seymour came to Los Angeles, he went first to the Holiness churches, but was locked out of the church that he thought he was called to pastor when the congregation heard his message of tongues. ... The experience of 'speaking in tongues' split the Holiness churches and resulted in intense struggles over turf. Theological polemics broke out. The Pentecostal Church of the Nazarene would drop the term 'Pentecostal' and struggle to disassociate itself from the new movement (*The Oxford Handbook of Methodist Studies*, pp. 184–85)

- Though some Pentecostals try to distance themselves from their Wesleyan Holiness roots (like Douglas Oss and other Assemblies of God theologians), it is incorrect to do so.

> **Donald Dayton:** The most influential Pentecostal Church in North America is the Assemblies of God, which claims a 'Reformed' identity (in part a product of efforts to assimilate into evangelical culture and move beyond Holiness behavioral and dress legalisms). Its historians minimize the roots of the denomination in the Holiness Movement, claiming to be followers of William Durham, the pastor of a Pentecostal mission in Chicago, who taught a 'finished work' doctrine of sanctification. They interpret Durham as an evangelical, teaching a gradual sanctification after conversion. I am convinced this is mistaken. Durham's 'finished work' theology is more like that of Moravian Count Zinzendorf in his conflicts with Wesley. Durham taught that all God promised was bestowed in conversion, including 'entire sanctification.' The

> ‘fundamental truths’ of the Assemblies of God contained an article on ‘entire sanctification.’ I am told that this statement was something of a compromise. Nearly all affirmed ‘entire sanctification’; the difference was over the method by which it was received, some teaching the Wesleyan/Holiness ‘second blessing’ while others taught the ‘finished work’ that all was received in ‘conversion.’ This article was modified in several steps in the twentieth century to approximate the evangelical position, but it remains testimony to the Wesleyan/Holiness roots of even this more ‘Reformed’ wing of Pentecostalism. (*Oxford Handbook of Methodist Studies*, 186)

2. British Pentecostal Influence

- A predecessor to Pentecostalism, **Edward Irving**, a popular London Presbyterian pastor, suggested in **1831** the possibility of the restoration of **gifts of the Spirit** in the modern church.

- Irving investigated reported instances of **glossolalia** (speaking in tongues) and its interpretation in a small Scottish town in 1830.

> **Richard Hogue:** Irving wrote extensively on what he referred to as the baptism of the Holy Spirit and spiritual gifts. He raised speaking in tongues to a high and inclusive place.
>
> > The gift of tongues is the crowning gift of all ... It is the proclamation that man is enthroned in heaven, that man is the dwelling-place of God, that all creation if they would know God, must give ear to man's tongue, and know the compass of reason. It is not that we speak, but Christ speaketh.
>
> He saw speaking in tongues as the "standing sign," meaning all other gifts flowed out of speaking in tongues. Irving originated the concept that speaking in tongues was the "outward and visible sign of that inward and invisible grace which the baptism of the Holy Ghost conferred." He also believed deeply in the devotional aspect of singing and praying in tongues. (*Tongues: A Theological History of Christian Glossolalia*, 209)

- Much to his sorrow, Irving never received the gift of tongues himself, but he was tried and expelled for speaking heresy by the Presbytery of London. He and his friends then formed the Catholic Apostolic Church, where tongues and prophecies were reportedly experienced.

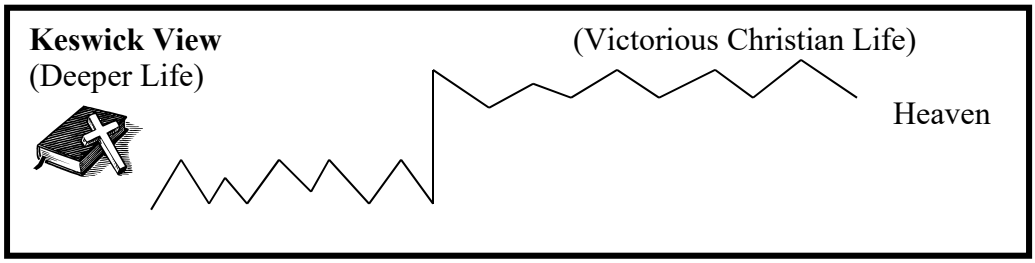
Henry Desker: As we all know, the old Irvingites were founded by Rev. Edward Irving, 1792–1834, who in 1834 was expelled from the Scotch Presbyterian Church of London, for propagating doctrines and practices antagonistic to the Reformed faith.

The earlier sect was noted for extravagant Chiliasm and for the effort of restoring the old Apostolic Church, especially its offices and charismata. Two years after Irving's death, 1836, the Christian world was divided among the Twelve Apostles, elected to re-evangelize it. Thus twelve provinces, or apostolates, were created, in which the ruling apostle was to exercise absolute ecclesiastical authority. In 1847, the Irvingites were fully organized as the "Catholic Apostolic Church." Several dates were set, with uniform failure, for the personal advent of Christ; but the sect survived all disappointments and began to get a strong foothold on the [European] Continent. (*Princeton Theological Review*, vol. 1, 1903, p. 488)

3. Keswick Higher Life Movement

- The **Keswick Higher Life Movement** flourished in England after 1875, and eventually penetrated American Christian circles with notable Christian teachers.

Keith Kettenring: The Keswick movement is not a denomination or doctrinal system but it does have a distinctive view of sanctification. Its distinction lies in the view that the victorious Christian life includes a necessary crisis event of total surrender in the process of sanctification. This event differs from the "entire sanctification" of Wesleyans since, in the Keswick view, sin is not fully removed. (*The Sanctification Connection*, 28)



- The annual **Keswick Convention,** which began in 1875, carried a holiness emphasis such as "the second blessing" with the fullness of the Spirit, while avoiding perfectionism. The Keswick displaced the concept of the second blessing as an eradication of sin altogether in favor of a "baptism in the Holy Spirit" as an empowerment for service.

> **Timothy Smith, *Called Unto Holiness*:** These teachings—the denial of the eradication of inward sin and the emphasis on premillennialism, faith-healing, and the gifts of the Spirit—opened a wide breach in the holiness ranks. The conflict spread to America when D.L. Moody; R.A. Torrey, first president of Moody Bible institute, Chicago; Adoniram J. Gordon, father of Gordon College, Boston; A.B. Simpson, founder of Christian and Missionary Alliance; and the evangelist J. Wilbur Chapman began to propagate in this country the Keswick version of the second blessing.

- Under the influence of the Holiness movement and notable "second blessing" teachings from Britain, the first Pentecostal churches originated during the Holiness Movement in America: the United Holy Church (1886); Fire-Baptized Holiness Church (1895); Pentecostal Holiness Church (1898).

- Having been formed as second-blessing holiness denominations, theses churches added the gift of tongues as evidence of a "third blessing" in addition to conversion and sanctification, at the outset of the Pentecostal movement in the 20th century.

> **Vinson Synan:** In his 1891 book, *Pentecost*, [R. C.] Horner taught that the baptism of the Holy Spirit was in reality a "*third work*" of grace subsequent to salvation and sanctification which empowered the believer for service. This view was elaborated in his two volume work Bible Doctrines which appeared in 1909. Also prominent in Horner's meetings were such "physical manifestations" as "prostration," "ecstasy," and "immediate laughter," which led to his being separated from the Methodist church. The most far-reaching effect of Horner's teaching was to separate in time and purpose the experiences of second-blessing sanctification and the "third blessing" of "baptism in the Holy Spirit," a theological distinction that became crucial to the development of Pentecostalism. (*The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition*, 50)

4. The American Restorationist Movement

- In addition to its background in the Wesleyan Holiness Movement, Pentecostalism is also associated with the Restorationist Movement of the 19th Century.

> **Peter Althouse, 20–21:** Pentecostal historian Edith Blumhofer asserts that seeing Pentecostalism as a restorationist movement bridges the tendency to split it into Wesleyan and non-Wesleyan components, while giving due importance to the various holiness movements, German Pietism, premillennialism and 'Higher Life' teachings inherent in Pentecostalism. ... She also states that there are four ways in which the restorationist motif influenced the rise of Pentecostalism. First, restorationism was closely related to the perfectionist hope for personal and

> religious reform. Late nineteenth-century America was optimistic in its own progress and betterment. Restorationism contradicted this belief by advocating a return to earlier norms. Being essentially ahistorical, restoration called for a purification of religious norms and practices that had been 'polluted' by historical development. Personal perfection and religious reform could only be achieved by returning to the patterns of New Testament Christianity. Second, restorationism contributed to assumptions about Christian unity and simplicity, especially with reference to church structure and doctrine. Restorationists ignored the diversity that existed in the early church before the advent of doctrinal disputes was the pattern for unity in the church today. Third, restorationism accompanied eschatological themes, as evident in the latter rain doctrine. Restorationism reinforced assumptions about the former and latter outpouring of the Spirit, the former being the apostolic pattern, the latter being the restoration of this pattern and precipitous to the coming eschatological reign of Christ. Fourth, restorationism supported Pentecostalism's antidenominational attitudes, for Pentecostals tended to find submission to church authority intolerable, both in terms of traditions and creeds as well as ecclesial power structures. Thus Pentecostals called for the restoration of apostolic Christianity, a restoration that started with the Reformers' doctrine of justification by faith, Wesley's doctrine of sanctification and the Pentecostal doctrine of Spirit baptism with tongues and the gifts of the Spirit. (*Spirit of the Last Days*, [T&T Clark, 2003], 20–21)

- This restorationist movement produced groups like the Church of Christ (under Barton Stone and Alexander Campbell), the Christadelphians (under John Thomas), the Latter Day Saints (under Joseph Smith), the Seventh-Day Adventist Movement (under William Miller and Ellen G. White), and the Jehovah's Witnesses (under Charles Taze Russell and Joseph Rutherford).

- Not surprisingly, then, many (though not all) early-20th-century fundamentalists regarded Pentecostalism as a cult.

  John Hannah notes, for example, that Lewis Sperry "Chafer did not hesitate to call Pentecostalism both a cult and a satanic agency, a view not uncommon among evangelicals in the 1920s." (*An Uncommon Union*, [Zondervan, 2009], p. 327, n. 61).

  Philip Jenkins: Pentecostal sects, like the New Age groups, also had strong female components in their leadership. However little it superficially resembles New Thought, Pentecostalism was similarly denounced as a vehicle for Oriental and occult influences.

Aimee McPherson's image as a cult leader was sealed when a scandal suggested that she was a hypocrite who used religion to make a good living, perhaps committing the very sexual sins that she so often denounced. In May 1926, reports that Aimee had drowned while swimming caused enormous grief among her followers. Several days later, however, she reappeared in Mexico, claiming that she had been kidnapped. Her story fell apart, and the mysterious incident seems to have involved a romantic escapade with her lover, a married engineer at station KFSG. She faced trial for conspiracy to produce false testimony, though her popularity was still sufficient to save her from jail. The case once more confirmed the worst stereotypes of the new generation of religious entrepreneurs. (*Mystics and Messiahs*, [Oxford University Press, 2000], 68).

- With the establishment of the National Association of Evangelicals in 1942, the general attitude of moderate fundamentalists toward Pentecostalism changed.

  William and Robert Menzies: One hundred and fifty leaders gathered in St. Louis in a constitutional convention for the formation of the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) in April 1942. Leaders from the Assemblies of God were invited to be part of this historic meeting. Evangelicals, many of whom had been led to believe that Pentecostals should be classified as a cult, had come to recognize that apart from the Pentecostal teaching about baptism in the Spirit with the accompanying sign of speaking in tongues, Pentecostal teaching was squarely in line with orthodox Christian theology. Association with Pentecostals during the course of World War II had brought Evangelicals into proximity with Pentecostals, and it was largely out of this encounter that a sense of spiritual solidarity emerged. (*Spirit and Power*, [Zondervan], 29)

THE BIRTH OF PENTECOSTALISM (1901–1909) – *The First Wave*

- In terms of its official beginning, Pentecostalism can be traced to Charles Fox Parham's Bible training school in Topeka, Kansas in 1901.
    - Parham was a former Methodist pastor and holiness teacher who taught the distinguishing characteristic of the "baptism of the Spirit" in his Bible school. He held large meetings in which participants were converted, sanctified, baptized in the Spirit, and healed of sickness.
    - Parham had studied to become a medical doctor. When he became ill with rheumatic fever he began to study the healings of Christ. He believed himself to have been divinely healed and then called into ministry.
- Agnes Ozman, a young woman at the Bible school, was the first to supposedly speak in tongues.

    J. Gordon Melton: Late in 1900, departing for an evangelistic trip, he asked his students to search Scripture for citations about the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Among Methodist Holiness people, the baptism was associated with their experience of sanctification, a second act of grace, which God worked among believers to make them perfect in love. The students discovered that speaking in tongues seemed to be the sign of the baptism. On New Year's Eve, the group began to pray for the baptism, and in the morning hours of January 1, 1901, Agnes Ozman (1870–1937) became the first person in modern times to successfully pray for the baptism and actually speak in tongues. The connection between baptism of the Spirit with speaking in tongues became the distinguishing feature of Pentecostalism. In the context of his Holiness background, Parham presented the baptism of the Holy Spirit as a third work of grace in the life of a believer who had already experienced sanctification (*Encyclopedia of Protestantism*, 417).

- Speaking of this event, Parham noted:

    Charles Parham: I laid my hands upon her and prayed. I had scarcely completed three dozen sentences when a glory fell upon her, a halo seemed to surround her head and face, and she began speaking the Chinese language and was unable to speak

English for three days. When she tried to write in English to tell us of her experience she wrote the Chinese. (Cited from Synan, 44).

Daniel Epstein: At their New Year's Eve service, Agnes Ozman asked her teacher to lay his hands upon her head. She asked him to pray that she might receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit with the "Biblical sign." Parham's students had all agreed independently that speaking in tongues would be the only indisputable proof of the end-time Holy Spirit baptism.

Parham did as he was asked. He laid his hands upon Agnes Ozman and prayed for a sign. A halo immediately appeared around her head. This must have been an unsettling experience. But the halo was not nearly so unnerving as what came out of her mouth, an eerie and at first unrecognizable singing. Someone at length identified it as Chinese.

Agnes Ozman had grown up in rural Nebraska. She went to Bible school in St. Paul and New York and served as a missionary in Kansas City before coming to Topeka. She had not heard ten words of Chinese in her life. But for the next three days the poor woman would not speak a word of English, nothing but Chinese. It had to be translated by a local citizen who had some familiarity with the language. (*Sister Aimee: The Life of Aimee Semple McPherson*, 44).

- According to some sources, Ozman also claimed to be able to speak other languages as well. In her testimony, she asserted that at least two eastern European natives were able to understand some of what she said when she spoke in tongues.

Agnes Ozman: On January 2, some of us went down to Topeka to a mission. As we worshipped the Lord I offered prayer in English and then prayed in another language in tongues. A Bohemian who was present said that he understood what I said. Some months later at a school house with others, in a meeting, I spoke in tongues in the power of the spirit and another Bohemian understood me. Since then others have understood other languages I have spoken. (Printed in the *Apostolic Faith*, 1951; cited from apostolicarchives.com; cf. Nils Bloch-Hoell, *The Pentecostal Movement*, 24)

- Notice that details in Ozman's testimony do not line up with details in Parham's memoir. (He said she did not speak English for three days. She said she was praying in English on the very next day.) Other such discrepancies have been noted by historians.

Martin E. Marty: At Topeka, Kansas, Parham imposed virtually monastic discipline on his followers, including the hypochondriac and ailing Miss Ozman. When he commanded study, she studied; when he ordered students to make converts, she proselytized. She longed for the Holy Spirit, she said, more than for her food. When Parham commanded her and others to seek signs of the Holy Spirit, she and her cohorts approached New Year's Day, 1901, testifying to the power of tongue-speaking of the sort they read about in the Book of Acts, "when the Pentecostal blessing fell." If disciples then "spake with other tongues," why not now?

Why not? New Year's Eve was prayer-service time. On the first morning of the new century, Ozman later remembered it: "I asked Bro. Parham to pray and to lay hands on me that I might receive the Baptism in the Holy Ghost. . . ." While he did so, "Bless HIM! I talked several languages for it was manifested when a dilect [sic] was spoken." Ozman claimed to be using Chinese and other foreign languages. Here was the new Book of Acts being written in Kansas. Two days later at a nearby Free Methodist church others spoke in tongues. When normal boundaries break, participants look for signals. Parham spoke in "Sweedish tongue, which later changed to other languages. . . ." Howard D. Stanley testified: "I saw the clovend [sic] tongues as of fire came down into the room and my vocal cords and tongue changed and I was speaking with another language and so was most of the others."

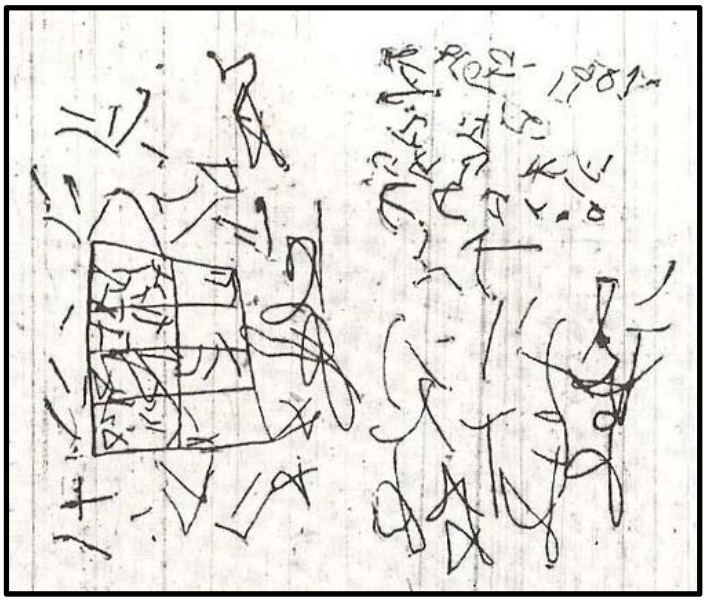
Like all such mythically cast stories, these had certain features that remain open to question. In an earlier stratum of testimony Miss Ozman referred to having spoken in tongues three weeks before New Year's Day, a less neat date, but one which others corroborated. She also claimed that she realized the significance of her speaking only later, but it is known that Parham had instructed her in advance to look for precisely that sign. The Pentecostals were generating group-behavior patterns that resulted at least in some measure from their participating within a highly conducive atmosphere. These people together generated a common cherishable experience. No Pentecostal would have listened to any explanation that took away the supernatural role of the Spirit.

Language was only part of the issue, but it was most colorful. Years later Sarah Parham wrote a fabulous life of Charles Fox Parham. By now she claimed that linguistics professors, foreigners, and government interpreters soon listened in at "Stone's Folly," the temporary abode of the Parham school They heard twenty distinct unstuttered and clear Chinese dialects. She averred that even a rabbi was astounded when a student read in Hebrew from an English Bible. "No not that one," he said when offered the text. "I want to see the Hebrew Bible. That man read in the Hebrew tongue." The Topeka Capitol called it all fakery, as it reported: "Queer Faith, Strange Acts . . . Believers Speak in Strange Languages."

> The Kansas City World saw the events as misfit in modernity: "These people have a faith almost incomprehensible at this day." Yet not all remained well. Parham soon abandoned Stone's Mansion, calling it a "pleasure resort," and in fulfillment of a dream he'd had, it burned.
> (*Modern American Religion, Volume 1: The Irony of It All:* 1893–1919, 240–41)

- As a result of the Topeka Pentecost, Parham pioneered the doctrine that tongues were the biblical evidence of "baptism in the Holy Spirit," and should be expected of those who had been converted and gone on to perfect sanctification.

- During the series of revival meetings that followed, it was later claimed that students of Parham spoke in 21 languages including Swedish, Russian, Japanese, Bulgarian, French, Norwegian, Hungarian, Italian, and Spanish.



A picture of Agnes Ozman's writings in "Chinese."
(Image from www.apostolicarchives.com.)

- Parham taught that missionaries do not need to study foreign languages, since the supernatural impartation of the gift of tongues would enable them to preach in miraculous tongues all over the world.

- Parham thus founded the Apostolic Faith movement and began on a revival tour around the Midwest.

Sherry DuPree: The ministry of Charles Parham was quite extensive. [His daughter-in-law] Pauline Parham's newspaper collection indicate[s] that revivals were held throughout the Midwest. Many of the newspaper articles described the new phenomenon of "Speaking in Tongues" and miraculous healings. The revivals were held between 1901 and 1906. One can also glean from Parham's picture collection that some of his followers were African Americans (*African-American Holiness Pentecostal Movement*, 121).

- During this time, **William Joseph Seymour** came under the influence of Parham in his Houston Bible School.

Charles R. Fox: Though [W. J.] Seymour had been a student in Parham's school before coming to Los Angeles, he never fully embraced all of Parham's teachings. Charles Parham's wife, Sarah, depicted Seymour as a faithful school attendant, and model student, who embraced all of the school's truths and teachings. Mrs. Parham asserted that Seymour was so well versed in Parham's teachings that he could recite them verbatim. But she does not account for the fact that Seymour wholly rejected some of Parham's more extreme teachings, such as annihilation of the wicked, and the eighth day creation (*William J. Seymour*, 139).

  - **Azusa Street Revival**. In 1906 tongues were spoken at Azusa Street in Los Angeles.

    - Seymour arrived in Los Angeles on Feb. 22, 1906 and became the pastor of a Nazarene Church.

    - He was invited to Los Angeles and preached on Acts 2:4, claiming that “anyone who does not speak in tongues is not baptized with the Holy Spirit,” though he himself had not received the gift of tongues. Although the congregation had claimed the “baptism of the Holy Spirit” for years, they were offended by Seymour‘s statements of not having another spiritual “experience.”

    - They church was not happy about his teachings and padlocked the door to keep him out.

    - Seymour’s definition of Baptism in the Spirit:

William J Seymour: The [leadership] of the Holiness Association … [taught] the Baptism with the Holy Ghost, that it was simply sanctification… They stated that sanctification was the baptism of the Holy Ghost. But yet they did not have the evidence of Acts 2, for when the disciples were all filled with the Holy Ghost, they spoke in tongues as the Spirit gave utterance. After the president heard me speak of what the true baptism of the Holy Ghost was, he said he wanted it, too, and told me when I had received it to let him know. (Cited from, Kay & Dyer, *Pentecostal and Charismatic Studies*, 13).

- Seymour began holding meetings in the homes of members and became the pastor of a black holiness church in a former African Methodist Episcopal church building located at 312 Azusa Street in downtown Los Angeles.

- On April 9, 1906, beginning with an eight-year-old boy, many received the baptism of the Holy Spirit at a prayer meeting held on Bonnie Brae Street. For the next three and a half years, three daily prayer/revival services were held at Azusa Street Apostolic Faith Mission (312 Azusa), where thousands received the baptism in the Holy Spirit with tongues.

- Even the *Los Angeles Times* covered this event. It described the event with these words:

  "Breathing strange utterances and mouthing a creed which it seems no sane mortal could understand … preach the wildest theories and work themselves into a state of mad excitement in their particular zeal…. They claim to have the 'gift of tongues,' and to be able to comprehend the babel."

Los Angeles Daily Time

WEDNESDAY MORNING, APRIL 18, 1906.

WEIRD BABEL OF TONGUES.

New Sect of Fanatics Is Breaking Loose.

Wild Scene Last Night on Azusa Street.

Gurgle of Wordless Talk by a Sister.

- By December 1906 many mission churches had been started in L.A. and others were beginning throughout the U.S.

- The first peak of the Azusa Street Revival last about three years until 1909, when attendance of the revival meeting began to wane because of the rise of sectarianism and lack of general acceptance.

- Today the Azusa Street Mission does not exist. It was demolished in 1931. On its place today is the Japanese-American Cultural and Community Center.

- The events in Kansas and Los Angeles became the foundation for mainline Pentecostal denominations.

- Although Charles Parham had helped to spark the Pentecostal Movement, he soon found himself alienated from it.

  Jack Hayford and David Moore: Parham was aware since April [1906] that William Seymour was now leading a Pentecostal revival in Los Angeles. Seymour regularly wrote Parham keeping him updated on events and asking him to come and help lead the revival. The Midwest travels and the events in Zion had delayed his going to Los Angeles until October. That trip, chronicled in the next chapter, was another turning point for Charles F. Parham. There his racism became fully visible and the decline of his influence began. ...

  Parham [eventually] traveled to Texas but ran into even more trouble. Long the target of rumors of homosexual activity, he was arrested in San Antonio and charged with sodomy. Oddly Parham did little to defend himself, expecting that his followers would simply trust that the charges were false. While the charges were eventually dropped, some of Parham's associates thought they were true and the incident left a shadow over Parham's ministry that he could never escape. Along with concerns over financial management, his eccentric doctrines, and racist attitudes Parham became an embarrassment to the Pentecostal movement as it grew in the first decades of the twentieth century.

  Parham's reaction was both one of retreat and accusation. He withdrew to his one remaining stronghold, the Galena area of Kansas, establishing a base in nearby Baxter Springs. From there he bitterly denounced Seymour and other Pentecostal leaders. He became an ardent segregationist and in his later years offered praise to the Ku Klux Klan. For over twenty years until his death in 1929, Parham was alienated from ignored by the movement he helped start (*The Charismatic Century*, Thomas Nelson, chapter 3).

KEY POINT REGARDING TONGUES: It is important to note that the Pentecostals, at this point, believed that the gift of tongues consisted of authentic foreign languages. It was not until later (when it became obvious that they were not speaking authentic foreign languages) that the Pentecostal position was adjusted to allow for non-language form of tongues-speaking.

Some early Pentecostals traveled to the mission field assuming they would be able to evangelize without needing to learn the language:

> **Robert Mapes Anderson:** "Alfred G. Garr (at right) and his wife went to the Far East with the conviction that they could preach the gospel in 'the Indian and Chinese languages.' Lucy Farrow went to Africa and returned after seven months during which she was alleged to have preached to the natives in their own 'Kru language.' The German pastor and analyst Oskar Pfister reported the case of a Pentecostal... 'Simon,' who had planned to go to China using tongues for preaching. Numerous other Pentecostal missionaries went abroad believing they had the miraculous ability to speak in the languages of those to whom they were sent. These Pentecostal claims were well known at the time. S.C. Todd of the Bible Missionary Society investigated eighteen Pentecostals who went to Japan, China, and India 'expecting to preach to the natives in those countries in their own tongue,' and found that by their own admission 'in no single instance have [they] been able to do so.' As these and other missionaries returned in disappointment and failure, Pentecostals were compelled to rethink their original view of speaking in tongues" (Robert Mapes Anderson, *Vision of the Disinherited: The Making of American Pentecostalism*).

- W. H. Durham's "Finished Work" Movement (1909–1912)
    - Durham was a Chicago pastor who came to visit Azusa Street Mission in 1907 and subsequently received the baptism with the Holy Spirit as evidenced by speaking in tongues.

> **W. H. Durham:** On Friday evening, March 1, His mighty power came over me, until I jerked and quaked under it for about three hours. It was strange and wonderful and yet glorious. He worked my whole body, one section at a time, first my arms, then my limbs, then my body, then my head, then my face, then my chin, and finally at 1 a.m. Saturday, Mar. 2, after being under the power for three hours, He finished the work on my vocal organs, and spoke through me in unknown tongues. I arose, perfectly conscious outwardly and inwardly that I was fully baptized in the Holy Ghost, and the devil can never tempt me to doubt it. First I was conscious that a living Person had come into me, and that He

> possessed even my physical being, in a literal sense, in so much that He could at His will take hold of my vocal organs, and speak any language He chose through me. Then I had such power on me and in me as I never had before. And last but not least, I had a depth of love and sweetness in my soul that I had never even dreamed of before, and a holy calm possessed me, and a holy joy and peace, that is deep and sweet beyond anything I ever experienced before, even in the sanctified life. And O! such victory as He gives me all the time. (*The Apostolic Faith*, March 1907. http://enrichmentjournal.ag.org/200602/extra_Durham.cfm)

- After returning to Chicago, Durham worked to spread the Pentecostal message faithfully.

- Upon moving his ministry to Los Angeles and returning to Azusa Street Mission in 1911, Durham began preaching the doctrine of the "finished work," which repudiated the holiness doctrine of sanctification as a second work of grace and instead declared that everything a believer would ever need was included in Christ's work on the cross.

- The "finished work" doctrine became such a controversy that W.J. Seymour, who had previously prophesied that "wherever [Durham] preaches, the Holy Spirit will come down on the people," expelled Durham from Apostolic Faith Church in 1912. Concerning his disagreement with the "three-stage way" of salvation within the Pentecostals, Durham wrote:

> **W. H. Durham:** "I began to write against the doctrine that it takes two works of grace to save and cleanse a man. I denied and still deny that God does not deal with the nature of sin at conversion. I deny that a man who is converted or born again is outwardly washed and cleansed but that his heart is left unclean with enmity against God in it…This would not be salvation."

- Durham's "finished work" doctrine would go on to influence Pentecostal groups such as the Assemblies of God, The Pentecostal Church of God, the Open Bible Standard Church, The International Church of the Foursquare Gospel, etc.

Theological Distinctions between Holiness and Pentecostalism			
	Stage 1	**Stage 2**	**Stage 3**
Holiness Churches	*Conversion* (also called regeneration)	*Sanctification* - Distinct in time and content from conversion - Also called "baptism of the Holy Spirit" or "second blessing" - Known as the "Wesleyan understanding" of sanctification - Sanctification at a definite fixed time	
Three-Stage Pentecostals *Parham, Seymour*	*Conversion* (also called regeneration)	*Sanctification* - Distinct in time and content from conversion - Also called "second blessing" - Sanctification at a definite fixed time - The pastoral theme behind this form of sanctification is that the Spirit can only enter purified hearts	*Baptism of the Spirit* with tongues-speaking
Two-Stage Pentecostals	*Conversion* (also called regeneration) all one needs to live a sanctified life is received	*Baptism of the Holy Spirit* - With speaking in tongues - Sanctification is a process that continues through life - Known as the "Baptist understanding" of sanctification	
Source: *The Pentecostals*, Walter J. Hollenweger, 25.			

DIVERSITY WITHIN PENTECOSTALISM (1906–1959)

From the beginning of the Pentecostal movement until the middle of the 20th century, Pentecostals were considered outcasts of Protestantism. Despite being excluded from mainline denominational churches, Pentecostalism grew out of its origins in socio-economically challenged communities and eventually gained greater social acceptance.

The Church of God in Christ

- Largely African-American, the Church of God in Christ was founded in 1897 in Memphis, Tennessee by church leaders C.H. Mason, son of former slaves, and C.P. Jones.

- Mason & Jones began their preaching ministry in Lexington, Mississippi, where they proclaimed the Wesleyan doctrine of entire sanctification as a second work of grace. Eventually, they would start the first Pentecostal church in America—the Church of God in Christ in Memphis.

- By 1906, the Church of God in Christ had spread widely into Tennessee, Mississippi, and Arkansas when news of the Azusa Street Revival reached the church and caused a division between Mason & Jones.

- Mason travelled to Los Angeles to witness the revival and received the Baptism. When he had returned to Memphis to proclaim the new doctrine of tongues, the church withdrew his membership. However, after two years of struggle, the Church of God in Christ became the first official denominational member of the Pentecostal movement in 1909.

- The Church of God in Christ would eventually grow to become one of the largest and fastest growing Pentecostal denominations in the world.

Church of God

- In 1903, A.J. Tomlinson, a Quaker involved in the holiness movement received a vision of God restoring the entire body of Christ to the faith of the New Testament. Tomlinson subsequently joined the "Holiness Church at Camp Creek" in North Carolina.

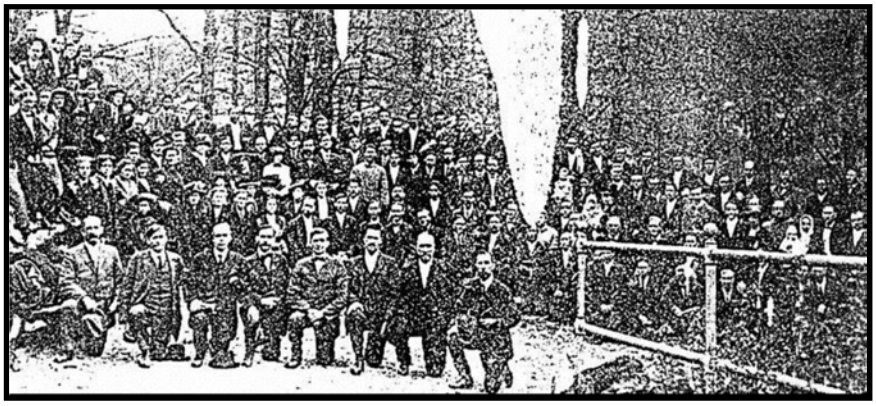
- Camp Creek established a mission in Cleveland, Tennessee, which came under the new doctrinal influence of the Azusa Street Revival under the leadership of Tomlinson. In 1908, Tomlinson was "baptized" and reportedly spoke 10 different languages in succession. Thus the church in Cleveland, which eventually became known as Church of God, became part of the Pentecostal movement.

- The Church of God in Cleveland eventually grew to become one of the mainstream members of the Pentecostal movement, joining the National Association of Evangelicals in 1943 and establishing affiliate churches internationally. In 2000, the Cleveland Church of God numbered nearly six million members and adherents over eighty nations worldwide.

Assemblies of God

- Assemblies of God is the first denomination to be entirely born of the Pentecostal Movement that started at Azusa Street.

- In 1914, an assembly of 300, many of whom were white Pentecostals ministers associated with C.H. Mason's Church of God in Christ, first gathered in Hot Springs, Arkansas.



- The group formed for a variety of reasons including: greater doctrinal unity and support among increasingly diversified versions of Pentecostalism, the need for a centralized foreign

missions agency, the establishment of Bible schools for future leaders, etc. Notable leaders in the founding members of the Assemblies of God are E. N. Bell, a former Baptist minister, J. Rosewell Flower, and M. M. Pinson.

- In 1914, led by Frank Ewart and Glenn Cook, the "Jesus only" or "Jesus' name" movement proclaimed disbelief in the Trinitarian nature of God. The movement caused founder E. N. Bell to be rebaptized "in Jesus' name" and eventually caused a denominational split in 1916.

- With 35 million members around the globe, the Assemblies of God is the largest and most well-known Pentecostal denomination in the world today.

The International Church of the Foursquare Gospel

- In July 1922, world famous evangelist Aimee Semple McPherson preached a message in Oakland, California on the vision of the four living creatures recorded in Ezekiel 1:4–28. McPherson saw an aspect of the "complete gospel" in each of the four creatures: the face of man was Jesus as Savior; the face of the lion was Jesus as baptizer in the Holy Spirit; the ox was Jesus as Healer; and the eagle was Jesus as coming King.

- McPherson constructed the Angelus Temple, which seated 5,300 people, and conducted 21 weekly services. "Sister Aimee" served as the pastor at Angelus Temple from 1923 to 1944, during which time she also became a radio evangelist and national celebrity.

> **William Kay & Anne Dyer on McPherson:** [She] shook off the grief of young widowhood to become one of America's most colorful, flamboyant, controversial and effective evangelists. Her histrionic sermons, preached before thousands in the huge Angelus Temple, Los Angeles, brought Hollywood to the pulpit (*Pentecostal and Charismatic Studies*, 27).

- The "four-fold" pattern of McPherson's visionary gospel, emphasizing the doctrines of salvation, healing, the baptism of the Holy Spirit, and the second coming of Christ, became the foundational teachings of the denomination, and would later influence the mainstream Pentecostals' emphasis of the "full gospel" (cf. Donald W. Dayton, *Theological Roots of Pentecostalism*, 21).

- In 1926, McPherson was involved in a major scandal which forever tainted her reputation:

  Kevin Starr: Once widowed, once divorced, Sister Aimee was in her mid-thirties, vital in every aspect of life, at the height of her fame. The object of one aspect of her vitality was Kenneth G. Ormiston, employed at the Temple as station engineer for KFSG, but unfortunately a married man. The ensuing farce survives today as Aimee Semple McPherson's enduring claim to notoriety. On the afternoon of 18 May 1926 McPherson was last seen at Ocean Park, a swimming area near Venice. She was presumed to have drowned, but a massive search by police and Temple members failed to discover any body. In the search two people, a diver and a Temple member, were themselves drowned. A little more than a month later, three days after an all-day memorial service at Angelus Temple, McPherson resurfaced on 23 June in the small Sonoran town of Agua Prieta, claiming to have been kidnapped and to have escaped from a shack in the Sonoran desert where she was being held captive. Researches with a taste for American-style grande guignol have patiently unraveled the entire episode. It is all but certain that Sister Aimee took a month's vacation in the company of Kenneth Ormiston, spending part of this time in a honeymoon cottage in Carmel. District Attorney Asa Keyes produced a grocery list from the Carmel cottage in what was unmistakenly McPherson's handwriting. For nearly half a year, Keyes gathered evidence preparatory to taking McPherson to trial on charges of conspiracy to produce false testimony. The embattled minister defended herself vocierfously all the while against the storm of scandal and innuendo that swept Lost Angeles. The [fundamentalist] Reverend Bob Shuler took to his desk to produce a sixty-four-page pamphlet on the affair which, even if one grants the venom running through every line, reduced McPherson's kidnapping story to total absurdity while at the same time ridiculing her on dozens of other points of theology and behavior.

  McPherson escaped going to trial when the District Attorney, fearing that his case fell short of the total conclusiveness needed to convict a person of McPherson's poopularity, withdrew charges at the last possible moment. Her disappearance and feigned kidnapping, however, spiced by the motive of sexual adventure, rendered her a laughingstock. After a year and more of press scrutiny and legal investigation, Aimee Semple McPherson became that from which no public figure can ever recover momentum–an object of public ridicule. The faithful held on, joyously mobbing her in a Temple celebration on the evening charges were dropped; but any larger influence she might have once possessed disappeared. She continued to preach until her death in 1944 from an overdose of Seconal (ruled accidental), but the scandal and the need to refute it proved a distracting burden (*Material Dreams*, 142–43).

- She has also been connected with the beginnings of the “Prosperity Gospel” within early Pentecostalism.

Ross Douthat: From the Jazz Age evangelist Aimee Semple McPherson down to TBN's nightly lineup of televangelists, Pentecostalist worship and prosperity preaching have been consistently intertwined. Indeed, prosperity theology may actually be eclipsing ecstatic prayer as the defining attribute of modern charismatic Christianity. As *Christianity Today*'s Ted Olsen noted in 2006, only half of American Pentecostalists report having spoken in tongues—but 66 percent agreed with the premise that "God grants believers wealth." (*Bad Religion* [Simon & Schuster, 2012], 194).

* * * * *

THE CHARISMATIC RENEWAL (1960–79) – The Second Wave

Since the beginning of the Pentecostal movement in the early 20th century, Pentecostalism remained a doctrinal adherence of people outside of the mainline Christian denominations in America. The Pentecostals were generally considered to be poor, uneducated, and their worship services noisy and disorderly. Speaking in tongues, prophesying, and exorcising demons were also considered bizarre behavior outside of normal "Christian behavior." However, this perception of the Pentecostal "outcast" would all change in the mid–20th century.

<u>Van Nuys Revival</u> (1960)

- In November 1959, **Dennis Bennett**, the rector of St. Mark's Episcopal Church in Van Nuys, California, was baptized in the Holy Spirit and began to pray in tongues. This was considered a remarkable event because Bennett was previously among those who disapproved of those who championed the baptism of the Holy Spirit, namely the Pentecostals.

- At the time, the Episcopalian denomination was considered one of the most respected groups of Protestants in America, as opposed to the Pentecostals, who were essentially at the "bottom of the chain" of Christian groups. It seemed very unlikely for Episcopalians to partake in the Pentecostal movement, until Bennett's experience led to the change in perception of the "baptism" in mainline denominations.

- Tongues-speaking gifts spread throughout his church, but was met with opposition by the majority. Bennett eventually resigned from St. Mark's Episcopal Church, but soon his

controversial advocacy of the gift of tongues caught the attention of the media, such as *Time* and *Newsweek*, which gave Bennett and overnight publicity as a leader of the so-called, Neo-Pentecostal movement among traditional denominations. The news reported, "glossolalia seems to be on its way back in US churches—not only in the uninhibited Pentecostal sects, but even among the Episcopalians."

- Having moved on to Seattle, Washington, Bennett continued his ministry of the Charismatic Renewal Movement at St. Luke's Episcopal Church. Soon, Christians of all different denominations, Baptists, Methodists, Catholics, and Presbyterians, began to attend St. Luke's prayer meetings, which reported an average of 20 people being baptized in the Holy Spirit per week.

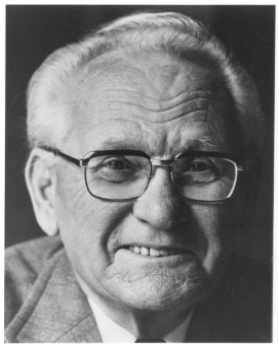
    - **Regarding Speaking in Tongues, Bennett taught:** "Open your mouth and show that you believe the Lord has baptized you in the Spirit by beginning to speak. Don't speak English, or any other language you know, for God can't guide you to speak in tongues if you are speaking in a language known to you. ... Just like a child learning to talk for the first time, open your mouth and speak out the first syllables and expressions that come to your lips. ... You may begin to speak, but only get out a few halting sounds. That's wonderful! You've broken the 'sound barrier'! Keep in with those sounds. Offer them to God. Tell Jesus you love Him in those 'joyful noises'! In a very real sense, any sound you make, offering your tongue to God in simple faith, may be the beginning of speaking in tongues" (Dennis Bennett, *The Holy Spirit and You*, pp. 76, 77, 79).

- One advocate of the revival described the movement as:

  "a spiritual movement that is defrosting a frigid church; … that is converting cocktail Christians into tithers; that is relaxing stiff-necked Pharisees confirmed in the faith but firmed in a past experience long dead; that is rocking the chairs of worldly bishops who make investigations in order to control the Holy Spirit; that metamorphoses social butterflies into spiritual dynamos" (Walter Hollenweger, *The Pentecostals*, 5).

- *The Journal of General Convention of Episcopal Bishops* was published in 1962 and affirmed that "God's Spirit is ever moving in new ways" and since "the church should not be a sect, but should be spacious," the Charismatic Renewal/Neo-Pentecostal Movement should relate itself to the "full rich, balanced life of the historic church" (Vincent Synan, *The Century of the Holy Spirit*, 156).

- Because of the acceptance of the Charismatic Renewal at the denomination level, the statement above became the official attitude toward the Neo-Pentecostal movement and opened the door to wide acceptance and participation of charismatics in the church. Soon after, the movement would begin to influence the Anglican church of England.



David du Plessis (1905-1987)—Raised in racially prejudice South Africa in a predominately white Pentecostal church, du Plessis became known as the ambassador of Pentecostalism to the rest of the church, communicating the doctrine of the Holy Spirit to many non-Pentecostals.

Du Plessis served as the General Secretary of the Apostolic Faith Mission and was involved in the first Pentecostal World Conference in 1947, held in Zurich.

Du Plessis also became a source of counsel for many mainline protest ministers who had experienced the baptism of the Holy Spirit and were deciding whether or not to remain in their denomination. He is also a champion of ecumenism, by which he earned the nickname among Protestant and Catholics, "Mr. Pentecost." (Source: *The Century of the Holy Spirit*, 361)

<u>Other Traditional Denominations</u>

- ***Lutheran*** – In 1947, a dynamic Lutheran lay leader, **Harald Bredesen**, was so impressed by the charismatic church service of an Assemblies of God congregation that he began to speak in tongues and became an advocate for the movement in his denomination.

    - Bredesen gained substantial influence in the 1960s when he eventually served on the staff of the World Council of Christian Education in New York, and led many to the Pentecostal experience, including notable figures like Pat Boone and Pat Robertson.

    - Many branches of the American Lutheran denomination became a part of the Pentecostal experience during the early 1960s, including the American Lutheran Church (ALC), Lutheran Church in America (LCA), etc.

    - *Christianity Today* conducted a poll in 1979 through Gallup Poll and estimated that 20 percent of all American Lutherans identified with the charismatic/Pentecostal renewal (cf. Vincent Synan, *The Century of the Holy Spirit*, 165).

- ***Presbyterian*** – Because of the influence of Presbyterian theologians such as B. B. Warfield and Charles Hodge, many 20th century Presbyterians sided with fundamentalism and rejected perfectionism and Pentecostalism. However, by the time the Charismatic Renewal began, the Presbyterians grew to become very involved in the movement.

    - The first notable Presbyterian minister to receive the Baptism of the Holy Spirit was **James Brown** of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Even prior to the famous Van Nuys Revival in 1960, Brown already boasted one of the largest "Charismatic prayer meetings" in the United States.

    - The Presbyterian Charismatic Communion (PCC) was organized in 1966 in efforts to "renew" the denomination, becoming the first charismatic organization to be formed in a mainline denomination. Within a couple years, hundreds of Presbyterian ministers and laypersons joined the organization.

- ***Methodist*** – Methodism's Holiness Movement was a great influence to the beginnings of the Pentecostal movement in the earlier part of the 20th century, especially since the Pentecostals' "second blessing" originated with Wesley. Until the era of the Neo-Pentecostal movement, many Holiness and Methodist Churches, such as the Church of the Nazarene, focused on the ethical cleansing aspect of the "second baptism," while their Pentecostal brothers stressed the experience of speaking in tongues.

    - Throughout the 1960s and into the 1970s, many within the Methodist church have been drawn to the Pentecostal experience through the leadership of many charismatic leaders such as Tommy Tyson, an early "convert" of the Methodist renewal, and Oral Roberts, one the most well-known charismatic figures of the movement.

Oral Roberts (1918-2009) – Born in Oklahoma to a home of Pentecostal holiness preachers, Roberts became known for his divine-healing crusades in the 1950s.

In 1965, he established Oral Roberts University and received much financial support from several Methodist congregations, and he eventually joined the United Methodist Church in 1968. ORU eventually became an important training ground for Methodist ministers.

Roberts is best known for his radio and television evangelism appearances. At one point, he was heard on 500 radio and television stations throughout the US every Sunday.

- The United Methodist Renewal Services Fellowship (UMRSF) was formed in 1977 and organized the famous Kansas City Charismatics Conference, which was participated by Pentecostal denominations, classic protestant denominations, as well as Catholic charismatics.

- ***Baptists*** – The baptism of the Holy Spirit was largely absent from typical Baptist doctrine, which was originally founded upon the importance of the believer‘s baptism. The first Baptist involvement within the Pentecostal movement can be traced back to 1906, when a group of Free-Will Baptists in North and South Carolina received the “baptism” after becoming influenced by the Azusa Street Revival.

    - One early Neo-Pentecostal Baptist minister was **John Osteen** (father of Joel Osteen), a southern Baptist minister, who first received the gift of tongues in 1958 but was charged with heresy by his Hibbard Baptist Church. Eventually, many among Osteen‘s congregation received the baptism and together they organized Lakewood Baptist Church in 1961.

    - **Pat Robertson** is one of the most notable figures in the charismatic renewal movement. Robertson first spoke in tongues when he received the Baptism of the Holy Spirit in 1957, while serving under Lutheran pastor Harald Bredesen.

    - Robertson established the **Christian Broadcasting Network** in Virginia in 1960, and has become a legendary figure in American religion and television industry. Robertson’s ministry was so influential that in 1988, he entered the race for the Republican nomination for the president of the United States.

- ***Roman Catholicism*** – Interestingly, one of the major effects of the Charismatic Renewal movement came upon Roman Catholics. Referring to themselves as Catholic Charismatics, these Catholics who were baptized in the Holy Spirit strived to integrate charismatic theology with traditional Catholic dogma.

    - The origin of the Catholic renewal movement is associated with a group of 25 Catholics students at a retreat near Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania on February 18, 1967. The group received the baptism of the Spirit, evidenced by laughing, prostrating to the floor, and speaking in tongues. One of the students, **Patty Gallagher**, described the meeting:

        “The professors then laid hands on some of the students but most of us received the baptism in the Spirit while kneeling before the blessed sacrament

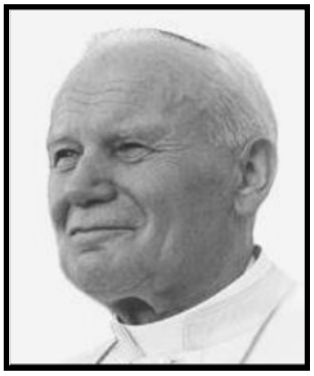
in prayer. Some of us started speaking in tongues; others received gifts of discernment, prophecy, and wisdom" (*The Century of the Holy Spirit*, 209).

- Many Catholic theologians involved in the Charismatic renewal combine writings of Catholic mystics with the traditional teachings of the church in seeking to interpret the movement within the realms of acceptable Catholic assessment.

- For the most part, Catholic charismatics sought to keep a positive relation with the Vatican and strived to show their submission to the Church.

- In the International Catholic Charismatic Renewal Conference held in 1973, Pope Paul VI appointed Cardinal Leon Joseph Suenens as his special adviser to oversee the reception of the Charismatic Renewal into the life of the Catholic Church.

- **Pope John Paul II:** The vigor and fruitfulness of the Renewal certainly attest to the powerful presence of the Holy Spirit at work in the Church in these years after the Second Vatican Council. Of course, the Spirit has guided the Church in every age, producing a great variety of gifts among the faithful. Because of the Spirit, the Church preserves a continual youthful vitality. And the Charismatic Renewal is an eloquent manifestation of this vitality today, a bold statement of what the Spirit is saying to the Churches (Rev. 2:7) as we approach the close of the second millennium. – Rome, 1987



- **Robert Culpepper** makes an interesting observation about the Catholic Charismatic Renewal Movement:

> It is truly remarkable that Catholics have received anything so obviously Protestant in its origins. It is also easy to understand why Catholic charismatics have been unwilling to accept Pentecostalism in unaltered form but have sought to stamp a Catholic image upon it…. Catholic charismatics have been so eager to show that they are still loyal Catholics, though their life has taken on a charismatic dimension … they remain committed Catholics, despite some emphases that seem quite evangelical‖ (*Evaluating the Charismatic Movement*, 157).

NOTABLE FEATURES OF CHARISMATIC THEOLOGY & PRACTICES

The theology of the Pentecostal and Neo-Pentecostal movement is largely built upon an attempt to duplicate the experience of the apostles recorded in the book of Acts.

- **Baptism of the Holy Spirit and gifts**

    - Like the original Pentecostal Movement of the early 20th century, which began on Azusa Street, the Charismatic Renewal Movement also emphasized the Baptism of the Holy Spirit as evidenced in the gift of speaking in tongues.

    - Although Agnes Ozman reported spoke in Chinese and Parham believed in the gift of tongues to be actual foreign languages. The gift of tongues in the Charismatic renewal movement has been dominated by the practice of ***glossolalia***—"a religious phenomenon of making sounds that constitute, or resemble a language not known to the speaker. It is often accompanied by an excited religious psychological state" (*New International Dictionary of the Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, 670).

    - Those who practice glossolalia within the movement often refer to the unintelligible language as an "angelic language."

    - Other gifts that were associated with the baptism of the Holy Spirit included the gift of prophecy, Word of Wisdom, Word of Knowledge, the gift of discerning the spirits, etc.

    - Some Pentecostals hold to the **"latter-day rain"** theory, which says that the gifts of the Holy Spirit had ceased until the end of times and are now recurring in order to prepare for the Lord's coming (Thomas Edgar, *Satisfied by the Promise of the Spirit*, 12).

- **Healing by prayer**

    - Notable "healers" began to take center-stage in the charismatic circles as early as the post-World War II era. **William Branham**, an American Baptists preacher, claimed to have an angelic revelation in 1946, through which he acquired the ability to repel diseases, even cancer, through prayer.

    - Branham and many of his "healer" successors begin to define a significant trait of the majority of 20th century Pentecostal groups, the belief of healing through prayer. Not

in the sense of God healing disease through prayer, but that individuals were empowered by God to pray over the healing of the diseases.

- The effectiveness of the healing is said to be associated with the genuineness of the believer‘s faith and sincerity in prayer. One particular Assemblies of God healer, **Richard Vinyard** comments on healing in a 1958 Pentecostal conference:

  > “If you will turn your faith loose tonight you can take heaven home with you. If there is going to be any healing for that body in that heaven, there is healing down here now. Healing does not fail because of the will of God, but because of the disbelief of his children” (Walter Hollenweger, *The Pentecostals*, 358).

- Oral Roberts became a prominent figure of the healing revival in the 1950s. As the Charismatic Renewal began to take part, Roberts‘ influence allowed him to hold large healing crusades that featured a healing line in which he would lay hands on and pray for the sick. By 1968, when he stopped his crusades, Roberts had reportedly prayed for over a million people.

- **Struggles against “principalities and powers”**

  - Pentecostals of the Charismatic Renewal movement often express a vivid demonology, holding Satan and his devils responsible for many of the difficulties in life, including sins and trials. For example, demons of lies, of fornication, Hitler demons and divorce demons, etc.

  - Charismatics saw the realm of faith as a battleground within Satan and were very sensitive to his doings, often resulting in a form of prayer that is addressed to evil angels, declaiming and proclaiming defeat of satanic powers.

  - Deliverance from the alleged “devils” of various kinds, in other words, exorcisms, would then become the evidence that a person has encountered the power of the Holy Spirit.

- **The premillennial return of Christ**

  - Generally, Pentecostal eschatology points to the fact that the 20th century belongs in towards the end of God‘s plan, and the outpouring of the Spirit is a sign that the period of grace is ending in preparation for the final dispensation – the kingdom of God.

- There are a number of implications for the Pentecostal "latter rain" understanding of the end times, which refers to the "rain" of grace being poured out upon the church through the Holy Spirit in preparation for the final "harvest" at the end of days.

    - **First – Emphasis on Missions.** Since the Spirit was being poured out for the sake of preparing the harvest, believers who have received the baptism must utilize the charismatic gifts to evangelize the lost and bring in the kingdom of God.

    - **Second – Holiness of the Church.** The church and its believers who are filled with the Holy Spirit ought to lead lives of holiness. Some Pentecostals would this reason practice an attitude of life often perceived as legalistic. Many notable veteran Pentecostal ministers would wear the same suits, give away large amounts of money, etc.

    - **Third – Restoration of the Church.** To Pentecostals, the gradual diminishing of New Testament pointed to the removal of the Holy Spirit from the church, which is attributed to the waywardness of the church. The Pentecostal movement is thus perceived as an upward trajectory of the restoration of the Holy Spirit to the church, which often could make Pentecostals seemed as if they were elitist.

    - **Fourth – Global Influence.** According to Acts 2:17, the Holy Spirit is to be poured out upon "all flesh." Thus, Pentecostals sought to see God's work all over the world and striving to build communities in diverse racial and generational groups globally.

- **Televangelists**

    - The timely advancement of technology helped propagate the Charismatic Renewal Movement into a different realm of ministry unavailable to generations before. The popularity of the television would reshape the face of charismatic ministry.

    - By the 1960s, the healing revival crusades had begun to dwindle and attendance was waning. Thus, the growing charismatic movement combined with the advancement of religious television gave rise to many television Christian teachers.

- **Oral Roberts**, since the time when his healing crusades were first recorded and broadcasted on television in the 1950s, continued to be a dominant force in the realm of religious television.

- **Kenneth Copeland** was among the most popular television teachers in the 1980s. Copeland, along with other men such as **Kenneth Hagin**, continued to proclaim the healing message as well as a growing emphasis on God's promise for prosperity to His children (Harrell, *The Century of the Holy Spirit*, 337).

- While many still observed the healing evangelist conduct their massive revivals, teaching on the message of the Holy Spirit began to replace revival meetings on television broadcast.

- By the mid-1980s, **Jimmy Swaggart**'s ministry flourished because of the staggering amount of exposure through television broadcast. Swaggart's network consisted of 3,200 stations in 145 countries, and had more than $150 million of income per year.

- **Pat Robertson**'s *700 Club* on the Christian Broadcasting Network became a major success story of 20th century media. Trinity Broadcast Network was also launched in California in 1969 by **Jim Bakker** and **Paul Crouch**.

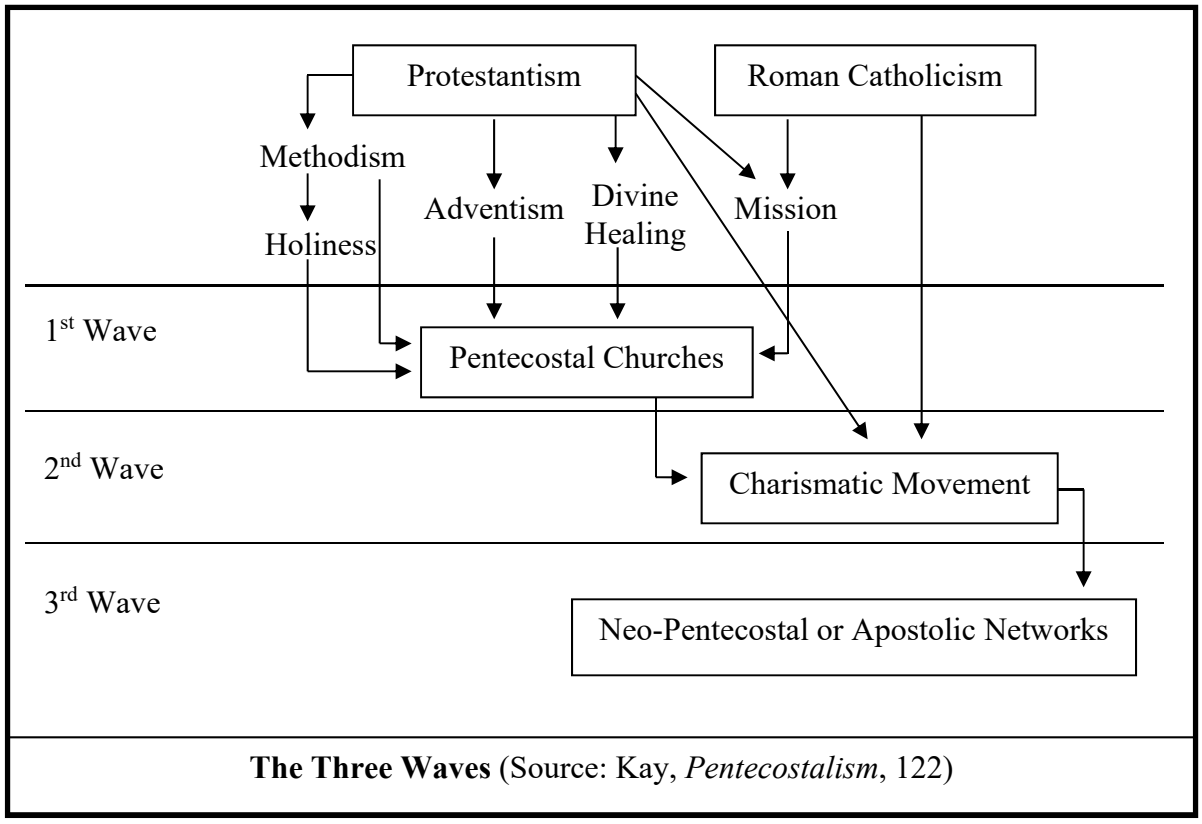
* * * * *

THE SIGNS & WONDERS MOVEMENT (1980–Present) – The Third Wave

Looking back in the history of charismatics, the "first wave" refers to the period of the early 20th century that gave rise to Pentecostalism, or "classical Pentecostalism," followed by a "second wave" that gave rise to the charismatic movement or charismatic renewal beginning in the 1960s. There is also a "third wave" which involved a "non-Pentecostal, non-charismatic, but neo-charismatic renewal" (*The New International Dictionary of the Pentecostal & Charismatic Movements*, 284).

- The "third wave" movement was largely composed of evangelical Christians who while supporting and applauding the work of the Spirit in the first two waves, have chosen not to be identified with either.

- Evangelical Christians desired to experience the power of the Holy Spirit through healing, exorcisms, prophecies, and other manifestations without disturbing the philosophy of ministries that were already in place.



The Three Waves (Source: Kay, *Pentecostalism*, 122)

Distinctives of the Third Wave

- Unlike the Pentecostal Movement, which believes that the baptism of the Holy Spirit is a second work of grace that occurs subsequent to the new birth, there is a widespread understanding in the Third Wave that the baptism of the Holy Spirit occurs at conversion (1 Cor. 12:13).

- There is an expectation of multiple "fillings of the Holy Spirit" after conversion, which some may closely resemble to what is known as the "Baptism of the Holy Spirit."

- A low-key acceptance of the gift of tongues. Speaking in tongues is not considered the initial physical evidence of spiritual baptism, but a gift to be used for ministry and prayer.

- Rather than the focus of individualized spiritual experiences, such as witnessing faith healers, the Third Wave looks for a ministry under the power and anointing of the Holy Spirit in the context of a body of believers.

- Third wave groups want to avoid divisiveness at any cost. Raising of hands in worship, public tongues and certain methods of prayer for the sick are accepted to maintain unity within churches. However, terms like "Charismatic" and "Spirit-filled" are generally rejected because of their elitist implications.

- **<u>Origins of the Third Wave</u>**

    - The term "third wave" was first used by **Peter Wagner** of Fuller Theological Seminary School of World Mission in 1983. According to Wagner, who rejected the label of "Pentecostal" and "charismatic," "the first wave was Pentecostal, the second the charismatic movement, and now the third wave is joining them" (MacArthur, *Charismatic Chaos*, 155).

        Peter Wagner: The Third Wave is a new moving of the Holy Spirit among evangelicals who, for one reason or another, have chosen not to identify with either Pentecostals or the charismatics…I see the Third Wave as distinct from, but at the same time very similar to the first and second waves. They have to be similar because it is the same Spirit of God who is doing the work… The major variation comes in the understanding of the meaning of the Baptism in the Holy Spirit and the role of tongues in authenticating this. (cited in MacArthur, *Charismatic Chaos*, 156)

    - **John Wimber**, minister of the Vineyard Christian Fellowship in Anaheim, California, was a big proponent of the Third Wave Movement. Wimber advocates his congregation to speak in tongues all at once and is persuaded that miracles, visions, tongues, prophecies, and healings are part of the gospel and power evangelism – hence the term Signs and Wonders Movement (or SWM).

        John Wimber: By power evangelism I mean a presentation of the gospel that is rational but that also transcends the rational. The explanation of the gospel comes with a demonstration of God's power through signs and wonders. Power evangelism is a spontaneous, Spirit-inspired, empowered presentation of the gospel…undergirded by supernatural demonstrations of God's presence…usually this takes the form of words of knowledge… healing , prophecy, and deliverance from evil spirits. (cited in MacArthur, *Charismatic Chaos*, 167)

- In 1970 Wimber joined the staff of the Yorba Linda Friends Church. Though he had a successful ministry, all was not well.

- "After encountering what he considered to be miraculous divine healings, he began to question his previous conviction. His experience led him in a new direction. Frustrated as a pastor of a fast-growing evangelical Friends church, Wimber left to join Wagner in doing church-growth consultations for the Fuller Evangelistic Association. The turning point for Wimber came in 1977 when his wife Carol was dramatically healed of what she called a 'personality meltdown.' While asleep she dreamed that she was filled with the Holy Spirit and then woke up speaking in tongues! This produced a change in Wimber's attitude from skepticism to openness concerning divine healing." (Ken Sarles, "An Appraisal of the Signs and Wonders Movement," *BibSac*,1988).

- Wimber's novel outlook led to the formation of a new kind of church in 1977—a "noncharismatic" church that focused on miraculous healings and other supernatural gifts. The church, known as the **Vineyard Christian Fellowship**, was started in Anaheim, California.

- In 1981 the Vineyard began to promote "power evangelism"—the use of signs and wonders for the purpose of evangelism. In less than a decade the church grew from a small Bible study of 17 people to a church of over 6,000.

- **<u>Basic Beliefs of SWM</u>** (cf. Michael Vlach's Historical Theology class notes)

  - The permanency of all spiritual gifts.

  - The miracles of the kingdom of God (George Ladd's already/not yet kingdom concept was important to leaders in the SWM.). Since the kingdom of God is present we should expect the miracles of the kingdom to be present as well.

  - Rejection of the western worldview

    - *Secularism*—the universe is closed off from divine intervention.

    - *Rationalism*—there must be a rational explanation for everything.

    - *Materialism*—nothing exists except matter and its movement and modifications.

- *Mechanism*—everything explained by cause and effect. No room for divine supernatural intervention.

  - Belief in the concept of the "excluded middle"

    - The first level is the material world.

    - The third level deals with transcendent realities like heaven and hell.

    - But there is a second level of reality in which there are things like spirits, ghosts, ancestors, demons, etc.. that are inhabitants of this world and time. This realm is recognized by the Eastern Worldview and was recognized by people in the West during the Middle Ages. But today, this second level is a 'blind spot' for today's Western worldview.

  - For SWM people, signs and wonders can be done to show people of pagan tribes that the God of the Bible is supreme over all beings.

  - Power evangelism is an encounter between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan. According to Wimber, "A system or force that must be overcome for the gospel to be believed is cause for a power encounter." Elijah's confrontation with the 450 prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel is the prime example of a power encounter.

- By the 1990s, the Pentecostal style of worship had entered into many mainstream evangelical churches with services featuring contemporary music, raising of hands, and prayer for the sick. Visitors of "third wave" services could have difficulty distinguishing the worship from a full-blown Pentecostal congregation.

PENTECOSTALS & CHARISMATICS WORLDWIDE

According to most recent statistics, charismatic Christianity is the fastest growing form of Christianity around the world. With the improvement of technology and the shortening of human distance, televangelists associated with the Pentecostal/Charismatic movements have extended their influence beyond the borders of the United States.

- **Africa** – Because of the Pentecostal emphasis on missions, great efforts of evangelism and missions were poured into Africa by Pentecostals worldwide. For example, after 1945,

African Pentecostal churches in countries like Ghana and Zimbabwe have been drawing financial resources from Pentecostal networks worldwide and beginning missionary travels beyond their own boarders. Many charismatic/Pentecostal Christians have also found their influence extending into African politics. For example, Pentecostal Christians have a vital role in the establishment of the newest country in the world, South Sudan. A recent news story of Pentecostal influence in South Sudan reports:

> It‘s not unheard of for politics and pulpit to mix. But in relations between states, faith usually takes a backseat to realpolitik. In the case of the 2005 peace treaty between northern and southern Sudan, though, it was the opposite. Douglas Johnston, with the International Center for Religion and Diplomacy in Washington, says American Christians essentially drove the politics.
>
> ‘Because a lot of them were doing missionary work down there and they had seen a lot of the very bad stuff going on,‘ Johnston said. ‘They would report back and then the churches got involved. Had it not been for that element, I don‘t think we would‘ve ever gotten involved in Sudan. Nor do I think anyone would have ever cared about Darfur.’
>
> After services at the Pentecostal Juba Christian Center parishioner Christine Poney said she expects Christianity to grow in South Sudan. She throws around the names of American televangelists like they‘re movie stars. ‘I watch them on TV so many times,’ said Poney. ‘I‘m a fan of TD Jakes, sorry to call it a fan, but I really like his preaching, they are real, practical. Benny Hinn is another Pentecostal gentleman … I even subscribe to his incoming mails and so forth. despite the recent issues about his family life, Benny Hinn is the man.’
>
> There‘s some concern here that a particular form of American Christianity is spreading too quickly. Marina Peter, the European coordinator of the Sudan Ecumenical Forum, said South Sudan is ripe for exploitation by unscrupulous preachers. She expects independence to set off a gold rush for souls‖ (Brunwasser, 4/11/2011).

- In recent years, free-standing mega-churches have become the fastest growing trend around the world. Most of these global churches are Pentecostal, or have been pioneered by Pentecostal pastors.
    - **Korea** – **David Yonggi Cho**, an Assemblies of God pastor, built the largest church in the world in Seoul, Korea – Yoido Full Gospel Church with more than 700,000 members. Anyang Assembly of God pastored by **Yong Mok Cho** has more than 150,000 members.

- **Chile** – **Javier Vasquez** is the pastor of Jotabeche Methodist Pentecostal in Santiago, Chile, with more than 350,000 members.

- On the international impact of the charismatic movement, Robert Culpepper writes:

  Robert Culpepper: The charismatic movement is international, as well as interdenominational. The tremendous upsurge of evangelism spearheaded by the Pentecostals throughout Latin America and the African continent is a well-recognized, well-documented fact. Though this is related more directly to classical Pentecostalism than to the charismatic movement, it is not without its significance for this movement. The situation varies, of course, from country to country, but in England and Ireland, in western Europe and even eastern Europe, in Japan and Korea, in Israel and India, in Australia and New Zealand the impression which the movement makes is very much the same – that of a young, virile, growing movement which is becoming more and more a factor to be reckoned with in the life of the church (*Evaluating the Charismatic Movement*, 19).

World Population in 2000	6,010,779,000
Professing Christians	1,990,018,000
- Roman Catholics	1,040,020,000
- Pentecostals/Charismatics	530,000,000
- Anglicans	73,200,000
- Baptists	59,600,000
- Lutherans	57,700,000
- Presbyterians	49,800,000
- Assemblies of God	35,000,000
- Methodists	33,000,000
Pentecostals/Charismatics	
- Denominational Pentecostals	215,000,000
- Catholic charismatics	92,000,000
- Protestant charismatics	71,000,000
- Mainline third wavers	110,000,000
- Chinese Pentecostals	52,000,000
Total Pentecostal/Charismatic Christians in 1999	530,000,000
Source: Vincent Synan, *The Century of the Holy Spirit*, 372	

Building the Cessationist Case

The *What* Question

What were the extraordinary gifts as defined by the New Testament?

I. The Gift of Apostleship

A. The Definition of "Apostle"

- At the outset, we should note that by "apostles" we do not simply mean "sent ones" in the general sense (cf. Php. 2:25; 2 Cor. 8:23; also Rom. 16:7). Rather, we are speaking of "apostles *of Jesus Christ*" — those select individuals directly appointed and authorized by Jesus Christ to be His immediate representatives on earth. In this sense, we are speaking of "capital A" apostles — such as the Twelve and the apostle Paul.

- It is this type of apostles that Paul speaks of in Ephesians 2:20; 3:5; 4:11 and in 1 Corinthians 12:29–30. This is important since, especially in Ephesians 4 and in 1 Corinthians 12–14, Paul references apostleship within the context of the charismatic gifts. If "apostleship" has ceased, it sets a precedent for considering whether or not some of the other offices/gifts have ceased as well.

- If the apostles were unique, and the period in which they ministered was unique, then it follows that the gifts that characterized the apostolic age were also unique.

B. The Authority of an Apostle

- The apostles were authoritative representatives of Christ Himself.

  > As **Samuel E. Waldron** explains, "In the New Testament, the Greek word *apostle* also possesses a similar technical meaning [to the Jewish legal term *Sjaliach*]. Jesus Christ was His Father's Apostle (Heb 3:1–2). Thus what Jesus said, His Father said (John 14:6–10). In a similar way, the Twelve are His apostles (John 20:21). To receive Christ's apostle is to receive Him (Matt. 10:40; John 13:20). Therefore, an apostle was one's legal representative. He possessed—to use modern parlance—power of attorney for someone else" (*To Be Continued?*, 24).

- As such, the apostles of Jesus Christ had unique authority; an authority that is seen in the writing of the New Testament Scriptures.

Wayne Grudem notes the unique authority possessed by the apostles: "The New Testament *apostles* had a unique kind of authority in the early church: authority to speak and write words which were 'words of God' in an absolute sense. To disbelieve or disobey them was to disbelieve or disobey God. The apostles, therefore, had the authority to write words which became words of Scripture. This fact in itself should suggest to us that there was something unique about the office of apostle, and that we would not expect it to continue today, for no one today can add words to the Bible and have them be counted as God's very words or as part of Scripture" (*Systematic Theology*, 905–906).

Samuel Waldron: "The apostles of Christ were the legal representatives of Christ. They were *as the man himself* . . . . In very reality, one's reception of an apostle of Christ was one's reception of Christ. To reject an apostle was to forfeit Christ and His salvation [Matt. 10:40; John 13:20]. Again, we have here a problem for modern apostles. Those who profess to be apostles must make their being received as apostles a mark of the true Christianity of those to whom they minister. They must see themselves as clothed with the authority of Christ Himself so that if one rejects them one rejects Christ. Until they are ready to be this brave, bold, and brazen, they should cease calling themselves apostles" (*To Be Continued?*, 31–32).

C. The Cessation of the Apostolic Office

- There are at least five reasons why there are no longer any apostles in the church today (and in fact have not been since the death of the apostle John).

1. The Qualifications Necessary for Apostleship

- First, and perhaps most basically, the qualifications necessary for apostleship preclude contemporary Christians from filling the apostolic office. In order to be an apostle, one had to meet at least three necessary qualifications:

(a) An apostle had to be an eyewitness of the resurrected Christ (Acts 1:22; 10:39–41; 1 Cor. 9:1; 15:7–8)

Samuel Waldron notes that seeing the resurrected Christ had to be with one's physical eyes (and was so even in the case of Paul). He writes:

> "All of this emphasis on physical sight is important for one reason: visions and dreams—even if real and genuine—do not qualify one to be an apostle of Christ. It is clear that the Bible emphasizes the distinction between the inner eye and the outer eye and counts revelation to the outer eye as a mark of superior dignity. Modern claims to have seen Jesus in a vision or dream do not qualify anyone to claim this indispensable characteristic of an apostle of Christ" (*To Be Continued?*, 27).

(b) An apostle had to be directly appointed by Jesus Christ (Mark 3:14; Luke 6:13; Acts 1:2, 24; 10:41; Gal. 1:1)

(c) An apostle had to be able to confirm his mission and message with miraculous signs (Matt. 10:1–2; Acts 1:5–8; 2:43; 4:33; 5:12; 8:14; 2 Cor. 12:12; Heb. 2:3–4).

We might also note that, in choosing Matthias as a replacement for Judas, the eleven also looked for someone who had accompanied Jesus throughout His entire earthly ministry (Acts 1:21–22; 10:39–41).

Note: Based on these qualifications alone, many continuationists agree that there are no apostles in the church today.

Thus, **Wayne Grudem** (a continuationist) notes in his *Systematic Theology*, "It seems that no apostles were appointed after Paul, and certainly, since no one today can meet the qualification of having seen the risen Christ with his own eyes, there are no apostles today" (p. 911).

Samuel Waldron: "Only someone with *each* of these characteristics could claim to be an apostle of Christ. Two out of the three were not sufficient. Every apostle of Christ must first have physically seen the resurrected Lord; second, must have been appointed directly by Christ; and, third, must have performed miraculous signs to vindicate himself as an apostle of Christ" (*To Be Continued?*, 30).

2. The Uniqueness of Paul's Apostleship

- Some have contended that, in the same way that Paul was an apostle, there might still be apostles in the church today. But this ignores the uniqueness with which Paul viewed his own apostleship. Paul's situation was not the norm, as he himself explains in 1 Corinthians 15:8–9. He saw himself as a

one-of-a-kind anomaly, openly calling himself "the last" and "the least" of the apostles.

- To cite from **Wayne Grudem** again:

  > It seems quite certain that there were none appointed after Paul. When Paul lists the resurrection appearances of Christ, he emphasizes the unusual way in which Christ appeared to him, and connects that with the statement that this was the "last" appearance of all, and that he himself is indeed "the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle" (Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 910).

- **Grudem** later adds:

  > Someone may object that Christ could appear to someone today and appoint that person as an apostle. But the foundational nature of the office of apostle (Eph. 2:20; Rev. 21:14) and the fact that Paul views himself as the last one whom Christ appeared to and appointed as an apostle ("last of all, as to one untimely born," 1 Cor. 15:8), indicate that this will not happen (*Systematic Theology*, 911, n. 9).

- Because Paul's apostleship was unique, it is not a pattern that we should expect to see replicated in the church today.

- Samuel Waldron, in *To Be Continued?* (p. 40) adds that Paul was affirmed by the other apostles in Acts 15, 21 and Gal. 2:7–9. No contemporary apostle can make that claim.

3. Apostolic Authority and the Closing of the Canon

- If we hold to a closed canon, we must also hold to the cessation of the apostolic office.

- **Hebrews 1:1–2** indicates that what God first revealed through the Old Testament, He later and more fully revealed through His Son. The New Testament, then, is Christ's revelation to His church. It begins with His earthly ministry (in the four gospels), and continues through the epistles – letters that were written by His authorized representatives.

- Thus, in **John 14:26** and **John 16:12–15**, Christ authorized His apostles to disclose new revelation to the church, promising them that the Helper would come and bring to their remembrance all that Jesus had taught them. The instruction they gave the church, then, was really an extension of Jesus' ministry, as enabled by the Holy Spirit (cf. Eph. 3:5–6; 2 Pet. 1:20–21). Those in the early church understood apostolic instruction as authoritative and as being on par with the OT Scriptures (cf. 1 Thess. 2:13; 1 Cor. 14:37; Gal. 1:9; 2 Pet. 3:16).

- Apostolic instruction still guides the church today through the New Testament Scriptures.

  - To cite again from **Wayne Grudem:** "In place of living apostles present in the church to teach and govern it, we have instead the writings of the apostles in the books of the New Testament. Those New Testament Scriptures fulfill for the church today the absolutely authoritative teaching and governing functions which were fulfilled by the apostles themselves during the early years of the church" (Ibid., 911).

- The doctrine of a closed canon is, therefore, largely predicated on the fact that the apostolic office was unique and passed away. If there were still apostles in the church today, with the same authority as the New Testament apostles, how could we claim that the canon is closed?

- But *since* there are no longer apostles in the church today, and *since* new inscripurated revelation must be accompanied by apostolic authority and approval, it is not possible to have new authoritative revelation today. The closing of the canon and the non-continuation of apostles are two concepts that necessarily go hand-in-hand.

4. The Foundational Role of the Apostles

- Closely related to the above is the fact that the apostles were part of the foundation period of the church (Eph. 2:20). Since (following the construction metaphor) the foundation stage precedes the superstructure, it is appropriate to infer that the apostles were given to the church for its beginning stages. As **Grudem** writes, "God's purpose in the history of redemption seems to have been to give apostles only at the beginning of the church age (see Eph. 2:20)" (*Systematic Theology*, 911, n. 9).

- **Samuel Waldron** echoes those same sentiments: "Ephesians 2:20, Matthew 16:18, and Revelation 21:14 teach that the apostles of Christ occupy a foundational position in the church. . . . This language suggests that the apostles are foundational in an historical sense to the universal church. Thus, they precede it in time. The foundation period of the church is, then, the first century when the original apostles lived. The superstructure period is all the following centuries of the church built on the ministry of the apostles. This restricts the Messianic apostolate to the foundational period of church history in the first century of the Christian era. Thus, it excludes the living presence in the church on earth of such apostles after the period of the church's historical founding" (*To Be Continued?*, 38–39).

- The cessationist interpretation of the "foundation" (as a reference to the initial period of church history) is strengthened by the evidence from the early church fathers. The foundation stage was something the fathers referred to in the past tense, indicating that they understood it as past.

  Thus, **Ignatius** (c. 35–115) in his *Epistle to the Magnesians*, wrote (speaking in the past tense):

  > "The people shall be called by a new name, which the Lord shall name them, and shall be a holy people." This was first fulfilled in Syria; for "the disciples were called Christians at Antioch," when Paul and Peter were laying the foundations of the Church.

  Irenaeus (c. 130–202) in *Against Heresies*, echoes the past tense understanding that Peter and Paul laid the foundations of the Church (in 3.1.1) and later refers to the twelve apostles as "the twelve-pillared foundation of the church" (in 4.21.3).

  Tertullian (c. 155–230), in *The Five Books Against Marcion* (chapter 21), notes the importance of holding to apostolic doctrine, even in a post-apostolic age:

  > No doubt, after the time of the apostles, the truth respecting the belief of God suffered corruption, but it is equally certain that during the life of the apostles their teaching on this great article did not suffer at all; so that no other teaching will have the right of being received as apostolic than that which is at the present day

> proclaimed in the churches of apostolic foundation. (Emphasis added)

Lactantius (c. 240–320), also, in *The Divine Institutes* (4.21) refers to a past time in which the foundations of the church were laid. Speaking of Jesus' disciples, he writes:

> But the disciples, being dispersed through the provinces, everywhere laid the foundations of the Church, themselves also in the name of their divine Master doing many and almost incredible miracles; for at His departure He had endowed them with power and strength, by which the system of their new announcement might be founded and confirmed.

Other examples could also be added from the later Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers. **Chrysostom**, for instance, would be another such source (from his *Homilies on Ephesians*).

- The point is simply this: The earliest church fathers, from just after the apostolic era, understood the work of the apostles to constitute a unique, "foundational" stage of the church. The fact that they reference this in the past tense, as something distinct from their own ministries, indicates that they understood that the apostolic age had passed, and thus the foundation stage was over.

5. The Historical Testimony of Those After the Apostles

- In the previous point, we contended that the apostles were given for the foundation stage of the church (Eph. 2:20), and that the early church recognized this foundation stage as a specific time-period that did not continue past the first century.

- But it is important to go one step further, and note that the earliest church fathers saw the apostles as a unique group of men, distinct from all who would follow after them.

(a) Those who came after the apostles did *not* view themselves or their contemporaries as apostles.

- According to their own self-testimony, those that followed the apostles were not apostles themselves, but were the "disciples of the apostles" (*The Epistle of Mathetes to Diognetus*, 11; *Fragments of Papias*, 5; cf. *The Epistle of Polycarp to the Philippians*, 6; Ignatius, *Against Heresies*, 1.10).

- After the apostolic age ended, the church was led by elders (including bishops) and deacons.

- Thus, **Clement** (late-first century) in his *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 42, notes that:

> The apostles have preached the Gospel to us from the Lord Jesus Christ; Jesus Christ [has done so] from God. Christ therefore was sent forth by God, and the apostles by Christ. Both these appointments, then, were made in an orderly way, according to the will of God. Having therefore received their orders, and being fully assured by the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, and established in the word of God, with full assurance of the Holy Ghost, they went forth proclaiming that the kingdom of God was at hand. And thus preaching through countries and cities, they appointed the first-fruits [of their labors], having first proved them by the Spirit, to be bishops and deacons of those who should afterwards believe.

- **Ignatius** (d. c. 115) purposely avoided equating himself with the apostles. Thus, he wrote, "I do not issue commands on these points as if I were an apostle; but, as your fellow-servant, I put you in mind of them" (*The Epistle of Ignatius to the Antiochians*, 11; emphasis added).

(b) Those who followed the apostles viewed apostolic writings as both unique and authoritative.

- For the early church, it was "the doctrine of the apostles" (cf. *The Epistle of Ignatius to the Magnesians*, 13; *The Epistle of Ignatius to the Antiochians*, 1) that was to be guarded, taught, and heeded. Thus, the "memoirs of the apostles" were held as canonical and

authoritative within the early church (cf. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 2.2.5; Victorinus, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, 10.9).

- Along these lines, **Justin** writes:

> And on the day called Sunday, all who live in cities or in the country gather together to one place, and the memoirs of the apostles [e.g. the New Testament] or the writings of the prophets [e.g. the Old Testament] are read, as long as time permits; then, when the reader has ceased, the president [e.g. the pastor] verbally instructs, and exhorts to the imitation of these good things (*The First Apology of Justin*, 67).

- The doctrine and writing of the apostles was unique, having been written by the authoritative representatives of Christ Himself. It was regarded as Scripture by the early church.

(c) Those who followed the apostles saw the apostolic age as a unique and unrepeated period of church history.

- The fathers saw the "times of the apostles" as a distinct, non-repeatable period of church history (cf. Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, 3.36.54; *Reply to Faustus*, 32.13; *On Baptism*, 14.16; *et al*).

- Thus, **Chrysostom** wrote on the uniqueness of fellowship during the apostolic age:

> I wish to give you an example of friendship. Friends, that is, friends according to Christ, surpass fathers and sons. For tell me not of friends of the present day, since this good thing also has past away with others. But consider, in the time of the apostles, I speak not of the chief men, but of the believers themselves generally; "all," he says, "were of one heart and soul. and not one of them said that aught of the things which he possessed was his own… and distribution was made unto each, according as any one had need." (Acts 4:32, 35.) There were then no such words as "mine" and "thine." This is friendship, that a man should not consider his goods his own, but his neighbor's, that his possessions belong to another; that he

> should be as careful of his friend's soul, as of his own; and the friend likewise. (*Homily* on 1 Thess. 1:8–10; emphasis added)

- **Chrysostom** looked back to the deep affection that characterized the apostolic era to provide a contrast to the relative lovelessness of the church in his day. In so doing, he underscores the fact that he understood the apostolic age to be long past. One additional passage might be cited in this regard:

  > I know that ye open wide your mouths and are amazed, at being to hear that it is in your power to have a greater gift than raising the dead, and giving eyes to the blind, doing the same things which were done in the time of the apostles. And it seems to you past belief. What then is this gift? charity. (*Homily* on Heb. 1:6-8; emphasis added)

- Many more examples from church history could be given. **Eusebius**'s whole history is based on the progression of church history from the "times of the apostles" (*Ecclesiastical History*, Book 8, introduction). **Basil**, in his work *On the Spirit*, points to previous leaders from church history (specifically Irenaeus) as those "who lived near the times of the apostles" (29.72). **Tertullian** spoke of events that occurred "after the times of the apostles" (*The Five Books Against Marcion*, 21).

Historical Conclusions: Consistently, the fathers (from the earliest times) mark the apostolic age (and the apostles themselves) as unique. Their writings were similarly regarded as unique and authoritative. Those that followed them were not considered to be apostles. Nor were the times that followed seen as equivalent to the times of the apostles.

Thus we agree, once again, with **Wayne Grudem** when he writes:

> It is noteworthy that no major leader in the history of the church – not Athanasius or Augustine, not Luther or Calvin, not Wesley or Whitefield – has taken to himself the title of "apostle" or let himself be called an apostle. If any in modern times want to take the title "apostle" to themselves, they immediately raise the suspicion that they may be motivated by inappropriate pride and desires for self-exaltation, along with excessive ambition and a

> desire for much more authority in the church than any one person should rightfully have. (*Systematic Theology*, 911)

A Final Note

- Throughout this discussion on apostleship we have leaned heavily on the work of Wayne Grudem (specifically, his *Systematic Theology*). This has been intentional for two reasons: (1) he makes excellent, biblically-sound arguments regarding this issue; and (2) he is a well-known and respected continuationist.

- It is significant, that (as a continuationist) he argues so convincingly for the cessation of the apostolic office and the uniqueness of the apostolic age – since this is the very premise upon which the cessationist paradigm is built.

- While the cessation of the apostolic gift/office is not the final argument for the cessationist case, it greatly strengthens the cessationist premise – especially in passages like 1 Corinthians 12:28–30, Ephesians 2:20 and 4:11, where apostleship is listed in direct connection with the other charismatic gifts and offices.

  Samuel Waldron: "There is at least one gift which we know for sure cannot be possessed in the church today—the gift of being an apostle of Christ. This is at least one way the church today ought not to attempt to copy the church of the New Testament. When we remember that according to the New Testament being an apostle of Christ was the first and most important gift, we can only conclude that there is a significant difference between the church of the New Testament and the church today. … We must consider the possibility that the cessation of the apostolate draws a doctrinal line at (or filters out) the continuation of the miraculous gifts. This cessation of the apostolate is indisputable. It provides a kind of doctrinal filter suggesting that the miraculous gifts do not exist in the church today. The cessation of the apostolate is, therefore, the crack in the foundation of Continuationism, the fatal flaw in their thinking. They think that to assume any distinction between the church today and the earliest church fails to take the New Testament seriously. This assumption is patently wrong." (*To Be Continued?*, 41).

- The New Testament is clear that the apostles of Jesus Christ consisted of a very limited group: the Twelve, Paul, and possibly James (cf. Gal. 1:19). Some charismatics attempt to assert that there were more apostles than this.

- On pp. 54–56 of *Satisfied by the Promise of the Spirit*, **Thomas Edgar** responds to a number of common passages regarding supposed apostles:

  Romans 16:7 **–** "It seems clear that Paul was referring to Andronicus and Junias as believers who were well known and respected by the apostles, but not apostles themselves."

  Salutations in Paul's epistles – "The salutation of the various Epistles indicates that the others mentioned with Paul were not considered apostles."

  2 Corinthians 8:23 – "[This verse] refers to 'messengers' of the churches which actually means 'representatives from local assemblies of believers.' The term *apostle* was commonly used in the culture of that day. This verse shows that it did not necessarily refer to the spiritual gift or to an individual. Philippians 2:25 similarly describes Epaphroditus as a 'messenger' (Gk. a*postolos*)."

  Galatians 2:7–9 – "Those in Jerusalem did not take lightly the idea of apostleship. Recognition of Paul's apostleship was not granted easily by the early church but was carefully examined." – Edgar goes on to point out that Galatians 2 excludes Barnabas, suggesting that he was not "an apostle in the full sense of an 'apostle of Christ' or as one of the Twelve."

  Galatians 1:19 – "[This verse] may suggest that James was an apostle, although this passage is often disputed. Its indirect nature leaves this open to question."

  1 Thessalonians 2:7 – "This appears to be an editorial use of the plural which is often used today. . . . A comparison with Acts 17:14–15 and the use of the word 'alone' in this passage indicates that neither Timothy nor Silvanus was with Paul in Athens, which precludes them from being included in the 'we' of this passage (see 1 Thess. 3:5). Therefore, it is very doubtful that Paul is indicating that Silvanus and Timothy are apostles in 1 Thessalonians 2:7. Instead he uses 'we apostles' to apply to himself specifically, and includes the others in only a very general sense."

D. Apostleship: Office or Gift?

- Wayne Grudem attempts to avoid the implications of his view by insisting that apostleship was *only* an office and *not* a gift. Thus, while he acknowledges that apostleship has ceased, he is not willing to admit that any of the gifts have ceased.

- In reality, the New Testament makes it clear that apostleship was <u>both</u> an office and a gift (much like prophet/prophecy, teacher/teaching, and healer/healing).

- Ephesians 4:11 refers to apostles (along with prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers) as gifts given by Jesus Christ to the church.

- First Corinthians 12 includes "apostles" in the list of charismatic gifts in that chapter.

    - **<u>John MacArthur</u>:** Some charismatics, recognizing that apostleship did not continue beyond the first century, attempt to argue that it was only an *office* and not a *gift*. Thus, they contend that while the apostolic *office* ceased, the miraculous *gifts* have all still continued. This clever attempt to circumvent the inevitable ramifications for the charismatic position ultimately falls flat, since *apostles* are listed in Paul's delineation of the spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 12:28–29, right alongside prophets, miracle-workers, and tongues-speakers. In the context, it is clearly one of the gifts Paul has in mind, flowing out of the argument he begins in verses 4–5 and concluding in verse 31 (where Paul uses the term *charisma* to refer to the items he had just listed in verses 28–30). Additionally, in Ephesians 4:11, Paul states that *apostles* are those whom Christ *gave* to the church. While it is true that *apostleship* was also an *office*, that does not preclude it from being a gift. Prophecy, for example, encompassed both an office and a gift, as did the gift of teaching.

      In the end, despite the protests of some continuationists, there is no escaping the fact that one of the most significant features described in 1 Corinthians 12 (namely, *apostleship*) is no longer active in the church today. It ceased. To acknowledge that point is to acknowledge the foundational premise on which cessationism is based. If apostleship ceased, it demonstrates that not everything that characterized the New Testament church still characterizes the church today. Moreover, it opens the door to the real possibility that some of the other gifts listed in 1 Corinthians 12–14 have also ceased. (*Strange Fire*, chp. 5)

- **Thomas Edgar**: The fact that the gift of apostle ceased with the apostolic age is a devastating blow to the basic assumption underlying the entire charismatic perspective, namely, the assumption that all gifts are to be operative throughout the church age. We know that at least one gift ceased; therefore, their foundational assumption is incorrect. Nevertheless, [Jack] Deere tries to nullify the fact that one of the spiritual gifts ceased in the first century by claiming that the gift of apostle is not a spiritual gift. . . . [But] even if apostleship were not a spiritual gift, the fact that it ceased would still show that one of the functions given to the body of Christ did cease. Thus, all of the functions of the beginning church did not continue. Therefore, the church today should not expect to have all of the functions that the church had in the first century. (*Satisfied by the Promise of the Spirit*, 232)

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II. **The Revelatory Gift of Prophecy**

A. The Definition of Prophecy

- When we speak of **revelatory prophecy** we are specifically speaking of the reception of **new revelation** from God which is then articulated by the human prophet. This sets it apart from preaching.

  - In preaching, we proclaim and expound the *prophetic word* that has been revealed *once for all* (cf. 2 Pet. 1:19; Jude 3). In that sense, preaching exhibits a prophetic character. But that is different from *the revelatory gift of prophecy* in which the prophet declared *new revelation* from God.

  - Our purposes here are to focus on the revelatory gift of prophecy.

- The word *prophet* itself comes from the Greek *prophētēs* which means "to speak in the place of" or to be a "spokesman." So a prophet is a spokesman for God. And when someone claims to be *exercising the gift of prophecy* or claims to have *a word from the Lord* that is exactly what they are claiming. In that moment, at least, they are claiming to be a spokesperson for God.

B. The Need to Test Prophets

- Throughout history, there have been many people who have claimed to be *prophets*, who have claimed to speak for God. But all Christians — whether charismatics or cessationists — would agree that at least some of these prophets were false prophets

- For example, in the second century, there was a false prophet named Montanus. Montanus claimed to speak for God. He said that the world was about to end, promoted extremely legalistic ethical standards on his followers, and claimed that God was going to establish the New Jerusalem, not in Jerusalem, but in the town of Pepuza in Phrygia. Needless to say, his predictions did not come true. He was declared a heretic by the early church.

- In the sixteenth century, during the time of the Resurrection, there were a number of radical Reformers who predicted the end of the world. One of them, a man named Melchior Hoffman suggested that the New Jerusalem would be established in Strasburg, Germany. Another man named Jan Matthys said the New Jerusalem would

founded in Munster, Germany. In response to the crazy predictions of these false prophets, Martin Luther sarcastically retorted that they had "swallowed the Holy Spirit, feathers and all."

- In the nineteenth century, just to give you one more example, a New England native named Joseph Smith claimed that God had given him new revelation—in the form of some heavenly, golden tablets. Joseph Smith translated these golden tablets to produce the Book of Mormon. Though Smith was widely recognized as a con artist in his own time, and though he taught bizarre and unbiblical doctrines, Joseph Smith's false prophecies sparked one of the largest cult movements in history.

- What is the point of these historical examples? It is simply to demonstrate the truth that false prophets exist, and that they represent a major threat to the church.

- Both the Old and New Testaments repeatedly warn believers about the danger of false prophets. If time permitted, we could go through dozens of passages that warn God's people to avoid people who claim to speak for God but in reality do not.

C. How to Recognize a False Prophet

- All of this raises a critical question for believers to ask: "How can we recognize a false prophet? How can we know when a person who claims to be prophesying for God, who claims to have received revelation from God that he or she is now reporting to others … how can we know when that person is telling the truth?"

- Well, the Bible articulates three objective criteria for evaluating self-professed prophets. If a so-called prophet fails on any one of these three points, he shows himself to be a false prophet.

- What are these three tests? Let me just state them briefly, and then we will consider them each in more detail:

    1. **Doctrinal orthodoxy** – Because God is a God of truth, those who truly prophesy on His behalf proclaim doctrines that are right and true.

    2. **Moral integrity** – God's true prophets are those who not only proclaim His truth, they also live out His truth.

    3. **Predictive accuracy** – Because God knows the end from the beginning, a true prophet of God predicts the future with 100% accuracy.

- Let's consider each of these in greater detail:

- **First,** a true prophet must be **doctrinally orthodox**. Conversely, any self-proclaimed prophet who deceives people by leading them into theological error is a *false prophet.* There are many passages we could look at which demonstrate this point. But I'll just give you two:

  - **Deuteronomy 13:1–5:** [1] "If a prophet or a dreamer of dreams arises among you and gives you a sign or a wonder, [2] and the sign or the wonder comes true, concerning which he spoke to you, saying, 'Let us go after other gods (whom you have not known) and let us serve them,' [3] you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams; for the Lord your God is testing you to find out if you love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul. [4] "You shall follow the Lord your God and fear Him; and you shall keep His commandments, listen to His voice, serve Him, and cling to Him. [5] "But that prophet or that dreamer of dreams shall be put to death, because he has counseled rebellion against the Lord your God who brought you from the land of Egypt and redeemed you from the house of slavery, to seduce you from the way in which the Lord your God commanded you to walk. So you shall purge the evil from among you.

  - In other words, Moses is saying, if a prophet comes to you and even if the prophet makes predictions that come true—if the prophet leads you away from the truth and into error, than that prophet is a false prophet. And you'll notice how seriously God treats this offense: He prescribes the death penalty for that kind of errant prophesy.

  - In a New Testament context, Peter gives a similar warning in **2 Peter 2:1:**

  - **2 Peter 2:1:** But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves.

  - There Peter equates false prophets with false teachers. Those who teach false doctrine demonstrate themselves to be false prophets.

  - *Charismatic comparison*: Dozens of examples could be given to document time after time when well-known charismatic "prophets" have taught egregious forms

of doctrinal error. From the Prosperity Gospel to the Word of Faith movement to Oneness Pentecostalism, the larger charismatic movement is hardly known for its doctrinal orthodoxy.

- When we see egregious doctrinal errors being taught by self-appointed prophets—like when **Benny Hinn** famously claimed there were actually nine members of the Trinity, or when **Kenneth Copeland** stated that Jesus took on the nature of Satan when He died on the Cross—we can be immediately certain that those individuals are not true prophets.

So doctrinal orthodoxy is the first test of a true prophet.

- **Second,** a true prophet must have **moral integrity.** Any self-proclaimed prophet who lives in unrestrained lust and greed shows himself to be a false prophet.

  - Again we could look at numerous biblical passages to demonstrate this point. But we will just consider two.

  - **Jeremiah 23:14–16:** [14] "Also among the prophets of Jerusalem I have seen a horrible thing: The committing of adultery and walking in falsehood; And they strengthen the hands of evildoers, So that no one has turned back from his wickedness. All of them have become to Me like Sodom, And her inhabitants like Gomorrah. [15] "Therefore thus says the Lord of hosts concerning the prophets, 'Behold, I am going to feed them wormwood And make them drink poisonous water, For from the prophets of Jerusalem Pollution has gone forth into all the land.' " [16] Thus says the Lord of hosts, "Do not listen to the words of the prophets who are prophesying to you. They are leading you into futility; They speak a vision of their own imagination, Not from the mouth of the Lord."

  - Clearly, these are false prophets. They claim to speak for God, but in fact they do not. And the Lord Himself notes the moral wickedness that accompanied these false prophets in ancient Israel.

  - In the New Testament, this same point is made. Jesus Himself, in the Sermon on the Mount, explained that you could identify false prophets by the fruit of their life (Matt. 7:20).

  - The apostle Peter, back in **2 Peter 2**, explains that false prophets were characterized by lust, covetousness, greed, and all sorts of iniquity. In verse 1,

which we already read, Peter mentions false prophets. Then he describes them in verses 2–3.

- **2 Peter 2:2–3:** [2] Many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of the truth will be maligned; [3] and in their greed they will exploit you with false words; their judgment from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep.

- So again we see that false prophets can be identified by their lifestyle. As Jesus said, we can know them by their fruits (Matt. 7:15–20). And when we see the fruit of gross immorality and impurity in someone's life, we can be confident that he is a false prophet no matter what he might claim.

- *Charismatic comparison*: Numerous moral failures and financial scandals have plagued some of the most well-known figures in the charismatic world (cf. *Strange Fire*, chap. 4).

- *When the best-known leaders and public faces of a movement are frequently embroiled in scandal and controversy due to lavish lifestyles or immoral escapades, it calls into question their self-proclaimed status as prophets of God.*

- Maybe just one example should be given. One of the most prolific prophetic groups within the broader charismatic movement was known as the Kansas City Prophets. This group included men like Mike Bickle and Rick Joyner, though two of the most highly-regarded of the Kansas City Prophets were Bob Jones and Paul Cain

- Both of these men were regarded as prophets by their fellow charismatics. Both of them were highly visible and influential, especially within the Third Wave circles in which they ministered.

- But both of them were subsequently disqualified from ministry on moral grounds. Bob Jones had to be removed from ministry when it came to light that he was using his prophecies to garner sexual favors from women. And Paul Cain's ministry was publicly scandalized when he admitted to long-term drunkenness and homosexuality.

- The irony is that, in spite of their lack of moral integrity, these men are still considered to be true prophets by many charismatics. But that conclusion flies in the face of the biblical tests of a true prophet.

Well, that brings us to a third test. In addition to doctrinal orthodoxy and moral integrity, a true prophet must meet one more qualification.

- **Third,** a true prophet must demonstrate **predictive accuracy.** Or to put this in the negative, if someone claims to speak prophetic revelation from God about the future, but then those predictions do not come to pass, we can safely conclude that person to be a false prophet.

- Once again, let's look at the Scriptures to see this principle delineated. And we could look at a number of texts, but again we will limit ourselves to two.

  - **Deuteronomy 18:20–22:** [20] 'The prophet who speaks a word presumptuously in My name which I have not commanded him to speak, or which he speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die.' [21] "You may say in your heart, 'How will we know the word which the Lord has not spoken?' [22] "When a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, if the thing does not come about or come true, that is the thing which the Lord has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him.

  - Well, that is just about as clear as it could possibly have been said. How can we know if a prophet is really speaking for the Lord, or if the prophet is presumptuous and false? Well, in addition to the other two tests we've already covered, look at the prophet's predictions about the future. Do they come true? If not, then that prophet is a false prophet.

  - The rest of Scripture reverberates with this same truth. According to Isaiah 44:26, God confirms the words of His true messengers. According to Jeremiah 28:9, the true prophet is the one whose prediction comes true. This is because, according to Ezekiel 12:25, the word which God speaks will come to pass.

  - By contrast, all a false prophet can do is hope that his predictions will come true. Look at what God says of false prophets in Ezekiel 13.

  - **Ezekiel 13:3–9:** [3] "Thus says the Lord God, 'Woe to the foolish prophets who are following their own spirit and have seen nothing. [4] O Israel, your prophets have been like foxes among ruins. [5] You have not gone up into the breaches, nor did you build the wall around the house of Israel to stand in the battle on the day of the Lord. [6] They see falsehood and lying divination who are saying, "The Lord declares," when the Lord has not sent them; yet they hope for the fulfillment of their word. [7] Did you not see a false vision and speak a lying divination when

you said, "The Lord declares," but it is not I who have spoken?' [8] Therefore, thus says the Lord God, 'Because you have spoken falsehood and seen a lie, therefore behold, I am against you,' declares the Lord God. [9] 'So My hand will be against the prophets who see false visions and utter lying divinations. They will have no place in the council of My people, nor will they be written down in the register of the house of Israel, nor will they enter the land of Israel, that you may know that I am the Lord God.'"

- Again, God's Word is very clear. Those who prophesy *presumptuously* in God's name, predicting things that don't come to pass, such self-proclaimed prophets meet with God's displeasure. They are false prophets and their prophecies ought to be rejected and ignored.

- *Charismatic comparison*: When we compare modern charismatic prophecy to this biblical requirement, we find that it again falls short. By their own admission, proponents of the modern gift of prophecy readily acknowledge that modern prophecies are often inaccurate and full of errors.

- Here are some examples from charismatics themselves:

  - **Rick Joyner:** "There is a prophet named Bob Jones who was told that the general level of prophetic revelation in the church was about 65% accurate at this time. Some are only about 10% accurate, a very few of the most mature prophets are approaching 85% to 95% accuracy. Prophecy is increasing in purity, but there is a still a long way to go for those who walk in this ministry" (Rick Joyner, *The Prophetic Ministry*, The Morningstar Prophetic Newsletter. Vol. 3, No. 2, p. 2).

  So Joyner openly acknowledges that modern prophecy is full of inaccuracies. But, how can modern prophets get around the warning of Deuteronomy 18:20–22? Well, they simply ignore it. Listen to what Rick Joyner says:

  - **Rick Joyner:** "One of the greatest hazards affecting maturing prophets is the erroneous interpretation of the Old Testament exhortation that if a prophet ever predicted something which did not come to pass he was no longer to be considered a true prophet (see Deut. 18:20–22). The warning was that if this happened, the prophet had been presumptuous and the people were not to fear him. If one predicts something in the name of the Lord and it does not come to pass, he probably has spoken presumptuously and needs to be repented of, but that does not make him a false prophet. No one could step out in the faith

> required to walk in his calling if he knew that a single mistake would ruin him for life." (Rick Joyner, *The Prophetic Ministry*, The Morning Star Prophetic Newsletter, Rick Joyner, Vol. 3, No. 2, p. 2.)

Rather than submitting to what the biblical text explicitly says, Joyner arbitrarily dismisses Deuteronomy 18 as if it doesn't apply. But pretending it's not there doesn't make it go away. The biblical standard is 100% accuracy. The problem is not with the biblical standard, it is with modern would-be prophets who fail to meet that standard.

Joyner is not the only charismatic prophet who contends that it's acceptable for modern prophecy to contain errors.

- **Bill Hamon:** "We must not be quick to call someone a false prophet simply because something he said was inaccurate. . . . Missing it a few times in prophecy does not make a false prophet. No mortal prophet is infallible; all are liable to make mistakes." (Bill Hamon, *Prophets and Personal Prophecy*, 176)

- **Jack Deere** suggests that even if a prophet were to "miss it so badly" that his prophecy "had immediate destructive effects" in the lives of other people, we still should not regard that person as a false prophet. (Jack Deere, *The Beginner's Guide to the Gift of Prophecy*, 131–32)

- Elsewhere **Jack Deere** explains, "Prophets are really messy. Prophets make mistakes. And sometimes when a prophet makes a mistake, it's a serious mistake. I mean, I know prophets just last year that cost people millions of dollars with a mistake they made. I talked to people who made the wrong investments, actually moved their homes, spent tons of money…."(Jack Deere, National School of the Prophets, "Mobilizing the Prophetic Office," May 11, 2000, 11:30 AM tape #3)

- When **Mike Bickle** interviewed **Bob Jones** about his prophetic ministry, Bickle asked, "So there has been errors; there's been a number of errors?" Jones responded with this: "Oh, hundreds of them." (Mike Bickle and Bob Jones, "Visions and Revelations," Audiotape 5)

- Well-known charismatic prophets **Cindy Jacobs** and **Chuck Pierce** have acknowledged this same reality: "We've made a lot of mistakes. There's no

excuse but we need to do better'" (Chuck Pierce and Cindy Jacobs at the National School of the prophets, May 13, 2000).

- Self-proclaimed prophet **Kim Clement** sums up the charismatic viewpoint with these words: "You can be a wrong prophet and not be a false prophet." (*Trinity Broadcasting Network,* "The prophetic ministry of Kim Clement," Aug, 13, 2002)

- In spite of the fact that Scripture says that a true prophet must be held to the standard of 100% accuracy, modern prophets simply ignore that standard, being content with the fact that their prophecies contain hundreds of mistakes.

- Even among conservative evangelical continuationists, this same sub-standard approach to prophecy is made.

  - **Wayne Grudem:** "There is almost uniform testimony from all sections of the charismatic movement that prophecy is imperfect and impure, and will contain elements which are not to be obeyed or trusted" (Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today*, 110).

  - Consequently, continuationists admit that people can rely too much on the subjective guidance of prophecy.

  - **Wayne Grudem:** "Usually this has been because they did not realize that prophecy in the Church age is not the word of God [i.e. the Bible], and can frequently contain errors" (Grudem, *Kingdom and Power*, 84).

  - In light of its fallible nature, continuationists caution people from depending on prophecy to make decisions:

  - **Sam Storms:** "One should avoid looking to or depending on the gift of prophecy for making routine daily decisions in life. God does not intend for the gift of prophecy to be used as the usual way we make decisions regarding his will" (Storms, *Are Miraculous Gifts for Today? Four Views*, 211).

  - The implications of this view make it essentially impossible to know when a prophecy is actually true or erroneous.

  - **Wayne Grudem:** Pastorally, if someone is in charge of a home fellowship group or if a pastor is in charge of a prayer meeting, you call it as you see it. I

have to use an American analogy, it's an umpire calling balls and strikes as the pitcher pitches the ball across the plate.

(Source: Wayne Grudem in his debate with Ian Hamilton, Timestamp 59:53; online at: http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justintaylor /2012/02/23/a-debate-on-the-continuation-of-prophecy)

- By ignoring the objective standards of Scripture, evaluating this view of modern prophecy is hopelessly reduced to total subjectivity.

- **Wayne Grudem:** "Did the revelation *seem* like something from the Holy Spirit; did it *seem* to be similar to other experiences of the Holy Spirit which he had known previously in worship. *Beyond this it is difficult to specify much further*, except to say that over time a congregation would *probably* become more adept at making evaluations . . . and become more adept at recognizing a genuine revelation from the Holy Spirit *and distinguishing it from their own thoughts*." (*The Gift of Prophecy in the NT and Today*, 120–21; emphasis added)

D. How Do Charismatics Rationalize Fallible Prophetic Revelation?

- All of this raises an important question. If the Bible requires 100% accuracy for prophets, then how can the charismatic movement justify prophets who regularly speak errors when they claim to be speaking words from the Lord?

  - In 1989, **Benny Hinn** predicted that Fidel Castro would die sometime in the 1990s; he also predicted that the homosexual community in America would be destroyed by fire before 1995, and that a major earthquake would devastate the East Cost before the year 2000.

  - In the 1990s, Kansas City prophets **Bob Jones** and **Rick Joyner** similar predicted that Southern California would soon be swallowed by the Pacific Ocean after a major earthquake.

  - More recently, **Pat Robertson** predicted that the U.S. would experience a horrific terror attack in the second half of 2007. According to Robertson: ""The Lord didn't say nuclear, but I do believe it'll be something like that - that'll be a mass killing, possibly millions of people, major cities injured. . . . There will be some very serious terrorist attacks . . . The evil people will come after this country, and there's a possibility – not a possibility, a definite certainty – that chaos is going to rule." (Pat Robertson, *The 700 Club*, 2007.

cf. Russell Goldman, "Pat Robertson's Worst Gaffe's, *ABC News*, May 18, 2013).

- Those kind of stories could be multiplied many times over. Those are just a few examples to make the point. If we were to apply the standard of **Deuteronomy 18**, we would have to consider these men to be false prophets.

- But charismatics are quick to say, "Just because a modern prophet gets a prediction (or even many predictions) wrong, that doesn't make him a false prophet."

- *How can they say this?*

- Well, the answer may surprise you.

- Defenders of modern prophecy generally claim that there are actually two categories of prophets (or revelatory prophecy) depicted in Scripture. The **first kind of prophet** is the one that is described in Deuteronomy 18. That kind of prophet had to be 100% accurate. His prophecies were infallible and authoritative.

- This category of prophets includes the Old Testament prophets, the New Testament prophets, and all of the writers of Scripture. These prophets declared God's revelation perfectly, meaning it was free from any errors.

- But according to charismatics and continuationists, there is a **second type of prophet** depicted in the New Testament. These second-tier prophets are called *congregational prophets*—and according to charismatic authors, these prophets were not held to a standard of complete accuracy.

    - So the argument essentially goes like this. While first-tier prophets (like Moses, Isaiah, Peter, and Paul) were held to a standard of complete accuracy, these second-tier *congregational prophets* were allowed to deliver prophecies that were full of errors.

    - Because this second-tier form of prophecy was not infallible, it was also not authoritative. In other words, when congregational prophets spoke, their prophecies did not have to be obeyed because, after all, they might be riddled with mistakes.

- In a sense then, this congregational-form of prophecy was essentially nothing more than Spirit-led advice, which may or may not be accurate, and which was optional for people to follow.

- According to continuationists like **Wayne Grudem** and **Sam Storms**, it is *this kind* of prophecy that has continued to today. Speaking of modern prophecy, Grudem says it this way: "I would put this idea of God bringing things to mind in the same category of authority as advice or counsel from a godly person" (Debate with Ian Hamilton, Timestamp: 27:39).

- To redefine "prophecy" as "Spirit-led advice" certainly provides a convenient explanation for all of the fallacious and outrageous words of prophecy that are spoken by modern prophets. Sadly, however, many Christians are coerced into doing things they otherwise would not do, on the basis of a supposed word of prophecy.

- Charismatic author **Kim Crutchfield** acknowledges that prophecy can be used to abuse people in the church. :

  Some churches and church leaders become abusive. Abusive church leaders use prophecies to castigate, vilify, and place fear in a person's heart. These are false prophecies uttered as a tool of social control. They predict doom for those who leave a church. Such leaders do not allow people to question the prophet, judge the prophecy or call the message into question. This is a clear abuse of spiritual authority. Unscrupulous leaders often use prophecies and words from the Lord to manipulate their flock. It is a crass form of spiritual manipulation. . . . [It] leaves people vulnerable to the whims and manipulations of would-be prophets.

  (Source: Kim Crutchfield, "The Use and Abuse of Prophecy," May 19, 2011. Online at: http://www.kimcrutchfield.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=60:the-use-and-abuse-of-prophecy&catid=34:theomusing)

- So you can see the devastating effects this type of prophecy can have in the church. It can really burden people with false messages.

- But there is an even bigger problem: That is not how the Bible defines prophecy.

  - *The notion of a lower class of prophets who were frequently inaccurate in their prophetic declarations is completely absent from the New Testament.*

E. Fallible Prophets?

- The New Testament nowhere suggests that prophets in the church were to be held to a lesser standard than their Old Testament counterparts. In fact, the New Testament evidence indicates exactly the opposite: New Testament prophets—no matter what church congregation they were part of—were held to very same standards as those employed in the Old Testament.

- For starters, the New Testament refers to both Old Testament prophets and New Testament prophets using the exact same terminology, without any clarification or distinction made between the two.

  John MacArthur: "The New Testament uses identical terminology to describe both Old and New Testament prophets. In the book of Acts, Old Testament prophets are mentioned in Acts 2:16; 3:24–25; 10:43; 13:27, 40; 15:15; 24:14; 26:22, 27; and 28:23. References to New Testament prophets are interspersed using the same vocabulary without any distinction, comment, or caveat (cf. Acts 2:17–18; 7:37; 11:27–28; 13:1; 15:32; 21:9–11)" (*Strange Fire*, 119).

- The word *prophētēs* is used in the New Testament to describe both Old Testament *prophets* and New Testament *prophets*. No distinction is made between the two.

  Sam Waldron: "If New Testament prophecy in distinction from Old Testament prophecy was not infallible in its pronouncements, this would have constituted an absolutely fundamental contrast between the Old Testament institution and the New Testament institution. To suppose that a difference as important as this would be passed over without explicit comment is unthinkable" (Sam Waldron, *To Be Continued?* 65).

But there are other indications as well:

- In **Acts 2:18**, Peter quoted from **Joel 2:28** to describe what prophesy would be like in the New Testament age. Joel 2:28 is an Old Testament passage, meaning that the type of prophecy it describes is *Old Testament quality* prophecy. In other words, by using that passage, Peter was declaring that New Testament prophecy would be the same as the Old Testament prophecy that Joel described.

- The New Testament describes its prophets (men like John the Baptist, Agabus, and the apostle John in the book of Revelation) in the same way that Old Testament prophets were described.

- For the sake of time, let's just consider **the ministry of Agabus**, who is mentioned a couple of times in the book of Acts. New Testament scholar **David Farnell** notes the parallels between Agabus and Old Testament prophets:

  David Farnell: [Agabus] introduced his prophecy with the formula, "This is what the Holy Spirit says" (Acts 21:11), which closely parallels the Old Testament prophetic formula of "thus says the Lord" so frequently proclaimed by Old Testament prophets (e.g., Isa. 7:7; Ezek. 5:5; Amos 1:3, 6, 11, 13; Obad. 1; Mic. 2:3; Nah. 1:12; Zech. 1:3-4). This same introductory phrase introduces the words of the Lord Jesus to the seven churches in the Book of Revelation (cf. Rev. 2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, 14). Like many Old Testament prophets, Agabus presented his prophecies through symbolic actions (Acts 21:11; cf. 1 Kings 11:29-40; 22:11; Isa. 20:1-6; Jer. 13:1-11; Ezek. 4:1-17; 5:1-17). Like the Old Testament prophets, Agabus was empowered by the Holy Spirit as the prophetic messenger (Acts 11:28; cf. Num. 11:25-29; 1 Sam. 10:6, 10; 2 Sam. 23:2; Isa. 42:1; 59:21; Zech. 7:12; Neh. 9:30). Like the Old Testament prophets, Agabus's prophecies were accurately fulfilled (Acts 11:27-28; 21:10-11; cf. 28:17). (Farnell, "Is the Gift of Prophecy for Today?" *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 1992–93)

- After an exhaustive study of New Testament prophecy, **Dr. Farnell** came to this conclusion:

  > **David Farnell:** In summary the early post-apostolic church judged the genuineness of New Testament prophets by Old Testament prophetic standards. Prophets in the New Testament era who were ecstatic, made wrong applications of Scripture, or prophesied falsely were considered false prophets because such actions violated Old Testament stipulations regarding what characterized a genuine prophet of God (Deut. 13:1–5; 18:20–22). . . . The early church affirmed the idea of a direct continuity between Old Testament and New Testament prophets and prophetic standards (ibid).

- So what's the bottom line? Nothing in the New Testament suggests that there was a second-tier of congregational prophets in the early church that was held to a lower standard of prophetic accuracy. Rather the opposite is true. The New Testament indicates that prophets in the church were measured by the same criteria as Old Testament prophets: (1) moral integrity, (2) doctrinal orthodoxy, (3) and predictive accuracy.

F. Charismatic Objections

- Now, at this point there are at least 3 main objections that continuationists will raise in response. So, let's deal with each of these one at a time.

- **First**, proponents of fallible prophecy will often point to **Romans 12:6** which in the New American Standard version reads, "Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, each of us is to exercise them accordingly: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith."

    - Based on this verse, charismatics argue that the accuracy of one's prophecy can vary depending on the amount of a person's faith. In other words, if a person only has 80% faith, his prophecy will only be 80% accurate.

    - But that is not the best understanding of the Greek in this case. The word "his" before "faith" is not there in the Greek. Rather, the word that is actually there is the definite article "the."

    - In other words, the verse would be better translated this way: "if prophecy, according to the proportion of *the* faith." This verse is not teaching that the accuracy of prophetic declarations varies in proportion to how much faith a person has. Rather, it is arguing that words of prophecy must accord perfectly with *the faith*—that body of previously revealed truth that constitutes sound doctrine (cf. Jude 3–4).

    - In other words, rather than teaching that prophetic declarations can be inaccurate, it is stating that *they must be absolutely accurate and orthodox*, in keeping with that which has been previously revealed … otherwise they are to be rejected.

    Additional Comments on Romans 12:6:

        - The Greek phrase in Romans 12:6 is literally rendered, "according to the analogy of the faith." As James Boice noted in his commentary on this verse, "The last words of the phrase are literally 'the faith' (not 'his faith,' as in the NIV)" (p. 1584).

        - Some argue that it should be rendered as "in proportion to *his* faith." This could be construed as making the accuracy of the prophecy contingent on the proportion of personal faith possessed by the prophet.

- The text is better rendered as "in correspondence with *the* faith" or (if one prefers) "in correspondence with *our* faith" – wherein prophecy was to be evaluated by an external standard of previously revealed doctrinal truth. (The plural pronoun "our" brings out this same idea, emphasizing a commitment to the "common standard shared within the community of believers" [Hultgren, Romans, 448].)

- Why do I believe the latter interpretation to be correct? Here are six reasons (in no particular order):

  (1) There needs to be a strong contextual reason to abandon the literal rendering of the text. In this case, the literal reading not only makes sense, I believe it makes the best sense of the passage.

  (2) Paul uses the phrase "the faith" to refer to the body of Christian truth in places like Galatians 1:23; 1 Tim. 1:4, 19; 3:9; 4:1, 6; 6:21.

  (3) The Greek term "analogia" can mean "in proportion to." But it often means things like "in correspondence with," "in relationship to," or "in analogy to." The broader semantic range of the word supports the objective view of "the faith" rather than the subjective view of "his faith."

  (4) After comparing the way prophecy is described in Romans 12 with the other gifts, Arland J. Hultgren notes, "By using the elaborate phrase ["according to the analogy of the faith"], he [Paul] points to something outside the personal faith of the prophet" (*Romans*, 449). In other words, the unique way in which Paul describes the limits placed on prophecy favors the objective view.

  (5) If a prophet's accuracy was simply dependent on the level of his own personal faith, and was not judged in accordance to the common standard of faith, then this "would open the gates to every abuse and even false teaching" (Kasemann, 341). "If there is no check the way is wide open for any heresy to be introduced; all a man has to do is claim that he is a prophet" (Morris, 441). That is exactly my concern with how this verse has been abused within charismatic circles.

  (6) This understanding is consistent with the way prophecy was judged in 1 Corinthians 14, where an external, objective standard applied to a prophet's words. As Morris explains, "Paul tells us that two or three would prophesy

and 'the others would weigh carefully what is said' (1 Cor. 14:29). It is clear that the early church was well aware of the danger of false prophets (Matt. 24:11, 24); there must be a testing of the spirits (1 John 4:1 – 6). It is some such process of which Paul appears to be speaking here [in Romans 12:6]" (Morris, 441).

- Finally, for what it's worth, the majority of Bible commentators likewise take this viewpoint. As Douglas Moo acknowledges, "Most commentators think it refers to *the* faith, the body of Christian truth" (*Romans*, NIV Application Commentary, 403).

- **Second**, proponents of fallible prophecy often look to **1 Thessalonians 5:20–22** in order to assert that *because New Testament prophecy had to be tested, it must have been fallible*.

  - **1 Thessalonians 5:20–22** reads as follows: "Do not despise prophetic utterances. But examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good; abstain from every form of evil."

  - Based on this verse, continuationists ask, "If New Testament prophecy was infallible, like Old Testament prophecy was, why did Paul command believers to test it carefully?"

  - We would respond by making the following observations:

    - Paul's statement, "Do not despise prophetic utterances" was written at a time when all agree the gift of prophecy was still active in the church. So, when cessationists reject the false predictions made by self-appointed modern prophets, they are not disobeying Paul's command. Rather, they are taking the command to test prophesy seriously. When we test modern prophets by the biblical standards of (1) moral integrity (2) doctrinal orthodoxy, and (3) predictive accuracy, we are right to reject those who do not pass the test.

    - In fact, in verse 22, Paul states that those "prophecies" which do not pass the test (and by implication those who declare such prophecies) are to be regarded as *evil*, and believers are to *abstain* from them. There is a gravitas to that kind of rejection of error which cessationists seek to take seriously.

    - The fact that Paul instructed his readers to "examine [prophetic utterances] carefully" does not imply that New Testament prophecy was fallible. Rather,

it indicates that false prophets posed a real threat to the New Testament church (cf. Matt. 7:15; 24:11; 2 Tim. 4:3–4; 2 Pet. 2:1–3; 1 John 4:1; Jude 4). Consequently, believers needed to examine all supposed prophecies carefully, so as to distinguish between true prophets and false prophets.

John MacArthur: The Thessalonians, in particular, needed to be wary of false prophets. Paul's two epistles to them indicate that some within their congregation had already been misled—both with regard to Paul's personal character (1 Thess. 2:1 – 12) and the eschatological future of the church (1 Thess. 4:13 – 5:11). Much of Paul's instruction was in response to the erroneous teaching that was wreaking havoc within the Thessalonian church. Perhaps that is why some of the Thessalonians were tempted to despise all prophetic utterances, including those that were true (*Strange Fire*, 125).

- Finally, the idea that New Testament prophecy had to be "examined" or "tested" does not mean it was qualitatively different from Old Testament prophecy. The very reason God told the Israelites that true prophecy had to be *orthodox* (Deut. 13:1–5) and *accurate* (Deut. 18:20–22) was so that they could test it. And why did it need to be tested? Because, just as in New Testament times, the threat of false prophets was an ever present danger (cf. Deut. 13:3; Isa. 30:10; Jer. 5:31; 14:14–16; 23:21–22; Ezek. 13:2–9; 22:28; Mic. 3:11).

- Paul himself considered the Bereans of **Acts 17:11** to be more noble because, even though he was an apostle, they had tested his teachings against the backdrop of previous revelation. As Luke says about them, "These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so."

- So where does that leave us regarding **1 Thessalonians 5:20–22?**

- **John MacArthur** provides a helpful answer: "Putting all this together, we see that 1 Thessalonians 5:20 – 22 does not support the charismatic case for fallible prophecy. Rather, it leads to the opposite conclusion, because it calls Christians to test any message or messenger that claims to come from God. When we apply the tests of Scripture to the supposed revelations of modern-day charismatics, we quickly see their 'prophesying' for what it really is: a dangerous counterfeit" (*Strange Fire*, 126).

- The **third objection** raised by many charismatics regards the **prophet Agabus** and his prediction in **Acts 21:11**.

  - According to continuationists, Agabus was a true prophet who got the predictive details of his prophecy wrong. In their minds, he provides an example – in fact, the only example – of a New Testament prophet who failed to make an accurate prediction.

  - In Acts 11:28, Agabus is affirmed as a true prophet, who accurately foretold the coming of a severe famine. But controversy surrounds Acts 21:10–11, when Agabus warns Paul of the coming persecution he will face if he returns to Jerusalem. Luke writes:

    - **Acts 21:10–11:** As we were staying there [in Caesarea Philippi] for some days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. And coming to us, he took Paul's belt and bound his own feet and hands, and said, "This is what the Holy Spirit says: 'In this way the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.' "

  - According to continuationists, the overall gist of Agabus's prophecy is accurate, but the details are wrong.

  - In particular, Agabus erred when he stated (1) that the Jews would bind Paul and (2) that the Jews would deliver Paul into the hands of the Romans.

    - As continuationist **Wayne Grudem** explains, this is "a prophecy whose two elements—'binding' and 'giving over' by the Jews—are explicitly falsified by the subsequent narrative" (*The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today*, 80).

  - Elsewhere, Grudem adds that, for Agabus, "the prediction was not far off, but it had inaccuracies in detail that would have called into question the validity of any Old Testament prophet" (*Bible Doctrine*, 411).

  - **So, how are we to think about Agabus?** Are the details of his prophecy *explicitly falsified* by the biblical text? Did he err when he predicted that the Jews would *bind* Paul and *hand him over* to the Romans?

  - Not at all. Rather, Agabus got the details exactly right. **Here are five reasons why:**

1. Nothing in the text states that Agabus got his prophecy wrong. Neither Luke, nor Paul, nor anyone else in Scripture criticizes the accuracy of Agabus's prediction or says that he erred. Thus, at best, the continuationist approach to Agabus is based on an argument from silence.

2. Luke's description of what happened to Paul in Jerusalem implies that the Jews "bound" him (just as Agabus predicted). Later in Acts 21, Luke explains what happened to the apostle shortly after he arrived in Jerusalem.

- The Jews "laid hands on" Paul (v. 27), "seized" him (v. 30), "dragged" him out of the temple (v. 30), "sought to kill" him (v. 31), and "were beating" him when the Roman soldiers finally arrived (v. 32).

- In Acts 26:21, Paul reiterates (before Agrippa) that the Jews "seized" him in the temple and "tried to kill" him. Since Paul did not willingly go with the Jewish mob (a point implied by verbs like "seized" and "dragged"), they would have had to restrain him in some way as they forcibly removed him from the temple—using whatever was immediately available to bind him.

- Thus, in both Acts 21 and Acts 26, the implication is that Paul was bound by the Jews before he was delivered to the Romans. Agabus explicitly said that Paul would be bound and the text implies that that is exactly what happened. (The Greek verb deo ["to bind"] can mean to arrest or imprison, but it can also mean to tie up with ropes [Luke 19:30] or to wrap with rags [John 11:44].) (The Greek verb *deo* ["to bind"] can mean to arrest or imprison, but it can also mean to tie up with ropes [Luke 19:30] or to wrap with rags [John 11:44].)

- Not only does the text *not* state that Agabus's prophecy was wrong, it gives us good reason to believe that his prediction that Paul would be "bound" by the Jews was exactly right.

3. Paul's later testimony confirms that the Jews "delivered him over" to the Romans. Continuationists claim that Agabus also erred when he predicted that the Jews would *give Paul over* to the Romans. But is such an error demanded by the text?

- In Acts 21:32, Paul is being beaten when the Roman cohort arrives. The Jews, upon seeing the soldiers, stop assaulting Paul (v. 32). The bloodied

apostle is then arrested by the Romans (v. 33). The implication of the text is that the Jews backed away and willingly relinquished Paul into the hands of the Romans once the soldiers arrived. Such accords perfectly with Agabus's prediction.

- The accuracy of Agabus's statement is further strengthened by the testimony of Paul himself. Acts 28:16–17, describing Paul's arrival in Rome, says this:

Acts 28:16–17: When we entered Rome, Paul was allowed to stay by himself, with the soldier who was guarding him. After three days Paul called together those who were the leading men of the Jews, and when they came together, he began saying to them, "Brethren, though I had done nothing against our people or the customs of our fathers, yet I was ***delivered as a prisoner*** from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans." (emphasis added)

- Significantly, Paul uses the same word for "delivered" that Agabus used in Acts 21:11 (*paradidomi*).

4. Agabus is quoting the Holy Spirit. In Acts 21:11, Agabus begins his prophecy by stating, "Thus says the Holy Spirit," (just like the Old Testament prophets would declare, "Thus says the Lord") and nothing in the text indicates that he was wrong to do so. (In fact, the Holy Spirit Himself inspired Luke to record Agabus's prophecy in just that way, with no qualifications or caveats.) Those who wish to accuse Agabus of error ought to be very careful, since Agabus himself is quoting the Holy Spirit.

5. No one in church history accused Agabus of errant prophecy until modern times. The church fathers don't talk about Agabus much. But when they do, they equate him (in accuracy and authority) with the Old Testament prophets. There is no hint of "fallible prophecy" in their description of Agabus or his prediction in Acts 21:11.

Now, I could go through quotes from well-known early Christian leaders, from Augustine to Chrysostom to Ambrose to Cyril. And what you would find is that these early theologians never question the accuracy of Agabus. Moreover, they regard him as being equal to Old Testament prophets like Isaiah and Ezekiel.

- When we consider the evidence from both Scripture and church history, we find that there is no valid reason to accuse Agabus of fallible prophecy. There were no errors with his prediction in Acts 21:11.

- And that again underscores the problem for the continuationist position. Because, as we noted earlier, if Agabus did not err in his prophecy, then there are no examples of fallible prophecy in the New Testament.

G. **Additional Thoughts on Prophecy**

Here are a few other objections that continuationists sometimes raise:

- **Samuel Waldron:** "Continuationists note that the prophets were subordinate to the Apostles of Christ. This is said in order to *imply* their fallibility. It is certainly true that the New Testament prophets were inferior in rank to the Apostles. This is suggested, for instance, by the consistent New Testament order in which apostles are mentioned first and prophets second (1 Cor. 12:29; Eph. 2:20; 3:5; 4:11). This subordinate position does not, however, imply their fallibility. As we have seen, the Old Testament prophets were distinctly inferior to Moses in the place they held in the nation of Israel (Num. 12:1–8). This, however, did not imply their fallibility" (*To Be Continued?*, 66).

  - **Note that the apostles are unique.** They are greater than the OT prophets, not equivalent to them. It is the apostles, not the prophets, who govern the 12 tribes of Israel (Matt. 19:28) in the future and whose names are on the foundation stones of the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:14). Also note Christ's words in Matthew 11:11.

- **Samuel Waldron:** "Continuationists argue that contemporary prophets receive a revelation or vision from God, but are not preserved from garbling the message when they utter it. Strictly speaking, this would mean they are seers and not prophets, a distinction nowhere made in the Bible. It would also mean they are false prophets (Deut. 18:15–22). Nowhere does the Bible make a provision for a well-meaning seer who garbles his message" (*To Be Continued?*, 67).

  Robert Saucy: "[The continuationist] wants to separate 'revelation' as being divine and therefore always infallible from the 'perception or reception' of that revelation, which is human and therefore liable to error. Such a separation between the revelation and its reception leads one to believe that the revelation is not given in words, but is apparently more akin got the existentialist or neo-orthodox nonpropositional revelation. For if the revelation is given in words, then

> even if left to his own humanness, it is difficult to see how the prophet could fail to perceive or receive such revelation and speak it faithfully unless he deliberately wanted to change the words. I am not suggesting that the prophet is necessarily able to interpret the revelation. There are biblical prophets who apparently did not fully understand the words that they spoke (e.g. Dan. 12:8 – 9; Zech. 4:5; 1 Peter 1:10 – 11). But they conveyed the words of the prophecy accurately and infallible. (*Are Miraculous Gifts for Today? Four Views*, 230).

- Some continuationists (e.g. John Piper) point to **1 Corinthians 13:9** and suggest that Paul's statement, "We prophesy in part" implies that New Testament prophets were fallible. But partial prophecy is not the same as inaccurate prophecy. Old Testament prophecies were partial (cf. 1 Pet. 1:10–12), yet they were nonetheless infallible.

- Some continuationists (e.g. John Piper) argue that **1 Corinthians 11:5** demands a non-authoritative form of New Testament prophecy. In that verse, Paul talks about women prophesying. Yet, in other New Testament passages, Paul teaches that women are not to exercise authority over men (cf. 1 Tim. 2:12). Thus, it is argued, if women could be prophets in the early church (cf. Acts 21:9) then New Testament prophecy must not be authoritative. But this objection falls short on at least two counts. First, women were not permitted to speak in the church (1 Cor. 14:34). Thus, whatever prophesying they did, it must have taken place outside of the local church meeting—in contexts in which they would not have violated Paul's stipulations in 1 Tim. 2. Second, it must be remembered that there were female prophets in the Old Testament as well (Ex. 15:20–21; Judges 4:4; 2 Kings 22:14–20; Isa. 8:3; cf. Luke 2:36). Thus, the cessationist position (that New Testament prophets were held to the same standard as Old Testament prophets) is not at all impugned by Paul's reference to women prophesying in 1 Cor. 11:5. Prophetesses in the New Testament would have been held to the same standard as their Old Testament counterparts.

- Some continuationists assert from **Acts 21:4** indicates that New Testament prophecy was not regarded as authoritative by the early Christians.

    - Though continuationists sometimes argue for fallible and non-authoritative prophecy in Acts 21:4, it is unreasonable to do so for a couple reasons. First, the exact content of the prophecy is not given by Luke. That makes it impossible to establish error in the prophetic message itself, because we don't know its exact contents. Second, whatever its specific contents were, the message is directly credited by Luke to the Holy Spirit. Since the Spirit cannot contradict Himself (cf. Acts 20:22), we should be very careful before we assume fallible prophecy in that verse.

- Based on the context, it is better to understand Acts 21:4 as a summary statement (by Luke) of the very same thing that happened in Acts 21:7-14. As had been occurring in every city (Acts 20:23), the prophetic message from the Holy Spirit warned Paul of the tribulation that awaited him in Jerusalem (cf. Acts 21:11). The response of the believers was one of sadness, entreating Paul not to go (cf. Acts 20:38; 21:12). Thus, there are two elements in play: (1) the revelation of the Spirit (which was both accurate and authoritative, and which revealed the tribulations that awaited Paul in Jerusalem); and (2) the reaction of Paul's friends (which was heartfelt and well-intentioned, but not-authoritative).

- Paul rightly understands that the word of prophecy is intended as a warning and not a prohibition. Paul is not disobeying a word of prophecy when he continues on his journey. Rather, he is doing exactly what the Holy Spirit had compelled him to do (Acts 20:22).

- This, by the way, has been the understanding of commentators throughout church history, like the fourth-century expositor, John Chrysostom. In his commentary on this passage, he clearly separates the Spirit's revelation (which was accurate and authoritative) from the urging of Paul's friends (which was heartfelt but non-authoritative).

- To quote again from **Thomas Edgar**:

    - "We do not have the exact words of the prophecy in Acts 21:4, which concerns the same subject as that of Agabus's prophecy. Therefore, it is inappropriate to claim with Carson and Grudem that Paul disregarded this prophecy, thereby showing that he did not regard it as authoritative. This is particularly true since there is a direct correspondence to this situation in the same passage. When Agabus gave his prophecy, warning Paul what would happen to him in Jerusalem, the disciples, including Luke, interpreted the warning to mean that Paul should not go to Jerusalem even though Agabus did not specifically say that Paul should stay away from Jerusalem (Acts 21:12–13). The most logical way to interpret Acts 21:4 is that the prophecy was much the same as Agabus's—a warning rather than a prohibition against going to Jerusalem. ... This warning was then understood by most of those present as a prohibition, just as the similar warning was incorrectly taken as a prohibition in Acts 21:12–13. On the other hand, it was correctly understood by Paul to be only a warning" (*Satisfied by the Promise of the Spirit*, 84).

Here are a few final thoughts to consider:

- The book of Revelation, which is clearly New Testament prophecy, brings a curse on any who add to what it has revealed (Rev. 1:3; 22:7, 10, 18, 19).

- The NT explains that the New Covenant is better than the Old (Heb. 8:1–13; 2 Cor. 3:1–6). But this would be strange if the prophets associated with the New Covenant were actually inferior to that of the Old.

- New Testament prophets were, as seen from above, both infallible and authoritative in their prophecies. Thus, if revelatory prophecy were still available today, it too would be both infallible and authoritative.

  > **Robert Saucy:** "[The continuationist's] definition of prophecy fails to see that the Spirit's work of inspiration in prophecy goes all the way to the actual prophecy, that is, the words spoken or written. As Peter says concerning prophecy, "men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:21). No matter what forms God's revelation to the prophet may entail (e.g., the visions of Ezekiel), the final revelation includes the verbal meaning. That is to say, the prophet's words are God's revelation and thus his words, not simply the human *report* of revelation (cf. 2 Sam. 23:2; Jer. 1:7, 9; 1 Cor. 2:13)" (*Are the Miraculous Gifts for Today? Four Views*, 230).
  >
  > **Thomas Edgar:** "Based on the description of the prophet in the New Testament no one can demonstrate that they are a prophet apart from the ability to predict the future. The predictions are not vague, general statements, but rather quite specific predictions that may be verified within reasonable time. They must also receive direct, immediate revelation" (*Satisfied by the Promise of the Spirit*, 84).

H. Review

- In review, the Bible articulates three criteria by which to evaluate a true prophet from a false prophet. Those criteria are (1) doctrinal orthodoxy, (2) moral integrity, and (3) predictive accuracy.

- In the mainstream charismatic movement, many modern prophets fail on all three of those criteria. However, failure on just one of those three is enough to disqualify a person from being regarded as a true prophet. This afternoon we have primarily concentrated on that third criteria, "predictive accuracy." What we have found is that,

even proponents of modern prophecy readily admit that it often contains errors and mistakes.

- Charismatics and continuationists attempt to compensate for that reality by suggesting that there was a form of New Testament prophecy that also contained errors and mistakes.

- However, upon closer examination, there is no biblical evidence to back up that assertion.

  As **John MacArthur** explains: "*Fallible* prophets are *false* prophets—or at best, misguided nonprophets who should immediately cease and desist from presumptively pretending to speak for God. . . . When compared to the clear criteria set forth in the Word of God, nothing about modern prophecy measures up" (*Strange Fire*, 119).

- By contrast, cessationists teach that the gift of prophecy has ceased. According to **Ephesians 2:20**, the apostles and prophets were for the foundation age of the church. When the apostolic age ended, prophets also quickly vanished from the scene.

- With the canon of Scripture complete, there is no longer any need for us to receive new revelation from God. We have the *prophetic Word*, and it contains all that we need for life and godliness. *The sufficiency of Scripture is at stake!*

SUMMARY: New Testament prophets were held to the same standard as Old Testament prophets since the NT writers make no attempt to distinguish between the two. Thus, the content of their prophecy (in proclaiming new divine revelation) had to accurately convey the true, error-free message they were receiving from God. If their prophecy was shown to be incorrect, it was also shown to not be from God. Moreover, now that we have the completed "prophetic Word," additional revelation from God is no longer needed for the present age.

I. Voices from History and Scripture

- **David Martyn Lloyd-Jones**, the well-known British pastor of the early twentieth century said this about the gift of prophecy:

> Try to imagine our position if we did not possess these New Testament Epistles, but the Old Testament only. That was the position of the early Church. Truth was imparted to it primarily by the teaching and preaching of the apostles, but that was supplemented by the teaching of the prophets to whom truth was given and also

> the ability to speak it with clarity and power in the demonstration and authority of the Spirit. But once these New Testament documents were written the office of a prophet was no longer necessary.
>
> . . . Again, we must note that often in the history of the Church trouble has arisen because people thought that they were prophets in the New Testament sense, and that they had received special revelations of truth. The answer to that is that in view of the New Testament Scriptures there is no need of further truth. That is an absolute proposition. We have all truth in the New Testament, and we have no need of any further revelations. All has been given, everything that is necessary for us is available. Therefore if a man claims to have received a revelation of some fresh truth we should suspect him immediately. . . .
>
> The answer to all this is that the need for prophets ends once we have the canon of the New Testament. We no longer need direct revelations of truth; the truth is in the Bible. We must never separate the Spirit and the Word. The Spirit speaks to us through the Word; so we should always doubt and query any supposed revelation that is not entirely consistent with the Word of God. Indeed the essence of wisdom is to reject altogether the term 'revelation' as far as we are concerned, and speak only of 'illumination'. The revelation has been given once and for all, and what we need and what by the grace of God we can have, and do have, is illumination by the Spirit to understand the Word. (D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Christian Unity* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987], 191–92)

- That is an excellent summary of the cessationist position. It also underscores the dangers that come from insisting that there are still prophets who are active in the church today.

- A **second** quote comes from another well-known British pastor, this time from the eighteenth century. It is none other than **Charles Spurgeon**:

> "Dear Brothers and Sisters, honor the Spirit of God as you would honor Jesus Christ if He were present! If Jesus Christ were dwelling in your house you would not ignore Him, you would not go about your business as if He were not there! Do not ignore the Presence of the Holy Spirit in your soul! . . . To Him pay your constant adorations. Reverence the august Guest who has been pleased to make your body His sacred abode. Love Him, obey Him, worship Him!
>
> "Take care never to impute the vain imaginings of your fancy to Him. I have seen the Spirit of God shamefully dishonored by persons—I hope they were insane—who have said that they have had this and that revealed to them. There has not, for some years, passed over my head a single week in which I have not been pestered with the revelations of hypocrites or maniacs. Semi-lunatics are very fond of coming with messages from the Lord to me and it may save them

> some trouble if I tell them once and for all that I will have none of their stupid messages. . . .
>
> "Never dream that events are revealed to you by Heaven, or you may come to be like those idiots who dare impute their blatant follies to the Holy Spirit. If you feel your tongue itch to talk nonsense, trace it to the devil, not to the Spirit of God! Whatever is to be revealed by the Spirit to any of us is in the Word of God already—He adds nothing to the Bible, and never will. Let persons who have revelations of this, that, and the other, go to bed and wake up in their senses. I only wish they would follow the advice and no longer insult the Holy Spirit by laying their nonsense at His door." (Charles Spurgeon, sermon entitled, "The Paraclete," October 6, 1872)

- Those words may sound harsh, but they underscore just how serious this issue is. It is not a trivial thing to claim you have received a word from God when in fact you have not.

- To make that point, here is a quote from the **prophet Jeremiah**. Listen to God's warning to any and all who would presume to speak false prophesies in His name:

> Thus says the Lord of hosts: "Do not listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you. They make you worthless; They speak a vision of their own heart, not from the mouth of the Lord. . . . I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran. I have not spoken to them, yet they prophesied. But if they had stood in My counsel, and had caused My people to hear My words, then they would have turned them from their evil way and from the evil of their doings. . . . I have heard what the prophets have said who prophesy lies in My name, saying, 'I have dreamed, I have dreamed!' How long will this be in the heart of the prophets who prophesy lies? Indeed they are prophets of the deceit of their own heart. . . . Behold, I am against the prophets," says the Lord, "who use their tongues and say, 'He [the Lord] says.' Behold, I am against those who prophesy false dreams," says the Lord, "and tell them, and cause My people to err by their lies and by their recklessness. Yet I did not send them or command them; therefore they shall not profit this people at all," says the Lord. (Jer. 23:16–32)

- That warning could not be clearer. The Lord opposes all who claim to declare divine revelation and yet speak words that come from their own imaginations.

J. <u>QUESTION</u>: What about the Spirit's Leading and Subjective Guidance of Believers?

- Cessationists do not deny the ministry of the Holy Spirit in providentially leading His people, by aligning their desires with His sovereign will (Ps. 37:4).

- Confusion comes when labels like "a word from the Lord" or "divine revelation" are applied to fallible impressions or subjective feelings of guidance.

- When fallible impressions are labeled "prophecy" (and therefore equated with prophetic revelation in the New Testament) the implications for practical church ministry are massive and highly problematic.

- In church history, Charles Spurgeon and D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones are sometimes brought up as Christian leaders who appealed to subjective guidance. Perhaps we can provide some balance from their own writings:

  <u>Charles Spurgeon</u> (sermon, "A Well Ordered Life"): "To live by impressions is oftentimes to live the life of a fool and even to fall into downright rebellion against the revealed Word of God. Not your impressions, but that which is in this Bible must always guide you. 'To the Law and to the Testimony.' If it is not according to this Word, the impression comes not from God—it may proceed from Satan, or from your own distempered brain! Our prayer must be, 'Order my steps in Your Word.' Now, that rule of life, the written Word of God, we ought to study and obey."

  (Spurgeon himself held to a cessationist position on the gifts, and did not equate "impressions" with the gift of prophecy.)

  <u>D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones</u> (*Fellowship with God*, p. 95): "Let us imagine I follow the mystic way. I begin to have experiences; I think God is speaking to me; how do I know it is God who is speaking to me? How can I know I am not speaking to man; how can I be sure that I am not the victim of hallucinations, since this has happened to many of the mystics? If I believe in mysticism as such without the Bible, how do I know I am not being deluded by Satan as an angel of light in order to keep me from the true and living God? I have no standard.... The evangelical doctrine tells me not to look into myself but to look into the Word of God; not to examine myself, but to look at the revelation that has been given to me. It tells me that God can only be known in His own way, the way which has been revealed in the Scriptures themselves."

* * * * *

Addendum: Prophecy and the Sufficiency of Scripture

Article Title: “Hearing Voices”
Author: John MacArthur

Have you noticed that no matter how many times charismatic televangelists make outlandish false "prophecies," they keep right on claiming the Lord has spoken directly to them, and people keep right on following them?

Failed Prophecies

Benny Hinn, for example, made a series of celebrated prophetic utterances in December 1989, *none* of which came true. He confidently told his congregation at the Orlando Christian Center that God had revealed to him that Fidel Castro would die sometime in the 1990s; the homosexual community in America would be destroyed by fire before 1995; and a major earthquake would cause havoc on the East Coast before the year 2000. He was wrong on all counts, of course. That did not deter Hinn. He is still making bold prophecies. Early last year he announced that a prophetess had informed him Jesus would soon appear physically in some of his healing meetings. Hinn said he was convinced the prophecy was authentic, and on his April 2, 2000, broadcast he amplified it with a prophecy of his own: "Now hear this, I am prophesying this! Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is about to appear physically in some churches, and some meetings, and to many of his people, for one reason: to tell you he is about to show up! So wake up! Jesus is coming, saints!"

Hinn's failed prophecies are reminiscent of a string of notorious claims Oral Roberts made a couple of decades ago. Roberts said in 1977 that he had seen a vision of a 900-foot-tall Jesus, who instructed him to build the City of Faith, a sixty-story hospital. Roberts said God had told him he would use the center to unite medical technology with faith healing, which would revolutionize health care and enable doctors to find a cure for cancer.

The building, completed in the early 1980s, was a colossal white elephant from the very start. When the City of Faith opened, all but two stories of the massive structure were completely vacant.

By January 1987, the project was saddled with unmanageable debt, and Roberts announced that the Lord had told him that he would die unless he raised $8 million to pay the debt by March 1. Apparently not willing to test the death-threat prophecy, donors dutifully gave Roberts the needed funds in time (with the help of $1.3 million donated at the last hour by a Florida dog-

track owner). Nevertheless, Roberts was forced to close the medical center and sell the building within two years in order to eliminate still-mounting debt. More than 80 percent of the building had never even been occupied. The promised cure for cancer never materialized either.
A list of similar failed prophesies over the past few decades could fill several volumes. And yet, amazingly, the "prophets" who make such fantastic claims now appear to have more influence than ever—even among mainstream evangelicals.

Seeking the Spirit apart from the Word

The charismatic movement began barely a hundred years ago, but its influence on evangelicalism can hardly be overstated. Its chief legacy has been an unprecedented interest in *extrabiblical revelation.* Millions influenced by charismatic doctrine are convinced that God speaks to them directly. "The Lord told me ..." has become the favorite cliché among these Christians.
Not all who believe that God speaks to them make prophetic pronouncements as outlandish as those broadcast by charismatic televangelists, of course. But they still believe God gives them extrabiblical messages—either through an audible voice, a vision, a voice in their heads, or simply an internal *impression.* In most cases, their "prophecies" are comparatively trivial. But the difference between them and Hinn's predictions is merely one of scale, not of substance.
The notion that God is giving messages to Christians today has received support from some surprising sources. Wayne Grudem, professor of biblical and systematic theology at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, believes God gives Christians prophetic messages by bringing specific thoughts to mind. Such impressions should be reported as postapostolic, nonbinding prophecy, he says.

Similar ideas have found sweeping acceptance even among noncharismatic Christians. Evangelicals have eagerly devoured *Experiencing God*, by Henry Blackaby and Claude King, which suggests that the main way the Holy Spirit leads believers is by speaking to them *directly.* According to Blackaby, when God gives an individual a message that pertains to the church, it should be shared with the whole body. As a result, extrabiblical "words from the Lord" are now commonplace even among noncharismatic evangelicals.

Why do so many modern Christians seek revelation from God through means other than Scripture? Certainly not because it is a reliable way to discover truth. All sides admit that modern prophecies are often completely erroneous. In my book *Charismatic Chaos*, I quote one leading "prophet" who was thrilled because he believed that two-thirds of his prophecies were accurate. "Well that's better than it's ever been up to now, you know. That's the highest level it's ever been."

In other words, modern prophecy is not a much more reliable way to discern truth than a Magic Eight-Ball or Tarot cards. And, I would add, it is equally superstitious. There is not warrant

anywhere in Scripture for Christians to listen for fresh revelation from God beyond what he has already given us in his written Word. In fact, Scripture unsparingly condemns all who speak *even one word* falsely or presumptuously in the Lord's name (Deut. 18:20-22). But such warnings are simply ignored these days by those who claim to have heard afresh from God.

Not surprisingly, wherever there is a preoccupation with "fresh" prophecy, there is inevitably a neglect of the Scriptures. After all, why be concerned with an ancient book if the living God communicates *directly* with us on a daily basis, however subtly? These fresh words of "revelation" naturally seem more relevant and more urgent than the familiar words of the Bible. Is it any wonder that they draw people away from Scripture?

The Sufficiency of Scripture

That is precisely why modern evangelicalism's infatuation with extrabiblical revelation is so dangerous. It is a return to medieval superstition and a departure from our fundamental conviction that the Bible is our sole, supreme, and sufficient authority for all of life. In other words, it represents a wholesale abandonment of the principle of *sola Scriptura.* Historic Protestantism is grounded in the conviction that the canon is closed. No "new" revelation is necessary because Scripture is complete and absolutely sufficient.

Scripture itself is clear that the day of God's speaking directly to his people through various prophetic words and visions is past. The truth God has revealed in Christ—including the complete New Testament canon—is his final word (Heb. 1:1–2; cf. Jude 3; Rev. 22:18-19). Scripture—the written Word of God—is perfectly sufficient, containing all the revelation we need. Paul tells Timothy: "From infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:15–17).

That passage makes two very important statements. First, "all Scripture is God-breathed." Scripture speaks with the authority of God himself! It is certain, reliable, and true. Jesus himself prayed in John 17:17, "Your word is truth." Psalm 119:160 says, "All your words are true." These statements set Scripture above every human opinion, every speculation, and every emotional sensation. Scripture alone stands as definitive truth. It speaks with an authority that transcends every other voice.

Second, the passage teaches that Scripture is utterly sufficient, "able to make you wise for salvation" and able to make you "thoroughly equipped for every good work." What clearer affirmation of the absolute sufficiency of Scripture could anyone ask for? Those who seek fresh

messages from God have, in effect, scorned the absolute certainty and absolute sufficiency of the written Word of God. And they have set in its place their own fallen and fallible imaginations. Does this mean God has stopped speaking? Certainly not, but *he speaks today through his Word.* Does the Spirit of God move our hearts and impress us with specific duties or callings? Certainly, but *he works through the Word of God* to do that. Such experiences are in no sense prophetic or authoritative. They are not *revelation*, but the effect of *illumination*, when the Holy Spirit applies the Word of God to our hearts and opens our spiritual eyes to its truth.

We must guard carefully against allowing our experience and our own subjective thoughts and imaginations to eclipse the authority and the certainty of the more sure Word.

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III. **The Gift of Tongues**

A. Acts 2 versus 1 Corinthians 12–14

- The charismatic gift that launched the Pentecostal movement in 1901 was speaking in tongues. But does the contemporary version of that gift match the biblical data?

- The definitive passage on the gift of tongues is **Acts 2**—where the majority of both cessationists and continuationists agree that the phenomenon consisted of the supernatural ability to speak in previously unlearned human foreign languages.

> **Acts 2:4–12 –** [4] And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance. [5] Now there were Jews living in Jerusalem, devout men from every nation under heaven. [6] And when this sound occurred, the crowd came together, and were bewildered because each one of them was hearing them speak in his own language. [7] They were amazed and astonished, saying, "Why, are not all these who are speaking Galileans? [8] "And how is it that we each hear them in our own language to which we were born? [9] "Parthians and Medes and Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, [10] Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the districts of Libya around Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, [11] Cretans and Arabs—we hear them in our own tongues speaking of the mighty deeds of God." [12] And they all continued in amazement and great perplexity, saying to one another, "What does this mean?"

- Verse 4 indicates that this was a speaking gift. And it consisted of real human languages which were miraculously spoken by those who had never learned those languages, such that Luke can list more than a dozen different dialects that were spoken.

- By contrast, charismatics generally acknowledge the fact that tongues-speakers today do not speak in authentic foreign languages — or, at least, not in languages that are immediately recognizable as such.

> **Wayne Grudem, *Making Sense of the Church*:** "Are tongues known human languages then? Sometimes this gift may result in speaking in a human language that the speaker has not learned, but ordinarily it seems that it will involve speech in a language that no one understands, whether that be a human language or not."

- While Grudem acknowledges that the gift of tongues could result in a real human language (in keeping with the inescapable implications of Acts 2), he is quick to admit that the gift of tongues that pervades modern charismatic practice consists of unintelligible speech — a language that no one understands.

- Modern linguists who have studied charismatic tongues (or "glossolalia") would agree that it does not consist of a genuine language. After years of first-hand research, University of Toronto linguistics professor William Samarin came to this conclusion:

> **William Samarin:** Glossolalia consists of strings of meaningless syllables made up of sounds taken from those familiar to the speaker and put together more or less haphazardly. The speaker controls the rhythm, volume, speed and inflection of his speech so that the sounds emerge as pseudolanguage—in the form of words and sentences. Glossolalia is language-like because the speaker unconsciously wants it to be language-like. Yet in spite of superficial similarities, glossolalia fundamentally is not language.

- Thus, it would seem, the contemporary charismatic version of tongues — in terms of non-human languages that no one understands — fails to match the gift as it is clearly described on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2.

- In order to bypass this dilemma, continuationists contend that there are more than one kind of *gift of tongues* in the New Testament. As one continuationist writer explained,

> **Adrian Warnock:** "One thing that most of us agree on is that there are different kinds of tongues…. I think it is fair to say that the tongues of 1 Corinthians are different from those of Acts 2. Paul himself speaks here of different kinds of tongues [1 Cor. 14:10]. It is at least possible that at different points in this passage [in 1 Cor. 12–14] Paul is talking about different forms of tongues."

- But does the biblical evidence allow for this distinction? More specifically, is the gift of tongues in 1 Corinthians *categorically different* than the gift described in Acts?

- Here are seven observations from the text, suggesting that the gift of tongues described in Acts was the same as that described in 1 Corinthians 12–14:

1. **Same Terminology:** In both Acts and 1 Corinthians 12–14, the same words are used to describe the gift of tongues. The primary word for tongues in Acts is "glossa" (2:4, 11; 10:46; 19:6). *Glossa* is a Greek word that means *languages*. Thus, it is the gift of

languages! As in Acts, the primary word for tongues in 1 Corinthians 12–14 is "glossa" (12:10, 28; 13:1, 8; 14:2, 4, 5, 9, 13, 18, 19, 22, 23, 26, 27, 39).

> **Wayne Grudem:** It should be said at the outset that the Greek word *glossa*, translated "tongue," is not used only to mean the physical tongue in a person's mouth, but also to mean "language." In the New Testament passages where speaking in tongues is discussed, the meaning "languages" is certainly in view. It is unfortunate, therefore, that English translations have continued to use the phrase "speaking in tongues," which is an expression not otherwise used in ordinary English and which gives the impression of a strange experience, something completely foreign to ordinary human life. But if English translations were to use the expression "speaking in languages," it would not seem nearly as strange, and would give the reader a sense much closer to what first century Greek speaking readers would have heard in the phrase when they read it in Acts or 1 Corinthians. (*Systematic Theology*, 1069).

2. **Same Description:** In both Acts and 1 Corinthians 12–14, the gift of tongues is described in ways that rational languages would be described. The miraculous ability, as it is described in Acts 2, is the supernatural ability to speak in other tongues (meaning foreign languages) (2:4, 9–11). In 1 Corinthians, as in Acts, the gift of tongues is described as a speaking gift (12:30; 14:2, 5).

    - The fact that it can be interpreted/translated (12:10; 14:5, 13) indicates that it consisted of an authentic foreign language, similar to the tongues of Acts 2. Paul's direct association of tongue-speaking with foreign languages in 14:10–11 and also his reference to Isaiah 28:11, 12 strengthens this claim.

    - Just as a side note, when Paul speaks of different "kinds" of tongues in 1 Cor. 12:10, the word for "kind" is *genos* from which we get the English word, "genus." It refers to different families of languages. So it is not suggesting a human kind of language verses a non-human kind of language. It is differentiating different families of human languages.

3. **Same Source:** In both Acts and 1 Corinthians 12–14, the gift of tongues was given by the Holy Spirit. The miraculous tongues in Acts were directly related to the working of the Holy Spirit (2:4, 18; 10:44–46; 19:6). In fact, tongue-speaking is evidence of having received the "gift" (*dorea*) of the Holy Spirit (10:45). As in Acts, the gift of tongues in 1 Corinthians was directly related to the working of the Holy Spirit (12:1, 7, 11, etc.). Similarly, the gift of tongues is an evidence (or "manifestation") of having received the Holy Spirit (12:7).

4. **Same Recipients:** In both Acts and 1 Corinthians 12–14, the gift of tongues was experienced by both apostles and non-apostles. On the Day of Pentecost it involved all of those gathered in the Upper Room. In Acts 11:15–17, Peter implies that the tongue-speaking of Acts 10 was the same as that of Acts 2, even noting that Cornelius and his household had received the same gift as the apostles on the Day of Pentecost.

    - In 1 Corinthians, Paul, as an apostle, possessed the gift of tongues (14:18). Yet he recognized that there were non-apostles in the Corinthian church who also possessed the gift.

5. **Same Primary Purpose:** In both Acts and 1 Corinthians 12–14, the gift of tongues was given as a sign to the nation of Israel that God was now working through the church. In Acts, it is presented as a sign for unbelieving Jews (2:5, 12, 14, 19). In 1 Corinthians, as in Acts, the gift of tongues was a sign for unbelieving Jews (14:21–22; cf. Is. 28:11). Note that the gift is even called a "sign" in 14:22 (the word "sign" is from the same Greek word as "sign" in Acts 2:22). Thus, the Corinthian use of tongues was a sign just as the apostles' use of tongues was a sign on the day of Pentecost.

6. **Same Connection to the Other Gifts:** In the book of Acts, the gift of tongues is closely connected with prophecy (2:16–18; 19:6) and with other signs that the Apostles were performing (2:43). In 1 Corinthians, as in Acts, the gift of tongues is closely connected with prophecy (all throughout 12–14).

7. **Same Reaction from Unbelievers:** In Acts 2, some of the unbelieving Jews at Pentecost accused the apostles of being drunk when they heard them speaking in other tongues (languages which those particular Jews did not understand). Similar to Acts, in 1 Corinthians, Paul states that unbelievers will accuse the Corinthians of being mad [not unlike "drunk"] if their tongues go uninterpreted (14:23), and are therefore not understood by the hearer.

    - Added to this is the fact that Luke (the author of Acts) was a close associate of Paul (the writer of 1 Corinthians), and wrote under Paul's apostolic authority. Moreover, the book of Acts was written *after* the first epistle to the Corinthians. It is unlikely, then, that Luke would have used the exact same terminology as Paul if he understood there to be an essential difference between the two gifts (especially since such could lead to even greater confusion about the gifts — a confusion which plagued the Corinthian church).

- **Conclusion:** The biblical evidence leads us to conclude that there is only one gift of tongues, and that it consisted of authentic foreign languages that the speaker had not previously learned (Mark 16:17; Acts 2:4, 8–11; 10:47; 11:17).

- Such a conclusion has significant ramifications for contemporary charismatics: by acknowledging that the modern form of tongues-speaking does not involve actual foreign languages, they are simultaneously acknowledging that their contemporary experience does not match the New Testament precedent.

Historical Note: It is probably worth noting at this point that the original Pentecostals under the leadership of Charles Fox Parham considered the gift of tongues to refer only to real, authentic foreign languages. As a result, they sent missionaries to foreign countries, only to have those missionaries return in disappointment, when it became clear that the tongues they were speaking were not real languages.

> **Jack Hayford and David Moore:** "Sadly, the idea of xenoglossalalic tongues [foreign languages] would later prove an embarrassing failure as Pentecostal workers went off to mission fields with their gift of tongues and found their hearers did not understand them" (*The Charismatic Century*, 42).

Regrettably, when Pentecostals realized their *tongues* were not real languages, they changed their interpretation of the Bible to fit their experience.

B. Additional Observations about the Gift of Tongues

Here are 8 additional observations about the gift of tongues. They demonstrate the fact that what the Bible says about tongues-speaking differs dramatically from the contemporary charismatic version of it.

1) **Not every believer was expected to speak in tongues.** Many charismatics claim that everyone should speak in tongues. But 1 Corinthians 12:8–11 and 27–31 make it clear that not every Christian received the gift of tongues (cf. 14:26).

   - Someone might object by point to Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 14:5 ("Now I wish that you all spoke in tongues"). But Paul has already explained that not everyone speaks in tongues, and he cannot be contradicting himself here. So how are we to interpret 1 Cor. 14:5? Well, I think we are helped when we recognize that it is almost identical to his earlier statement in 7:7 regarding singleness. ("Yet I wish that all men were even as myself"). Obviously, Paul wasn't commanding every believer to pursue singleness. He was making a rhetorical point. Thus,

Paul's wish does not indicate that everyone in the Corinthian congregation actually spoke in tongues.

2) **Paul's reference to the 'tongues of angels' does not justify unintelligible speech.** The "tongues of angels" in 1 Corinthians 13:1 should be interpreted hyperbolically in keeping with the context of the passage (as Paul's subsequent examples demonstrate). It is parallel to his statements of "knowing all mysteries and all knowledge" and "faith that literally removes mountains." Both of those statements articulate hyperbolic impossibilities, and that is how we should likewise the "tongues of angels." It may even be a figure of speech meaning "to speak very eloquently."

    - If one insists on taking it literally, there are still two things to consider: (1) It is the exception and not the rule, as evidenced by the rest of the New Testament teaching on tongues and as evidenced by the other examples Paul uses in vv. 1–3. (2) Every time angels spoke in the Bible, they spoke in a real language that people could understand (cf. Gen. 19; Exod. 33; Joshua 5; Judges 13).

3) **The fact that true tongues could be translated indicates they consisted of genuine languages.** The concept of interpretation implies a rational message. As Norm Geisler (*Signs and Wonders*, 167) explains:

    Norman Geisler:"The fact that the tongues of which Paul spoke in 1 Corinthians could be 'interpreted' shows that it was a meaningful language. Otherwise it would not be an 'interpretation' but a creation of the meaning. So the gift of 'interpretation' (1 Corinthians 12:30; 14:5, 13) supports the fact that tongues were a real language that could be translated for the benefit of all by this special gift of interpretation."

4) **The purpose of the gifts was to edify others, not to edify yourself.** The purpose of the gifts (within the church) is to edify the body (12:7; cf. 1 Pet. 4:10–11). Paul's whole point is that love is superior to the gifts (chp. 13). The intended use of tongues, therefore, occurs when the message is translated so that fellow believers are edified. Tongues (languages) that are not translated do not profit the body because the message cannot be understood (14:6–11). Paul is not promoting a private use of tongues, since that does not edify others—cf. 14:12–19. Paul's statement in 1 Cor. 14:4 that the one who speaks in tongues edifies himself was said as a negative, as the context makes clear; Paul was noting that tongues was less desirable than prophecy, because prophecy edifies others.

5) **The prayer "in tongues" that is mentioned in 1 Corinthians 14 is a public prayer, not a private prayer.** Charismatics want to define tongues in 1 Corinthians 14 as a private prayer language. But Paul's prayer in 14:14–15 is a public prayer, not a private

prayer. The entire discussion regards the use of the gift in the church, and since verse 16 mentions that the ungifted person (who does not understand the language being spoken) will not be able to affirm a public prayer that he does not understand.

- Again, verses 14–15 do not mitigate against the view that tongues are authentic foreign languages. The person who prays in a foreign language should also pray that he will be able to interpret the foreign language so that all who are present will be blessed by the translation of the message.

- Along those lines, Paul defines what he means by "speaking to God and not to men" when he says that "no one understands" (14:2). This would be true of a foreign language that someone spoke but no one else knew. The hearers would not be edified because they would not understand what was being said.

6) **These gifts were to be exercised in an orderly way.** The gift of tongues was to be used in an orderly manner in the church (14:27–28, 39–40). Any disruptive or disorderly use of tongues-speaking goes against the way God intended the gift to be used.

7) **Nothing in 1 Corinthians suggests that the tongues described there were anything other than genuine foreign languages.** Viewing tongues as authentic foreign languages is the only natural interpretation of Acts 2 and has the least number of problems in interpreting 1 Cor. 12–14.

- As **Thomas Edgar** observes, "There are verses in 1 Corinthians 14 where foreign language makes sense but where unintelligible ecstatic utterance does not (e.g. v. 22). However, the reverse cannot be said. A foreign language not understood by the hearer is no different from unintelligible speech in his sight. Therefore, in any passage where such ecstatic speech may be considered possible, it is also possible to substitute a language not familiar to the hearers. In this passage there are no reasons, much less the very strong reasons necessary, to depart from the normal meaning of *glossa* and to flee to a completely unsupported usage" (*Satisfied by the Promise of the Spirit*, 147).

- In interpreting the Bible, we use the clearer passage to help us understand the less-clear passage. In this case Acts 2 is the clearer passage. So it is appropriate to allow our understanding of Acts to inform our interpretation of 1 Corinthians.

- As a side note, we might add that there are no other passages that specifically teach about the gift of tongues. Some charismatics try to find tongues in Romans

8:26 and 2 Corinthians 5:13, but the context in those passages makes it clear that the gift of tongues is not in view.

8) **We might also add that, while not authoritative, the universal testimony of the church fathers supports the cessationist understanding of tongues.** The church fathers agreed that the gift of tongues in 1 Corinthians was the same as that described in Acts. Moreover, they interpreted that gift as consisting of rational, foreign languages. Though many could be cited, here is a small sampling from several early Christian leaders.

Augustine (354–430): "In the earliest times, 'the Holy Ghost fell upon them that believed: and they spoke with tongues," which they had not learned, "as the Spirit gave them utterance.' These were signs adapted to the time. For it was necessary for there to be that betokening of the Holy Spirit in all tongues, to show that the Gospel of God was to run through all tongues over the whole earth" (*Homilies on the First Epistle of John*, 6.10).

Gregory of Nazianzus (c. 329–390): "They spoke with strange tongues, and not those of their native land; and the wonder was great, a language spoken by those who had not learnt it. And the sign is to them that believe not, and not to them that believe, that it may be an accusation of the unbelievers, as it is written, '"With other tongues and other lips will I speak unto this people, and not even so will they listen to Me" saith the Lord'" (*The Oration on Pentecost*, 15–17).

John Chrysostom (c. 344–407), commenting on 1 Cor. 14:1–2: "And as in the time of building the tower [of Babel] the one tongue was divided into many; so then the many tongues frequently met in one man, and the same person used to discourse both in the Persian, and the Roman, and the Indian, and many other tongues, the Spirit sounding within him: and the gift was called the gift of tongues because he could all at once speak divers languages" (*Homilies on First Corinthians*, 35.1).

Severian of Gabala (d. c. 408): "The person who speaks in the Holy Spirit speaks when he chooses to do so and then can be silent, like the prophets. But those who are possessed by an unclean spirit speak even when they do not want to. They say things that they do not understand" (*Pauline Commentary from the Greek Church*. Cited from *1–2 Corinthians*, Ancient Christian Commentary Series, 144, in reference to 1 Cor. 14:28).

C. Defining the Gift of Tongues

- Based on the biblical and historical evidence, the gift of tongues was a supernaturally endowed ability, given by the Holy Spirit to select Christians, enabling those believers to speak in previously unlearned human languages. The content contained words of praise to God, and the intended use of the gift involved the translation of the message for the general edification of fellow believers or evangelism of unbelievers. This ability was not given to all Christians nor were they commanded to seek it. It was not considered the hallmark of the early church, nor is it ever highlighted as a normal part of the Christian experience.

- But that is not how charismatics define tongues. In modern charismatic practice, the gift of tongues primarily consists of a devotional prayer language which is available to every believer. This prayer language does not necessarily consist of an authentic foreign language (and in fact usually does not). Rather it consists of a heavenly, spiritual language which, by definition, does not need to conform to the linguistic structures of earthly, human languages. As long as the tongues are used in private praise and prayer, they do not need to be interpreted.

- When we compare the biblical evidence to modern charismatic and continuationist experience, we find that the two are not the same. The New Testament does not present two types of tongues; but only the miraculous ability to speak previously unlearned foreign languages. Clearly, that does not match the contemporary phenomenon.

  > As **Norm Geisler** observes, "Even those who believe in tongues acknowledge that unsaved people have tongues experiences. There is nothing supernatural about them. But there is something unique about speaking complete and meaningful sentences and discourses in a knowable language to which one has never been exposed. This is what the real New Testament gift of tongues entailed. Anything short of this, as 'private tongues' are, should not be considered the biblical gift of tongues." (*Signs and Wonders*)

Addendum

Article: Four Points about Tongues from 1 Corinthians 14
Author: Phil Johnson

A goodly portion of Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians is focused on correcting that congregation's abuse of spiritual gifts—tongues in particular. The whole theme of the apostle's admonition about how the gifts were to function is neatly summarized in 1 Corinthians 14:40: "All things should be done decently and in order." Along the way, it's hard to miss the stress the apostle places on that which *edifies*. The point Paul makes repeatedly is that the gifts should always be used in a way that enlightens and instructs the mind. "I would rather speak five words with my mind in order to instruct others, than ten thousand words in a tongue" (v. 19).

That principle has been largely ignored—and often diametrically opposed—in the doctrine and practice of the modern charismatic movement. The real point of 1 Corinthians 14 is often buried under endless arguments about the exegetical nuances of that passage. I want to take a more big-picture perspective of the text and point out a few of that chapter's most important ideas.

1. "Tongues" were real languages.

Paul is clearly no proponent of any kind of "speech that is not intelligible" (v. 9). Sounds and syllables without meaning are of no use whatsoever. "There are doubtless many different languages in the world, and none is without meaning" (v. 10). Throughout the chapter, he is talking about real languages with *real meaning.* The ecstatic gibberish of the modern charismatic movement does not even fit the apostle's definition of a language.

Furthermore, he says in verse 11, "If . . . I do not know the meaning of the language, I will be to the one who speaks a barbarian, and the one who speaks will be a barbarian to me" (NASB). All true language has a meaning, and if the meaning cannot be understood, it sounds like the noises of a troglodyte. If the tongue is merely gibberish and has no translatable message, it is actually worse than a savage tongue.

So Paul insists that whenever tongues are spoken, *they should be translated.* Verse 13: "One who speaks in a tongue should pray for the power to interpret." And verses 27-28: "If any speak in a tongue, let there be only two or at most three, and each in turn, and let someone interpret. But if there is no one to interpret, let each of them keep silent in church and speak to himself and to God."

In other words, if someone is authentically speaking in tongues, the utterance contains a message, and the message must be translated for those who hear. Even if the tongues-speaker is praying alone and no one else is around to hear, he is to pray that he may interpret.

Paul was *not* authorizing the use of tongues as a private prayer language, as some charismatics claim. But let's lay that issue aside for the moment and simply point out that whenever tongues is spoken, whether in public or in private, whether in prophecy or in prayer, an interpretation is always to be sought.

2. Speaking in tongues is not supposed to be a mystical exercise that bypasses the mind.

Paul's overriding message throughout this whole chapter is that everything done in the public worship service is supposed to be edifying to the hearers. That is his key point. He is calling for intelligibility. He is appealing for clarity. When we say something in public worship, the people in the congregation need to *understand* the message.

Go through this passage and notice how many times the apostle uses terms like *understanding, edification,* and *the mind.* A lot of Christians in the post-charismatic era have the utterly false notion that true spirituality is something that bypasses the intellect and operates mysteriously in the soul. That opinion has more in common with Hinduism than with true Christianity. Genuine Christianity is not anti-intellectual. We do not believe that the mind is a detriment to spirituality. In fact, we believe true spirituality involves being transformed by the renewing of our *minds.* We are sanctified by the *truth,* and truth is something we apprehend primarily with our minds.

The notion that the intellect is to be switched off while we seek some form of mentally disengaged spiritual ecstasy is an utterly false notion. If that is your idea of spirituality, then you might as well join the swaying mobs at the Kali temple in Calcutta who have done just that: they have switched off their minds in pursuit of spiritual euphoria.

Here Paul is telling us that the primary purpose of spiritual gifts is for *edification.* And by "edification," he means the building up of the *mind* through a better understanding of the truth. If you do a study on the Greek word *oikodomeo* (which is translated *edify* in verses 3, 4, 5, 12, 17, and 26), you will find that almost everywhere this word appears in the New Testament, it speaks of building up the understanding. A person is "edified" in the biblical sense when the *mind* is enriched with truth and understanding.

That is why Paul insists that utterances in other tongues must be translated. What good is a message that bypasses the minds of the hearers? We don't grow spiritually through subliminal means. We are sanctified when the truth is applied to our minds and our minds are transformed.

Matthew Henry writes, "Even an apostle could not edify, unless he spoke so as to be understood by his hearers. To speak words that have no meaning to those who hear them, is but speaking into the air. . . . There can be no assent to prayers that are not understood. A truly Christian minister will seek much more to do spiritual good to men's souls, than to get the greatest applause to himself."

When we have a message for the assembly of God's people, the sound must be distinct. The *message,* not the *language,* is the key to the gift of tongues. The Holy Spirit does not gift people with languages just to make interesting noises. There's a message to be conveyed, just like on Pentecost, when the wonderful works of God were proclaimed in the hearer's native tongues. And notice this carefully: Regardless of your position on the charismatic movement, you must ultimately confess that Scripture demands that tongues-speakers remain silent, unless the message they have to convey is going to be understood be the people who are present to hear. Verse 28: "If there is no one to interpret, let each of them keep silent."

I know of few charismatic churches where people are taught to be submissive to that command. There's a charismatic church not far from where I live that is one of the largest in America. Every Sunday morning in their worship service, they have a time at the end of the pastoral prayer when everyone in the church is invited to "worship the Lord" aloud. Most do so by speaking in tongues simultaneously. It produces exactly the kind of chaotic environment Paul warns against in verse 23: "If, therefore, the whole church comes together and all speak in tongues, and outsiders or unbelievers enter, will they not say that you are out of your minds?"

3. It is wrong to allow the church service to become chaotic.

Some charismatics delight in precisely the sort of chaos Paul condemns here. The so-called "Toronto Blessing" virtually conferred liturgical significance on chaos and noise in many charismatic churches. I visited a world-famous charismatic church at the height of the Toronto hysteria, and much of the service consisted of unbelievable chaos.

The preacher that night contradicted virtually every one of the principles laid out in 1 Corinthians 14. He cautioned people against using their minds and their doctrinal convictions to evaluate what they were about to see. He said, "God wants to reach your heart, not your mind. It is not necessary for you to have a rational understanding of what is going on here." He encouraged people to speak in tongues simultaneously, even though no one interpreted any of those utterances. And he finally turned the meeting over to absolute chaos, unleashing a frenzy of noise and activity in the name of the Holy Spirit.

Can God possibly be behind such phenomena? The Bible answers that question with a definitive *no.* Verse 33 says, "God is *not* a God of confusion." Such chaotic displays in the churches must not be attributed to Him. The Word of God speaks with the utmost clarity on this. In more familiar King James terminology, "God is not the *author* of confusion." He is neither glorified nor pleased where chaos and confusion reign.

4. Tongues are a sign to unbelievers.

In verse 22, Paul writes, “Tongues are a sign not for believers but for unbelievers.” Here he contrasts tongues with prophecy, which he says is meant for believers.

What is his point? Simple: *Prophecy* involved a message from God in a language everyone understood. The message conveyed in *tongues* was intelligible only to those who understood the language.

Remember, *all* the languages a tongues-speaker used were Gentile languages. Hebrew was the Jewish language, and Aramaic was a first-century variation of Hebrew. All other tongues were Gentile languages.

The fact that God would give inspired truth in a Gentile tongue was itself significant. At Pentecost it was remarkable enough to hear the disciples speaking in languages that were not their own. But to the first-century Hebrew ear it would have been equally amazing to hear them proclaiming truth about Jehovah in Gentile tongues. That is something no true Israelite would ever do.

Jews in first-century Israel often spoke Greek, of course, because that was the common language of commerce. Some of them also spoke Latin, and many other dialects. But when they came to the Temple, when they rehearsed the wonderful works of God, or (above all) when they prayed, they prayed in Hebrew, because that was deemed the language of God and His people.

The gift of tongues changed all that. For the first time ever, inspired truth was revealed by God in languages other than Hebrew. This in and of itself was a remarkable sign, not only to the unbelieving Gentile hearers, but also to the unbelieving Jews.

And for the unbelieving Jews, it was a sign of judgment to come. Isaiah 28:11 contains this promise about the Messiah: “By people of strange lips and with a foreign tongue the Lord will speak to this people.” The apostle Paul paraphrases that verse in 1 Corinthians 14:21, just before saying that tongues are a sign to unbelievers. His primary meaning, then, is that tongues are a sign of *judgment* against the unbelieving Israelites and a token of divine grace to the Gentile unbelievers who hear the message in their own tongues.

So again we see that the gift of tongues was God’s declaration that the wall of partition had been broken down. Although the oracles of God had once been committed to the Jewish race alone, now the message about God’s wonderful works would extend to every nation, people, and tribe. That was the primary significance of the gift of tongues. It was never intended to be a Babel of noise that no one, including the speaker, understood.

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IV. **The Gift of Healing:**

A. The Continuationist Position

Continuationists assert that:

- The gift (or gifts) of healing is defined as the occasional ability to heal (as God so directs) primarily through the means of prayer (as in James 5). Such healings are not always effective or immediate in their intended results.

- Thus, gifts of healing "are occasional and subject to the purposes of God" (Storms, *Four Views*, 213).

- "Gifts of Healings" (as it is literally translated) suggests that Paul was speaking about different gifts or powers of healing, not one gift for all diseases at all times (cf. Storms, *Four Views*, 212).

- Gifts of healing are tied to the gift of faith, since the faith is the confidence that God will act in a miraculous way. This is tied in with the "prayer of faith" in James 5. Gifts of healing thus include praying for the sick and laying hands on them, with the fervent expectation that God will heal them. This of course does not always mean that God will answer our prayer in the way we expect, since God may not always will to heal (cf. Storms, *Four Views*, 213–14).

- Since the apostles were the most gifted of all people in the church, and since spiritual gifts range in strength and intensity, we should not expect the average believer to heal with the same ability as the apostles (such as Peter and Paul) (Deere, *Surprised by the Power of the Spirit*, 64–68; cf. Grudem, *Kingdom and Power*, 99)

B. The Cessationist Response:

- The Phrase "gifts of healings" occurs only in 1 Cor. 12 and is ambiguous in its context. The gift should be defined by the way it was manifested by Jesus and the apostles.

- James 5 is not connected to the miraculous gift of healing. Instead, it is connected to answered prayer. Cessationists believe in God's ability to heal as a providential answer to the prayers of His people. But they do not equate that with the New Testament gift of healing.

- When the biblical data is considered, it quickly becomes obvious that modern charismatic healings do not compare with the miraculous healings performed by Jesus and the apostles.

    - **Richard Mayhue:** Dr. [Jack] Deere seems to contradict his own theory when he writes, "I believe that God is doing NT-quality miracles in the church today, and I believe He has done them throughout the history of the church." The only quality of miracles we know of from Acts are those done by the apostles. Yet Dr. Deere elsewhere theorized that the miracles of the church were substandard compared to those of the apostles. Both cannot be true.

        If the nature of healing today is the same as that in the Scripture, then it follows that what characterized divine healing then would validate divine healing today.

        The Christian community must come to grips with the fact that it is extremely rare when a reported healing begins to match up with the biblical model. When God miraculously healed through the prophets, Christ, or the apostles, these qualities, among others, characterized the healing:

        1. It was immediate.
        2. It was public.
        3. It took place on ordinary, unplanned occasions.
        4. It included illnesses that were untreatable by the medical community.
        5. It was complete and irreversible.
        6. It was undeniable, even to detractors.

        Taking contemporary healing a step further, most of today's reported healings look little different than reported healings from the cults and other world religions." (Mayhue, *TMSJ*, 271–72)

- The only biblical illustrations we have of these phenomena run contrary to the practices of contemporary charismatics.

    - **Thomas Edgar:** "The gift of working miracles means that a specific individual can directly perform miracles. The gift of healing means that a specific individual can heal other people directly. The same applies to casting out demons if it is considered a gift. The individual has the ability to perform the miracle or healing. Instances where people are healed in answer to prayer are not instances of the exercising of spiritual gifts but are the direct work of God in response to prayer. If believers gather and pray for a sick person and

that person is healed miraculously, this is not evidence that the gift of healing exists today. This demonstrates that God answers prayer.

None of today's claims of miracles or healings are of the magnitude or quality of those in the New Testament. Little correspondence exists between the biblical descriptions and today's so-called miracles and healings to allow any credence to the allegation that they are the spiritual gifts of the New Testament. Very few people claim to perform miracles directly, and those who claim to do so fail frequently. But the Holy Spirit never fails. The incidents in the early church involved multitudes of healings without any failures.

The alleged evidence for 'lesser' gifts amounts to no evidence at all. We find nothing in Scripture that describes an instance of lesser gifts, nor does it suggest that such gifts ever existed. Without doubt the scriptural gifts were miraculous, but the modern-day charismatic gifts do not compare to those in Scripture. We must not miss the important fact that the very admission of 'lesser' gifts and the need for charismatic defenders to find them in the Bible is a direct admission that even the charismatics know their gifts do not conform to Scripture" (Edgar, *Satisfied*, 116–17).

C. Five Characteristics of Biblical Healing:

1. **New Testament healings did not depend on the recipient's faith.** Unlike charismatic faith healers, who make the promise of healing conditional on the sick person's faith, the healings performed by Jesus and the apostles were not dependent on any such prerequisite.

- For example, only one of the ten lepers in Luke 17:11–19 expressed faith, yet all ten were healed.

- The centurion's servant received healing, but only the centurion is said to have had faith (Matt 8:5–13).

- Lazarus in John 11, Jairus' daughter in Matthew 9, and the widow's son in Luke 7 were all dead and incapable of displaying faith.

- The demoniacs of Matthew 8:28–29 and Mark 1:23–26 cannot reasonably have had faith before being healed.

- The lame man healed at the pool of Bethesda (John 5:1–16) did not even know who Jesus was until later.

- Jesus healed the multitudes (see Matt 9:35; 11:2-5; 12:15-21; 14:13-14, 34-36; 15:29-31; 19:2), not all of whom believed.

- In Acts, we similarly see the apostles healing a lame man without demanding faith (Acts 3:7) as well as delivering a girl from demons (Acts 16:18) and even raising the dead (Acts 9:40; 20:10), miracles which did not demand faith from the recipient.

2. **New Testament healings were complete, permanent, and 100% effective.** The narrative of the Gospels and Acts is clear that the healings of Christ and the Apostles were complete, permanent, and successful. Jesus healed real diseases, not psychosomatic ones. He cleansed lepers, gave sight to the blind, made crippled men walk, and raised dead people.

    - For example, in Matthew 14:36, those who touched the hem of Christ's garment "were made perfectly well."

    - Moreover, Christ healed lepers (see Matt 8:2-3; Mark 1:40-42; Luke 5:12-13; 17:11-21) whose healing had to have been complete in order to pass the inspection of the priest (see Lev. 14:3, 4, 10).

    - In fact, there is no record of any New Testament miracle which was not ultimately complete and successful.

        - The two exceptions some may point to, however, include the inability of the disciples to cast out a certain demon (Matt 17:20) and Christ's decision to heal a blind man in two stages (Mark 8:22-26). Yet, in the first case, the failure was caused by a lack of faith on the part of the disciples, and Jesus later did cast out the demon (see v. 18). And, in the second case, Jesus fully restored the man after the man saw "men like trees, walking" (v. 24).

    - Not only did Christ have 100% success in His healing ministry, but so did the apostles in the book of Acts.

3. **New Testament healings were undeniable.** The healing miracles of Jesus and the apostles could not be denied, even by the enemies of Jesus.

    - The unbelieving Pharisees did not deny Jesus' power, they simply distorted the truth in order to cast dispersion on the source of His power (Matt. 12:24).

- For example, in John 11:47-48, Christ raised Lazarus and "everyone, including His enemies, stood amazed, astounded, and unable to deny or discredit the miracles."

- In Acts 4:16–17, after Peter healed a lame beggar (Acts 3:1-10), the Sanhedrin was unable to deny that such a miracle occurred.

- In Acts 16, when Paul cast the demon out of the slave girl in Philippi, her angry owners did not deny what had happened. Rather, they dragged Paul before the city magistrates and had him thrown in jail.

4. **New Testament healings were instantaneous.** Another common characteristic of the healing ministries of Christ and the Apostles was that their healings were instantaneous. There was no period of recovery or recuperation necessary.

    - One such example is found in Mark 1:42 where "as soon as [Christ] had spoken, immediately the leprosy left him, and he was cleansed."

    - Although no exceptions to this rule occur in the book of Acts, there are three possible exceptions in the Gospels. These are found in Mark 8:22–26 (where a blind man is healed in two stages), Luke 17:11–19 (where the ten lepers are cleansed while on the way to see the priest), and John 9:1–7 (where the blind man is healed after washing in the Pool of Siloam). But those delays were a matter of only a few minutes, and in keeping with Jesus' purposes for those specific healings. Moreover, those people were completely healed—not over days or weeks, but in a matter of moments. Thus, an overall examination of New Testament healings will show them to be immediate.

5. **New Testament healings were not prearranged.** Another important characteristic of the miracles of Christ and the Apostles is that they were not prearranged, but rather were done in the normal course of ministry.

    - For example, in Matthew 8:14–15, Christ healed Peter's mother-in-law simply because she was feeling ill when He came to Peter's house.

    - In Matthew 9:20, He healed a woman who simply, and secretly, touched the hem of His garment while he was walking to Jairus' house.

    - In Matthew 9:27–29 during Jesus' travels, He healed two blind men who happened to be in the vicinity. And, in Acts 3:6-7 Peter healed a beggar while he and John were "about to go into the temple" (v. 3).

- These, and other instances, confirm that New Testament healings were not pre-scheduled. Jesus and the apostles did not limit their healings to healing crusades in environments that could be highly organized and tightly controlled. Jesus certainly did not require the help of screeners—those found at charismatic miracle meetings who keep the seriously ill and physically disabled from reaching the stage.

Charismatic Comparisons:

- One can easily see how different New Testament healings were from the so-called healing ministries of modern faith healers.

- When modern faith healers excuse their inability to heal on the lack of faith in the sick person, or when their healings are not successful, or when their supposed successes don't stand up under scrutiny, or when they claim their healings take place over a long period of time, or when they limit their miracle crusades to tightly controlled and highly manipulated events … they show just how far from the biblical standard they are.

- Now, evangelical continuationists are more conservative on this point. They generally distance themselves from faith healers, and that's a good thing. But they essentially reduce **the gift of healing** to answers to prayer. A person with the gift of faith prays for a sick person, and God answers that prayer in accordance with His will.

- Well, we would all agree that God answers prayer, and that He can do so in ways that seem extraordinary.

- But praying for God to heal and then waiting for days or weeks to see if God is going to answer that prayer, that is not how the New Testament describes miraculous healing. That is certainly not the way in which the healing ministries of Christ and the apostles are portrayed. But by insisting that the New Testament gift of healing has continued, charismatics set themselves up for confusion and disappointment:

> **John Wimber:** Sometimes our experiences don't fit with our understanding of what the Bible teaches. On the one hand, we know that God is sovereign and that he sent Jesus to commission us to pray for and heal the sick. On the other hand, we know from experience that healing does not always occur. Why would God command us to heal the sick and then choose not to back up our act (so to speak) by not healing the person for whom we pray? This can be downright discouraging, as I learned years ago in my own congregation when I began to

> teach on healing. It was nine months before we saw the first person healed. (John Wimber, "Signs, Wonders, & Cancer," *Christianity today*, October 7, 1996, 50)

- Wimber is right to be frustrated. But he fails to recognize the real problem. It is his misguided understanding of the miraculous gift of healing that results in the disconnect he observes in real life.

- So again, one can see the massive disconnect between the way in which the New Testament describes miraculous healing, and the way in which the modern charismatic version of healing falls far short.

SUMMARY: The NT gift (or gifts) of healing was of the same quality and kind as healings in the Old Testament, healings in the Gospels, and healings in the book of Acts. While cessationists appreciate answers to prayer in which God intervenes in healing a sick person, they maintain that this does not fit the biblical description of miraculous healing by a Spirit-endowed healer. Since the healings of contemporary charismatics do not fit the biblical description, they cannot be construed as being the same thing.

Conclusion: When the summary of biblical evidence is considered, from both the OT and NT, the evidence does not support contemporary continuationist practice.

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QUESTION: What about stories of miraculous healings from the mission field?

Five thoughts:

1. **Supernaturalism:** It is important to note that cessationism, by definition, does not deny the possibility of supernatural events (what some would term "miracles," but what cessationists would generally regard as "extraordinary acts of providence"). Regarding healing, cessationists believe that God can heal someone *whenever* He wants. This is why we pray for those who are sick.

> **Samuel Waldron:** I am not denying by all this that there are miracles in the world today in the broader sense of supernatural occurrences and extraordinary providences. I am only saying that there are no miracles in the stricter sense [of] miracle-workers performing miraculous signs to attest the redemptive revelation they bring from God. Though God has never locked Himself out of His world and is still at liberty to do as He pleases, when He pleases, how He pleases, and where He pleases, He has made it clear that the progress of redemptive revelation attested by miraculous signs done by

> miracle-workers has been brought to conclusion in the revelation embodied in our New Testaments. (*To Be Continued?*, 102)
>
> **John MacArthur:** Does God heal? I believe He does. I do not automatically discount all claims of supernatural healings just because some are false. But I am convinced that dramatic, miraculous, immediate intervention by God is quite rare—never dependent on some supposedly gifted person who acts as an agent of healing.
>
> Genuine healings may come as a result of prayer and most often involve simple natural processes. Other times, God speeds up the recovery mechanisms and restores a sick person to health in a way that medicine cannot explain. Sometimes he overrules a medical prognosis and allows someone to recover from a normally debilitating disease.
>
> Healings like that come in response to prayer and the sovereign will of God and can happen at any time. But the gift of healing, the ability to heal others, special anointings for healing ministry, healings that can be "claimed," and other typical faith-healing techniques have no biblical sanction in the post-apostolic era. (*Charismatic Chaos*)

2. **Gifts of Healing:** What cessationism denies, however, is that the *miraculous gifts of healing*—as illustrated in the lives of Christ and the Apostles—have continued throughout church history. In other words, cessationism teaches that no "faith healer" alive today has the ability to heal like Jesus and the Apostles did.

> **Thomas Edgar:** "The gift of working miracles means that a specific individual can directly perform miracles. The gift of healing means that a specific individual can heal other people directly. The same applies to casting out demons if it is considered a gift. The individual has the ability to perform the miracle or healing. Instances where people are healed in answer to prayer are not instances of the exercising of spiritual gifts but are the direct work of God in response to prayer. If believers gather and pray for a sick person and that person is healed miraculously, this is not evidence that the gift of healing exists today. This demonstrates that God answers prayer.
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> None of today's claims of miracles or healings are of the magnitude or quality of those in the New Testament. Little correspondence exists between the biblical descriptions and today's so-called miracles and healings to allow any credence to the allegation that they are the spiritual gifts of the New Testament. Very few people claim to perform miracles directly, and those who claim to do so fail frequently. But the Holy Spirit never fails. The incidents in the early church involved multitudes of healings without any failures. (Edgar, *Satisfied*, 116–17).

3. **Biblical Quality Miracles:** The healing miracles performed by Christ and the Apostles were immediate, public, verifiable, and undeniable (even by unbelievers).

They were 100% effective and resulted in complete healing from organic diseases (such as blindness, deafness, and paralysis).

> **Richard Mayhue:** The Christian community must come to grips with the fact that it is extremely rare when a reported healing begins to match up with the biblical model. When God miraculously healed through the prophets, Christ, or the apostles, these qualities, among others, characterized the healing:
>
> 7. It was immediate.
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> 10. It included illnesses that were untreatable by the medical community.
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> 12. It was undeniable, even to detractors.
>
> Taking contemporary healing a step further, most of today's reported healings look little different than reported healings from the cults and other world religions." (*TMSJ*, 271–72)
>
> **Paul Stevens and Michael Green:** Jesus had no failure rate, and no reversions afterwards. All Christian healers experience both. . . . His healings seem to have been complete and instantaneous, apart from two recorded incidents where there was a short delay and renewed ministry before the cure was complete. Healings by the church are not like that, unfortunately. Often there is delay. Often there is failure. (*Living the Story* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), p. 164)

4. **Verifiability:** While the charismatic world is full of stories about miraculous healings, the evidence for the veracity of these healings dissipates under scrutiny. When the "miracles" performed by modern-day faith healers are compared to the biblical standard, they fall woefully short.

> **S. H. Smith:** A further question concerns the apparent absence from the modern world of biblical-style miracles. Obviously, we would not expect storms to be stilled or people to walk on water, because these were one-off events meant as signs that God's power was supremely present in one man, Jesus. But that still leaves a huge range of others—healings of the blind, the lame, the paralyzed, the mentally ill, for example. Even the multiplication of food would not come amiss in countries where food supply is a perennial problem. Yet the miracles in today's Church seem to be far more low-key, being restricted to the healing of chronic back pain and the like—healings, in fact, that it is difficult to witness and almost impossible to verify.
>
> Of course, the more charismatic Churches often claim that the kind of miracles that were common practice in the early Church—healings of physical infirmity, even resuscitations—do still happen, but such claims are never specific. This kind of miracle always seems to occur away from the public gaze in some backwater of a distant country where the beneficiary of the miracle or any reliable

witnesses to it can never be produced. Evidence that it took place always seems to be of the hearsay variety. (*Problems of Faith*, chp. 4)

5. **The Continuationist Acknowledgment:** Even leading continuationists recognize a disconnect between the quality of miraculous healings performed by Jesus and the Apostles, and that which characterizes the modern charismatic movement. That admission is significant, since it represents a *de facto* acknowledgment of the cessationist premise.

   John Piper: It seems to me, both biblically and experientially, that there was an extraordinary outcropping of supernatural blessing surrounding the incarnation, which has not been duplicated at any point in history. Nobody has ever healed like Jesus healed. He never failed, he did it perfectly, he raised people from the dead, he touched and all sores went away, and he never blew it. (Interview with David Sterling, "A Conversation with John Piper," *The Briefing*, October 27, 2011, http:/matthiasmedia.com/briefing/2011/10/a-conversation-with-john-piper/.)

   Jack Deere: It is wrong to insist that the apostolic ministry of signs and wonders is the standard for the gifts of healing given to the average New Testament Christian. We have vivid descriptions of the apostles' ministry in signs and wonders, but apart from the ministry of the apostles there are few if any descriptions of the average Christian who had healing gifts, or examples of how the miraculous gifts operated in the local church. It is simply not reasonable to insist that all miraculous spiritual gifts equal those of the apostles in their intensity or strength in order to be perceived as legitimate gifts of the Holy Spirit. (*Surprised by the Power of the Spirit*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993, pp. 66–67)

   Sam Storms: When asked to pray for the sick, people are often heard to respond: "I can't. I don't have the gift of healing." But if my reading of Paul [in 1 Cor. 12] is correct, there is no such thing as the gift of healing, especially if it is envisioned as a God-given ability to heal every one of every disease on every occasion. Rather, the Spirit sovereignly distributes a charisma of healing for a particular occasion, even though previous prayers for physical restoration under similar circumstances may not have been answered, and even though subsequent prayers for the same affliction may not be answered. In sum, "gifts of healings" are occasional and subject to the sovereign purposes of God. (*The Beginner's Guide to Spiritual Gifts*, 70)

Addendum: The Pandora's Box of Continuationism

By redefining the gifts, the continuationist position opens the door to all sorts of dangers.

- Continuationists define **the gift of prophecy** as a non-authoritative, non-binding, fallible, often-incorrect human report of divine revelation. This form of "congregational prophecy" is *fundamentally different* than both Old Testament prophecy or Apostolic prophecy which were authoritative and therefore had to be 100% accurate.

    - This opens the door for any Christian to interpret any personal impression or subjective feeling as a potential revelation from God.

    - It removes any authoritative, objective standard for questioning the legitimacy of someone's supposed revelation from God. (Who are you to call into question what God told me to do?)

    - It opens the door wide open for false prophets in the church (cf. Matt. 7:15).

    - In practice, this view teaches believers to look for revelation from God outside of the Bible. (Because we have the completed "prophetic word" [2 Peter 1:19–21], we should not expect any additional words of prophetic revelation from God.)

    - In practice, this type of prophecy has the potential to compel people to make very bad decisions … which is why proponents of this view warn people not to base any future decisions on a word of prophecy.

    - This view allows people to say, "Thus says the Lord" and then to give a word which, in fact, is full of errors and therefore, in fact, is something the Lord did not say. In actuality, it ascribes to the Holy Spirit something that is not true.

    - This view demeans and cheapens the true gift of prophecy as it operated in the Old and New Testaments. It redefines prophecy from being an articulated message or "word from God" which could always be accurately reported to being a subjective impression that is then interpreted (fallibly) by the recipient.

    - This view denies the foundational role that the prophets played in the establishment of the early church (Ephesians 2:20).

- This view is forced to defend itself by appealing to anecdotes; the view itself is the result of contemporary experience being forced upon the text, rather than the text being allowed to speak for itself.

- It equates prophecy to "subjective guidance" and applies it to trivial decisions (like cancelling a newspaper subscription).

- It faults the fallible nature of prophecy on the "lack of faith" exercised by the prophet. This is somewhat similar to faith healers who fault their inability to heal on the lack of faith in the sick person.

- Those who hold this view are, in essence, admitting to a form of cessationism; since they agree that the authoritative, infallible form of prophecy has ceased.

    - It is inconsistent for Grudem to claim that God spoke individually and personally in the Old Testament (in an effort to build continuity with the NT) and then, simultaneously, claim that NT prophecy is inherently different than (and therefore incongruous with) OT prophecy.

* * * * *

- Continuationists define **the gift of tongues** as primarily consisting of a devotional prayer language which is available to every believer. Unlike the Apostolic gift (in Acts 2), this prayer language does not consist of an authentic human foreign language. Rather, it consists of non-sensical gibberish which is labeled as "the tongues of angels" or a "spiritual/heavenly language." As long as the tongues are used in private, they do not need to be interpreted.

    - This position opens the door into broader Pentecostalism, since "speaking in tongues" is the hallmark of the Pentecostal movement.

    - In practice, this view encourages believers to equate deeper spiritual intimacy with God with certain emotional and ecstatic experiences. It can foster spiritual pride in the church, between those who have experienced the gift and those who haven't.

    - This view opens the door to ecumenism, since "speaking in tongues" is experienced within many, doctrinally-diverse groups (including Roman Catholics and even non-Christian religions)

    - This view minimizes the truly miraculous nature of what the Holy Spirit did through the Apostles in Acts 2 – since it applies the same terminology ("gift of tongues") to

something that is fundamentally different. It relegates the "gift of languages" to speaking gibberish (and then credits God for the gibberish).

- This view affirms a selfish use of the gifts. Yet, Paul is clear that the gifts are given for the edification of others within the body of Christ; and not for self-edification.

- This view is not only foreign to the clear description of Scripture; it is also foreign to the clear testimony of church history. No one in church history equated the "gift of tongues" with gibberish until the modern charismatic movement.

- Within broader Pentecostal circles, the ability to "speak in tongues" is something that can be taught and learned (which would not be true of the actual gift).

* * * * *

- Continuationists define **the gift of healing** as the occasional ability to heal (as God so directs) primarily through the means of prayer (as in James 5). Such healings are not always effective or immediate in their intended results. Again, they distance this ongoing gift of healing from the healing ministries of Christ and the Apostles—whose healings were immediate and undeniable.

  - Though they try to distance themselves from faith healers like Benny Hinn, continuationists continue to create confusion by claiming that "gifts of healing" are still to be expected in the church today.

  - In essence, they open the door for the spiritual extortion of faith healers and others, because they condition believers to maintain false hopes and expectations.

  - Whereas Apostolic healings were clearly miraculous, immediate, public, and undeniable; the continuationist understanding of healing essentially reduces the "gift of healing" to "a prayer for healing which may or may not be answered over a long period of time." To reduce the gift in this way is to make a mockery of what was really happening in the time of the New Testament.

  - When someone does not get healed, no one takes responsibility for that failure. Thus, a person with the "gift of healing" is authenticated when his or her prayers are answered; yet, there is no accountability when his or her prayers for healing fail to produce the intended result.

The When Question

When did the extraordinary gifts cease in church history?

- The continuationist/cessationist debate revolves around several primary questions: the *when* question (regarding the *duration* of the miraculous gifts) and the *what* question (regarding the *nature* of the miraculous gifts). A third question also arises, regarding *why* the gifts ceased if they did indeed pass off the scene.

The What Question: *What were the gifts in the New Testament (based on the biblical evidence)? And how does modern charismatic practice compare?*

The Gift of Prophecy

New Testament prophets are to be held to the same standard as Old Testament prophets since the NT writers make no attempt to distinguish between the two. Thus, the content of their prophecy (when proclaiming new divine revelation) must accurately convey the true, error-free message they are receiving from God. If their prophecy is shown to be incorrect, it is also shown to not be from God. Moreover, now that we have the completed "prophetic Word," additional revelation from God is no longer needed for the present age.

The Gift of Tongues

The gift of tongues was a supernaturally endowed ability, given by the Holy Spirit to select Christians, enabling those believers to speak in previously unlearned human languages. The ideal use of the gift involved the translation of the message for the general edification of fellow believers or evangelism of unbelievers. This ability was not given to all Christians nor were they commanded to seek it. It was not considered the hallmark of the early church, nor is it ever highlighted as a normal part of the Christian experience.

The Gift of Healing

The NT gift (or gifts) of healing were of the same quality and kind as healings in the Old Testament, healings in the Gospels, and healings in the book of Acts. While cessationists appreciate answers to prayer in which God intervenes in healing a sick person, they maintain that this does not fit the biblical description of miraculous healing by a Spirit-endowed healer. Since the healings of contemporary charismatics do not fit the biblical description, they cannot be construed as being the same thing.

This understanding of what the gifts were can be strongly defended from the biblical evidence. By their own admission, this understanding of the gifts does not describe what is happening in contemporary charismatic/continuationist circles.

This, then, raises a follow up question…

The When Question: *If the miraculous gifts (biblically defined) are not occurring in the church today, then does the Bible give us indications as to when (and why) those gifts should cease?*

- In interacting with this question, the following six texts (at least) must be addressed.

* * * * *

Acts 2

Acts 2:14–21

> But Peter, taking his stand with the eleven, raised his voice and declared to them: "Men of Judea and all you who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you and give heed to my words. "For these men are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only the third hour of the day; but this is what was spoken of through the prophet Joel:
> 'AND IT SHALL BE IN THE LAST DAYS,' God says,
> 'THAT I WILL POUR FORTH OF MY SPIRIT ON ALL MANKIND;
> AND YOUR SONS AND YOUR DAUGHTERS SHALL PROPHESY,
> AND YOUR YOUNG MEN SHALL SEE VISIONS,
> AND YOUR OLD MEN SHALL DREAM DREAMS;
> EVEN ON MY BONDSLAVES, BOTH MEN AND WOMEN,
> I WILL IN THOSE DAYS POUR FORTH OF MY SPIRIT
> And they shall prophesy.
> 'AND I WILL GRANT WONDERS IN THE SKY ABOVE
> AND SIGNS ON THE EARTH BELOW,
> BLOOD, AND FIRE, AND VAPOR OF SMOKE.
> 'THE SUN WILL BE TURNED INTO DARKNESS
> AND THE MOON INTO BLOOD,
> BEFORE THE GREAT AND GLORIOUS DAY OF THE LORD SHALL COME.
> 'AND IT SHALL BE THAT EVERYONE WHO CALLS ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED.'

- Acts 2, which records the Day of Pentecost, is one of the central passages that must be considered in the continuationist/cessationist debate.

- The modern Pentecostal movement was born, in large part, through the study of this passage. In 1901, Charles Parham (the recognized founder of the modern Pentecostal movement),

> … directed [his students] to the account of Acts 2 where xenolalic tongues sparked the initial phase of Christian growth, and on Jan. 1, 1901, one of Parham's students (Agnes Ozman) experienced the expected blessing and sign. (*International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, 956)

- Parham was convinced that the end of human history would be marked by a "latter rain" outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and that the initial evidence of this outpouring would be miraculous tongues. For both of these elements of his theology, Acts 2 was a foundational starting point.

- With regards to the *when* question, we are more concerned with whether or not Acts 2:17–21 (which comes from Joel 2:28–32) indicates *how long* the miraculous gifts will continue throughout church history.

- Conservative evangelical scholars continue to debate the proper interpretation of Acts 2:16 –21. There are at least four views regarding how these verses, at the beginning of Peter's sermon at Pentecost, relate to the prophecy of Joel 2:28–31.

  1. Future Fulfillment Only. This view argues that Joel's prophecy will be literally fulfilled at some point in the future (toward the end of the 7-year Tribulation period). Peter used Joel's prophecy as an illustration of what was happening at Pentecost. (Merrill F. Unger [in "The Baptism with the Holy Spirit (Part 2)" *BSac* 101:403 (July 1944): 373-74], and Clifford Rapp Jr. [in "A Doctrinal Study of Acts 2:14" *CTSJ* 1:1 (Spring 1995)] defend this view.)

  2. Dual Fulfillment. This view suggests that the prophecy was fulfilled at Pentecost (at least partially [Joel 2:28-29]) with a more full fulfillment to come in the future. (Walter C. Kaiser, [in *Back Toward the Future: Hints for Interpreting Biblical Prophecy* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989) 43], Paul Feinberg, (in "Hermeneutics of Discontinuity," *Continuity and Discontinuity* [ed. J. S. Feinberg; Wheaton: Crossway, 1988] 126-127)] are representatives of this type of view. This view would include proponents of progressive dispensationalism.)

  3. Past Fulfillment Only. This view suggests that Joel's prophecy has been completely fulfilled in New Testament history. Whether the cosmic signs are allegorized, applied to Christ's crucifixion, applied to the destruction of Jerusalem, or applied to some other historic event, the case is made that we should not expect a future fulfillment of Joel's prophecy. (John R. Stott [in *The Message of Acts* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1990), 73] and F. F. Bruce [in *Commentary on the Book of the*

Acts, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954), 67–6] represent this view, which is the typical covenantal understanding of the text.)

4. An Advance Type. Daniel J. Treier, in "The Fulfillment of Joel 2:28–32: A Multiple-Lens Approach" *JETS* 40:1 (March 1997): 13–26, argues for an advance typology, in which (if I am reading him correctly) Peter referred to the future historic events of Joel's prophecy as a type of Christ's earthly ministry. In the same way that the cosmic disturbances of Joel's prophecy will motivate faithfulness to Yahweh at the end of the age, so the miracles of Christ should have invoked a similar response from the crowd at Pentecost. (Treier's explanations and conclusions can be found in his article in *JETS*.)

- Our primary objective here, of course, is not to delve into the *pros* and *cons* of each of these viewpoints. But a treatment of Acts 2 would not be complete without at least acknowledging the various exegetical/hermeneutical issues that surround the text.

- Our goal is to consider this passage as it relates to the continuationist/cessationist discussion—specifically with regard to the *when* question. *Does Acts 2:16–21 indicate how long the miraculous gifts of the Spirit will continue into the church age?*

- **Douglas Oss**, representing the Pentecostal (Assemblies of God) perspective, argues that Acts 2 sets the stage for continuing gifts throughout the whole church age. He writes,

> The modern Pentecostal movement has from its inception emphasized Peter's "this is what is spoken" definition of the "last days" as the primary foundation for the empowering aspects of its pneumatology. Spurred on by this understanding of fulfillment, Pentecostals have steadfastly proclaimed the continuing charismatic nature of the church empowered by the Spirit. (*Are Miraculous Gifts for Today: Four Views*, p. 265).

- In Oss's view, Peter applied Joel's prophecy to the whole church age (which began at Pentecost and will end at Christ's return), and not just to Pentecost itself. The church age will be an age that is marked by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and the evidences of such an outpouring will include prophecies and visions. According to Oss, we should expect charismatic phenomena (like prophecies and visions) to mark the entire church age.

- **But there is a problem.** Joel's prophecy includes other elements that did not occur on the day of Pentecost, and in fact have not yet occurred in church history ("wonders in the sky," "signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke," "the sun will be

turned into darkness and the moon into blood.") These cosmic signs are clearly not a normative, continuing part of the church age.

- Oss recognizes this difficulty and responds by writing:

> It is often pointed out in objection to this understanding of the text that the more cosmic events (Acts 2:19b–20) simply did not occur and therefore Acts 2 is not the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy. But in light of Peter's clear fulfillment language (e.g., 'this is what is spoken'), it is better to understand the signs that occurred on the day of Pentecost as marking out the beginning of the last days and the more cosmic signs as belonging to the end of the last days, just prior to the day of the Lord. (*Four Views*, 266).

- In other words, the miraculous signs of Pentecost were a fulfillment of the first part of Joel's prophecy, and the miraculous signs of the Parousia (Christ's return) will be a fulfillment of the second part of Joel's prophecy. The important thing to recognize (according to Oss) is that the church age is the age of the Spirit's working. And since the Spirit is working for the entire church age, we should expect Him to dispense the miraculous gifts throughout the entire church age.

- But there are a couple issues at play here. **First**, one has to assume that Oss's understanding of the fulfillment language in Acts 2 is correct in order to embrace his view. Not even all charismatics would agree with Oss's assessment. Some would interpret Acts 2:16–21 in terms of dual fulfillment, identifying their contemporary experience with the "latter rain" of Joel 2:23.

- **Second**, and more importantly, Oss cannot exegetically support his claim that the signs accompanying Pentecost (and the apostolic era) should be *expected to endure* throughout all of the church age. Rather, it seems more tenable to assert, given Oss's own reasoning, that in the same way that the *cosmic signs* are limited to the end of the age, the *charismatic signs* would be limited to the beginning. If that which marks the end is only found at the end, then that which marked the beginning could reasonably be expected to be found only at the beginning. At best, Oss's understanding of Acts 2:16–21 leaves the *when* question open-ended.

- **What about the "latter rain" of Joel 2:23?**

- Traditionally, many Pentecostal charismatics have seen their movement as the "latter rain" of Joel 2:23. Thus, they believe that, though Joel 2:28–31 may have been partially

fulfilled at Pentecost, its full fulfillment began in 1901 (or shortly before) when the modern Pentecostal Movement began.

> "Simultaneously, similar groups sprang up all over the world. They claimed that God in the last days before the millennial reign of Christ was pouring out His Holy Spirit upon His powerless church. There was to be a second, or fuller, realizing and fulfillment of Joel 2:28–29" (Robert C. Dalton, *Tongues As of Fire*, pp. 9–10).

- According to this perspective, the end of the church age will be marked by a great outpouring of the Holy Spirit (as evidenced by miraculous gifts) just before the Lord returns. Even if the miraculous gifts ceased or significantly declined in church history, they have now reappeared in keeping with Joel's prophecy.

- One primary problem with this interpretation is that it undermines the chronology of Joel's prophecy. If the specifics of Joel's prophecy (in 2:28–29) are to be interpreted in a literal futurist sense, then the other elements of Joel's prophecy must be viewed in the same way. But those other elements (which chronologically precede 2:28–29) have not yet literally occurred. Unger explains:

  > Before ever it [Joel 2:28–31] is fulfilled, however, the great invasion from the North must occur (Joel 2:1–10), the Tribulation take place (Acts 2:19–21), Armageddon be fought (Joel 2:11), Israel be regathered and converted (Joel 2:12–17), and the Lord's Second Advent come, issuing in great deliverance (Joel 2:18–27). (Unger, "The Baptism with the Holy Spirit (Part 2)," 374)

- One cannot take a portion of Joel's prophecy in a literal futurist sense, and simultaneously disregard the other elements of his prophecy. Since those other elements have not yet occurred, the "latter rain" self-identification of some Pentecostals becomes very difficult to exegetically maintain.

- Another problem involves the context of Joel 2:23.

  John MacArthur: Those who hold to this view often appeal to "the former rain and the latter rain" of Joel 2:23, insisting that the *former rain* was the Spirit's coming at Pentecost and the *latter rain* was a second outpouring of the Spirit in the twentieth century. What they fail to realize is that, in the context of Joel 2, verse 23 is a promise regarding literal rainfall during the millennial kingdom. The *former rain* refers to autumn rain, and the *latter rain* to spring showers. In context, Joel was explaining that on the millennial earth both of those rains will fall "in the first month." His point was that, due

to God's blessing during that future age, crops will flourish and vegetation will grow in abundance. The following verses in Joel 2:24–26 make that point abundantly clear. Thus, the "former and latter rain" have nothing to do with either the Day of Pentecost or the modern Pentecostal movement. To base a whole movement on an intentional misrepresentation of a passage is onerous. (*Strange Fire*, Appendix)

- Interestingly, some "latter rain" advocates will readily admit that the miraculous gifts either temporarily ceased or seriously declined at some point in church history. They differ with cessationists, of course, by asserting that the gifts have now reappeared in full force.

- In an extended quotation, **Thomas Edgar** responds to the "latter rain" movement with these words:

> Many Pentecostals hold that the sign gifts did cease and that they have reoccurred in these "latter days." This must be demonstrated from Scripture, however. There is no biblical evidence that there will be a reoccurrence in the church of the sign gifts or that believers will work miracles near the end of the Church Age. However, there is ample evidence that near the end of the age there will be false prophets who perform miracles, prophesy, and cast out demons in Jesus' name (cf. Matt 7:22–23; 24:11, 24 ; 2 Thess 2:9–12). During the Church Age there will be false leaders who fashion themselves as ministers of righteousness (2 Cor 11:13–15). During the Tribulation period, there is no indication that believers, other than the two witnesses of Revelation 11:3–12, will perform miracles. Those performed by the two witnesses are exceptional, and their actions are comparable to those of Old Testament prophets rather than to those of the apostles. The two witnesses are not part of the church, and if they were, they could hardly be considered typical of the church.
>
> The "latter rain" arguments are incorrectly based on verses that actually are referring to seasonal rainfall in Israel. Hosea 6:3 and Joel 2:23, for example, refer not to some unusual outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the last days of the Church Age. They refer instead to spring rains, in contrast to early rains in the fall.
>
> The arguments based on the expression "in the last days" in Acts 2:16–21 are also invalid. … This passage gives no evidence for a reoccurrence of miraculous gifts during the "last (latter) days" of the church. The present charismatic movement is characterized by phenomena that began in the church about 100 years ago, which apart from any historical connection or evidence are claimed to be the same as the miracles performed in the apostolic age. It is simply naive to accept this claim without some direct historical link or solid biblical evidence that these present phenomena are the same as those in the days of the apostles. (Thomas R. Edgar, "The Cessation of the Sign Gifts" *BSac* 145:580 (October 1988), 375)

- **What can we conclude then about Acts 2:16–21 and the *when* question?**

  - No matter which hermeneutical approach the continuationist brings to the text, the exegetical evidence actually works against his non-cessationist views. At best, it leaves the question opened-ended—to be addressed by other, more specific texts.

  - More to the point, Peter's reference to the cosmic signs of Joel's prophecy (which do not characterize the entire church age) argue in favor of viewing the charismatic signs similarly (as phenomena which similarly do not characterize the entire church age).

  - On a side note, when discussing Acts 2, it is important to understand that the book of Acts represents a transitional time at the beginning of church history. Moreover, as a narrative account, interpreters must be careful in making it normative for all of church history.

  - *Also:* As an Old Testament prophet, Joel's reference to "prophesying" must be understood in the context of OT prophecy. It is therefore inconsistent for the continuationist to apply this verse to the modern charismatic movement while simultaneously redefining NT prophecy as something categorically different than OT prophecy.

* * * * *

1 Corinthians 1:4–9

(1 Cor. 1:4–9) *I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus, that in everything you were enriched in Him, in all speech and all knowledge, even as the testimony concerning Christ was confirmed in you, so that you are not lacking in any gift, awaiting eagerly the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will also confirm you to the end, blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

- Though often overlooked in this debate, 1 Corinthians 1:4–9 is a passage that some have suggested "implies that the gifts of the Spirit are operative until 'our Lord Jesus Christ is revealed' (C. Samuel Storms, *Are Miraculous Gifts for Today? Four Views*, p. 205).

- Does verse 7 imply that the spiritual gifts enjoyed by the Corinthians will endure until the second coming of Christ?

- Commentators are divided over this issue—on a couple fronts. For instance, not all commentators agree that the "gift" (*charismati*) of verse 7 is referring, in a specific sense, to the "spiritual gifts" of chapters 12–14.

    - The word "gift" does not appear with the adjective "spiritual."

    - Paul uses "gift" elsewhere in this letter to refer to non-miraculous gifts (such as the "gift" of singleness in 7:7; cf. 2 Cor. 1:11). He also uses it elsewhere to speak of salvation through Christ (Rom. 5:15; 6:23).

    - The general nature of Paul's introduction, and his emphasis on soteriological grace (from conversion to consummation) also suggest this conclusion. Thus, even charismatic commentators (such as Gordon Fee) recognize the possibility that Paul is using "gift" here in a general redemptive, rather than a special miraculous, sense.

- On the flip side, Paul's reference to "speech" and "knowledge" (in verse 5) does seem to set the stage for his later discussion regarding revelatory gifts (from tongues and prophecy to wisdom and knowledge).

    - In a period when all of the charismatic gifts were undeniably in operation, Paul could have easily spoken of all of the gifts of grace (both redemptive and miraculous/charismatic) in a general sense. Then again, the speech and knowledge of verse 5 could have more to do with providing a God-ordained contrast to the philosophical wisdom of the world (which Paul will immediately discuss in chapters 1–3).

- It is interesting to note that God the Father and God the Son are referenced multiple times in this passage. If the special gifts of the Spirit are primarily in view here, it is noteworthy that the Person of the Spirit is not mentioned.

- Commentators also seem to be split on the relationship between the two phrases, "so that you are not lacking in any gift" and "awaiting eagerly the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ." Some see no temporal link between the two phrases (or at least make no mention of it in their comments on the text). In other words, they do not assert that the second phrase is an indication (or implication) of how long the gifts will last.

- Others do see a link, claiming that the gifts of verse 7 will last until the revelation of Christ at His return. Of these scholars, those who interpret the gifts redemptively, contend that the grace of salvation will continue until the Lord returns. On the other hand, those

who interpret the gifts more specifically (in terms of 1 Corinthians 12–14) contend that it is the miraculous/charismatic gifts which will continue. These charismatic commentators generally support their interpretation by pointing to 1 Corinthians 13:8–10, basing their understanding of 1 Corinthians 1:7 on that later text.

- Grammatically and contextually, the case cannot ultimately be proven either way. Even if one concludes that the gifts in view here are specifically the gifts of 1 Corinthians 12–14 (which is highly debatable), the interpreter must be cautious not to read more into Paul's introductory comments than is actually there. Paul's purpose here is to introduce his epistle in a general sense (by means of thanksgiving and encouragement). He will get to specifics (regarding the special miraculous gifts) later in the letter.

- The bottom line is that the apostle does not explicitly say (in this text) that the gifts will last until the return of Christ. Rather, he urges the Corinthians (who were the blessed recipients of divine grace) to continue in their eager expectation for Christ's return (when the grace that they enjoyed now, in part, would be realized in full.) The *implied* duration that charismatic commentators see in the text seems to be based more on a preceding theological presupposition (read in from 1 Cor. 13), than on conclusive exegetical data from this passage itself.

- Ultimately, the *when* question cannot be decisively or definitively answered from this text. The passage, which is an introductory word of thanksgiving (for the Corinthians' salvation and state of spiritual blessing) and encouragement (that they would eagerly anticipate the return of Christ), leaves the *when* question open.

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1 Corinthians 13:8–13

(1 Cor. 13:8–13) *Love never fails; but if there are gifts of prophecy, they will be done away; if there are tongues, they will cease; if there is knowledge, it will be done away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part; but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away. When I was a child, I used to speak like a child, think like a child, reason like a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things. For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known. But now faith, hope, love, abide these three; but the greatest of these is love.*

- There seem to be only two things that commentators agree on when it comes to 1 Corinthians 13:8–13:

(1) The point of the passage is the superiority of love over spiritual gifts

(2) This passage is one of the most hotly debated in the church today.

- It is ironic, in fact, that a passage about love has been such a point of contention. And the interpreter, before he ever gets to these six verses, does well to first read the preceding half of chapter 13. Verse 2 is especially *apropos*, for even if we had all knowledge (such that we could solve every exegetical riddle including this one), but did not have love, we would be nothing.

- This is not an excuse for slip-shod exegesis, but rather as a reminder of Paul's main point. His primary aim in verses 8–13 is not to tell his readers when the gifts will cease. It is rather to substantiate one important spiritual axiom, that the temporary is inferior to the eternal. In a church that had wrongly prioritized certain gifts, abusing them for selfish purposes, the apostle's message could not have been more needed. He takes their focus from what will not last (prophecy, tongues, and partial knowledge), and reminds them of what will not fail (namely, love).

- That being said, Paul does make some important statements about spiritual gifts in this passage. It is with some reluctance, then, that we move from the grander theme of love to the specific topic at hand.

- **Verse 8:** "Love never fails; but if prophecy, they will be done away; if tongues, they will cease; if knowledge, it will be done away."

- In contrast to love, which never fails, at least three of the revelatory gifts will fail at some point. Those three gifts are delineated in verse 8 (prophecy, tongues, and knowledge). They are probably singled out because the Corinthians' misuse of the gifts primarily revolved around these three. Thus Paul is emphasizing his point: *Love is greater than any gift,* even the most popular gifts, like prophecy, tongues, and knowledge.

- It is interesting (and significant) that Paul uses two different words when speaking about the cessation of these gifts.

    - When speaking of prophecy and knowledge he uses a form of the word *katargeo* (translated "will be done away"), but regarding tongues he uses a form of the word *pauo* (translated "cease"). Some commentators have argued that this is simply a stylistic change, in which Paul used a different word to avoid redundancy. But that seems unlikely for at least two reasons:

(1) Paul uses *katargeo* again in verse 10 and once more in verse 11. By using it four times in vv. 8–11 (twice in verse 8 and twice in verses 10-11), Paul demonstrates that he is not adverse to a redundant use of the same word. In fact, he uses *katargeo* a total of eight times in this epistle, but uses *pauo* only once (and it is here, in this verse). Paul's unique choice of *pauo* in contrast to his repeated use of *katargeo,* under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, is surely more significant than just a desire for stylistic variation.

(2) Paul's argument will proceed by contrasting that which is *partial* with that which is *complete* (in vv. 9–11). While it is possible to have partial prophecy and partial knowledge, it is not really possible to have partial languages (no matter how those languages are construed). Thus, while partial prophecy (v. 9) and partial knowledge (v. 9) will "be done away," tongues simply "cease" (or *stop*). The timing of that cessation (of tongues) is not explicitly delineated in the passage.

- It is interesting to note as well that *pauo* is in the middle voice, perhaps giving it something of a reflexive force. Based on this, some commentators have contended that tongues cease *of themselves*. Other commentators disagree, arguing that the middle voice has no exegetical significance here beyond stylistic choice. In any case, Paul's change from *katargeo* to *pauo* can simply be glossed over as a stylistic variation. As Don McDougall explains:

  > Paul used *pauo* for a distinct purpose, a purpose different from what he communicated by *katargeo*. The use of the two different verbs was not merely to avoid repetition, because Paul uses *katargeo* four times in vv. 8, 10, and 11. Thus a distinction is intended. (*TMSJ* 14/2 [Fall 2003])

- As Paul continues his argument in vv. 9–12, he narrows the discussion to knowledge and prophecy (as forms of partial revelation), and leaves the subject of tongues behind. He does not address the question of *when* tongues cease. He simply says *tongues cease*. This is in contrast to love which continues (vv. 8, 13).

- The question of *how long tongues will continue* into church history, or *when tongues will cease*, is not directly answered by this text. Nor is it necessary to Paul's main point. But what about *prophecy* and *knowledge*?

  > ***1 Corinthians 13:9-13:*** *(9) For we know in part and we prophesy in part; (10) but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away. (11) When I was a child, I used to speak like a child, think like a child, reason like a child; when I*

became a man, I did away with childish things. (12) For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known. (13) But now faith, hope, love, abide these three; but the greatest of these is love.

- In **verse 9**, Paul narrows his argument to focus on prophecy and knowledge specifically (both of which are forms of *partial* revelation). Some will argue that tongues (along with all the other charismata) are implied by the context. But interpreters must be careful not to simply (and conveniently) dismiss certain exegetical elements as "changes in style," when those changes do not fit with their interpretation.

- At the very least, it seems that Paul leaves out tongues in verse 9 because it is somewhat extraneous to his argument, which contrasts that which is *partial* from that which is *complete*. Gordon Fee (a continuationist) among others recognizes this distinction. Fee explains that the absence of tongues in verse 9 is due "partly to the fact that 'tongues' does not lend itself easily to the way these sentences are expressed. 'We speak in tongues in part' is not particularly meaningful" (p. 644, n. 21).

- On a side note, if the cessation of tongues is tied to the "perfect," and if the "perfect" refers to the return of Christ, the continuationist faces an interesting problem. Those who interpret "tongues" as "heavenly languages" or as "prayer speech to God" (as most continuationists do) are faced with a dilemma. *Do heavenly languages stop (cease) when believers get to heaven?* Thiselton in his commentary recognizes this problem, noting that Paul's use of *pauo* "must surely call into question the notion that tongues are either, in Paul's view, a language of heaven, or a paradigmatic way of expressing exalted intimacy with God. If this were so, why would they cease at the *eschaton* [when the perfect comes]?" (p. 1061)

- In any case, Paul narrows the discussion here to prophecy and knowledge. He does this because his focus is on partial revelation in contrast to perfect revelation. This is explicit in verses 9–10, where the apostle writes: *We know in part and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect [complete] has come, then that which is in part will be done away.*

- There are at least a couple important exegetical points to be noted in these verses.

  (1) First, "the perfect" (*to teleion*) can be translated as "perfect," "complete," or "mature." Because of its contrast with the "partial," it seems best to understand it as "complete." Thus, it is *perfect* in the sense of *perfectly complete* (with an emphasis on quality rather than quantity). And it is *mature* in the sense of *having*

reached its intended end or fulfillment. Paul's use of the term elsewhere, as well as its use in the Septuagint, seems to support this understanding of the text.

(2) Second, both "the perfect" and "the partial" are neuter in gender and singular in person. This is in distinction to "prophecies" (feminine plural) and "knowledge" (feminine singular) from verse 8. Grammatically, the "partial" does not specifically refer to "*gifts* of prophesy" or "*gifts* of knowledge." If it did, it would be feminine plural.

- It seems instead, from the context, to refer to the partial revelation (or knowledge) *that results from* (and thus characterizes) the revelatory gifts. This is in keeping with verses 2, 9, and 12, which emphasize not the incompleteness of the gifts themselves, but the incompleteness of the revealed information that comes from them. It is that incomplete revelation that will be done away when *the perfect* comes.

- Along these lines, **Thomas Edgar** reasons:

> The prophecies and knowledge in this passage are not the gifts themselves, as most interpreters seem to assume, but the content associated with the gifts. There are several reasons for understanding the passage this way. The gifts are not partial, nor will there be a day when the partial gifts will be replaced by complete gifts. The stress in this passage is not on the gifts but on knowledge and prophecies [which result from the gifts], such as Agabus's prophecy regarding famine. The word "prophecies" used here does refer to the gift in a few passages. However, it usually refers to the prohecies themselves. Likewise, "knowledge" is not described anywhere as one of the spiritual gifts. The "word of knowledge" is the gift; however this title is not used here. Finally, verse 12 refers not to gifts specifically but to unclear versus direct sight and partial versus complete knowledge.
>
> . . . Someone will object that this entire section of 1 Corinthians discusses gifts; therefore, this must be the issue here. While Paul is still discussing gifts, in this particular section he is discussing the content resulting from the gifts and the basic element involved in the gift of tongues. He does this in order to show that the basic reason for these gifts is only temporal and the gifts are, therefore, less significant than love that lasts. Direct sight and complete knowledge will eventually be every Christian's privilege; therefore, the partial knowledge and prophecy resulting from the gifts will no longer be necessary. (*Satisfied by the Promise of the Spirit*, pp. 245–46)

- Whether or not one agrees with all of Edgar's conclusions (and not all cessationists do), his overarching premise is hard to argue against: namely, that Paul's focus is on

the *incomplete revelatory content* that characterizes the revelatory gifts. This is in contrast to *the perfect*, which by implication would refer to *complete revelatory content*, or at least a time when such content will be available.

- This interpretation is further supported by the illustrations of verses 11–12. The child/adult contrast in verse 11 is one of limited understanding versus full, mature understanding. The mirror/face-to-face contrast, again, is one of limited "dim" perception as opposed to uninhibited "face-to-face" perception. Thus Paul concludes verse 12 by saying outright: "Now I know in part, but then I will know fully, just as I also have been fully known."

- If this understanding is correct, then Paul's emphasis is not: "When the perfect comes, the *partial gifts* will be done away." Rather, his point is that: "When the perfect comes, the *incompleteness and obscurity that now characterizes the gifts* will be done away." Or perhaps more clearly, "When the perfect comes, *that which is partial about the gifts* (namely, the obscure and incomplete knowledge that characterizes them) will be done away." When complete revelation comes, partial knowledge will come to an end.

- Richard Gaffin points out the significance of this understanding:

> Paul's primary emphasis here is on the partial, obscured quality of the believer's present knowledge brought by prophetic gifts, in comparison with faith, hope, and especially love that have what we might call an eschatological "reach" or "grasp" (vv. 12–13). Such knowledge will not cease until the arrival of "perfection" (v. 10). . . .
>
> With this accent on the partial *quality* of the believer's present knowledge, the particular *media* of that revealed knowledge are, strictly speaking, incidental. Paul mentions prophecy and tongues because of his pastoral concern in the wider context (chaps. 12–14) about the proper exercise of these two gifts. But the time of their cessation is not a point he is concerned with, and it is gratuitous to insist on the contrary from verse 10. Rather, his interest is in showing the duration of our present, opaque knowledge — by whatever revelatory means it may come (and that would even include inscripturation) and whenever they may cease. (*Are Miraculous Gifts for Today? Four Views*, p. 55).

But what Is the "Perfect" in 1 Corinthians 13:10?

- It seems there are almost as many views of "the perfect" as there are commentators who write about 1 Corinthians 13:8–13. Space on a blog does not permit a full investigation into each of these, but rather a cursory explanation of the major views.

The Different Views

(1) Some (such as F.F. Bruce) argue that *love itself* is *the perfect*. Thus when the fullness of love comes, the Corinthians will put away their childish desires.

(2) Some (such as B.B. Warfield) contend that the *completed canon of Scripture* is *the perfect*. Scripture is described as "perfect" in James 1:25, a text in which the same word for "mirror" (as in v. 12) is found (in James 1:23). Thus partial revelation is done away when the full revelation of Scripture comes.

(3) Some (such as Robert Thomas) contend that *the mature church* is *the perfect*. This view is primarily based on the illustration of verse 11 and on the close connection between this passage and Eph. 4:11–13. The exact timing of the church's "maturity" is unknown, though it is closely associated with the completion of the canon, and the end of the apostolic era (cf. Eph. 2:20).

For an excellent defense of this view see either, Robert Thomas's *TMSJ* article: http://www.tms.edu/tmsj/tmsj4g.pdf; or Don McDougall's *TMSJ* article: http://www.tms.edu/tmsj/tmsj14g.pdf.

(4) Some (such as Thomas Edgar) see *the believer's entrance into the presence of Christ* (at the moment of death) as *the perfect*. This view accounts for the personal aspect of Paul's statement in verse 12. Paul personally experienced full knowledge when he entered Christ's presence at his death (cf. 2 Cor. 5:8).

(5) Some (such as Richard Gaffin) see *the return of Christ* (and the *end of this age*) as *the perfect*. This is also the view of most continuationists. Thus, when Christ comes back (as delineated in chapter 15), the partial revelation we know now will be made complete.

(6) Some (such as John MacArthur) view *the eternal state* (in the general sense of the *glorified state*) as *the perfect*. This view accounts for the neuter of *to teleion* (as a reference to a general state of events and not a personal return of Christ), and also allows for the obscurity of revelation to continue into the Millennial Kingdom. This view overlaps with both numbers 4 and 5 above in that, according to this view: "For Christians the eternal state begins either at death, when they go to be with the Lord, or at the rapture, when the Lord takes His own to be with Himself" (John MacArthur, *First Corinthians*, 366).

The Preferred View

- Of these views, I (personally) find the last three more convincing than the first three. This is partly due to the testimony of church history. Dr. Gary Shogren, after doing an in-depth study of some 169 patristic references to this passage, concludes that the church fathers unanimously saw the perfect in terms of something beyond this life (most normally associating it with the return of Christ). Even Chrysostom (who was clearly a cessationist) saw it this way. While not authoritative, such evidence is difficult to dismiss.

- From an exegetical perspective, the first three views have difficulty explaining the phrase, "then I will see face-to-face" (v. 12) as something other than the full knowledge that believer's receive in glory. It is also difficult to imagine how the term "perfect" could describe the Christian's present level of knowledge in this life.

- Taking the final three views, "the perfect" or "perfection" would be essentially synonymous to "glorification." Such a view seems to adequately fit the historical data, while also accounting for the personal nature of Paul's statements in verse 12. The moment of the believer's glorification *is* the moment in which all the partial knowledge of this life is removed and replaced with full knowledge.

- Though we have the completed canon, our knowledge is still not perfect (which is why discussions like this one continue to persist). Do we have all that we need for life and godliness? Absolutely. But do we now know fully as we will then be fully known (v. 12)? This does not seem to be the case.

- For Paul, his partial understanding and partial knowledge was done away at the moment of his death, when he was ushered instantly into the presence of Christ (v. 12; cf. 2 Cor. 5:8). The incompleteness and obscurity of this life disappeared. In its place he experienced the full revelatory knowledge of glory. When he died, his partial knowledge became full knowledge, as his faith became sight.

- For Paul's readers (and for all believers who would die throughout church history), complete understanding came at the moment they entered the presence of Christ. For those believers, in the future, who are alive at His return, complete understanding will come at the moment of His appearing. In either case, the obscurity of this life is done away for each believer when glorification comes.

- If, as seems apparent in the passage, the *teleion* refers to the individual's presence with the Lord [either through death or through rapture], this passage does not refer to some prophetic point in history. [Instead,] it serves to remind the Corinthians of the abiding

nature of love in contrast to the gifts, which by their inherent nature are only temporal, only for this life. (cf. Thomas Edgar, *Satisfied by the Promise of the Spirit*, 246)

- Paul's instruction to the Corinthians, then, is that they be *less worried* about what only has value for this life (the limited knowledge derived from the gifts), and *more concerned* with what has value for the life to come (namely, love). This fits perfectly within the scope of Paul's larger argument.

- Thus, how long the gifts will continue into church history is not explicitly addressed in this passage. For Paul and his Corinthian readers, living in an era in which charismatic gifts were unarguably operational, it is unlikely that Paul was thinking in terms of church history and more likely that he was thinking in terms of the personal experience of his audience. For the Corinthian recipients of this letter, the limited knowledge of prophecy did not "cease" at the close of the canon or at the return of Christ. It ceased, instead, at the moment they were ushered into our Lord's presence.

- Paul's point, then, is that until we each get to heaven our knowledge (through whatever means it comes) remains incomplete. But when glorification comes, then that which is partial will be done away.

One Important Closing Thought

- One final point should be made. The interpreter can take any of the above positions, and still remain a cessationist. In fact, there are cessationists who hold to each position listed above.

- Thus, Anthony Thiselton notes in his commentary: "The one important point to make here is that few or none of the serious 'cessationist' arguments depends on a specific exegesis of 1 Cor 13:8–11. … *These verses should not be used as a polemic for either side in this debate*" (pp. 1063, emphasis original).

- Ultimately, we conclude that this text does not explicitly answer the *when* question, with regard to when the miraculous and revelatory gifts will end in church history. To be sure, they will not continue into the eternal state. But whether or not the gifts themselves remain in operation *until* the end of the church age is something beyond the scope of Paul's argument in 1 Corinthians 13. It is not the apostle's purpose to answer the *when* question from the perspective of church history. Rather, his goal is to make one very important point: *Love is superior to the gifts. While the gifts produce that which is incomplete (and therefore limited to this life), love never fails — it has value both for this life and for the life to come.*

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Additional Thoughts about 1 Corinthians 13:10:
(cited from Thomas Edgar, *Satisfied by the Promise of the Spirit*, 244–46)

> Since the point at which this "setting aside" takes place is described as when "that which is perfect comes," many have discussed the meaning of "perfect" (*teleion*) in this passage, arriving at different conclusions. Although the word *teleion* is often translated "perfect," it can mean either "finished, complete, mature, or perfect." The "perfect" in this passage is specifically contrasted as the opposite to "that which is partial." Therefore, the meaning of "perfect" must be "complete." This not only is a common meaning for *teleion*, it is the only one that makes a sensible contrast with "partial. …
> Verse 9 states that the reason prophecies and knowledge will be set aside is that they are only partial. Verse 10 as we have just seen refers to "complete" replacing "partial." Verse 12 then begins to close the discussion by stating that, "Now we only know partially; but then (at the *teleion*), we will know completely." Thus, it is definite that the concept of "complete" replacing "partial" is the basic point in this passage, showing why love outlasts prophecies, knowledge, and tongues.
>
> Notice that verse 10 is a general principle rather than a statement of specifics. It states a commonly recognized general principle and is used as a general principle in this passage. Paul gives it as a self-evident reason for his argument that prophecies and knowledge will be set aside due to the fact that they are partial. He apparently expects this to be a self-explanatory statement. The conclusive evidence that this is a general principle is the use of the neuter singulars "that which is partial" and "that which is complete." The neuter singular shows that these are used to refer to the general concepts of anything that is partial and anything that is complete. If it referred to the specifics of this passage, which would be partial prophecies and partial knowledge, then it would be feminine since both are feminine.
>
> Therefore, the fact that *teleion* is neuter shows it is a general principle and tells us nothing about the gender of what is referred to in this discussion. This is the same as the fact that the neuter *to ek merous* ("that which is partial") tells us nothing about the gender of what is referred to as "partial" in the passage. According to the context, the "partial" are prophecies and knowledge, both of which are feminine.
>
> The meaning of *teleion* is also unmistakable in this passage and, in fact, is specifically stated in verse 12. It is when the partial knowledge is replaced by complete knowledge and partial prophecies are replaced by direct sight. Paul states this as an individual event—when the individual knows and sees—rather than as a group event such as the translation of the church to heaven. Yet a group event is a possibility if the individual aspect in verse 12 is deemphasized and the aspect of completed prophecy is

put in its place. Paul seems to be saying, "Emphasize love, which lasts, instead of prophecies, knowledge, and tongues, which are only temporal and will one day be superseded."

One other significant aspect should be noted. The prophecies and knowledge in this passage are not the gifts themselves, as most interpreters seem to assume, but the content associated with the gifts. There are several reasons for understanding the passage in this way. The gifts are not partial, nor will there be a day when the partial gifts will be replaced by complete gifts. The stress in this passage is not on the gifts but on knowledge and prophecies, such as Agabus's prophecy regarding famine. The word "prophecies" used here does refer to the gift in a few passages. However, it usually refers to the prophecies themselves. Likewise, "knowledge" is not described anywhere as one of the spiritual gifts. The "word of knowledge" is the gift; however, this title is not used here. Finally, verse 12 refers not to gifts specifically but to unclear versus direct sight and partial versus complete knowledge. In the same way, "tongues" in this discussion must refer to language rather than to the gift. When the gift of tongues is being discussed, some qualifying addition such as "speak in" tongues or "the" tongues is used. The apparent exception in 1 Corinthians 14:26 actually refers to the language spoken rather than the gift itself and is, therefore, no exception.

Someone will object that this entire section of 1 Corinthians discusses gifts; therefore, this must be the issue here. While Paul is still discussing gifts, in this particular section he is discussing the content resulting from the gifts and the basic element involved in the gift of tongues. He does this in order to show that the basic reason for these gifts is only temporal and the gifts are, therefore, less significant than love that lasts. Direct sight and complete knowledge will eventually be every Christian's privilege; therefore, the partial knowledge and prophecy resulting from the gifts will no longer be necessary.

The content resulting from these gifts goes on long after the gift was exercised to produce that content. For example, Isaiah prophesied many years ago and his prophecy still remains, although both Isaiah and his gift are long gone. Thus, whatever the *teleion* may be, it is only the content that continues, not necessarily the gift. It is only language that continues to that point, not necessarily the gift. If, as seems apparent in the passage, the *teleion* refers to the individual's presence with the Lord, this passage does not refer to some prophetic point in history. These factors mean that this passage does not teach when gifts will cease or how long they will last. It serves to remind the Corinthians of the abiding nature of love in contrast to the gifts, which by their inherent nature are only temporal, only for this life.

* * * * *

Ephesians 2:20

Ephesians 2:19–22: *"So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, [20] having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit."*

- This passage (specifically verse 20) is a critical text for the cessationist, since it establishes (in his paradigm) the notion that New Testament prophets were given for the foundation stage of the church, and not for the entire church age. In the same way that the apostles are no longer in the church today, neither are prophets. Thus, it is reasoned, the gift of prophecy has ceased.

- Virtually all conservative evangelicals agree that there are no apostles in the church today (in terms of the specific office, as used in Ephesians 2:20; 3:5; and 4:11 and numerous other places in Paul's writings). After all, an apostle had to be **(1)** be an eyewitness of the resurrected Christ (Acts 1:22; 10:39–41; 1 Cor. 9:1; 15:7–8); **(2)** be directly appointed by Jesus Christ (Mark 3:14; Luke 6:13; Acts 1:2, 24; 10:41; Gal. 1:1); and **(3)** have the ability to confirm his mission by miraculous signs (Matt. 10:1–2; Acts 1:5–8; 2:43; 4:33; 5:12; 8:14; 2 Cor. 12:12). Based on these three criteria (all three of which one must meet to be an apostle), there were no longer any apostles (in the specialized sense) after the first century.

- Since the apostolic office has ceased, having accomplished its purpose in laying the foundation for the church, can we then conclude that the prophetic office has also ceased?

- This, according to most commentators, depends on who the "prophets" are in this verse. If the "prophets" are New Testament prophets, then the cessationist paradigm is greatly strengthened. As continuationist **Wayne Grudem** has written:

  > If [Ephesians 2:20 is] referring to all the prophets in all the local congregations in first century churches . . . then it would seem that they are portrayed in a unique 'foundational' role in the New Testament church, and we have to agree with Dr Gaffin—we would expect this gift to cease once the New Testament was complete (Grudem, *Prophecy*, 48).

- (Note that most commentators do not believe that the OT prophets are included in verse 20, because they are excluded [in the context] by 3:5. Also, it would be strange [though not impossible] for Paul to list the OT prophets in a way that was chronologically out of

order. See Harold Hoehner's commentary on Ephesians for a full discussion on this point.)

- At first glance, it appears that the verse is highlighting two distinct offices within the early church—that of apostle and that of prophet.

- But Grudem sees it differently. In his view, the verse would be better translated as "the apostle-prophets" or "the apostles who are also prophets." It is the prophetic aspect of the apostle's ministry that is being discussed in this verse. Thus, the apostolic office is the only one that we should expect to have ceased.

- Dr. Grudem's primary argument for his position appeals to Granville Sharp's first rule of Greek grammar. According to this rule,

> When the copulative *kai* connects two nouns of the same case, if the article ho, or any of its cases, precedes the first of the said nouns or participles, and is not repeated before the second noun or participle, the latter always relates to the same person that is expressed or described by the first noun or participle" (Sharp, *Remarks on the Uses of the Definitive Article*, 2).

- In other words, in a Greek construction of article-noun-*kai*-noun, the two nouns refer to the same person.

- While it is generally recognized that Granville Sharp's rule consistently applies to *singular* nouns, it does not universally apply to plural nouns. **Daniel Wallace** explains:

> "Sharp's rule Number 1" doesn't always work with plural forms of personal titles. Instead, a phrase that follows the form article-noun-"and"-noun, when the nouns involved are plurals, can involve two entirely distinct groups, two overlapping groups, two groups of which is one a subset of the other, or two identical groups (Wallace, 72–78).

- Because the nouns in this case are plural in form, Granville Sharp's rule does not apply. Consequently, Grudem's creative attempt to interpret this verse as "the apostle-prophets" is seriously weakened.

- In the words of Thomas Edgar, a cessationist:

> Ephesians 2:20 could not be more clear. The verse contains no difficult words, nor any difficult or unusual grammatical constructions. The grammatical construction of

one article preceding two nouns joined by "and" is a familiar and well-known construction. Any alleged complexities in interpreting this verse arise not from the verse itself but from the presuppositions of the interpreter (Edgar, *Satisfied by the Promise of the Spirit*, 78–79).

- In establishing that there are two distinct offices in this verse, Richard Gaffin (in *Perspectives on Pentecost*) notes that it is important to keep several key exegetical points in mind. These can be summarized as follows:

  (1) Ephesians 4:11 clearly distinguishes between the apostles and the prophets. The context of the letter, then, points to a distinction in Ephesians 2:20.

  (2) First Corinthians 12:28 is the only other text where apostles and prophets are mentioned together. Here also, they are clearly presented as separate groups.

  (3) Paul does not designate the apostles as "prophets" anywhere else in his writings.

  (4) Since Paul does not do so elsewhere, it is unlikely that he would do so here at least without a little bit of explanation.

- We conclude, then, that the grammar, the context (cf. Eph. 4:11), and Paul's usage elsewhere provides strong evidence for the fact that the "prophets" of 2:20 are distinct from the "apostles." This would be true, also, of Ephesians 3:5 (in which it is clear that New Testament, not Old Testament, prophets are in view).

- To again cite Grudem's earlier quote (from above):

  If [Ephesians 2:20 is] referring to all the prophets in all the local congregations in first century churches [i.e. New Testament prophets in a general sense] . . . then it would seem that they are portrayed in a unique 'foundational' role in the New Testament church, and we have to agree with Dr Gaffin—we would expect this gift to cease once the New Testament was complete.

- Based on the exegetical evidence, this is exactly what cessationists expect.

  Thomas Edgar, *Satisfied by the Promise of the Spirit*, 240: This verse states that the apostles and prophets are the foundation of the church and that Christ is the cornerstone. The passage refers to the universal church, not to a local church or mission field. Foundations are necessarily at the building of any structure. Although the building in Ephesians 2:20 is a figure of speech, it illustrates truth. Christ, the

> cornerstone, came first. The members of the church are actually "built upon" (Gk. *epoikodomeo*) the foundation. This passage strongly implies that apostles and prophets are of the past and were only at the beginning. Someone may say, "We still need the foundation; therefore, apostles and prophets are still given." We still need Christ the cornerstone, but he has not been present physically since he ascended. Christ fulfilled his purpose on earth, and the church continues based on that. Likewise the apostles and prophets fulfilled their purpose, and the church builds on that.

* * * * *

Ephesians 4:11–13

(Eph. 4:11–13) *And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.*

There are three questions here that concern the issue of the continuation of the gifts.

1. First, what does μέχρι ("until") modify?

2. Second, does the μέχρι clause have an eschatological referent?

3. Third, how does Paul's earlier statement in Ephesians 2:20 relate to his instruction in Ephesians 4:11?

Charles Powell helps to summarize the first two of these key issues:

> This passage appears in the section of Ephesians where Paul is exalting his readers to love and unity. In the midst of the exhortations he teaches that each believer was given "grace according to the measure of Christ's gift." Paul then cites Ps 68:18 along with a parenthetical explanation about the ascension. The complex problems involved with the quote and the parenthesis are not our concern here. Suffice to say, the quotation is used to argue that Christ would give the church spiritual gifts. Paul does not elaborate on the gifting of each believer, instead he speaks about the gifted men which Christ has given to the church. He gave the church apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and other teachers. All of these gifted men equip the saints for the work of the ministry for the

building up of the body until all attain the unity of faith and the knowledge of the Son of God to the fullness of Christ.

There are two questions here that concern the issue of the continuation of the gifts. First, what does μέχρι (until) modify? And second, does the μέχρι clause have an eschatological referent? The significance of these questions would be that the apostles and prophets would then continue to the Second Coming of Christ. It is best to answer the second question first. The referent of the μέχρι clause does seem to be eschatological. The standard that is to be reached is essentially perfection. All (οἱ πάντες) the church are to attain the following: first, "the unity of faith." Whether this refers to unity in doctrine, power of faith, or unity in general, it would be difficult to argue that this goal was achieved either in the first century or in subsequent church history. The second goal is "the full knowledge (τῆς ἐπιγνώσεως) of the Son of God." Does the canon of Scripture, the creeds, the teaching of the church through history, spiritual gifts, or any spiritual experience bring the entire church to this kind of knowledge? The third goal is the state of being a complete/mature man (ἄνδρα τέλειον). This could refer to a certain level of maturity attainable in this age (1 Cor 2:6; 14:20; Phil 3:15; Heb 5:14), but more likely it has the same idea as 1 Cor 13:11 ("when I became a man"), and so refers to an eschatological state. The fourth goal is "the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." It is obvious that all in the church have not reached the same level of maturity as Christ. Therefore, "the end" is described in terms of ultimate spiritual growth of the believer into the absolute perfection that is found in Christ. The metaphor of a mature person is used to portray the heavenly state of believers (cf. 1 Cor 13:10-12).

The second issue is the syntax of μέχρι. Deere and Storms argue that the apostles and prophets will continue until the church reaches its full stature by connecting μέχρι with ἔδωκεν in 4:11. While prepositions usually modify verbs, in this case the verb is a bit remote. It seems better to connect it with εἰς οἰκοδομὴν τοῦ σώματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ, a prepositional phrase that has a verbal idea. The previous two prepositional phrases (εἰς ἔργον διακονίας,εἰς οἰκοδομὴν τοῦ σώματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ) are also connected to a prepositional phrase πρὸς τὸν καταρτισμὸν τῶν ἁγίων) or are in a logical sequence with each prepositional phrase modifying the previous clause. Thus, the body is built up until all attain the unity of faith. While the apostles and prophets contribute to the equipping the saints, they do this as the foundation. Most of the equipping of the saints is done by the pastors and teachers of the local churches. This text, then, does not really give clear cut evidence for the noncessationist position.

(**Source:** Charles Powell, "Questions Cessationists Should Ask: A Biblical Examination of Cessationism," http://bible.org/article/questions-cessationists-should-ask-biblical-examination-cessationism#P44_19172).

- **Regarding <u>question 1</u> (above),** it is best to see the "until" as referring to the ongoing work of edification ("the building up of the body of Christ") done by the saints who have been equipped for that work by the apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers.

- **Note the important exegetical point made by James Montgomery Boice:**

> **<u>James Montgomery Boice</u>:** In older versions of the English Bible there was a small but serious error that may have contributed to the church's blindness at this point or, to state the matter another way, may have resulted from its prejudice. It involves a comma. In the original King James Version (there has been a change in more recent editions), Ephesians 4:11–12 said, "And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, [that is the comma] for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ."
>
> In this version of the text God is said to have given the teaching gifts, which we normally associate with ministers, so that the ministers may do three things: (1) perfect the saints, (2) do the ministry, and (3) edify or build up the body of Christ. That is, the professionals do it all. They have the gifts, and they are to use them to do all the church's work. . . .
>
> But that translation was wrong! Armitage Robinson was probably the first commentator to notice it and insist that it was a mistake. He argued—and virtually all commentators since have agreed with him—that the comma should be eliminated. Without that comma, the passage says something entirely different. Instead of giving three tasks to "ministers," it gives one task to the clergy ("equip the saints") and another to the laity ("do the ministry"). As a result of both fulfilling their proper, God given function, "the body of Christ may be built up."
>
> Here is the real sequence:
>
> 1. Those who have been given the gifts of teaching are to use those gifts to equip or "prepare" the saints, so that, as a first objective,
> 2. Believers may do the work of "ministry" or "service," and that, as an ultimate objective,
> 3. The church may be "built up," "reach unity in the faith," and "become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.
>
> The translation (the correct one) gives an immediate purpose to God's giving of the teaching gifts: to equip the saints. It gives an ultimate purpose to God's giving of these gifts: to build up the church. But it preserves the essential intermediate step which is an "every-member ministry." It follows that where this intermediate step is not taken, where the clergy try to do the whole work, there the church stagnates and divisions occur. (J. M. Boice, *Ephesians*, Baker 1997, 140–41)

> **F. F. Bruce, *Colossians, Philemon,* and *Ephesians*, NICNT, 349:** [v. 12] The three prepositional phrases in this verse are not coordinate one with another, as might be suggested by the RSV rendering ("for the equipment of the saints, for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ"); the second and third phrases are dependent on the first, as is indicated by their being introduced by a different preposition from the first.

- Though "apostles and prophets" are no longer given in the church today, they continue to equip the saints through their teachings which are recorded for us in written form in the New Testament.

> **James Montgomery Boice:** Although there are significant differences between the gifts Paul lists in Ephesians 4:11, which is why they are given different names and are listed individually, it is worth noting that (in this list at least) all the gifts of the Lord to the church involve teaching. The apostle and prophets provided the initial and normative teaching; it is preserved in the New Testament, which parallels the Old. Evangelists proclaim the core of this teaching, centered in the gospel of redemption from sin by Jesus Christ. Pastors and teachers instruct and care for the flock through an even fuller communication of scriptural truth. This is not to say that there are not other gifts that do not particularly involve teaching. But it does mean that the teaching gifts are particularly needed if the church is to mature in the direction Paul describes" (*Ephesians*, 137).

- At that point, the answer to **question 2** becomes somewhat irrelevant for the charismatic discussion. However, it is best to see Paul's reference to the "unity of the faith" and the "mature man" as referring to a time that is attainable *before* the end of the church age. Classical cessationists, such as Robert Thomas, would argue that the maturity of the church described here coincides closely with the completion of the NT canon.

- Regarding **question 3**, Paul's earlier statements regarding the foundational role of apostles and prophets becomes very important for understanding his reference to them in Ephesians 4:11–13.

- The foundation is laid only once. Yet, it continues to support the entire building throughout every stage of construction.

> **Peter O'Brien, *Ephesians*, 298:** "The specific mention, first of all, that Christ gave *apostles* and *prophets* corresponds to the earlier references in 2:20 and 3:5 to their *foundational* role as the authoritative recipients and proclaimers of the mystery of Christ (note also their appearance first in Paul's list of 1 Corinthians 12:28).

F. F. Bruce, *Colossians, Philemon,* and *Ephesians*, NICNT, 346: Of the "gifts" that are named, three are mentioned in order of precedence in 1 Cor. 12:28, where God is said to have set in the church "first apostles, second prophets, third teachers." Here evangelists are placed between prophets and teachers, and teachers are given the twofold designation "pastors and teachers." Both lists agree in placing apostles first and prophets after them. Apostles and prophets, as was indicated in Eph. 2:20, are viewed as the foundation "gifts" in the church.

A. Skevington Wood, *Ephesians*, Expositor's Bible Commentary, 58: "Apostles" and "prophets' have already been paired as providing a foundation for the Christian temple (Eph. 2:20; 3:5).

D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Christian Unity* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987), 183: [regarding Eph. 4:11] The offices mentioned by the Apostle are apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. Concerning these there has been much writing and discussion and disputation throughout the centuries. I suggest that these can be divided into two groups. First there are certain offices which were temporary and extraordinary in the church, certain functions which were only meant to be in use for a certain period and which since then have disappeared. Obviously the second group therefore consists of the permanent offices in the life and witness of the Church. … In the first group, the extraordinary and temporary, we have apostles and prophets . . . ; and in the second permanent group we have pastors and teachers.

In Summary:

John MacArthur: Advocates of modern-day apostleship make two incorrect assumptions about this passage. First, they assert that the unity, knowledge, and maturity described in verse 13 refer to the second coming of Christ. Second, they contend that all five of the offices listed in verse 11 (apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers) must continue until the second coming. But neither of those assumptions is warranted by the text itself.

Let's look at the second assumption first. Does this passage indicate that the offices listed in verse 11 will last *until* the conditions described in verse 13 are met? That interpretation might be possible if verse 12 were omitted from the text. Grammatically, however, the word "until" in verse 13 points back to the nearest participle in verse 12 ("building up"), and not to the distant verb "gave" in verse 11. Thus, Paul's point is that those offices listed in verse 11 were given by Christ so that, according to verse 12, the saints might be equipped to build up the body of Christ (v. 12). It is the *building up* of body of Christ by the saints, then, that

continues *until* the conditions in verse 13 are realized. Nothing in the text indicates that *apostles* and *prophets* will be present throughout the entire church age; but only that the work they began (equipping the saints to build up the body of Christ) will continue. This grammatical conclusion is strengthened by the context of Ephesians, since Paul has already explained that *apostles* and *prophets* were limited to the foundation age of the church (Eph. 2:20).

We can now consider the unity and knowledge described in verse 13. Some scholars insist that such an ultimate objective is not attainable this side of glory. Thus, they contend, Paul must be describing the church's heavenly unity and knowledge—attributes that will only be realized after the rapture of the church. But that idea does not fit the flow of Paul's thought; he is describing the results produced as the saints build up the church. His focus is not on God's final work of glorification in heaven, but on the work of faithful believers in the church here on earth. Within the church, it is possible for believers to possess a profound unity based on a shared commitment to biblical truth, an intimate knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, and a deep level of spiritual maturity. Paul also adds sound doctrine (v. 14) and growth in Christ-likeness (v. 15) as additional benefits that result from the saints being properly equipped to build up the body of Christ (v. 12).

Rightly understood, Ephesians 4:11–13 does not teach that a five-fold pattern of ministry (including apostles and prophets) will continue throughout all of church history until the second coming of Christ. Rather, this passage demonstrates that the purpose for which the Lord Jesus gave apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers to the church was to equip the saints. When properly equipped, the saints are enabled to build up one another within the body of Christ. And the result is that the church is strengthened—growing in unity, knowledge, maturity, sound doctrine, and sanctification. Because Paul had already indicated that the apostles and prophets were for the foundation only, he did not need to reiterate that those offices were temporary. Though those two offices did not last beyond the first century of church history, the apostles and prophets still equip the saints through the Spirit-inspired writings which they left for us. The other three offices (evangelist, pastor, and teacher) have continued throughout church history. As such, they continue to equip the saints in every generation for the purpose of building up the church. (*Strange Fire*, chap. 5)

* * * * *

Hebrews 2:2–4

(Heb. 2:2–4) For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just penalty, how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?

After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard, God also testifying with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will.

Article: Hebrews 2:3-4 and the Sign Gifts
Author: Daniel B. Wallace

In the sometimes heated discussions over the question of the duration of certain spiritual gifts, one argument has persisted from the side of charismatics: There is no proof-text that any spiritual gift has ceased. As impressive as this argument sounds, a couple of responses should be given. First, if the NT was written by men who in fact *exercised* these sign gifts, why should they say that such had ceased? It would be difficult to find a text in which this point would be explicit. Second, the NT apostles by and large expected the Lord's return in their lifetime (cf. 1 Thess 4:15: "*we* who are alive, who are remaining until the coming of the Lord"). Hence, we should not expect them to make any statements regarding the cessation of gifts, since that would presuppose that they knew the Lord's return would be delayed. In order to find such a statement, we would need to construct the following scenario: A member of an apostle's band writes a letter *after* that apostle had died. Further, in the letter he finds some reason to explicitly mention something about sign gifts.

Such a scenario is difficult to imagine. Happily, the NT provides not only one, but two books that fit such a picture: Jude and Hebrews. And both address--to some degree at least--the issue of gifts and authority. Our purpose in this paper is to look more closely at one text, Hebrews 2:3-4.

Hebrews 2:3-4 is a text often put forth by cessationists that certain spiritual gifts have ceased. The text reads as follows: . . . "[3] How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which was at first declared by the Lord, and was attested to us by those who heard him, [4] while God was also bearing them witness with signs and wonders and various miracles and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will."

The argument that this text refers to the cessation of certain gifts is based on an inference in the text, viz., that since the first generation of Christians were explicitly eyewitnesses to certain sign gifts, the second generation of Christians was not. Usually books that address the issue of gifts don't go further than this point. One has to wonder how valid it is, however.

Several things in the text need to be examined to see whether this text has any validity for the cessation of sign gifts. First, the genitive absolute in v 4 (συνεπιμαρτυροῦντος τοῦ θεοῦ/ "God bearing witness") needs to be addressed. A couple of points should be mentioned.

(1) On a purely syntactical level, the genitive absolute does not of course relate to anything. But it is not like the vocative—that is, it is not extra-sentential. Rather, it is virtually a *constructio ad sensum*. That is, it is merely a Greek convention for expressing adverbial relations, usually of a temporal nature.

(2) Thus, it is neither helpful nor accurate to leave a genitive absolute dangling. The genitive absolute exists precisely because the subject of the genitive participle is different from the subject of the verb in the main clause. But the genitive absolute construction is still dependent on the time of the main verb.

(3) So to what is it semantically dependent? The genitive absolute is most naturally subordinated to the aorist ἐβεβαιώθη ("was attested, confirmed"). To take it back to the future ἐκφευξόμεθα ("shall we escape") in v 3 is stretching things, although the meaning would fit a continuationist position ("How shall we escape . . . while God bears witness with signs and wonders . . . ?"). Still, not only the distance, but the awkwardness of meaning poses a problem. That is, the conditional participle (ἀμελήσαντες) makes perfectly good sense ('if we neglect. . .') as the modifier of the future verb. But what is the relation of the genitive absolute construction to the verb? Over 90% of genitive absolute constructions are temporal (the next largest category is causal). If that is the case here, what is the meaning? Is it something like, "by what means can we possibly escape this great salvation while God is bearing witness to us"? The sense connection is lacking, no matter how you construe it. Take this a step further. It is even more improbable that the genitive absolute is subordinated to the conditional participle: "if we neglect . . . while God is bearing witness . . ." The force of the argument would have been considerably strengthened had the author said, "if we neglect so great a salvation *which* God bears witness to . . ." But that would require an adjectival participle--which, by definition, does not fit the genitive absolute construction. This leaves one of two options left: (a) the aorist indicative, ἐβεβαιώθη, as the word to which the genitive absolute is semantically (not technically syntactically; see above) subordinate to. This makes perfectly good sense; besides, the structure fits most naturally: "it was attested to us by those who heard him, while God bore witness . . ." Or (b) the substantival aorist participle τῶν ἀκουσάντων: the idea then would be that when eyewitnesses heard the message, God bore witness to them. This also makes good sense, and seems to be allowed for by the loose connection of the GA (genitive absolute construction) with the verbal element in the substantival participle. As such, it yields a nice text for cessationism. There are, however, three problems with it: (i) the aorist indicative is closer to the GA; (ii) GAs are normally semantically related to finite verbs (though they sometimes are attached to infinitives; I do not know of any examples off-hand in which they are attached to substantival participles, though this does not strike me as impossible); (iii) the overall meaning is more logically connected if the author is arguing that the *confirmation* was made by accompanying signs, rather than that the *hearing* was accompanied by such signs.

What complicates the issue is the meaning of the aorist indicative. The verb ἐβεβαιώθη of course can mean "was confirmed," or even "was guaranteed" (cf. BAGD). If the latter, then it would make good sense to regard the GA as subordinate to τῶν ἀκουσάντων. The sense would be that those who heard could guarantee that their message of the gospel was from God because he also bore them witness. This is in line with other texts that imply the same idea (cf. 1 John 1:1-4; 2 Pet 1:12-16; etc.). (2) The GA participle συνεπιμαρτυροῦντος means "bearing testimony together with." The associative idea, coupled with "was guaranteed" for the aorist

indicative and a causal GA (see above) renders the following: "it was guaranteed to us by those who heard him because God also bore them witness with signs and wonders . . ." That is, a guarantee could be made by the eyewitnesses because they *knew* that the message was from God since they experienced these miracles.

But what if the meaning of the aorist indicative verb is simply "confirm" and the GA is merely temporal ("while")? This would seem to mean that the gospel was confirmed "to us" when God simultaneously bore witness by performing signs. If so, who are the "us"? Two possibilities: (a) either the author(s) as distinct from the Christians to whom he is writing, or (b) both the author(s) and the believers to whom he is writing. Although there are no structural clues for detecting shifts for exclusive/inclusive "we"--indeed, sometimes the shifts happen very quickly and without warning--it does seem that in this context 'to us' would make better sense if the author included his audience. Otherwise, the audience becomes a third party that requires further confirmation. In v 3, the "we" of "How shall we escape" is probably picked up again by the "to us." The whole argument is strengthened if this is the case. But if this is the case, then doesn't it mean that the *audience* experienced the sign gifts: the gospel was confirmed "to us" (audience included) while God bore witness with signs. . . ?

Yes, this seems to be the case. Does this mean that the sign gifts continued to exist for second-generation Christians? Not exactly. Three careful distinctions need to be made: (1) God bore witness *with* someone (the sun-prefix on συνεπιμαρτυροῦντος implies this) "to us." The only option is "those who heard"--thus, eyewitnesses. Thus, these believers were recipients or observers of such sign gifts; they were not performers of them. The eyewitnesses seem to be the only ones implied here who exercised such gifts. This, in itself, may well imply that the sign gifts lasted only through the first generation of Christians: once the eyewitnesses were dead, so were these gifts. (2) The aorist indicative ἐβεβαιώθη loses much of its punch if the author intends to mean that these gifts continue.[2] He so links the confirmation to the eyewitnesses—and the proof of such confirmation by the sign gifts—that to argue the continued use of such gifts seems to fly in the face of the whole context. If such gifts continued, the author missed a great opportunity to seal his argument against defection. He could have simply said: "How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which was . . . confirmed to us by those who heard *and is still confirmed* among us while God bears witness with signs . . ." By way of contrast, note Gal 3:5 (written when the miraculous was still taking place; two present participles are used): "Does he who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law, or by hearing with faith?" (RSV) This contrast is significant: The author of Hebrews, who is so articulate a defender of his position, lost a perfect opportunity to remind his audience of the

[2] The aorist indicative means "it happened," but we cannot legitimately extrapolate from that a meaning, "and it doesn't happen now." The aorist can't be used to state a negative in the present time. However, the *context* often is sufficiently clear that one can extrapolate from the author's overall meaning a once-for-all idea. Does not Paul say "Christ died for our sins"? Does not the author of Hebrews argue that "God has spoken to us in Son in these last days"? In such instances the aorist is used, but *by itself* a once-for-all idea cannot be meant. Nevertheless, we are on sure ground to argue that the author can use the aorist when he means a once-for-all idea. The tense is well-suited for such, even though corroborative data need to be supplied to see it.

reality of their salvation by not mentioning the current manifestation of the sign gifts. That is, *unless* such were no longer taking place. Though an argument from silence, I think the silence is fairly deafening. The sign gifts seem to be on their way out. (3) But what about this confirmation "to us"--second-generation Christians? I take it that Hebrews was written in the mid 60s (shortly after Paul had died), but that it was written to a long-established Jewish church which was waffling in their faith. If so, then we would expect some of the first-generation believers to have had some contact with them. (Good grief—first-generation folks even have contact with third generation folks at times!) There is no question that some of these folks had witnessed such miracles. There is a rather large question, however, as to whether they had performed them themselves. One simply can't find support for such a view in Hebrew 2:1-4.

All in all, Hebrews 2:3-4 seems to involve some solid inferences that the sign gifts had for the most part ceased.[3] Further, it offers equally inferential evidence of the purpose of the sign gifts: to confirm that God was doing something new. The whole argument of Hebrews rests on this assumption: there is a new and final revelation in Jesus Christ (cf. 1:1-2). He is the one to whom the whole OT points; he is the one who is superior to the Aaronic priesthood, to prophets, and to angels. He is indeed God in the flesh. Is it not remarkable that in this exquisitely argued epistle, the argument turns on Scripture over against experience? The strongest appeal the author makes to the audience's experience is to what they were witnesses to *in the past*. If the sign gifts continued, shouldn't we expect this author (like Paul in Gal 3:5) to have employed such an argument?

I do not pretend to think that this sole text solves the problem of the duration of the sign gifts. But whatever one's views of such gifts, this passage needs to be wrestled with.

[3] To be sure, not all of them had yet: John was still to write his Revelation of Jesus Christ. (But since the author of Hebrews was most likely not from John's circle of influence, for all practical purposes the gift of prophecy might even be viewed as dead as far as he was concerned.) At the same time, "signs and wonders and various miracles" is the normative description of healing and miraculous *deeds*, not prophetic words.

The Why Question

Why did the extraordinary gifts pass away in church history?

Review of the Argument:

- The continuationist/cessationist debate revolves around several primary questions: the *what* question (regarding the *nature* of the miraculous gifts) and the *when* question (regarding the *duration* of the miraculous gifts). A third question also arises, regarding *why* the gifts ceased if they did indeed pass off the scene.

The What Question: *What were the gifts in the New Testament (based on the biblical evidence)? And how does modern charismatic practice compare?*

The Gift of Prophecy

New Testament prophets are to be held to the same standard as Old Testament prophets since the NT writers make no attempt to distinguish between the two. Thus, the content of their prophecy (when declaring new divine revelation) must accurately convey the true, error-free message they are receiving from God. If their prophecy is shown to be incorrect, it is also shown to not be from God. Moreover, now that we have the completed "prophetic Word," additional revelation from God is no longer needed for the present age.

The Gift of Tongues

The gift of tongues was a supernaturally endowed ability, given by the Holy Spirit to select Christians, enabling those believers to speak in previously unlearned human languages. The ideal use of the gift involved the translation of the message for the general edification of fellow believers or evangelism of unbelievers. This ability was not given to all Christians nor were they commanded to seek it. It was not considered the hallmark of the early church, nor is it ever highlighted as a normal part of the Christian experience.

The Gift of Healing

The NT gift (or gifts) of healing were of the same quality and kind as healings in the Old Testament, healings in the Gospels, and healings in the book of Acts. While cessationists appreciate answers to prayer in which God intervenes in healing a sick person, they maintain that this does not fit the biblical description of miraculous healing by a Spirit-endowed healer. Since the healings of contemporary charismatics do not fit the biblical description, they cannot be construed as being the same thing.

This understanding of <u>what</u> the gifts were can be strongly defended from the biblical evidence. By their own admission, this understanding of the gifts does <u>not</u> describe what is happening in contemporary charismatic/continuationist circles.

This, then, raises a follow up question…

<u>The When Question</u>: *If the miraculous gifts (biblically defined) are not occurring in the church today, then does the Bible give us indications as to when (and why) those gifts should cease?*

- In interacting with this question, we considered the following six texts:

1. **Acts 2** – Even if Acts 2 is regarded as the fulfillment of Joel 2, it does not demonstrate the continuation of spiritual gifts throughout the entire church age. Rather, it would suggest that the church age is bookended by supernatural phenomenon—marked by charismatic signs at the beginning and cosmic signs at the end. Moreover, the prophecy predicted in Joel 2 is the Old Testament form of prophecy—which poses a problem for continuationists who want NT prophecy to be categorically different than OT prophecy. As dispensationalists, though we may see a partial fulfillment of Joel 2 in Acts 2, we believe the full fulfillment of Joel 2 will take place during the Tribulation after the church age has ended.

2. **1 Corinthians 1:4–9** – This passage is not determinative regarding the when question.

3. **1 Corinthians 13:8–12** – This passage is hotly debated with regard to the identity of the "perfect" in verse 10. The cessationist position does not stand or fall with one's interpretation of the *perfect*. Thus, Anthony Thiselton notes in his commentary: "The one important point to make here is that few or none of the serious "cessationist" arguments depends on a specific exegesis of 1 Cor 13:8–11. … *These verses should not be used as a polemic for either side in this debate*" (pp. 1063, emphasis original).

4. **Ephesians 2:20** – This verse is significant because it clearly states that the "apostles and prophets" played a foundational role in the establishment of the church. Thus we conclude that the gifts of apostleship and prophecy were limited to the foundational (i.e. apostolic) age of church history. The cessation of those gifts sets a precedent for the cessation of other miraculous and revelatory gifts (like miracle-working, healing, and tongues).

5. **Ephesians 4:11–13** – This passage notes the effect that apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers have had in the equipping of God's people for the building up of the church. That "building up" process will continue until the church reaches a state of maturity. These verses do not overturn Paul's earlier statements that the apostles and prophets were for

the foundation of the church – the effect of their ministry is felt for all of church history (through their writings), yet the foundation itself was laid only once.

6. **Hebrews 2:3–5** – Although this passage lists the gifts in the past tense, it is not conclusive about the duration of the gifts in church history. However, it may suggest that the gifts had largely begun to subside by the time the book of Hebrews was written.

Of these texts, most modern cessationist scholars find **Ephesians 2:20** to be the most compelling. The gifts of apostleship and prophecy were for the *foundational* age of the church. Therefore they ought not to be expected after the foundational age ends.

Because gifts of miracle-working and healing were closely associated with the apostles and the advancement of the gospel (Acts 3:1–11; 5:15–16; 6:8; 8:1–7; 9:32–43; 14:3; 14:8–10; 16:16–18; 19:11–12; 20:9–12; 28:8–9; Heb. 2:3–4); and because the gift of tongues was closely associated with the gift of prophecy (cf. the connection between tongues and prophecy in Acts 2:17 and in 1 Cor. 14); it is reasonable to conclude that those gifts were also limited to the foundational age of the church.

Thus, cessationists assert that the *miraculous sign gifts* (such as healing and miracle-working) which authenticated the advancement of the gospel through the apostles and early evangelists (like Stephen and Philip); and the *revelatory gifts* (such as prophecy and tongues) passed away after the foundational age of the church came to an end.

But this raises a third question:

If the miraculous gifts (rightly defined) are not being manifest in the church today …

And if the miraculous gifts ceased after the foundation age of the church …

Why were these gifts given, such that they were no longer necessary after the foundation age ended?

At least three purposes are designated in Scripture:

A. As a sign by which God authenticated His messengers during a time of transition from Israel to the church. That purpose was no longer necessary once the transition was complete and the church was firmly established.

- A primary purpose of the miracles and healings that Jesus performed was as a sign to authenticate his claims (cf. John 2:11, 23; 3:2; 4:54; 6:2, 14; 7:31; 10:37–38; 12:37; 20:30). As Peter told the Jews at Pentecost:

  "Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know" (Acts 2:22).

- The disciples were given power by Christ to perform similar signs (cf. Matt. 10:1, 7; Mark 6:12–13; 16:20).

- The record of Acts depicts the apostles performing miracles and healings as signs that authenticated their message (cf. Acts 2:43; 4:30; 5:12; 6:8; 8:6, 13; 14:3; 15:12).

- Extraordinary experiences were shared by ordinary, Gentile converts (like Cornelius in Acts 10). This was also a sign that God was working through the church. Thus, Paul can tell the Corinthians that their ability to speak in tongues was a sign to the unbelieving world (1 Cor. 14:22). He then quotes from Isaiah 28:11, indicating that it was specifically a sign of God's judgment against unbelieving Israel.

- Paul describes his evangelistic ministry to the Gentiles as being authenticated by "signs and wonders" (Romans 15:19).

- In 2 Corinthians 12:12, Paul defends his apostleship by noting that his ministry was characterized by the signs of an apostle. He told the Corinthians, "The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with all perseverance, by signs and wonders and miracles."

- Finally, in Hebrews 2:3 – 4, the link between the sign gifts and God's authentication is made overtly clear: "How will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard, God also testifying with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will."

- At other select times in redemptive history, God has used miraculous gifts (such as miracle-working and healing) to authenticate His messengers. This was also true during the time period of the apostolic age.

Robert Saucy: The cumulative evidence we have examined—the limitation of the apostolic gift to the first generation, the clusters of miracles in the biblical record, and the evidence from church history—points unmistakably to the fact that there were special times of miraculous activities in which the miracles functioned primarily as signs. Since the time of Christ and the apostles was such a time of extraordinary miracles, the same level of activity cannot be seen as the norm of all church history. …

The primary purpose of miraculous activities during these special periods was not for the general needs of God's people. To be sure, people benefited from the miraculous activity (e.g., healings), but the fact that they are called "signs" points to their primary purpose as authentication of God's spokesmen and their prophetic message. …

The presence of extraordinary "sign" miracles at certain times in biblical history denies the explanation, sometimes put forward, that the lack of comparable miracles at other times was due to sin or unbelief. God sent miracle workers among his people whenever he desired, *even in times of great unbelief.* The depth of the faith of the people of Israel at the time of the Exodus is questionable, especially during the desert wanderings. Yet God worked miracles in their midst through his servant Moses. Elijah and Elisha clearly worked miracles and prophesied in the midst of an apostate people. The same could be said for Jews among whom both Jesus and the apostles ministered. The record of Israel's history is sadly one of a tendency away from obedient belief in God. Nevertheless, God gave them prophets and worked miracles on their behalf according to his will. ("An Open but Cautious View," *Four Views*, 117–119)

Thomas Edgar, *Satisfied by the Promise of the Spirit*, 248–49: "The stated purpose of the sign gifts as confirmatory fits the special need of the initial historical establishment of the beginning church."

B. As a means by which to give additional revelation to the church. That purpose ceased to be necessary once the canon was completed.

- By definition, the written Word of God consists of that which God has revealed through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

2 Peter 1:20–21 – "But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation [*creation* or *origination*], for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God."

- In the Old Testament, God's Word was revealed through His prophets. In the New Testament, God's Word was revealed through His Son (Jesus Christ).

Hebrews 1:1–2 – "God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world."

- The Lord Jesus promised that He would give additional revelation to His church through His authorized representatives (namely, the Apostles). By extension, additional revelation would also come to the church through New Testament prophets who operated under the authority of the Apostles.

  John 14:23–26 -- "Jesus answered and said to him, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him. He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine, but the Father's who sent Me. These things I have spoken to you while abiding with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you."

  John 16:12–15 – "I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak of His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of Mine and will disclose it to you. All things that the Father has are Mine; therefore I said that He takes of Mine and will disclose it to you."

- The Apostles, therefore, rightly recognized their own inspired writings as being part of the biblical canon, on par with the books of the Old Testament (1 Thessalonians 2:13; 2 Peter 3:15–16).

- New Testament prophecy had to be measured against apostolic teaching (cf. Rom. 12:6 where it is best translated "the faith"; 1 Thess. 5:20–22; compare 1 Cor. 14:29 with Acts 17:11). The danger of false prophets was a constant reality in the first century church.

- Now that the New Testament canon is complete, there is no longer a need for prophetic revelation in the church today. Moreover, now that the apostles have passed off the scene, it would be impossible to authenticate modern-day prophecies as actually being from God.

  Richard Gaffin, "A Cessationist View," *Four Views*, 45: Many continuationists are in fact cessationists, in that they recognize there are no apostles today. That reflects an appreciation of the unique authority of the apostles and the tie between that authority and the authority and (closed) canonicity of the New Testament. That awareness, in turn,

implies the legitimacy of distinguishing between an apostolic and postapostolic era of church history, or what parallels it, between an open and closed canon period.

Everyone who accepts this distinction has to think through its ramifications. A flat "all the gifts are for today" will not do (and in fact is not the position of many continuationists). But what is the connection between gifts like prophecy and the presence of apostles? Is it coherent exegetically and theologically to maintain, on the one hand, the cessation of the revelatory word gift of apostleship (for surely it was primarily that, cf. Gal. 1:11 – 12; 1 Thess. 2:13) and, on the other, the continuation of the prophetic gifts? Would not such continuation take us back to the open canon situation of the early church, and do so without the control of a living apostolate?

C. As a means by which to edify others in the church. This is still a purpose of spiritual gifts, but it does not necessitate the continuation of the foundational gifts (e.g. the miraculous sign gifts and revelatory gifts).

- The exercise of sign gifts (like healing) and revelatory gifts (like prophecy) naturally brought benefits to other people, even if that was not the only purpose of the gift.

- It should not surprise us then that, even though a primary purpose of the gifts was to provide both divine authentication and additional revelation for the establishment of the church, these gifts also provided benefit for other believers.

- The gifts were not to be used selfishly. But they were to contribute to the mutual edification of the body of Christ.

- In **1 Corinthians 12:7** Paul states that, "To each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good."

- This is consistent with **Ephesians 4:11–12** in which the gifts of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers are given by Christ so that the body might be edified.

- Importantly, the fact that both the *miraculous sign gifts* (such as healing) and the *revelatory gifts* (such as prophecy and tongues) were to be used for edification within the local church congregation does not negate the other purposes for which these gifts were given.

    - For example, in the midst of instructing the Corinthians to translate tongues so that the congregation can be edified—Paul states that the overarching purpose of the tongues gift is as a sign to unbelievers (14:22).

- Thus, in an age when all the gifts were active, all the gifts were to be used for the edification of others. Today—at a time when only some of the gifts remain, those remaining gifts are still to be used for building up one another in the body of Christ.

- Having said that, however, the church today is still edified through the miraculous and revelatory gifts that characterized the apostolic age. Every time we pick up a Bible, we are benefiting from the prophetic gifts that characterized their apostolic ministries. The fact that God authenticated their message with signs and wonders only increases our confidence in their message.

- Thus, continuing edification in the church is *not* dependent on the continuation of the miraculous sign gifts or the revelatory gifts. The apostolic age has ended and the canon is complete. Yet, through the apostolic witness of Scripture and the leading work of the Holy Spirit, believers continue to build up one another in the church – building on the foundation laid by the apostles and prophets – as they seek to glorify the Head, Jesus Christ.

- Finally, it might be noted that when continuationists argue for *self-edification* in their practice of contemporary gifts, they are actually violating this purpose of the gifts.

  Thomas Edgar: Why did God give gifts to his people? The gifts mentioned in Mark 16:17–20 are signs that accompany the preaching of the gospel to the world. Romans 12:6–8 discusses the gifts as ministries to be exercised. First Corinthians 14:22 specifically states that tongues are given for the purpose of a sign to unbelievers. … First Corinthians 12:7 states that "the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal." The construction here and in 14:22 (*eis* with the accusative) indicates the desired end or purpose for giving the gifts. The purpose is for profit. It is evident from the remainder of the chapter [and also 1 Corinthians 13–14] that this profit is to be profit for the *others*. … Ephesians 4:11–12 states that people with their God-given gifts are to minister to the church in order to build it to maturity. … First Peter 4:10 specifically states that "as every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold gift of God." This is a specific plea to use the gift to minister to others. To be good stewards of the gift, it must be used to help others as God intended when he gave them to us.

  The entire New Testament describes spiritual gifts as being used to minister to others. In no instance does it state that gifts were to be used for personal benefit. The nature of the gifts themselves indicates that they are given to enable the recipient to minister to others. For example, the gift of *teacher* is given to teach others, and the gift of helps is given to help others. Spiritual gifts are given by God in order to enable the one who has the gift to minister to others. Some gifts focus on ministry to unbelievers, while

other gifts focus on ministry to believers. God did not give any gift merely to benefit the recipient of the gift. (*Satisfied by the Promise of the Spirit*, 39–40)

UNDERSTANDING 1 CORINTHIANS 12–14

The translation used here is the HCSB.

Presupposition: Based on its description elsewhere (cf. Acts 2), the gift of tongues consisted of the miraculous ability to speak in foreign languages that one had never learned. Similarly, the gift of prophecy consisted of authoritative and error-free revelation from God.

Proposition 1: True spiritual gifts are distinct from pagan counterfeits (12:1–3)

> 12 Now concerning what comes from the Spirit: brothers, I do not want you to be unaware. [2] You know that when you were pagans, you used to be led off to the idols that could not speak. [3] Therefore I am informing you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God says, "Jesus is cursed," and no one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit.

Proposition 2: Different spiritual gifts are sovereignly bestowed on different believers by the Triune God for the purpose of edification in the church (12:4–11).

> [4] Now there are different gifts, but the same Spirit. [5] There are different ministries, but the same Lord. [6] And there are different activities, but the same God activates each gift in each person. [7] A demonstration of the Spirit is given to each person to produce what is beneficial:
>
> > [8] to one is given a message of wisdom through the Spirit,
> > to another, a message of knowledge by the same Spirit,
> > [9] to another, faith by the same Spirit, to another, gifts of healing by the one Spirit,
> > [10] to another, the performing of miracles, to another, prophecy, to another, distinguishing between spirits, to another, different kinds of languages, to another, interpretation of languages.
>
> [11] But one and the same Spirit is active in all these, distributing to each person as He wills.
>
> **Note: "different kinds of languages" does not mean *earthly* vs. *heavenly*, but different "families" of earthly languages. (cf. 14:10)**

<u>Illustration</u>: Not every part of the human body has the same function. Rather, they all function together for the good of the whole. (This emphasizes, again, that the purpose of spiritual gifts in the church is for the edification of the body.)

> [12] For as the body is one and has many parts, and all the parts of that body, though many, are one body—so also is Christ. [13] For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. [14] So the body is not one part but many. [15] If the foot should say, "Because I'm not

a hand, I don't belong to the body," in spite of this it still belongs to the body. [16] And if the ear should say, "Because I'm not an eye, I don't belong to the body," in spite of this it still belongs to the body. [17] If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? [18] But now God has placed each one of the parts in one body just as He wanted. [19] And if they were all the same part, where would the body be? [20] Now there are many parts, yet one body.

[21] So the eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" Or again, the head can't say to the feet, "I don't need you!" [22] But even more, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are necessary. [23] And those parts of the body that we think to be less honorable, we clothe these with greater honor, and our unpresentable parts have a better presentation. [24] But our presentable parts have no need of clothing. Instead, God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the less honorable, [25] so that there would be no division in the body, but that the members would have the same concern for each other. [26] So if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.

Proposition 3: Not everyone has been given the same spiritual gift. Thus, not everyone is called to be a prophet or to speak in tongues.

[27] Now you are the body of Christ, and individual members of it. [28] And God has placed these in the church:

first apostles, second prophets,
third teachers, next miracles,
then gifts of healing, helping,
managing, various kinds of languages.
[29] Are all apostles? Are all prophets?
Are all teachers? Do all do miracles?
[30] Do all have gifts of healing?
Do all speak in other languages?
Do all interpret?

[31] But desire the greater gifts. And I will show you an even better way.

Proposition 4: Love is greater than the exercise of any spiritual gift. This, again, underscores the point that the purpose of the gifts is to accomplish love for others through edification. (1 Cor. 13:1–13)

Note: In vv. 1–3, Paul uses extreme examples to show that even a superlative exercise of any gift is still inferior to love.

13 If I speak human or angelic languages but do not have love, I am a sounding gong or a clanging cymbal.
[2] If I have the gift of prophecy and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith so that I can move mountains but do not have love, I am

nothing.
[3] And if I donate all my goods to feed the poor, and if I give my body in order to
boast but do not have love, I gain nothing.

Note: In vv. 4–7, Paul shows the superiority of love by describing its quality.

[4] Love is patient, love is kind.
Love does not envy,
is not boastful, is not conceited,
[5] does not act improperly,
is not selfish, is not provoked,
and does not keep a record of wrongs.
[6] Love finds no joy in unrighteousness
but rejoices in the truth.
[7] It bears all things, believes all things,
hopes all things, endures all things.

Note: In vv. 8–12, Paul contrasts the eternality of love with the temporality of any spiritual gift.

[8] Love never ends.
But as for prophecies,
they will come to an end;
as for languages, they will cease;
as for knowledge, it will come to an end.
[9] For we know in part,
and we prophesy in part.
[10] But when the perfect comes,
the partial will come to an end.
[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 put aside childish things.
[12] For now we see indistinctly, as in a mirror,
but then face to face.
Now I know in part,
but then I will know fully,
as I am fully known.
[13] Now these three remain:
faith, hope, and love.
But the greatest of these is love.

Proposition 5: Returning to the theme of spiritual gifts, Paul argues that those gifts which immediately produce edification (like prophecy) are superior to those gifts which do not immediately edify others (like speaking in a foreign language where translation would be necessary for the congregation to understand and be edified). (1 Cor. 14:1–5)

> 14:1 Pursue love and desire spiritual gifts, and above all that you may prophesy.
>
> **Note: Speaking in a foreign language that no one else in the congregation understands would be "not speaking to men but to God," since God knows all languages even if "no one" in the congregation understands. (Given the context, the "no one" refers to those in the congregation.)**
>
> 2 For the person who speaks in another language is not speaking to men but to God, since no one understands him; however, he speaks mysteries in the Spirit. 3 But the person who prophesies speaks to people for edification, encouragement, and consolation.
>
> **Note: When Paul spoke of "mysteries" he was not referring to mystical or ecstatic experiences, but to revelatory content. This understanding is reinforced by Paul's use of the word μυστήριον in other places, including earlier in this section (1 Cor. 13:2; cf. Rom. 11:25; 16:26; 1 Cor. 2:7; 15:51; Eph. 3:3–4; 5:32; Col. 1:26). Unless the foreign language was translated, the truth it contained would remain obscured, because the congregation would not understand what was being said.**
>
> **Note: Speaking in an untranslated foreign language may edify the speaker (because he is exercising his spiritual gift), but it does not edify the congregation (because they cannot understand what is being said.) Consequently, prophecy is superior to tongues, because prophecy builds up the church. Paul is *not* condoning self-edification as a proper end in itself. Rather, he is explaining why something that only edifies oneself is *inferior* and *improper*. That is why tongues must be translated, or otherwise the speaker must remain silent.**
>
> 4 The person who speaks in another language builds himself up, but he who prophesies builds up the church. 5 I wish all of you spoke in other languages, but even more that you prophesied. The person who prophesies is greater than the person who speaks in languages, unless he interprets so that the church may be built up.
>
> **Note: The phrase "I wish you all spoke in tongues" is grammatically parallel to 1 Cor. 7:7. It is a rhetorical device used by Paul to make a point. Moreover, in this context, Paul's emphasis is on the priority of prophecy over tongues.**

<u>Illustration</u>: Paul uses several illustrations to demonstrate why speaking in untranslated foreign languages are unhelpful and unedifying to the church. These illustrations make it clear that, for Paul, the gift of tongues consisted of speaking in authentic foreign languages. (1 Cor. 14:6–12)

[6] But now, brothers, if I come to you speaking in other languages, how will I benefit you unless I speak to you with a revelation or knowledge or prophecy or teaching? [7] Even inanimate things that produce sounds—whether flute or harp—if they don't make a distinction in the notes, how will what is played on the flute or harp be recognized? [8] In fact, if the trumpet makes an unclear sound, who will prepare for battle? [9] In the same way, unless you use your tongue for intelligible speech, how will what is spoken be known? For you will be speaking into the air. [10] There are doubtless many different kinds of languages in the world, and all have meaning. [11] Therefore, if I do not know the meaning of the language, I will be a foreigner to the speaker, and the speaker will be a foreigner to me. [12] So also you—since you are zealous for spiritual gifts, seek to excel in building up the church.

Proposition 6: If a person speaks in untranslated foreign languages, he ought to pray for understanding so that he can translate the language. Only then can he edify others in the church. If he, himself, does not know what he is saying, his understanding is unfruitful (something Paul considers a negative). (14:13–18)

Note: The prayer here is a public prayer (since it is affirmed by those listening). There is nothing here about "private prayer languages."

[13] Therefore the person who speaks in another language should pray that he can interpret. [14] For if I pray in another language, my spirit prays, but my understanding is unfruitful. [15] What then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will also pray with my understanding. I will sing with the spirit, and I will also sing with my understanding. [16] Otherwise, if you praise with the spirit, how will the uninformed person say "Amen" at your giving of thanks, since he does not know what you are saying? [17] For you may very well be giving thanks, but the other person is not being built up.

Note: Paul's comments in vv. 18–19 do not necessitate a private form of tongues. It is more likely that when Paul used tongues outside of the church he did so as part of his missionary activity. There is a biblical precedent for this use of tongues in Acts 2, 10, 19. There is no biblical precedent for a private, devotional form of tongues.

[18] I thank God that I speak in other languages more than all of you; [19] yet in the church I would rather speak five words with my understanding, in order to teach others also, than 10,000 words in another language.

Proposition 7: Paul's tone (throughout this section, as in this entire letter) is one of correction. Thus, Paul's statements to the Corinthians should be understood as corrective in tone. Paul is not condoning the way in which the Corinthians have used spiritual gifts to exalt themselves. (1 Cor. 14:20)

[20] Brothers, don't be childish in your thinking, but be infants in regard to evil and adult in your thinking.

Proposition 8: The gift of tongues was a sign for unbelievers (primarily, the apostate nation of Israel). Paul makes that point explicit by citing Isaiah 28:11. (1 Cor. 14:21–25)

> [21] It is written in the law:
>
> > I will speak to these people
> > by people of other languages
> > and by the lips of foreigners,
> > and even then, they will not listen to Me,
>
> says the Lord. [22] It follows that speaking in other languages is intended as a sign, not for believers but for unbelievers. But prophecy is not for unbelievers but for believers.
>
> **Note: The response of unbelievers to the foreign languages of Corinth is almost identical to the response of some of the Jewish people on the day of Pentecost (in Acts 2). This supports the claim that the tongues of Acts and Corinth were the same.**
>
> [23] Therefore, if the whole church assembles together and all are speaking in other languages and people who are uninformed or unbelievers come in, will they not say that you are out of your minds? [24] But if all are prophesying and some unbeliever or uninformed person comes in, he is convicted by all and is judged by all. [25] The secrets of his heart will be revealed, and as a result he will fall facedown and worship God, proclaiming, "God is really among you."

Proposition 9: In case it was missed, Paul again emphasizes that the purpose of spiritual gifts in the church is the edification of others. He gives some practical instruction in that regard (governing both tongues and prophecy). (1 Cor. 14:26–33)

> [26] What then is the conclusion, brothers? Whenever you come together, each one has a psalm, a teaching, a revelation, another language, or an interpretation. All things must be done for edification. [27] If any person speaks in another language, there should be only two, or at the most three, each in turn, and someone must interpret. [28] But if there is no interpreter, that person should keep silent in the church and speak to himself and to God.
>
> **Note: "Speaking to himself and to God" is the application of keeping "silent in the church." If there is no one to interpret, the tongues speaker is to keep it to himself. Again, this is not something Paul encourages. Rather, it is a control that Paul places on the Corinthian congregation to avoid the self-serving disorder that was characterizing their church services (cf. vv. 33, 40).**
>
> [29] Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should evaluate. [30] But if something has been revealed to another person sitting there, the first prophet should be silent. [31] For you can all prophesy one by one, so that everyone may learn and everyone may be encouraged. [32] And the prophets' spirits are under the control of the prophets, [33] since God is not a God of disorder but of peace.

Note: The evaluation of the prophets likely refers to discerning between people (e.g. true prophets vs. false prophets). In this sense, it parallels Paul's instruction in 1 Thess. 5:19–21.

Proposition 10: Paul concludes this discussion by noting that the exercise of spiritual gifts must be done in an orderly way. Thus, any practice of the gifts today that is not exercised in an orderly way (according to Paul's instructions) constitutes an illegitimate practice.

Note: Women were to remain silent in the churches.

> As in all the churches of the saints, [34] the women should be silent in the churches,
> for they are not permitted to speak, but should be submissive, as the law also says.
> [35] And if they want to learn something, they should ask their own husbands at
> home, for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church meeting. [36] Did the
> word of God originate from you, or did it come to you only?

Note: All things must be done in an orderly way.

> [37] If anyone thinks he is a prophet or spiritual, he should recognize that what I
> write to you is the Lord's command. [38] But if anyone ignores this, he will be
> ignored. [39] Therefore, my brothers, be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid
> speaking in other languages. [40] But everything must be done decently and in order.

Note: The command not to forbid tongues does not apply to the modern charismatic counterfeit.

Addendum:
RESPONDING TO TEN COMMON OBJECTIONS TO CESSATIONISM

These objections reflect common attacks leveled against cessationists by charismatics.

1. **Objection 1:** Cessationism grieves and quenches the Holy Spirit (cf. Eph. 4:13; 1 Thess. 5:16–22).

   Robert Ivy: It is a sin to quench the Spirit. 1 Thessalonians 5:19 states very plainly, "Do not quench the Spirit." … if you believe as I do, that the gifts are here for us to use, then it is undeniable that the church squelches the Spirit every day as people gather together and no sick are prayed for with faith for healing, when no one is instructed so much as a word about the gifts, when prophecy is treated with contempt. I think any Christian can understand a burden to expose sin when it is hidden, and it is sad that so few think of our disbelief as sin.

   Response:

   A. By redefining the gifts, the charismatic position cheapens the remarkable nature of those gifts, lessening the glorious working of the Spirit in the earliest stages of the church.

   B. This is seen especially in less conservative charismatic groups where outrageous practices (like barking in, laughing in, or being slain in the Spirit) and doctrinal non-discernment run rampant.

   C. In redefining healing, the charismatic position presents a bad testimony to the watching world, when the sick are not healed. In redefining tongues, the charismatic position promotes a type of mindless gibberish more in keeping with cult groups, than with anything we know of biblical history. In redefining prophecy, the charismatic position lends credence to those who would claim to speak the very words of God and yet speak error.

   D. This, then, is the primary concern of cessationists… that the honor of God and the Word of God be exalted—and that it not be cheapened by watered-down substitutes.

   E. In a real sense, cessationists are trying to apply 1 Thessalonians 5:19 – 21 … we are taking what some would consider "prophecy" and we are comparing it to the biblical definition of prophecy to see how it measures up.

F. The Scripture is the *word* of the Holy Spirit. We are going to Him, then, to ask Him about His gifts, when we go to the Scriptures to define the gifts.

2. **Objection 2:** There is no one text that explicitly demands the cessation of the gifts. The best cessationists can do is imply cessationism from a variety of texts.

Adrian Warnock: Most importantly of all, if the Bible never intended that we get the impression that gifts are for today, why are there not any real "killer verses" to make it clear to us that this is not the case? (http://www.adrian.warnock.info/2006/07/sufficient-and-efficient-grace.htm)

Jack Deere: If you were to lock a brand-new Christian in a room with a Bible and tell him to study what the Scriptures have to say about healing and miracles, he would never come out of the room a cessationist. … No one ever just picked up the Bible, started reading, and then came to the conclusion that God was not doing signs and wonders anymore and that the gifts of the Holy Spirit had passed away. The doctrine of cessationism did not originate from a careful study of the Scriptures. The doctrine of cessationism originated in *experience.*

Response:

A. The primary problem here is that the *When* question is all that is being highlighted here. Is there a clear "killer" verse that tells us *when* the gifts will cease? Perhaps not. Nor would we necessarily expect it, since the New Testament is a collection of letters written to churches during the time in which the gifts were still active. But, are there clear "killer" verses that describe for us *what* the gifts were? Absolutely. A new Christian may not leave his study of the Bible thinking the gifts ceased early in church history, but he also will not leave his study thinking that prophets declared divine revelation inaccurately or that tongues-speakers mumbled jibberish.

B. Depending on one's interpretation of the "perfect" in 1 Cor. 13:10, a person may feel that there is a "killer verse" to make the case. Personally, I don't believe that the "perfect" refers to the completed canon or the mature church. I believe it refers to the glorified state, and there are a growing number of cessationists who agree on that point. It is also helpful to note that, various commentators have taken up to six different interpretations of the "perfect" and still held to a cessationist viewpoint.

C. The reality is that charismatics don't have a "killer verse" either. The passages that charismatics point to can be explained as a command or description that would be expected if given at a time when the gifts were still in operation.

3. **Objection 3:** There are texts that explicitly demand that we not prohibit or despise the gifts, but rather seek them (1 Cor. 14:5, 39)

Jon Ruthven: 1 Cor 12:21 says that no "member" (spiritual gift) of the body is allowed to say to another, 'I have no need of you!'" But cessationism says exactly that. Cessationism also denies clear commands of the Bible: "Desire earnestly the best gifts" (12:31). "Eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy" (14:1) "Try to excel in gifts that build up the church [especially prophecy in the context]" (14:12). "Be eager to prophesy and do not forbid to speak in tongues" (14:39). Cessationism *does* "quench the Spirit." and *does* "despise prophecy" (1 Thes 5:19-20) by denying it even exists. In contrast to cessationism, Paul encourages Timothy to "fan into flame the gift of God" (1 Tim 1:6). Many commentators feel this is the gift of prophecy.

A. Cessationism does not deny that prophecy exists in the church today (in the form of the prophetic Word.) Cessationism, rather, denies that there are currently prophets in the church today who give new revelation from God to His people. The prophetic Word, the Bible, is what we teach, study, and apply. We believe that the Spirit speaks through His Word.

B. As noted above, these verses that Ruthven points to can be explained as a command or description that would be appropriate within its historical context since it was given at a time when the gifts were still in operation.

John MacArthur: Paul wrote these words at a time when the revelatory gift of prophecy was still active—during the foundation age of the church (cf. Ephesians 2:20). His command, "do not despise prophetic utterances," specifically applies to a time when that revelatory gift was in full operation. When cessationists discredit the false predictions of modern-day "prophets," they are not violating Paul's injunction. Rather, they are taking divine revelation seriously—applying the biblical standards of accuracy and orthodoxy to messages that claim to come from God. In reality, it is charismatics who despise that which is truly prophetic when they indiscriminately endorse a counterfeit form of the gift. (*Strange Fire*, chp. 6)

C. Most believers do not greet one another with a holy kiss, command their wives to wear head coverings, or debate whether or not there is a baptism for the dead. Those examples (all from 1 Corinthians) may not quite be parallel with spiritual

gifts, but they do make the point that historical context is a crucial part of our interpretation.

4. **Objection 4:** There are texts that imply that the gifts will last for the entire church age (Acts 2:17–21; Romans 11:29; 1 Cor. 1:4–5 ; 1 Cor. 13:10; Eph. 4:11–13)

Jon Ruthven: The New Testament teaches that since the ascension of Christ we are living in "the last days," the time when the exalted Christ sends to the church *all* His spiritual gifts *until* His second coming. When Peter at Pentecost describes what is happening, he says essentially, "Joel's prediction about the Spirit being poured out, being expressed in prophecies, dreams and visions (revelation experiences), is *now* being fulfilled *in these last days*." If the promise of Spirit-caused revelation in dreams, visions and prophecies is for *the last days*, then are we, almost 2,000 years after this event, now *earlier* than the "last days" of Peter's time— a time when this prediction no longer applies? No. We, too, must be in the "last days," at least until Jesus comes, and therefore these revelatory gifts are still promised for our time.

Wayne Grudem: Doctrinal disputes should be settled by appeal to Scripture. Experience is not our final authority - Scripture is. But the Scripture talks about these spiritual gifts quite openly and honestly and frequently and talks about them in the context of the New Testament church and I think they're part of the church age.

A. **Acts 2:17–29** –

In the continuationist view, Peter applied Joel's prophecy to the whole church age (which began at Pentecost and will end at Christ's return), and not just to Pentecost itself. The church age will be an age that is marked by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and the evidences of such an outpouring will include prophecies and visions. Thus, we should expect charismatic phenomena (like prophecies and visions) to mark the entire church age.

But there is a problem. Joel's prophecy includes other elements that did not occur on the day of Pentecost, and in fact have not yet occurred in church history ("wonders in the sky," "signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke," "the sun will be turned into darkness and the mood into blood.") These cosmic signs are clearly not a normative, continuing part of the church age. Douglass Oss (Pentecostal) recognizes this difficulty and responds by writing:

> It is often pointed out in objection to this understanding of the text that the more cosmic events (Acts 2:19b–20) simply did not occur and therefore Acts 2 is not the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy. But in light of Peter's

> clear fulfillment language (e.g., 'this is what is spoken'), it is better to understand the signs that occurred on the day of Pentecost as marking out *the beginning of the last days* and the more cosmic signs as belonging to *the end of the last days*, just prior to the day of the Lord. (Four Views, 266; emphasis added).

In other words, the miraculous signs of Pentecost were a fulfillment of the first part of Joel's prophecy, and the miraculous signs of the Parousia (Christ's return) will be a fulfillment of the second part of Joel's prophecy. Thus, given Oss's own reasoning, in the same way that the *cosmic signs* are limited to the end of the age, the *charismatic signs* would be limited to the beginning. If that which marks the end is only found at the end, then that which marked the beginning could reasonably be expected to be found only at the beginning.

B. Romans 11:29 – The context indicates that this is not about miraculous gifts given to the church. It is actually about Old Testament promises made to Israel.

C. 1 Cor. 1:4–5 – The bottom line is that apostle does not explicitly say (in this text) that the gifts will last until the return of Christ. Rather, he urges the Corinthians (who were the blessed recipients of divine grace) to continue in their eager expectation for Christ's return (when the grace that they enjoyed now, in part, would be realized in full.) The *implied* duration that charismatic commentators see in the text seems to be based more on a preceding theological presupposition (read in from 1 Cor. 13), than on conclusive exegetical data from this passage itself.

Ultimately, then, the *when* question can be decisively or definitively answered from this text. The passage, which is an introductory word of thanksgiving (for the Corinthians' salvation and state of spiritual blessing) and encouragement (that they would eagerly anticipate the return of Christ), leaves the *when* question open.

D. 1 Cor. 13:10

In this particular passage, if the emphasis is on partial knowledge versus complete knowledge (rather than the gifts themselves); and if Paul is writing in terms of his own personal experience (as verse 12 seems to indicate) rather than in terms of church history; then he leaves the question of *when* the gifts cease in church history unanswered in this passage.

Thus, I believe we must look to other passages to answer the *when* question.

Having said that, I certainly recognize that there are some compelling arguments for the other views of the "perfect." As noted above, any of the six views of the "perfect" can be adopted and still fit within a cessationist framework.

E. Eph. 4:11–13

If the charismatic agrees that there are no longer apostles in the church today (which most correctly do), then this passage loses its force for asserting that the prophetic office necessarily lasts until the return of Christ.

5. **Objection 5:** The charismatic gifts filled more purposes/needs than just authenticating the message/messenger. Those needs still exist in the church today. Therefore the gifts are also still needed.

Jon Ruthven: Before we begin, let us look at the central problem with the "cessationist" argument, above. It claims that *because* spiritual gifts can be used as *proof* of doctrine, then the gifts *must cease* when the need for that proof is fulfilled (that is, when the New Testament was written). … It is highly doubtful that the New Testament ever intended spiritual gifts to be used as proof, but even if it did, the New Testament itself shows many *other, clearly-stated and necessary functions* for spiritual gifts, which, by the same logic, should demand their continuation! … Bottom line: cessationism teaches that since the function of the "miraculous" or "revelatory" spiritual gifts was to accredit the doctrine of the New Testament, then no more such gifts can now occur. But the New Testament itself nowhere says that spiritual gifts are to accredit New Testament doctrine or establish the canon of Scripture. The New Testament *is explicit*, however, about the gifts' other functions: "for the common good," to reveal secrets of the heart, to convict sinners, to cause worship of God, to exhort, encourage, and edify (1 Cor 14).

A. The cessationist argument contends that the miraculous gifts were part of the apostolic age – the foundation age of the church.

B. Why were they necessary during that age? Because (1) God was transitioning from Israel to the church (2) in so doing, God authenticated His messengers (including His Son) (3) thus, He provided a sign to unbelieving Israel (4) by vindicating His evangelists and (5) also strengthening His church.

C. Does the church still need to be strengthened and edified today? Of course. But does the church still need to be established, founded, and authenticated in the same way as it was in the first century? No.

D. If it can be demonstrated that the gifts as practiced in the New Testament are no longer being practiced today, the cessationist paradigm gives a reasonable explanation as to why.

6. **Objection 6:** Cessationists are afraid to embrace the full power of the Holy Spirit due to peer-pressure, traditional stereotypes, and personal comfort boundaries.

   Rob Wilkerson: I cannot help but get the very strong sense that the arguing, exegeting, debating, and striving against a continuationist position is in some way, great or small, motivated by a fear of the unknown, the subjective, the unexplainable, and the abuse [of gifts].

   Response: Actually, cessationists are afraid of attributing to the Spirit something that did not originate from Him; of adding to His Word; of taking His name in vain; and of presenting His power in such a way that it is not unique or incredible.

   Cessationism is motivated by a genuine *fear of the Lord* that they not add to His Word or attribute to Him that which He did not do.

7. **Objection 7:** Cessationists are inconsistent in asserting that some of the gifts have ceased (the miraculous gifts) while some of the gifts have continued (the non-miraculous gifts).

   Jon Ruthven: Most cessationists believe that the "non-miraculous" spiritual gifts continued: hospitality, helps, administration, evangelism, pastoring, teaching, *etc*. On the other hand, the "miraculous" gifts had to cease because they accredited new doctrine. Besides creating an artificial and unbiblical distinction among spiritual gifts, this teaching confuses the sufficiency of doctrine with the *means by which* that doctrine is communicated. Just as inspired preaching *applies* the gospel to the hearers' spiritual needs but does not add to the Scripture, so the same for the gift of prophecy. Just as the gift of hospitality *expresses* the gospel in physical ways, but does not add content to Christian doctrine, in the same way a gift of healing. *Neither* the "non-miraculous" *nor* the "miraculous" gifts *add* anything to the content of the gospel; they are simply means to communicate the gospel, whether in word or in deed. Spiritual gifts do not *prove* the Gospel, so much as they *are* the Gospel!

   A. It is not inconsistent for cessationists to differentiate between types of gifts if the Scripture itself does this. For example, in 1 Corinthians 13, Paul focuses only on

the revelatory gifts (tongues, prophecy, knowledge, wisdom) even after listing all the gifts in chapter 12.

B. The vast majority of continuationists (doctrinally-conservative charismatics) agree that there are no longer apostles in the church today. For charismatics to assume that the apostolic office has ceased but that the prophetic office continues seems equally inconsistent (especially in light of passages like Eph. 2:20).

C. Ephesians 2:20 gives us reason to conclude that those gifts associated with the apostles and prophets (e.g. the miraculous and revelatory gifts) were limited to the foundation-laying age of the church.

8. **Objection 8:** Cessationists promote a sterile overly-formal Christianity which overemphasizes doctrinal head knowledge and underemphasizes true spirituality.

Wayne Grudem: I don't know that that is representative of all of cessationism but there is a segment of the cessationist community that is so suspicious of any emotional component, any subjective component in all of our relationship with God and with others that it tends to quench a vital aspect of the personal relationship with God in the lives of ordinary believers. And that can tend to a dry orthodoxy in the next generation that abandons that faith and the church spiritually becomes dry and static, and I'm concerned about that.

Response:

A. Cessationists are not looking to avoid emotion in worship. Rather, we want to ensure that our emotions represent a genuine response to truth, and not an artificial frenzy that is being whipped up.

B. The sad reality is that many charismatic churches emphasize experience over sound doctrine. This is utterly backwards. If the doctrine is wrong, the experience is immediately suspect.

9. **Objection 9:** Cessationism is wrong because miracles still occur, not to mention all of the sign gifts that are displayed each week at thousands of charismatic churches.

A. If the so-called gifts and miracles that take place in modern charismatic circles do not measure up to the biblical criteria, then they are not the real thing.

B. However, it is important to note that cessationism is not anti-supernatural, nor is it a product of post-Enlightenment rationalism. Cessationists would be quick to acknowledge that God can act at any time in any way He chooses.

Along these lines, **John MacArthur** explains:

> Miracles in the Bible [primarily] occurred in three major periods of time. The time of Moses and Joshua, the time of Elijah and Elisha, and the time of Christ and the apostles. . . . And it is during those three brief periods of time and those alone that miracles proliferated; that miracles were the norm; that miracles were in abundance. *Now God can interject Himself into the human stream supernaturally anytime He wants. We're not limiting Him.* We're simply saying that He has chosen to limit Himself to a great degree to those three periods of time. (http://www.gty.org/Resources/Sermons/1368_Is-This-the-Age-of-Miracles)

C. Cessationism, then, does not deny the reality that God can do whatever He wants whenever He wants (Psalm 115:3). It does not put God into a box or limit His sovereign prerogative.

D. But it does acknowledge that there was something unique and special about the age of miracles and miracle-workers that defined the ministries of Moses and Joshua, Elijah and Elisha, and Christ and His apostles. Moreover, it recognizes the seemingly obvious fact that those kinds of miracles, performed by miracle-workers (like parting the sea, stopping the rain, raising the dead, walking on water, or instantly healing the lame and the blind) are not occurring today.

> **John MacArthur:** The apostolic age was marvelously unique and it ended. And what happened then is not the normal thing for every Christian. The normal thing for every Christian is to study the Word of God, which is able to make us wise and perfect. [It] is to live by faith and not by sight. (Ibid.)

E. But can God still do extraordinary things in the world today? Certainly He can, if He chooses to do so. In fact, every time a sinner's eyes are opened to the gospel, and a new life in Christ is created, it is nothing short of a miracle.

> **Samuel Waldron**: I am not denying by all this that there are miracles in the world today in the broader sense of supernatural occurrences and extraordinary providences. I am only saying that there are no miracles in the stricter sense [of] miracle-workers performing miraculous signs to attest the redemptive revelation they bring from God. Though God has never locked Himself out of His world and

> is still at liberty to do as He pleases, when He pleases, how He pleases, and where He pleases, He has made it clear that the progress of redemptive revelation attested by miraculous signs done by miracle-workers has been brought to conclusion in the revelation embodied in our New Testaments. (*To Be Continued?* 102)

F. The question is not: Can God still do extraordinary things? Of course He can.

Rather, the definitive question is this: Are the miraculous gifts of the New Testament still in operation in the church today—such that what was the norm in the days of Christ and the apostles ought to be expected today? To that, all cessationists would answer "no."

10. Objection 10: Cessationism is dying out.

Jon Ruthven: Cessationism is an increasingly beleaguered position represented by three concentric circles. Many strongest defenders of cessationism in the inner circle are defecting to more modern "mediator" positions, who can see both sides and respect the arguments of charismatics, but still resist personal change. But this second circle in turn is losing defectors to the outer circle of the "open-but-cautious" position. It may well be that if present trends continue, and we speak the truth in love, that our friend George will one day discover that cessationism has taken its rightful place in the Museum of Theological Curiosities beside the "gap theory" of creation, the bodily ascension of Mary, and the doctrine that Mussolini is the antichrist.

Wayne Grudem: By far the most common view expressed among seminary graduates is open but cautious. They say "I'm not convinced by the cessationist arguments but I really don't know how to put these things into practice in my own church and I've never seen them happen." . . . [T]he cessationist argument is not winning the day in terms of exegetical arguments or persuasiveness in the books published. I think it's appealing to a smaller and smaller group of people.

A. Actually, cessationism is alive and well, even within so-called charismatic circles.

B. If, often by their own admission, the phenomena taking place in their churches is different than that which characterized the New Testament church as described in the book of Acts – then in a very real sense, they are cessationists.

C. But, comments like those above underscore the need for the *Strange Fire* book and conference. It is high time for cessationists to regain the biblical and historic high ground for defending the true work of the Holy Spirit.

Interview with Tim Challies (Part 1)

Tim: *What was the purpose of such a controversial conference like Strange Fire? Why did you choose not to invite one of the best of the reformed continuationists to speak at your event and to defend his position? Wouldn't that have strengthened the cessationist arguments while also showing an earnest desire for unity?*

John: Let me begin by thanking you, Tim, for the opportunity to respond to these important questions about the Strange Fire conference and book. I would also like to thank your readers for their willingness to post these questions.

The goal of the Strange Fire Conference was to sound a trumpet blast in the midst of an evangelical world that has largely grown ambivalent about this vital issue. Sometimes you need to take a strong stand in order to get people's attention; and we wanted the conference to make that kind of definitive statement. Because the honor of the Holy Spirit is at stake, we were convinced that we could not remain silent.

Our decision not to host a debate at the Strange Fire Conference was intentional. Debates are rarely effective in truly helping people think carefully through the issues, since they can easily be reduced to sound bites and talking points. By contrast, a clear understanding of biblical truth comes from a faithful study of the Scriptures. Our hope is that the conference sparked a renewed desire for that kind diligent study on this important issue.

I also expect continuationists to respond in writing to the things I have written in the book. I welcome that kind of interchange. It allows people to think carefully, over a prolonged period of time, about the arguments on both sides of the issue. It has always been through the written word that theological disputes like this have been grappled with in church history. That requires the kind of devotion and effort that brings serious discussion to the fore. I have taken those pains in *Strange Fire*, and would hope that others would interact on that same level.

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Tim: *There are some matters the Bible makes absolutely clear (e.g. You must trust in Christ alone for your salvation) and some things that continue to perplex us so that even genuine, Bible-loving Christians can disagree on them (e.g. baptism and the miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit). Why does God allow questions like these to remain unclear to us? Why are you taking such a strong stand on what is really just a secondary issue?*

John: These questions remind me of an article Thabiti Anyabwile wrote during the Strange Fire Conference, in which he explained why this issue is so important. He wrote, "First, we have to admit that there's a correct and an incorrect position on this issue. Somebody is right and

somebody is wrong. . . . Second, we have to admit that how we view this issue substantially impacts the nature of the Christian life. It matters. It's not an inconsequential idea. Someone worships God appropriately, someone doesn't. . . . Third, we have to admit that this issue practically impacts Christian worship and fellowship. It's not only a private matter, but a corporate one as well."

I agree with all of that. This is an issue of critical importance because it affects our view of God as well as our understanding of how to live out the Christian life, both individually and corporately.

I don't think, however, that this issue is unclear in Scripture. The fact that Christians disagree on what the Bible teaches does not mean that there is a lack of clarity in Scripture, but rather in Christians. The Word of God is our authoritative rule for faith and practice—meaning that it is perfectly sufficient for teaching sound doctrine and governing right living. Certainly, an orthodox pneumatology fits under that umbrella.

On the one hand, I would agree that this is a second-level doctrinal issue—meaning that someone can be either a continuationist or a cessationist and still be a genuine follower of Jesus Christ. I have always maintained that position, and I reiterated that point several times during the conference. I have good friends who consider themselves continuationists, and I am confident that these men are fellow brothers in Christ. But that doesn't excuse the seriousness of the error. In fact, I would appeal to my continuationist brethren to reconsider their views in light of what Scripture teaches.

On the other hand, I am firmly convinced that this secondary issue has the very real potential to taint a person's understanding of the gospel itself. In such cases, it becomes a primary issue. For example, charismatic theology *does* corrupt the gospel when it expresses itself in the form of the prosperity gospel. Moreover, the global charismatic movement happily shelters other heretical movements—such as Catholic Charismatics and Oneness Pentecostals. Taken together, the number of charismatics who hold to a false form of the gospel (whether it is a gospel of health and wealth or a gospel of works righteousness) number in the hundreds of millions, which means they actually represent the majority of the global charismatic movement. That is why we took such a strong stand both at the conference and in the book.

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Tim: *You noted that you see this issue clearly resolved in Scripture. Can you explain, briefly, the biblical case for cessationism?*

John: The full answer to this question would require a lengthy response; and I spend several chapters in the book making the case. But since you asked me to be brief, I'll do my best to stay

concise. I find it helpful to shape the case for cessationism around three questions: *What?*, *When?*, and *Why?*.

First, *what* were the miraculous and revelatory gifts (like apostleship, prophecy, tongues, and healing) according to the Word of God? Scripture gives us a clear description. But when we compare that biblical description with the modern charismatic movement, we find that the latter falls far short. Though charismatics use biblical terminology to describe their contemporary experiences, nothing about the modern charismatic gifts matches the biblical reality.

For example, God's Word explicitly says that true prophets must adhere to a standard of 100% accuracy (Deut. 18:20–22) and nothing in the New Testament exempts them from that standard. The book of Acts depicts the gift of tongues as producing real human languages (Acts 2:9–11), and nothing in 1 Corinthians redefines tongues as irrational babble. And the New Testament further describes the miraculous healings of Jesus and the Apostles (including the healing of organic diseases like paralysis, blindness, and leprosy) as being immediate, complete, and undeniable (cf. Mark 1:42; 10:52; etc.). These, and many other Scripture passages, demonstrate the truly extraordinary quality of the biblical gifts.

But here is the point. The modern gifts of the charismatic movement simply do not match up to their biblical counterparts. Modern prophecy is fallible and full of errors. Modern tongues consists of unintelligible speech that does not conform to any human language. Modern healings do not compare to the miracles performed by Jesus and the Apostles.

Amazingly, leading continuationists readily acknowledge this fact. Wayne Grudem, for example, agrees that apostleship has ceased. He further argues for a modern version of prophecy that is fallible and frequently characterized by mistakes. Sam Storms has a whole article attempting to justify the idea that modern tongues do not have to be real human languages. And in a recent interview, John Piper acknowledges that there was something unique and unrepeatable about the healing miracles of Christ.

Based on those admissions, I would challenge them to consider in what sense they should even be called 'continuationists,' because they essentially acknowledge that the *biblical* gifts have not *continued*. And if these aren't the biblical gifts we're talking about, what are they, and what Scriptural evidence is there for their operation in the church?

So, I don't deny that charismatics have lots of experiences. But I do deny the notion that those experiences match what the Bible describes as the miraculous and revelatory gifts of the New Testament. The modern experiences don't even come close. There is nothing extraordinary about fallible prophecy, irrational tongues, or failed healings. While I recognize that sometimes God providentially chooses to heal people through answered prayer, those occurrences are not at all the same thing as the New Testament gift of healing.

Second, *when* did the gifts cease? One important passage that helps answer that question is Ephesians 2:20, which explains that apostles and New Testament prophets were the "foundation" upon which the church was being built. Before the canon of Scripture was complete, that foundation was still being laid through the apostles and prophets, and through the miraculous and revelatory gifts that accompanied and authenticated their ministries. But once the foundation was laid, those offices and gifts passed away. To follow Paul's metaphor, the foundation is not something that is rebuilt at every phase of construction. It is laid only once.

Many reformed continuationists (including Wayne Grudem) readily acknowledge that apostleship has ceased. So even they admit that one of the most significant elements listed in both 1 Corinthians 12 and Ephesians 4 has passed away. So, at that level at least, they are cessationists.

Finally, we must look to the purpose of the gifts—*why* they were given. The New Testament explains that they functioned to authenticate God's messengers, while the canon of Scripture—and thus the fullness of God's revelation—was still incomplete. Jesus Himself was "*attested* to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs" (Acts 2:22). Paul referred to "the signs of a true apostle" (2 Cor. 12:12). The author of Hebrews spoke of the Gospel being attested by God "both with signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will" (Heb. 2:4).

After the apostolic age passed, with the foundation of the church laid and the canon of Scripture closed, such attestation was no longer required. The sufficiency of Scripture and the fullness of God's completed revelation in His written Word is so glorious that it no longer needs miraculous confirmation. As Peter explains, the prophetic word is even *more sure* than the most extraordinary of eye-witness experiences (2 Pet 1:16–21). In the all-sufficient Scriptures, God's truth is self-attesting and self-evident through the illuminating power of the Holy Spirit (Heb. 4:12).

Now, I realize there are disputes over some of those passages. But that is the very discussion I want to spark in the evangelical community. Let's dig into the Scriptures and deal with the biblical and theological issues. I should add that we address these and other passages in much greater depth in the *Strange Fire* book. Not that anyone would want to count, but the Scripture index includes nearly 450 biblical references.

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Tim: *You acknowledge, of course, that many godly, respected theologians are continuationists. How would you explain the continuationist theology of faithful men like John Piper, D.A. Carson, and Wayne Grudem if the cessationist position is so clearly taught in the Bible?*

John: First, let me reiterate how much I do appreciate those men. As I explain in the book, I am truly grateful for the extensive contributions they have made to the truth and life of the church. I have personally benefited from my interactions with each of them, and from the many helpful books they have authored. I love these men as coworkers in the ministry of the gospel, and I thank the Lord for giving them as gifts to the church in this generation.

As I noted at the conference, I believe their openness to modern charismatic gifts is an anomaly. Obviously, I cannot read minds nor do I desire to judge motives. But I do wonder if perhaps their positions are evidence of either the influence of personal relationships with charismatic friends and family members, or the pervasive impact charismatic theology has had on the wider culture.

Wayne Grudem, as I mentioned earlier, openly acknowledges that there are no apostles in the church today. John Piper says that he does not speak in tongues. And I'm fairly confident that D. A. Carson does not personally practice any of the charismatic gifts. In that sense, then, I think they may be more cessationist (in terms of their personal practice) than their published positions would suggest.

My major concern is that their openness to the issue unwittingly gives the whole movement an aura of theological credibility that it does not deserve. That is why I titled the last chapter of *Strange Fire*, "An Open Letter to My Continuationist Friends." I want to appeal to them, on the basis of their theological acumen and exegetical expertise, to reexamine the issue. At the very least, I hope they will join with us in drawing a clear line in the sand and condemning the aberrations and excesses of the broader charismatic movement.

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Tim: *You have been clear that charismatic theology damages Christ's name and the gospel. Excluding the obviously and patently unbiblical, extreme charismatics such as Benny Hinn, what is the damage that may be done as a result of reformed, continuationist preaching and practice?*

John: This is a question we directly address in chapter 12 of the book—identifying eight dangerous ramifications of holding to a continuationist position. I can't go into detail on all eight of those concerns here, but perhaps I can briefly highlight two of them.

First, I am concerned that reformed continuationists provide theological cover for the broader movement—including those who are not nearly as careful as they are. Once you legitimize fallible prophecy, irrational tongues, and failed healings (as if those are true expressions of the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit), you open Pandora's Box to all sorts of theological error and disaster. In using biblical terminology to describe something other than the biblical phenomena, continuationists unwittingly provide cover for charlatans and deceivers who use their arguments to propagate falsehood and justify abuses.

Let me give one quick example of that. I remember meeting with a charismatic prophet in my office several years ago—a man who has since been publicly discredited as a drunken, immoral fraud. But at the time, he was considered one of the foremost of the Kansas City Prophets. And he had come, along with another continuationist leader, in order to convince me that he was a true prophet. It was a strange meeting. His behavior was extremely bizarre. But the other leader defended him, insisting that this was how he acted when he was under the power of the Spirit.

So we asked this other continuationist leader why he believed this man to be a true prophet when he acted so strangely, and when so many of his so-called revelations were wrong and full of errors. I'll never forget his response. He simply appealed to Wayne Grudem's work on prophecy as his defense.

Examples like that illustrate the problem. Albeit unintentionally, reformed continuationists are providing a defense for people far less-noble or ethical than they are. In that sense, they are holding the gates open for the Trojan horse of aberrant theology and spiritual abuse that runs rampant in the broader charismatic world.

Second, on a related note, I am deeply concerned with the notion of ongoing revelation in the church today. Though my continuationist friends would never intentionally attack the sufficiency of Scripture, I believe their acceptance of modern prophecy actually undermines the sufficiency of Scripture in profoundly destructive ways.

As I write in *Strange Fire*, "The continuationist view actually defaults on the sole sufficiency of Scripture at the most practical levels—because it teaches believers to look for additional revelation from God outside the Bible. As a result, people are conditioned to expect impressions and words from God beyond what is recorded on the pages of Scripture. By using terms like *prophecy*, *revelation*, or *a word from the Lord*, the continuationist position has the real potential to harm people by binding their consciences to an erroneous message or manipulating them to make unwise decisions (because they think God is directing them to do so). Though continuationists insist that congregational prophecy is not authoritative (at least, not at the corporate level), it is not difficult to imagine countless ways it might be abused by unscrupulous church leaders" (pp. 242–3).

By definition, then, and contrary to 2 Timothy 3:16–17, Scripture alone cannot be said to make the man of God *complete*, *thoroughly equipped* for *every* good work. Some other extrabiblical revelation or experience is made necessary. That kind of theology is downright dangerous.

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Tim: *In his review of your book, Thomas Schreiner says that you painted with too broad a brush and failed to acknowledge some of the good qualities of the reformed continuationist movement.*

He says, "The clarion call of warning should be modified with clearer and more forthright admissions that many charismatics adhere to the gospel and are faithful to God's Word." How would you respond?

John: First, I'd like to thank Tom for his willingness to review the book. I have great respect for his work as a careful exegete and biblical commentator. Second, I was encouraged to see where he has landed on the issue. I hope more will follow his example—being willing to rethink their continuationist leanings and come to a cessationist conclusion in light of the biblical evidence.

Regarding his concerns about the broad brush, I would respectfully disagree. Certainly, I would affirm that there are charismatics who adhere to the true gospel, and I acknowledge that point in the book. Here are a couple examples:

> Page 81 – "I do believe there are sincere people within the Charismatic Movement who, in spite of the systemic corruption and confusion, have come to understand the necessary truths of the gospel. They embrace substitutionary atonement, the true nature of Christ, the Trinitarian nature of God, biblical repentance, and the unique authority of the Bible. They recognize that salvation is not about health and wealth, and they genuinely desire to be rescued from sin, spiritual death, and everlasting hell."
>
> Page 231 – "I want to emphasize, from the outset, that I regard as brothers in Christ and friends in the ministry all who are faithful fellow workmen in the Word and the gospel, even if they give a place of legitimacy to the charismatic experience. I have good friends among them who label themselves as 'reformed charismatics' or 'evangelical continuationists.'"

So of course I would agree that there are true believers within the charismatic movement. But that does not negate the seriousness of the corruption. The charismatic quest for extrabiblical revelation, subjective impressions, ecstatic experiences, and so on, represents a massive danger to the church. Error is still error, even if there are true believers who embrace and espouse it. And when the error threatens the church in such significant ways, it needs to be called out and directly confronted.

After the conference, there were some who accused me of saying that nothing good has ever come from those who are part of the charismatic movement. But that is not what I said, nor is it what I believe. Regarding those who are genuine believers, I would readily acknowledge the positive contributions that various charismatic pastors, authors, and laypeople have made within the larger church. However, I'm convinced that those contributions have been made *in spite* of their heterodox pneumatology, not because of it.

Finally, I think those who accuse me of using too broad of a brush are being naïve about the actual composition of the global charismatic movement. We briefly mentioned this earlier, but it is worth reiterating. The fact of the matter is that the majority of charismatics around the world (including both classic Pentecostals and neo-Pentecostals) embrace the prosperity gospel. John T. Allen, in his book *The Future Church* (Doubleday 2009) explains how pervasive the prosperity gospel really is:

> "Perhaps the most controversial element of the Pentecostal outlook is the so-called 'prosperity gospel,' meaning the belief that God will reward those with sufficient faith with both material prosperity and physical health. Some analysts distinguish between 'neo-Pentecostal,' which they see as focused on the prosperity gospel, and classic Pentecostalism, oriented toward the gifts of the Spirit such as healings and tongues. Yet the Pew Forum data suggests that the prosperity gospel is actually a defining feature of all Pentecostalism; majorities of Pentecostals exceeding 90 percent in most countries hold to these beliefs" (pp. 382–83).

That is a frightening statement, and it reveals just how pervasive the false gospel of health and wealth is within the global charismatic movement. But the data from surveys and studies back up those numbers.

Now that may be shocking to many, especially in North America (and also in the UK). People have responded to the conference by saying that I need to turn off TBN and get out more. They say that they personally know many charismatics who affirm *sola fide* and the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity, and who deny the excesses and heresies of prosperity theology. In point of fact, I know those kinds of people too. Some of them are my dear friends. But the makeup of the movement is not determined by any single individual's personal experience—unless he or she has personal knowledge of more than a half billion people. In the book, we make the argument by documenting the relevant statistical data. And the numbers paint a very different picture than that imagined by most American evangelicals.

On a global level, the *majority* of charismatics are being seduced by the false gospel of prosperity theology. Add to that the fact that the charismatic movement includes 120 million Catholic Charismatics and another 24 million Oneness Pentecostals, and you begin to realize just how widespread the problem is.

I'm deeply concerned that most American evangelicals are blissfully ignorant of what is actually happening across the globe. The reality is that the gospel being proclaimed and believed by the majority of charismatics around the world is *not* the biblical gospel. That was why I wanted Conrad Mbewe to speak at the Strange Fire Conference—because he sees what the charismatic movement is actually doing in places like the African church.

So, coming back to your question, I understand that some reviewers will find my tone too harsh and my brush too broad. But I think the problem is a whole lot bigger than anyone realizes. And it breaks my heart to think that hundreds of millions of souls are being caught up into a movement where they are being seduced by false forms of the gospel.

That is why I wanted to sound such a strong warning. And I'm willing to be accused of broad-brushing in order to get that message out.

Interview with Tim Challies (Part 2)

Tim: *There are many areas of doctrine in which well-respected, godly theologians hold opposing views, and the miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit are just one of them. Again, we are thinking here of the best and most gospel-centered of the continuationists. Why focus on this area now when it threatens to inhibit unity and further divide true believers? Why not focus on baptism or eschatology or another issue?*

John: Tim, thank you again for your willingness to host this interview. It is a joy to think through these issues for the glory of the Lord Jesus.

There are plenty of people who think that these kinds of robust theological discussions threaten unity in the church. As you might imagine, I've heard from a number of them since the conference.

It seems that in the postmodern climate of our time, the church has adopted the idea that if disagreement over doctrine exists within the church, it is the one who sounds the alarm that is being divisive. But I disagree with that sentiment. In the New Testament, a factious man was someone who taught doctrine contrary to what was handed down from the apostles (1 Tim 6:3; 2 Tim 1:13). Calling for the correction of error in the church is not creating disunity. That disunity exists by virtue of the doctrinal defection. In fact, it is the call for a return to sound doctrine that is the effort of true unity, because real, biblical unity centers on doctrinal truth and is motivated by love.

According to Ephesians 4:3, we are to be "diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." Paul doesn't leave us guessing what the unity of the Spirit looks like; it's the doctrinal unity delineated in verses 4–6, which comprises a comprehensive theology ("one body" points to a sound ecclesiology; "one Spirit," pneumatology; "one hope," eschatology; "one Lord," Christology; "one faith," bibliology; "one baptism," soteriology; and "one God," theology proper).

All true believers are unified at the core on those distinctives in the Spirit; but it takes time and study to experience that unity in our relationships. That's why love must energize our quest for practical unity (Phil. 1:27)—love for God and His truth and love for one another. Even in 1 Corinthians 13:6, in the heart of Paul's discussion about spiritual gifts, the apostle reminded his readers that "love rejoices in the truth." So, drawing attention to serious error—error that's being tolerated even in some of the otherwise-healthiest of churches—in order to recover and uphold the truth is a loving thing to do.

While it might be hard for some to understand, it was love that drove me to write this book and have this conference: love for God and His honor, love for His truth, love for His church and her purity, and, in the cases of the prosperity gospel that pervades the global movement, a love for the millions of souls who are trapped by some of the most deceitful false teaching that history has ever seen. It is my earnest desire and prayer to see the church unified. But a unity that knowingly tolerates error is not the unity that Scripture promotes. So, if we want to be truly unified, we have to be willing to confront error for the sake of the truth. And that might mean that superficial unity is disrupted.

Now someone might ask, "But isn't this a secondary issue?" I would respond by asking, "Is the true understanding of the dignity of the Holy Spirit a secondary issue?" That's a frightening notion, since the worship of the true God in the true way is our highest priority. And this issue has dramatic implications both for how we view God and for how we worship Him.

As we've witnessed over the past hundred years, charismatic distinctives have opened the door to doctrinal deviations that have distorted the gospel to create another gospel that many have embraced to their eternal destruction. As Conrad Mbewe brought to our attention, that false gospel is the face of so-called Christianity in many parts of the world. In light of what's at stake, it's hard to believe anyone would claim that the way we think about the Person and work of the Holy Spirit is not vitally important.

Regarding the other two issues you mentioned (baptism and eschatology), I actually have addressed those issues in the past. A number of years ago, I engaged R. C. Sproul in a dialogue about infant baptism at a Ligonier Conference. In that interchange, I contended that there is no New Testament warrant for infant baptism. At the 2007 Shepherds' Conference, I addressed the issue of amillennial eschatology. Though on a smaller scale, I received the same kind of reaction to that message as I've received from charismatics regarding the Strange Fire Conference. So I think I've been pretty consistent in talking frankly about these various issues throughout the years.

Having said that, comparing intramural disagreements about baptism or eschatology to the present discussion is like comparing apples to oranges. Such an objection doesn't take into

account both the severity and the ubiquity of the charismatic error on the global level. Errant pneumatology is not ancillary to the charismatic movement. It is the very thing that defines it. And when an entire movement is defined by a heterodox theology that threatens the purity of the church by tolerating and even promoting false forms of the gospel, it must be boldly confronted.

Because of its potential to distort the gospel and to elevate experience over biblical truth, there is something considerably more ominous about charismatic error than those other two issues. Church history bears out that point. While paedobaptist and amillennial distinctives have been variously held by orthodox theologians throughout church history, charismatic theology has a much more sinister spiritual heritage: from the Montanists of the early church, to the Zwickau prophets and Münster radicals of the Reformation, to the Quakers, Shakers, Jansenists, and Irvingites of more recent church history.

There's a sense in which our response ought to correspond to the threat level posed by the doctrinal issue in question. I'm convinced that charismatic theology poses a major threat, and consequently deserves a strong response.

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Tim: *We often hear today that many believers from a Muslim background—especially those from closed countries who do not have easy access to God's Word—are claiming they had a vision of Christ and that in this vision he directed them to a place or person where they could hear the gospel. This proclamation of the gospel led to their conversion. Do you believe these stories? Do you consider such visions a valid means that God may work in our world today?*

John: There are several points that could be made in answer to this question. Let me begin with just a general comment about how to interpret experience. It is important to remember that, as Christians, we ought to develop our theology from Scripture and then interpret experience accordingly. Danger comes when believers get that backwards—allowing experience to define their theology, and then reinterpreting the Bible to make it fit.

With regard to these kinds of stories, I am always somewhat skeptical about third- and fourth-hand accounts of supposedly supernatural happenings. It's not that I doubt the power of God to do whatever He wants. Obviously, He can (Psalm 115:3). But I question whether the story itself is an accurate record of what actually took place. Sometimes well-meaning people misinterpret what really happened. Sometimes second-hand stories are unintentionally exaggerated. And sometimes, sadly, people purposefully manufacture tall tales.

For example, there are unbelievers in false religions all over the world who claim to have received divine revelations or to have witnessed miracles. I don't believe any of those things, because they are reported by people who do not truly know God.

Regarding the visions in question, it is important to recognize that those who have investigated such claims have found the evidence to be sorely lacking. For example, this article directly addresses the issue: http://www.svchapel.org/resources/articles/22-contemporary-issues/57-dont-you-believe-it.

Now, don't get me wrong, I am thrilled to hear that Muslims are coming to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. That is remarkable, and I rejoice in that reality! Moreover, I would gladly affirm that their regeneration truly is a miracle (just as it is for every sinner), even if I would deny the notion that any previous dreams, impressions, or experiences were revelatory or miraculous.

I suppose that brings us to the crux of the matter. Do I believe that people in the Muslim world are actually seeing Jesus Christ? No, I do not. Paul stated in 1 Corinthians 15:8 that he was "the last of all" to see the risen Christ. So, I believe that precludes anyone outside of those listed in 1 Corinthians 15 of being able to claim legitimate visions of the resurrected Savior. (The apostle John, of course, was one of those included in 1 Corinthians 15. Accordingly, I don't believe the book of Revelation sets a precedent for believers to expect genuine visions of Jesus to occur throughout church history.)

Furthermore, it is important to note that these individuals are still unbelievers when they reportedly have these experiences. Consequently, these experiences (whatever they are reported to be) cannot constitute examples of the charismatic gifts having continued, since spiritual gifts are only given to believers (1 Cor. 12:7)—and these people do not come to saving faith until later.

Finally, the New Testament clearly states that the way in which the gospel is spread in this age is through preaching. As Paul explains in Romans 10:14–15, unbelievers will not hear the gospel unless missionaries go to them proclaiming the good news of salvation:

> How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher? How will they preach unless they are sent? Just as it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news of good things!"

To claim that the gospel is now being spread through supernatural visions and revelatory dreams (rather than gospel preaching) goes contrary to Paul's words in those verses.

By the way, that is why we live-stream our church services every Sunday in Arabic (through http://www.gracechurch.org), so that those sermons are available to Arab-speakers all around the world. We believe that faith comes from hearing the proclamation of the good news. In our

efforts to fulfill the Great Commission, we can't assume that supposed visions are legitimate, when the means that God has ordained is the proclamation is the gospel.

Now, can God providentially work in such a way as to use people's thoughts and impressions to draw them to faith in Jesus Christ? Yes, I believe that's possible. As I noted earlier, God can do whatever He wants. But that work is neither revelatory nor miraculous. Phil Johnson gave a helpful explanation of this point in his breakout session at the Strange Fire Conference. He said this:

> "How do we understand that inner sense, especially when God seems to use it to prompt us to pray, or witness, or duck and run at precisely the right moment? Because let's be honest: that kind of thing does happen to most of us from time to time.
>
> Here's the point: I do believe that God might providentially use a spontaneous thought in my head to accomplish something wonderful. But that's what it is, and no more. It's a remarkable providence, not a prophecy [nor a revelatory vision]. As I have been saying, God ultimately controls and uses everything providentially. . . . The fact that He uses an idea in my mind to achieve some good purpose doesn't make the idea itself inspired."

So where does that leave me? Well, I praise God that, in His perfect providence, He is drawing Muslims to saving faith in Jesus Christ. At times, the circumstances in which these individuals hear the gospel and are converted may sound extraordinary to us. Certainly, the miracle of regeneration is always extraordinary! But for reasons that come from the study of Scripture, I do not believe anyone today is genuinely experiencing supernatural visions or revelatory dreams.

Those interested in this thinking more about this topic should check out Fred Butler's helpful blog post on this topic: http://hipandthigh.wordpress.com/2013/11/01/muslim-dreams-and-visions-of-jesus/.

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Tim: *What would you say to a close and dear brother or sister in the faith, whom you know to have a real relationship with Christ and proven devotion to the local church, who has privately mentioned that they regularly pray in tongues? Do I have good reason to be alarmed? What Scriptures could I use as a basis to address this claim?*

John: I empathize with people who have these kinds of questions, because this is where theology meets real life—at the point where it impacts relationships with family members and friends. On the one hand, we want to be faithful to the truth of God's Word. That means we need to lovingly confront error and point people to the Scriptures. On the other hand, we want to do so with

gentleness and patience (cf. 2 Tim. 2:25), doing our best to preserve the relationship without compromising what we know to be true.

If it were my friend, I would seek to graciously begin a discussion with him on that issue. In fact, I golf semi-regularly with a Pentecostal pastor from central California. We are friends and this topic has been a point of ongoing conversation between us. Our interchanges are always amicable and respectful, even as we talk frankly about things.

Asking questions is a great way to start that kind of conversation. The goal would be to have an open dialogue about the issue, prayerfully bringing everything back to the Word of God (Acts 17:11). The Spirit of God honors the study of His Word, so that is where the discussion needs to be centered. I would also direct my friend to additional resources that are likewise focused on explaining the biblical text, so that he could read or listen to them on his own time.

In terms of potential dangers, I do believe that modern tongues is an unsafe spiritual practice. True worship takes place in spirit and truth (John 4:24), meaning it involves both the emotions and the mind. By contrast, a worship practice that empties the mind or consists of vain repetitions (Matt. 6:7) has more in common with pagan religion than true worship. The fact that modern glossolalia parallels pagan religious rites should serve as a major warning of the dangers inherent in this unbiblical practice.

In terms of what Scriptures to use, nothing is better than an in-depth study of the relevant chapters in Acts and 1 Corinthians. Good biblical commentaries and other exegetical tools will help you navigate those passages. Though it is not a full-fledged commentary, the *Strange Fire* book spends considerable time looking at the gift of tongues from those texts. Other resources like Thomas Edgar's *Satisfied by the Promise of the Spirit* or Sam Waldron's *To Be Continued?* are also very helpful.

A lot of the interpretative issues in Acts and 1 Corinthians 12–14 become clear by simply applying the basic rules of hermeneutics. For example, one of the most fundamental principles of Bible interpretation is that Scripture interprets Scripture, and that the clearer passage ought to be used to interpret the less clear passage. Regarding tongues, Acts 2 is explicit that the gift of tongues produced real human languages. When we allow the clearer passage of Acts 2 to govern our interpretation of 1 Corinthians 12–14, we can make a strong case that the tongues of 1 Corinthians were also real human languages. That simple observation undermines the modern charismatic practice of vocalizing irrational speech.

One final note, charismatics often respond to cessationists by pointing to 1 Corinthians 14:39, insisting that anyone who forbids the practice of charismatic glossolalia today is violating Paul's injunction there. But the apostle's command has nothing to do with the modern counterfeit

experience. At a time when the authentic gift of miraculously speaking foreign languages was still in operation, of course believers were not to forbid its use.

But that is not the gift of tongues being practiced in today's charismatic movement. And because incoherent babble is not the true gift of tongues, to dissuade someone from doing it is not a violation of Paul's command. Rather, it's the loving thing to do in the interest of promoting the true work of the Spirit through His Word.

* * * * *

Tim: *Hypothetically speaking, if tomorrow every continuationist began to strictly follow the guidelines for the use of spiritual gifts set forth in 1 Corinthians, so they used these gifts considerately, with decency and order, how would your attitude change? To put it another way, how much of your opposition is based on the fact that many of these folks are behaving in a way that is contemptuous no matter what you believe about the miraculous gifts.*

John: My initial response to this question is that, if charismatics started following the guidelines of 1 Corinthians 12–14 they would no longer be able to practice the modern versions of the gifts at all. And I'm not saying that facetiously. The biblical guidelines necessitate that the genuine gifts are being exercised, and I'm convinced they are not.

But I think I understand the intent of your question, so I'll broaden my response to what I think you are really asking. If modern tongues speakers and prophets followed the biblical guidelines for orderly worship, it would certainly improve the situation dramatically. Something as simple as applying 1 Corinthians 14:34 would have an immediate and widespread effect throughout most of the charismatic world.

I am thankful, by the way, for denominations that try to take those biblical guidelines seriously. From what I know of it, Sovereign Grace seems to be one such organization. I don't agree with their continuationism, but I recognize that they are making an effort to employ Paul's instructions to the Corinthians.

Having said that, there is one important stipulation in 1 Corinthians 12–14 that I think is universally missed by the charismatic movement. Spiritual gifts were given to the church in order to edify *others* not to edify *yourself*. Paul makes that point repeatedly throughout his epistle to the Corinthian congregation (1 Cor. 12:7–10; 13:1–7; 14:12, 26). Thus, any use of the gifts that primarily intends to produce *self*-edification is a misuse of that gift.

Immediately, someone will object by pointing to 1 Corinthians 14:4, when Paul wrote, "He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church." But that verse does not validate self-edification as a legitimate end in itself. If it did, it would run contrary to Paul's

instruction throughout the entirety of chapters 12–14. In fact, Paul is making exactly the opposite point. He is demonstrating the superiority of prophecy over tongues, because prophecy edified other people immediately without first needing to be interpreted. That is why the apostle insisted on the translation of the foreign languages that were spoken, so that the gift of tongues could fulfill its purpose of edifying *others*.

The modern idea of using tongues primarily for self-edification runs contrary to the entire spirit of Paul's instruction. There is simply no Scriptural warrant for that kind of selfish exercise of a spiritual gift. It goes against the way in which the biblical gift of tongues was to be utilized and regulated within the worship services during the first century.

And so, while I think the church would be helped by a movement-wide commitment to practice the contemporary charismatic gifts according to the guidelines in Scripture, it would not ultimately be enough to solve the problem. We would still run up against the fact that the modern versions of the miraculous gifts are not the same as the New Testament reality. So, while it would be a step in the right direction, to stop there would be nothing more than a half-measure.

* * * * *

Tim: *The Strange Fire conference focused primarily on the worst examples of the Charismatic and Pentecostal movements. While the charlatans rightfully need to be exposed and rebuked, there are also many godly Christians who feel like they have been unjustly tarnished with an overly broad generalization. Do you think there would be value in a conference that would interact not with the worst, but the best of charismatic leaders (such as D.A. Carson, Wayne Grudem, and John Piper)? Would you be willing to organize or participate in such an event?*

John: First, I want to clearly state that I take no joy in being perceived as unloving or in hurting the feelings of fellow believers. My heart is deeply burdened by the errors and excesses that I have spoken out against in *Strange Fire*. I do not issue these criticisms flippantly. I would also direct readers to the first part of this interview, where I interact with the idea that I have made an overly broad generalization.

But for those who want to get angry at me, I would humbly suggest that such anger is misplaced. In the days following the conference, I came across an article written by a Pentecostal pastor entitled, "A Pentecostal in (General) Support of the Strange Fire Conference." When I read his article I was thrilled, because his reaction is representative of the kind of response I was hoping the conference would evoke. He wrote this:

> "I recognize the value of unity, but a unity not grounded in and centered on the truth is merely a superficial unity. If we Pentecostals want John MacArthur to make distinctions

> when he calls out the Charismatic movement for its abuses, then maybe we should be the first ones making distinctions and calling out heresy and excess where we find it. . . .
>
> We Pentecostals and Charismatics needed to be offended. I'm afraid it may be the only thing that will make us think critically and Biblically about ourselves as a movement. And for this offense I want to thank John MacArthur and the participants in the Strange Fire Conference. The most hurtful thing about that conference is not the broad generalizations, sweeping condemnations, or lack of distinctions. For me as a Pentecostal the most hurtful thing about the Strange Fire Conference is my knowledge that far too many of the criticisms are true."

Though he doesn't agree with my cessationism, he understands what we were trying to accomplish through the Strange Fire conference and book. I would recommend his article to all of my charismatic friends (and critics): http://questiontradition.wordpress.com/2013/10/24/a-pentecostal-in-general-support-of-the-strange-fire-conference/

Regarding those godly Christians to whom you refer in the question, perhaps the best response I can give is by citing a section out of chapter 12 of *Strange Fire*:

> "I want to emphasize, from the outset, that I regard as brothers in Christ and friends in the ministry all who are faithful fellow workmen in the Word and the gospel, even if they give a place of legitimacy to the charismatic experience. I have good friends among them who label themselves as 'reformed charismatics' or 'evangelical continuationists.'
>
> The Charismatic Movement is teeming with false teachers and spiritual charlatans of the worst kind, as can be aptly illustrated by turning the channel to TBN (or any of several smaller charismatic television networks). Certainly I do not view my continuationist friends in the same light as those spiritual mountebanks and blatant frauds. In this chapter, I'm writing to Christian leaders who have proven their commitment to Christ and His Word over the years. Their allegiance to the authority of Scripture and the fundamentals of the gospel has been consistent and influential—and it is on that basis that we share rich fellowship in the truth.
>
> I am thankful for the extensive contributions they have made to the truth and life of the church. I have personally benefited, along with my congregation, from books written by continuationist authors—including systematic theologies, biblical commentaries, historical biographies, devotional works, and treatises defending fundamental doctrines such as substitutionary atonement, biblical inerrancy, and the God-given roles for men and women. . . .

> Thus, while I am thankful we are together for the gospel, I am equally convinced that the unity we share in the core of the gospel must not preclude us from addressing other extended gospel issues; rather, it should motivate us to sharpen one another for the sake of biblical accuracy. Love for the truth, without any lack of personal charity, is what motivates me to write a book like this" (pp. 231–32).

I could cite additional paragraphs from the book that convey that same sentiment. It is a sincere articulation of my respect and appreciation for those men. The reason I wrote chapter 12 is because I really do hope those men will join with me in confronting the abuses and excesses of the broader movement. I don't want to distance myself from them. But I'm hoping they will further distance themselves from the corrupt theology that pervades the larger charismatic world.

Regarding the need for another conference, people are welcome to have any kind of conference they want. Ultimately, however, these issues are not going to be resolved in a conference format where opposing sides are debated over the course of just a few days. They are only going to be resolved through the serious and diligent study of God's Word.

Rather than initiating another conference, I am more interested in sparking a movement committed to reclaiming the honor of the Holy Spirit. And I would be glad to stand with these men in that effort, for the glory of Christ and the good of His church.

I sincerely hope they'll join me.