**[Continuationism and Cessationism: An Interview with Dr. Wayne Grudem](https://www.challies.com/interviews/continuationism-and-cessationism-an-interview-with-dr-wayne-grudem/)**

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This is the second of two interviews I have conducted with leading theologians discussing the issues of cessationism and continuationism. You can read the first interview with Dr. Sam Waldron [here](https://www.challies.com/?p=18034). It will help you define terms and understand a cessationist perspective. Today’s interview examines this issue from the continuationist perspective.

Dr. Wayne Grudem is Research Professor of Bible and Theology at Phoenix Seminary. He holds a B.A. from Harvard University, M.Div. from Westminster Theological Seminary and Ph.D. from the University of Cambridge. He has served as president of the Council for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, as president of the Evangelical Theological Society (1999), and as a member of the Translation Oversight Committee for the English Standard Version of the Bible. He has written more than 60 articles for both popular and academic journals, and his books include : *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today*, and *Business for the Glory of God*. He has also co-edited *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A response to Evangelical Feminism* and edited *Are Miraculous Gifts for Today? Four Views*.

I began our discussion by describing the purpose of this interview and the audience who was most likely to read it. I then proceed to ask questions of Dr. Grudem.

*How important is this issue in the grand scope of all that’s going on in the church today. How much attention do you feel this subject deserves?*

That’s a hard first question because there is no one answer that fits every church. I am in a church, Scottsdale Bible Church in Arizona, that has about 7,000 people in it. I suppose its position would be “open but cautious.” Its heritage would be more from Dallas Seminary and Calvin Seminary and Bible Church background which has traditionally been more cessationist. In fact, in people’s actual prayer lives as well as in the personal conversation of the pastor in the pulpit to the congregation, people talk about the Lord leading them and guiding them in specific ways. Sometimes in ways it sounds very much like the gift of prophecy to me, but they don’t call it prophecy. They call it prompting or leading. I am thankful for all of that and I am very comfortable being in a home fellowship group where people pray and are willing to say how they think the Lord is leading them and guiding them as they pray and what He brings to their minds. And they don’t call it prophecy. But I’m thinking, “That sure looks like prophecy to me!”

The pastoral leadership of the church might or might not say that there are people with the gift of healing today but in fact I am on the elder board and quite often at the beginning of an elder meeting we’ll lay hands on someone and anoint someone with oil in prayer for healing according to James 5. God sometimes answers those prayers in wonderful, and I would say miraculous ways.

So what is very important is people’s day-by-day walk with God and whether that is a vital, personal, ongoing relationship in which people, ordinary Christians, are regularly praying about concerns and events in their lives and getting answers to prayers and knowing the reality of the Holy Spirit’s guidance and direction. What’s also important is people depending on the Lord in seeking His blessing and empowering in their ministries.

So how important is it? Some of the things that go on would be called by other names in more charismatic churches and they probably would be a bit more demonstrative. But the Holy Spirit can work in such a variety of ways.

*Let me ask this. Do you feel that there is some inconsistency with cessationists in terms of what they believe and how they actually act out their faith? You gave the example of guidance. Many people I know claim to be cessationist yet still have no trouble claiming that “God told me” – they are using what Dr. Waldron called prophetic language.*

I am thankful for that. However, Tim, I think we have to recognize that there is a segment of the cessationist community that is ready to pounce on anyone who speaks of subjective forms of guidance; ready to pounce on anyone who speaks of dealing with promptings of the Lord in one way or another; that is highly suspicious of any emotional component in worship or prayer. 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.

Now, are you aware of this new book that came out last month called “Who’s Afraid of the Holy Spirit?” Let me get that off the shelf.

*I believe Justin Taylor sent me a link to it just a couple of days ago.*

It’s called *Who’s Afraid of the Holy Spirit?* and it’s by Dan Wallace who is a New Testament professor at Dallas Seminary.

*And you wrote the foreword, right?*

I did. I wrote the foreword and Josh McDowell wrote the foreword. It is an insider’s look at dispensational cessationism and saying, “While we’re still officially cessationist we can…become too rationalistic; give too high a priority on knowledge instead of relationship and this can produce in us a bibliolatry (believing in the Father, Son and the Holy Bible).” The net effect of this is the depersonalization of God and that part of the motivation for depersonalizing God is the increasing craving for control. We want to affirm that God is still a God of healing and miracles; Evangelical rationalism can lead to spiritual defection; many of the power brokers of Evangelicalism have been white, obsessive-compulsive males since the turn of the century; the Holy Spirit’s guidance is still needed in discerning the will of God; we must not avoid the sufferings of Christ in seeking out the power of the Spirit; and then they talk about the witness of the Holy Spirit. I thought it was a very healthy book and I eagerly commend it. I didn’t agree with everything in it but I thought that it was very good.

Back to “how important is it?” I would want to say to cessationists and to open but cautious people on the one hand that I agree that there are ways in which the Holy Spirit is still working that are similar to what was happening in the first century churches and described in the New Testament. I think that the first century church and the New Testament generally encourages us to seek miraculous workings of the Holy Spirit much more than we do in mainstream Evangelical churches. I think if we did, and if we taught about spiritual gifts that were consistent with Scripture and which put safeguards against abuses, that we would see a much greater explosion of the powerful working of the Holy Spirit in bringing more unbelievers to Christ and in bringing physical and emotional and relational healing to people within our churches and in bringing us to new levels of joy in worship beyond the very positive things that we see today. I would like to see much more, not just openness to, but encouragement of the miraculous works of the Holy Spirit. That’s what I’ve written some of the things that I have.

*In general most Reformed people do not hold the position you do as a continuationist. Why do you feel that most Reformed believers are cessationists?*

I am not sure that we know what most “Reformed believers” hold. I know what a number of professors at Reformed seminaries hold but that may not be representative of what is actually going on. I just want to say that as a qualification.

The dominant literature coming out of Reformed presses and Reformed seminary professors has been more cessationist I think. I think that’s a fair characterization.

*Would you be willing to suggest some reasons why that would be?*

[Laughs] You want me to answer, really, don’t you?

*I suppose!*

The most basic reason, and one which I think everyone can agree on, is a desire to protect the unique authority of the Bible and to protect the closed canon and not to have anything compete with Scripture in authority in our lives. That’s a fundamental, deep concern among cessationists and I affirm that concern and I think it’s very important to maintain it in the church.

I think it is somewhat of a historical aberration that cessationism – that the leaders of the Reformed movement have been cessationist. This was certainly not true in the seventeenth century among Puritans in England, for instance, like Richard Baxter. In *The Christian Directory* he has a number of statements that align almost exactly with my view of the gift of prophecy. And I quote those in the back of *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today*. I took a couple of pages from Baxter’s *The Christian Directory* and I faxed those to J.I. Packer and said, “It looks like Baxter holds the same view of prophecy that I do.” Packer faxed me back and said, “Yes, you’re right. This was the standard Puritan view. They weren’t cessationists in the Gaffin sense.” Let me just find that. Jim Packer gave me permission to quote that. I am quoting John Knox, the Scottish Reformer, the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, Samuel Rutherford, George Gillespie, Richard Baxter. I quote this on page 353 to 356 of *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today*. Packer, whose doctoral dissertation at Oxford was on Richard Baxter’s works, sent back the following: “By the way, some weeks ago you faxed me an extract from Baxter about God making “personal, informative revelation” (those were Packer’s words). This was the standard Puritan view as I observed it – they weren’t cessationist in the Richard Gaffin sense.” That’s J.I. Packer’s personal fax to me on September 9, 1997 and I quoted it by permission.

Packer knows the Puritans well. You also have this article in the *Westminster Confession of Faith* saying that the Westminster Assembly recognized different views of prophecy. Byron Curtis, who had this article in the Westminster Journal saying that the phrase “private spirit” in the *Westminster Confession* (110) means “private revelations of the Holy Spirit – personal revelations of the Holy Spirit” and it puts it in the same category as decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers and doctrines of men. These are all to be examined and attested by Scripture. So Curtis argues (there’s been an answer to him in the *Westminster Journal*, but I don’t think it’s been an adequate one), and I think Curtis is right that the *Westminster Confession* itself allows for this and says it has to be subject to Scripture.

So I think we have in the twentieth century a historical aberration not essential to Reformed theology that cessationism has become the dominant view. It may be a legacy from B.B. Warfield and the respect with which people held Warfield. Warfield was responding to Roman Catholicism and their claims for the validity of their doctrines based on appeals to miracles and Warfield was trying to discredit that. I don’t know what Warfield would say about the modern charismatic movement but that isn’t what was in his view at the time.

To be honest, Tim, the early beginnings of Pentecostalism in the United States in 1901 and 1906 at Topeka, Kansas and then at Azusa Street in Los Angeles, these were not theologically-sophisticated, highly-trained people leading the movement. They were more ordinary believers in whose minds the Holy Spirit began to work in a remarkable way but they didn’t understand it very well at times and didn’t articulate it very well. They began promoting a doctrine of baptism in the Holy Spirit after conversion that was a mistake and they mislabeled it – they should have called it filling or empowering of the Holy Spirit. I think much of it was a genuine work of the Holy Spirit. But it wasn’t defended by people who knew Greek, Hebrew, Latin, German and French and had been to Princeton Seminary. And so it was so easy for people to focus on the abuses and mistakes and the misstatements or less than carefully articulated theological statements by the defenders of what was going on.

And honestly, I think that people who tend to gravitate towards a position of leadership in denominations that are highly doctrinally self-conscious tend to be people for whom doctrinal precision and analysis is of very high value. And their ministries naturally gravitate towards being very clergy-oriented and very oriented towards the ordained clergy and the means of grace – the administration of the sacraments, the preaching of the Word, discipline – these are all clergy-run means of grace. And so we are coming out of a heritage of the neglect of the importance of ordinary lay people ministering to one another in small groups and home fellowship groups and things like that – in prayer and personal words of counsel and encouragement and exhortation – that just wasn’t a strong suit among many of our Reformed forbearers in the last century. And so when something comes along that has strong lay emphasis, an emphasis on lay ministry, and it wasn’t anything that was printed in the bulletin that was going to happen that week, it seems like things are not done decently and in good order. Then it begins to find reasons to criticize.

*When you discuss these issues with cessationists, what do you feel is the single greatest misunderstanding of charismatics by cessationists? This is your opportunity to get that one thing off your chest.*

I don’t know that anything comes to mind. I have lived and worked and fellowshipped in so many contexts and have been able to be thankful for so many different contexts. To give you two examples, my son Elliot, was just six weeks ago ordained as a pastor in the Presbyterian Church of America in Raleigh, North Carolina, and I spoke at his ordination. A few months before that my son Alexander married a woman from an Assemblies of God background and I co-officiated the wedding with her father who is an Assemblies of God pastor. I felt very comfortable in both situations. To take another example, on the same week I received invitations (this is probably twelve years ago) to write notes on Second Corinthians for what was then called *The New Geneva Study Bible*, edited by R.C. Sproul, and to write notes on Romans for *The Spiritual Life Study Bible* edited by Jack Hayford which is a charismatic study Bible. I accepted both invitations and didn’t tell either party that I was doing the other. They both come out within a short time of each other. I am just thankful for both ministries and for what they are doing for the work of the kingdom.

I would say that it is too easy to have in mind a mental picture of a caricatured episode that has been on television. If cessationists would actually attend some worship services or prayer meetings in more responsible Vineyard churches or Foursquare Churches or Assemblies of God churches or independent charismatic churches, I think they would be surprised how strong people’s love for God is, and love for His Word, and desire to be subject to His Word, and not to teach or do anything that would be wrong, and how much real ministry and real healing in people’s lives (I don’t mean just physical healing, but emotional and relational and spiritual healing) is going on and how much zeal for the lost, how much evangelism, how much care for the poor, how much actual carrying out the work of the kingdom is being done in these charismatic, Pentecostal and Third Wave churches. It’s marvelous. It’s wonderful and I think we need to be aware of the good examples of it of which there are tens of thousands and then be thankful for them.

*Let me turn to a couple of questions that I know are of concern to cessationists, that they routinely bring up as concerns about continuationist theology. The first of these is: if we grant the existence of non-authoritative prophecy, does not such a position weaken the argument for the sufficiency and authority of Scripture? In other words, does the existence of non-authoritative prophecy weaken our claims for the inerrancy and sufficiency of Scripture?*

I would restate that question by saying, if we say that God works through means other than Scripture, doesn’t that weaken our authority for Scripture? I would answer, no, these are things other than Scripture. If, for instance, we say that God works through the advice of friends or the wise counsel of a pastor or elder, doesn’t that weaken the authority of Scripture? It doesn’t, because it is a different category of thing. It is something we think is used by God and through which God can work, and our strong belief in the Sovereignty of God would encourage us to think that, but it comes with human authority but not with absolute divine authority. Whatever people would say about prophecy I would say, what about advice from friends and counsel from friends? How do you understand that? Same thing. Can’t God work through that? Sure. Well, can’t God work through prophecy? What’s the difference? I don’t see that it is a qualitatively different thing. In fact I think the Westminster Confession of faith, chapter 1, paragraph 10, hints at the fact that we should put these in a similar category. So no, I don’t think so.

Can there be mistakes that lay people make? Sure, but those aren’t the responsible leaders that we should quote. I can quote from any movement mistakes of irresponsible lay persons.

*Probably the most common critique of continuationist theology by cessationists is that it relies too heavily on experience. Cessationists often claim that continuationists allow experience to drive their hermeneutic. How do you answer that?*

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.

*Is it possible to believe in a continuationist position without having experienced any of the gifts?*

I encounter students and pastors all the time who say “I’m not persuaded by the cessationist arguments from Scripture but I’ve never seen any of these miraculous things in my life.” That is the most common comment that I hear about these things from people who are in mainstream Evangelical positions. And over the years as I’ve taught not only here at Phoenix Seminary but at other seminaries – adjunct at other seminaries – 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.” Tim, the 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.

Are you aware of this book, *Miraculous Gifts for Today: Four Views* that I published from Zondervan?

*Yes, though I just received it a couple of days ago.*

A mature, widely-respected Evangelical leader in England, said to me about that book, that the thing most Evangelicals in England found surprising was that any argument could be made for cessationism at all. Another widely-respected British Evangelical leader fifteen years ago said to me that the battle between cessationists and non-cessationists in England is over. The cessationists have lost. Or the charismatics have won. I’m not sure exactly what he said but it was something like that. And that’s the case, I think, in almost the entire world outside the United States.

*So you feel that it is a caricature that the cessationists have Scripture and the continuationists rely on experience.*

Yes. You know, Jack Deere in his book *Surprised by the Power of the Spirit* – do you know this book, published by Zondervan?

*I know of it, though I haven’t read it.*

His argument is that the primary reason why cessationists hold their view is experience. That is, he says, they haven’t experienced any of these miraculous gifts and so they construct a theology to justify it. He was a highly-respected Hebrew and Old Testament professor at Dallas Seminary promoting a cessationist view.

*So he would say that the lack of experience is as much an argument from experience as actually having had the experience?*

Yes. I think that’s an excellent book, actually. I agree with ninety-eight percent of it. He has some little thing about apostles that I don’t agree with but otherwise I think it’s an excellent book.

*One more question that a cessationist might have has to do with prophecy, as you might expect, and the fallibility of prophecy. If God grants prophecy today, why is it so frequently misunderstood? Continuationists will often explain that the details of prophecy do not work out perfectly perhaps due to human weakness or sin. Since God can make Himself clear, and usually did so in the Bible, why doesn’t He do so today?*

He chose to work thought imperfect means.

*And you’d say in Scripture He did not?*

Scripture is unique. He worked in a way that is inerrant and absolutely authoritative. But, throughout the whole history of the canon, from Adam and Eve to the book of Revelation you have a story of God interacting personally with individual people. The cessationist view wants to tell us that this doesn’t happen anymore today, and I don’t feel that’s right. I should say, interacting personally with individual people in ways that are distinct from the canonical words of Scripture which they had at the time. It is God speaking to individual people. In spite of the fact that the Bible is full of those hundreds and hundreds of examples, now cessationists come along and say, “Sorry, God doesn’t do that today. He did that throughout the whole history of the Bible but He doesn’t do that today.” That is relating directly to specific people other than through the written words of the canon that they had at that time.

*Do you believe that the way God spoke to people in Old Testament times, say, for example, the way God spoke to Abraham, is that consistent with the way God speaks to us today? How would God have spoken to Abraham?*

The way God speaks to people can vary widely in biblical times and it can today as well. Going back to “why does God speak to us in ways that are fallible,” I would say the same question can be asked of many other things. Why does God work through evangelists who are imperfect? Why does God work through pastors who work through imperfect sermons? Why does God work through Sunday school teachers who say things imperfectly? Why does God work through the advice of friends, some of whom make mistakes? God works in this age through imperfect people. That’s his normal manner of working. And to object to something by saying, “How can God work through this if it’s imperfect?” is just denying the entire way God works through people…

*I think the argument would be not that God works but that He speaks. The trouble people have is in an imperfect word of God.*

Doesn’t God speak through Sunday school teachers that are imperfect? Does He speak through personal counsel and advice that is imperfect? What’s the difference?

I really enjoy getting into this discussion when I get into it.

*I’m sure you do!*

I’ve been away from it. I’ve been into Bible translation and manhood and womanhood and I’m on rich and poor nations and I’ve forgotten about all this.

*Let me turn to the future to cessationist/continuationist relations. In the last few months I think we’ve seen some interesting developments between continuationists and cessationists. John MacArthur invited C.J. Mahaney to preach from his pulpit and there’s also the Together for the Gospel conference that is coming up. Do you feel that these developments might just herald a new day for cessationist/continuationist relations?*

I hope so. I see these as outworking of the pastoral and church level the kinds of interaction and mutual appreciation that I’ve seen for the last twenty years in the academic world.

*Is it feasible or even desirable for cessationists and continuationists to come together to worship as members of the same church or denomination or is this too big an issue?*

Sure.

*No trouble with that?*

No. I pose an interesting hypothetical question at the end of this book, *Are Miraculous Gifts For Today: Four Views*. The very last segment of the book is my reflection on spending two days of conversations with the other four authors, Richard Gaffin, the cessationist, Robert Saucy, from Talbot, the open but cautious, Sam Storms being a Vineyard or Third Wave person, and Doug Oss from the Assemblies of God, and me. After everyone wrote their essays we met in a hotel conference room in Philadelphia for two days, no tape recorders, no notes, just the five of us talking for about seventeen hours. In my summary of it I talked about what had happened (and nobody changed his mind) but it was a wonderful discussion because all five of us had Ph.Ds in New Testament or theology and Doug Oss in his forties was the youngest in the room so we were fairly mature in our views. I said, “What if, by some strange act of God’s providence, we were all thrown together in the same church and we were the five elders?” Here’s how we would have to make adjustments and allowances, but I think we could all work together. I love to pray with Richard Gaffin who is my cessationist friend because He walks with God. So I talk a little bit about that. [this references page 348 of the book]

I’ve been in a Vineyard church, I was about five years in a Vineyard church; I did a pastoral internship while I was at Westminster Seminary in an Orthodox Presbyterian Church – loved the people there and am thankful for the church; have been an elder of a Southern Baptist Church; now I’m at a Bible church. Wherever you go you find people, ordinary Christians, who love the Lord and they love His Word and if you can show things to them in the Bible they believe it and they try to follow it. I think that’s a wonderful thing.

*On the subject of Southern Baptists, I wondered if you had any thoughts about the new policy adopted by their mission board. I don’t know if you heard about that, but it forbids missionary candidates from speaking in tongues.*

I haven’t read it so don’t want to comment. If it’s true I’d be very disappointed.

*Fair enough. Let’s head towards wrapping this up. Why does God allow issues like this to exist in the church? You have to believe that He could easily clear up such issues as continuationism and cessationism. Why does He allow disputes like this to carry on?*

Well, for one He wants to test our hearts and see what our attitude is towards those with which we disagree. And two, He purifies the church through controversy because our positions are then deepened and strengthened. And so through the whole history of the church the controversies over the deity of Christ, over the Trinity, the great Reformation controversies over justification, the controversy in the church in our generation over inerrancy, controversy over men and women in the church, controversy over spiritual gifts – everybody changes. In recent controversy everyone has changed somewhat. But they come to a more nuanced, more refined, more accurate position and then they hold firm. That is happening in the controversy over manhood and womanhood issues and we have more openness to and appreciation of the valuable ministries of women in the church, yet the church is not going to go in an egalitarian position. Ultimately, the vast majority of God’s people are going to have churches where only men are elders.

*So you feel this is a valuable discussion and one that will end in a consensus of the church…*

What happens is over time the vast majority of God’s people come to the right decision. Then, like the Arians in the fourth century, or like the anti-inerrantist people in our lifetime, the people on the other side eventually are marginalized and continue but with very little impact on the church as a whole. I think that is going to happen with egalitarians in the manhood/womanhood controversy, but it is going to take some time to get worked out because the culture has such strong pressure in the other direction. I think with regards to cessationists and non-cessationists the controversy has been very healthy in a number of ways: there has been a greater appreciation of the importance of spiritual gifts and ministry by every Christian to one another; there’s been remarkable change in worship styles that I think has been very valuable and we have, in large measure, the charismatic movement to thank for that; there has been a great appreciation for the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives and the empowering of the Holy Spirit and the validity of prayer and prayer for miracles today. On the other hand some of the abuses and mistakes of the charismatic/Pentecostal movement have been highlighted and people are trying to restrain those and refrain from making some mistakes like that. And there has been a new emphasis on the unique authority of the Bible and I’m thankful for that. So I think there’s good on both sides.

*So you feel this controversy is going to end with others in the history of the church? That it will strengthen the church?*

Oh yes, definitely! It already has.

[**What Makes the Spiritual Gifts Discussion Different**](https://www.challies.com/articles/what-makes-the-spiritual-gifts-discussion-different/)

[September 14, 2018](https://www.challies.com/articles/what-makes-the-spiritual-gifts-discussion-different/)   #[spiritual gifts](https://www.challies.com/tag/spiritual-gifts/)

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Iam under the impression that the earliest Christians didn’t expend a lot of effort debating the cessation or continuation of the miraculous spiritual gifts. Their discussions did not revolve around wrongly denying the existence of active gifts or wrongly affirming the continuation of ceased gifts. After all, they clearly and undeniably saw the gifts of prophecy, healing, and tongues in operation. Trusted Apostles heard words of prophecy and affirmed their truthfulness, lame legs were healed and blind eyes were opened, people who had no knowledge of a language were suddenly speaking it. For this reason, the concern of the New Testament is not defending the existence of the gifts, but teaching their purpose and proper use.

Today, though, Christians are pulled in two directions so that some are convinced the miraculous gifts have ceased (cessationists) while others believe they continue (continuationists or charismatics). We do not seem to be drawing much closer to a resolution.

Both groups believe the Bible is God’s inerrant and authoritative instruction on what we are to believe and how we are to live, so, at their best, both make careful use of it. Both make use of it to explain what they see and experience in their lives and churches. Continuationists, seeing evidence that the miraculous gifts continue to our day, go to the Bible to understand why they remain operative and how to properly exercise them. Cessationists, seeing no evidence that the miraculous gifts continue to our day, go to the Bible to understand why they do not remain operative and why it’s futile to attempt to exercise them. The odd thing is that both are looking at the same information and experiences, but interpreting them entirely differently.

What is clear to both groups is that what we see today is not entirely the same as what is described in the Bible. In the New Testament we read descriptions of people suddenly being gifted with fluency in a foreign language so they could preach the gospel in it. We read of dramatic, instantaneous, visible, and undeniable miracles like eyes being opened that had been blind from birth and legs being strengthened that had been crippled for years. We are told of people hearing and affirming words of prophecy—even predictive prophecy—that were spoken clearly and taken as authoritative.

Today, though, those who speak in tongues make few claims that their languages are human or understandable by anyone other than God and a person with the gift of interpretation. Healings are generally of minor ailments, gradual, often invisible, and go unaffirmed by the medical community. Prophecy is fallible and usually vague enough to be open to varying interpretations.

Continuationists focus on the similarities and say, “These are the same thing.” Cessationists focus on the differences and say, “These are not the same thing.” Continuationists look at the evidence, see the similarities with the New Testament, and conclude these things are tongues, healing, and prophecy. Cessationists look at the evidence, see the differences with the New Testament, and conclude these things are not tongues, not healing, and not prophecy. Continuationists see the difference between the New Testament and today as a challenge to keep attempting to practice the gifts. Cessationists see the difference between the New Testament and today as a reason to stop attempting to practice the gifts.

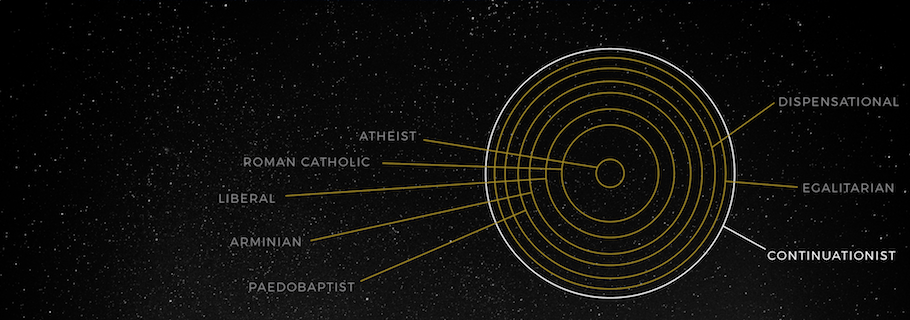
I believe that to some degree, both groups have a tendency to read Scripture through their experiences.

These varied ways of interpreting the same data stands at the heart of the distinction between continuationists and cessationists. I believe that to some degree, both groups have a tendency to read Scripture through their experiences. Based on the evidence cessationists find, they say these supernatural events were meant to last only a while so they could stand as a kind of affirmation of the Apostles and early church leaders until the completion of the biblical canon. Based on the evidence continuationists find, they say these supernatural events were meant to be normative in the church.

Here is my challenge to both both groups: We need to tighten up our biblical reasoning. As people of the Word, we need the Bible to be our starting point when it comes to understanding and explaining any phenomenon or any lack of phenomenon. We cannot allow the apparent lack of gifts to make us turn to Scripture already determined to prove their cessation; we cannot allow the apparent existence of gifts to make us turn to Scripture already determined to validate their continuation.

Cessationists would do well to ensure they are grounding their position in Scripture rather than depending so heavily on a lack of evidence in accounting for the similarities between the New Testament and today. After all, God may be waiting for us to display an openness toward the gifts before he grants them. Doesn’t he often grant gifts to those who have begun to act in faith? Continuationists would do well to ensure they are grounding their position in Scripture rather than depending so heavily on what they consider a preponderance of similarities between the New Testament and today. After all, there really is a significant variance between the gifts as they were and the gifts as they are, and couldn’t this be evidence they are not the same thing?

Together, we must be people who interpret our experience through Scripture instead of people who interpret Scripture through our experience.



[**Why I Am Not Continuationist**](https://www.challies.com/articles/why-i-am-not-continuationist/)

[July 7, 2016](https://www.challies.com/articles/why-i-am-not-continuationist/)   #[holy spirit](https://www.challies.com/tag/holy-spirit/) #[spiritual gifts](https://www.challies.com/tag/spiritual-gifts/)

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Today I come to the end of the series I’ve titled “Why I Am Not…” The purpose of this series has been to take a look at the things I do not believe and all along it has been my desire to explain rather than persuade. So far I have told why I am not [atheist](https://www.challies.com/?p=25491), [Roman Catholic](https://www.challies.com/?p=25516), [liberal](https://www.challies.com/?p=25542), [Arminian](https://www.challies.com/?p=25570), [paedobaptist](https://www.challies.com/?p=25591), [dispensational](https://www.challies.com/?p=25616), or [egalitarian](https://www.challies.com/?p=25637). Today I want to explain why I am not continuationist or, if you prefer, charismatic.

Once again we need to begin with definitions. “Continuationism is the belief that the supernatural gifts of the Holy Spirit taught in the Bible—such as prophecy, tongues, interpretation of tongues, healings, and miracles—have not ceased and are available for the believer today. Continuationism is the opposite of cessationism which teaches that supernatural gifts have ceased either when the canon of Scripture was completed or at the death of the last apostle.”[\*](http://www.theopedia.com/continuationism) In other words, this is a matter of whether certain miraculous gifts that were active at one time are still active today. I believe those miraculous gifts have ceased.

Once again, my beliefs on this matter are not easily separated from my background. Growing up in conservative, Reformed churches I knew no continuationists. I knew that such people existed only when I heard my parents speak sheepishly about their early introduction to Pentecostalism. They told us of their attempts to receive the gift and their growing acknowledgement that their tongues-speaking friends were simply uttering repetitive, nonsensical phrases. It was not until I was in my mid-twenties and a baptist that I first encountered tongues. The band at a worship conference entered into a time of “spontaneous worship” and immediately many of the people around me began to make strange sounds. It took me a few minutes to understand what was happening.

A more formal introduction to continuationism came when I encountered Sovereign Grace Ministries. I had first become aware of this ministry through online connections and then through C.J. Mahaney’s books. I attended one of their worship conferences and here I saw what they called prophecy—prophetic songs meant to communicate divine truth to people in the audience. (“The Holy Spirit is giving me a song. I believe this song is for all the people here named Katie. If your name is Katie, please come to the front as the Holy Spirit has something to say to you.”) What I found at that conference and in these churches were people who were godly and kind and committed to Reformed theology, yet also firmly charismatic. Though I was certainly underwhelmed by this example of prophecy, I was so taken by the people, by their love for the Lord, and by their excitement in worship that I returned home wondering whether my family should find a way of joining them. For the first time I saw that continuationism was not necessarily opposed to sound doctrine.

It was at this time and in this context that I began to read, that I began to ponder, and that I began to search the Bible to see what it says about the continuation or cessation of the miraculous gifts. I read defenses of continuationism written by the theologians of the charismatic movement: Wayne Grudem and Sam Storms come to mind. I saw leaders I admire profess their view that the gifts continue to be operative today. I also read MacArthur’s *Charismatic Chaos*, [interviewed](https://www.challies.com/?p=18034) Sam Waldron, and read a number of critiques of continuationism. Through it all I became increasingly convinced that the miraculous gifts have ceased. I could not be continuationist.

I am not continuationist because of my understanding of the Bible. I see that those miraculous gifts were given for a specific time and purpose—they were given to accredit the message of the gospel when it was first going forth and before the Bible had been completed. As that time and purpose drew to a close, so too did the gifts. This is easily seen when we read the New Testament with an eye to when the different books were written. While an early book like 1 Corinthians has a lot to say about miraculous gifts, later books have far less to say. In fact, by the time Paul is writing to Timothy he is not expecting that Timothy will experience a miracle and not instructing him to pursue one, but rather prescribing a very ordinary cure for an ailment—“have a little wine for the sake of your stomach.” Paul himself suffered with physical pain but was unable to receive a miraculous cure. As we read through the New Testament we see these gifts slow and cease over the course of decades.

The miraculous gifts I see and hear in the charismatic movement have only the barest resemblance to the New Testament gifts.

First, then, I am not continuationist for biblical reasons. But second, I am not continuationist for reasons related to observation and experience. The miraculous gifts I see and hear in the charismatic movement have only the barest resemblance to the New Testament gifts. The miracles are internal and unverifiable, the tongues angelic rather than actual, the prophecy fallible. I know of no credible accounts of the kind of dramatic miracles we see described in the New Testament—a limb regenerating, a dead and decaying man being raised. Whatever “miracles” I hear of today are nowhere near as dramatic, visible, and instantaneous as the ones we see described in the ministry of Jesus and his Apostles. I know of no Christian who has been able to preach the gospel in a language he does not know. A number of times I have had well-meaning people prophecy to or about me but these have always been vague impressions more than authoritative words from God. Even as we discuss continuationism, we need to acknowledge that what has continued is, at best, a mere shadow of what the Bible describes.

I am not continuationist and do not believe that my experience of the Christian faith and life suffer on that basis. Instead of focusing on the drama of the miraculous I find joy in the beauty of God’s ordinary providence. The great drama unfolding in, through, and around us is foremost a story of God working through his careful, constant providence, his moment-by-moment means of bringing about his will.

I would like to direct you to two recent resources that have been helpful to me. The first is an exchange between Sam Storms and Thomas Schreiner. Schreiner explains [Why I Am a Cessationist](https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/why-i-am-a-cessationist) and Storms explains [Why I Am a Continuationist](https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/continuationist/). Both men explain their position and I suppose you can easily guess which I found more compelling. The second resource is this excellent lecture from Phil Johnson in which in his inimitable way he explains [Why I Am Cessationist](https://www.youtube.com/embed/3i0iv_L1nqc).

**Why I Am a Continuationist**

JANUARY 22, 2014  |  [**SAM STORMS**](https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/profile/sam-storms/)

So, why am I a continuationist? My reasons follow. (Please note that I’ve written several articles that provide more extensive evidence for the points I make, but space limitations permit me only to mention them by name. All of them are found at [my website](http://samstorms.com/enjoying-god-blog).)

Let me begin with the consistent, indeed pervasive, and altogether positive presence throughout the New Testament (NT) of all spiritual gifts. The problems that emerged in the church at Corinth were not due to spiritual gifts, but to immature people. It wasn’t the gifts of God but the childish, ambitious, and prideful distortion of gifts on the part of some that accounts for Paul’s corrective comments.

Furthermore, beginning with Pentecost and continuing throughout the book of Acts, whenever the Spirit is poured out on new believers they experience his charismata. There is nothing to indicate these phenomena were restricted to them and then. Such appear to be both widespread and common in the NT church. Christians in Rome ([Rom. 12](https://www.esv.org/Rom.%2012/)), Corinth ([1 Cor. 12-14](https://www.esv.org/1%20Cor.%2012-14/)), Samaria ([Acts 8](https://www.esv.org/Acts%208/)), Caesarea ([Acts 10](https://www.esv.org/Acts%2010/)), Antioch ([Acts 13](https://www.esv.org/Acts%2013/)), Ephesus ([Acts 19](https://www.esv.org/Acts%2019/)), Thessalonica ([1 Thess. 5](https://www.esv.org/1%20Thess.%205/)), and Galatia ([Gal. 3](https://www.esv.org/Gal.%203/)) experience the miraculous and revelatory gifts. It’s difficult to imagine how the NT authors could have spoken any more clearly about what new covenant Christianity is supposed to look like. In other words, the burden of proof rests with the cessationist. If certain gifts of a special class have ceased, the responsibility is his or hers to prove it.

**Extensive Evidence**

I’d also point to the extensive NT evidence of so-called miraculous gifts among Christians who are not apostles. In other words, numerous non-apostolic men and women, young and old, across the breadth of the Roman Empire consistently exercised these gifts of the Spirit (and Stephen and Philip ministered in the power of signs and wonders). Others aside from the apostles who exercised miraculous gifts include (1) the 70 who were commissioned in [Luke 10:9, 19-20](https://www.esv.org/Luke%2010%3A9%2C%2019-20/); (2) at least 108 people among the 120 who were gathered in the upper room on the day of Pentecost; (3) Stephen ([Acts 6-7](https://www.esv.org/Acts%206-7/)); (4) Philip ([Acts 8](https://www.esv.org/Acts%208/)); (5) Ananias ([Acts 9](https://www.esv.org/Acts%209/)); (6) church members in Antioch ([Acts 13](https://www.esv.org/Acts%2013/)); (7) anonymous converts in Ephesus ([Acts 19:6](https://www.esv.org/Acts%2019%3A6/)); (8) women at Caesarea ([Acts 21:8-9](https://www.esv.org/Acts%2021%3A8-9/)); (9) the unnamed brethren of [Galatians 3:5](https://www.esv.org/Galatians%203%3A5/); (10) believers in Rome ([Rom. 12:6-8](https://www.esv.org/Rom.%2012%3A6-8/)); (11) believers in Corinth ([1 Cor. 12-14](https://www.esv.org/1%20Cor.%2012-14/)); and (12) Christians in Thessalonica ([1 Thess. 5:19-20](https://www.esv.org/1%20Thess.%205%3A19-20/)).

We must also give room to the explicit and oft-repeated purpose of the charismata: namely, the edification of Christ’s body ([1 Cor. 12:7; 14:3, 26](https://www.esv.org/1%20Cor.%2012%3A7%3B%2014%3A3%2C%2026/)). Nothing I read in the NT or see in the condition of the church in any age, past or present, leads me to believe we’ve progressed beyond the need for edification—and therefore beyond the need for the contribution of the charismata. I freely admit that spiritual gifts were essential for the birth of the church, but why would they be any less important or needful for its continued growth and maturation?

There is also the fundamental continuity or spiritually organic relationship between the church in Acts and the church in subsequent centuries. No one denies there was an era or period in the early church that we might call “apostolic.” We must acknowledge the significance of the personal, physical presence of the apostles and their unique role in laying the foundation for the early church. But nowhere does the NT ever suggest that certain spiritual gifts were uniquely and exclusively tied to them or that the gifts passed with their passing. The universal church or body of Christ that was established and gifted through the ministry of the apostles is the same universal church and body of Christ today. We are together with Paul and Peter and Silas and Lydia and Priscilla and Luke members of the same one body of Christ.

Very much related to the previous point is what Peter says in [Acts 2](https://www.esv.org/Acts%202/) concerning so-called miraculous gifts as characteristic of the new covenant age of the church. As D. A. Carson has said, “The coming of the Spirit is not associated merely with the *dawning* of the new age but with its *presence,* not merely with Pentecost but with the entire period from Pentecost to the return of Jesus the Messiah” ([*Showing the Spirit*](http://www.amazon.com/Showing-Spirit-Theological-Exposition-Corinthians/dp/0801025214/?tag=thegospcoal-20), 155). Or again, the gifts of prophecy and tongues ([Acts 2](https://www.esv.org/Acts%202/)) are not portrayed as merely inaugurating the new covenant age but as characterizing it (and let us not forget that the present church age = the “last days”).

We must also take note of [1 Corinthians 13:8-12](https://www.esv.org/1%20Corinthians%2013%3A8-12/). Here Paul asserts that spiritual gifts will not “pass away” (vv. 8-10) until the coming of the “perfect.” If the “perfect” is indeed the consummation of God’s redemptive purposes as expressed in the new heaven and new earth following Christ’s return, we can confidently expect him to continue blessing and empowering his church with the gifts until that time.

A similar point is made in [Ephesians 4:11-13](https://www.esv.org/Ephesians%204%3A11-13/). There Paul speaks of spiritual gifts (together with the office of apostle)—and in particular the gifts of prophecy, evangelism, pastor, and teacher—as building up of the church “*until* we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (v. 13; italics mine). Since the latter most assuredly has not yet been attained by the church, we can confidently anticipate the presence and power of such gifts until that day arrives.

I’d also point to the absence of any explicit or implicit notion that we should view spiritual gifts any differently than we do other NT practices and ministries portrayed as essential for the life and wellbeing of the church. When we read the NT, it seems evident that church discipline should be practiced in our assemblies today and that we should celebrate the Lord’s Table and water baptism, and that the requirements for the office of elder as set forth in the pastoral epistles still determine how life in the church should be pursued, just to mention a few. What good exegetical or theological reasons can be given for why we should treat the presence and operation of spiritual gifts any differently?

**Consistent Testimony**

Contrary to popular belief, there is consistent testimony throughout most of church history concerning the operation of the miraculous gifts of the Spirit. It simply isn’t the case that the gifts ceased or disappeared from early church life following the death of the last apostle. Space doesn’t permit me to cite the massive evidence in this regard, so I refer you to four articles I wrote with extensive documentation (see “[Spiritual Gifts in Church History](http://www.samstorms.com/enjoying-god-blog/post/spiritual-gifts-in-church-history--1-)”).

Cessationists often argue that signs and wonders as well as certain spiritual gifts served only to confirm or authenticate the original company of apostles and that when the apostles passed away so also did the gifts. The fact is no biblical text (not even [Heb. 2:4](https://www.esv.org/Heb.%202%3A4/) or [2 Cor. 12:12](https://www.esv.org/2%20Cor.%2012%3A12/), two texts I explain in articles [here](http://www.samstorms.com/)) ever says signs and wonders or spiritual gifts of a particular sort authenticated the apostles. Signs and wonders authenticated Jesus and the apostolic message about him. If signs and wonders were designed exclusively to authenticate apostles, we have no explanation why non-apostolic believers (such as Philip and Stephen) were empowered to perform them (see especially [1 Cor. 12:8-10](https://www.esv.org/1%20Cor.%2012%3A8-10/), where the “gift” of “miracles,” among others, was given to average, non-apostolic believers).

Therefore, this is a good reason for being a cessationist only if you can demonstrate that authentication or attestation of the apostolic message was the sole and exclusive purpose of such displays of divine power. However, nowhere in the NT is the purpose or function of the miraculous or the charismata reduced to attestation. The miraculous, in whatever form, served several other distinct purposes: *doxological* (to glorify God: [John 2:11; 9:3; 11:4; 11:40](https://www.esv.org/John%202%3A11%3B%209%3A3%3B%2011%3A4%3B%2011%3A40/); and [Matt. 15:29-31](https://www.esv.org/Matt.%2015%3A29-31/)); *evangelistic* (to prepare the way for the gospel to be made known: see [Acts 9:32-43](https://www.esv.org/Acts%209%3A32-43/)); *pastoral* (as an expression of compassion and love and care for the sheep:[Matt. 14:14](https://www.esv.org/Matt.%2014%3A14/); [Mark 1:40-41](https://www.esv.org/Mark%201%3A40-41/)); and *edifying* (to build up and strengthen believers: [1 Cor. 12:7](https://www.esv.org/1%20Cor.%2012%3A7/) and the “common good”; [1 Cor. 14:3-5, 26](https://www.esv.org/1%20Cor.%2014%3A3-5%2C%2026/)).

All the gifts of the Spirit, whether tongues or teaching, prophecy or mercy, healing or helping, were given (among other reasons) for the edification, building up, encouraging, instructing, consoling, and sanctifying of the body of Christ. Therefore, even if the ministry of the miraculous gifts to attest and authenticate has ceased, a point I concede only for the sake of argument, such gifts would continue to function in the church for the other reasons cited.

**Still Final and Sufficient**

Perhaps the most frequently heard objection from cessationists is that acknowledging the validity of revelatory gifts such as prophecy and word of knowledge would necessarily undermine the finality and sufficiency of Holy Scripture. But this argument is based on the false assumption that these gifts provide us with infallible truths equal in authority to the biblical text itself (see my article “[Why NT Prophecy Does NOT Result in ‘Scripture-Quality’ Revelatory Words](http://www.samstorms.com/enjoying-god-blog/post/why-nt-prophecy-does-not-result-in--scripture-quality--revelatory-words--a-response-to-the-most-frequently-cited-cessationist-argument-against-the-contemporary-validity-of-spiritual-gifts-)”).

One also hears the cessationist appeal to [Ephesians 2:20](https://www.esv.org/Ephesians%202%3A20/), as if this text describes all possible prophetic ministry. The argument is that revelatory gifts such as prophecy were uniquely linked to the apostles and therefore designed to function only during the so-called foundational period in the early church. I address this fundamentally misguided view at length [here](http://www.samstorms.com/enjoying-god-blog/post/ephesians-2:20---the-cessationists--go-to--text--an-on-going-response-to-strange-fire-). A close examination of the biblical evidence concerning both the nature of the prophetic gift as well as its widespread distribution among Christians indicates there was far more to this gift than simply the apostles laying the foundation of the church. Therefore, neither the passing of the apostles nor the movement of the church beyond its foundational years has any bearing whatsoever on the validity of prophecy today. One also hears often of the so-called cluster argument, according to which supernatural and miraculous phenomena were supposedly concentrated or clustered at unique periods in redemptive history. I’ve addressed this argument [elsewhere](http://samstorms.com/enjoying-god-blog/post/cessationism-and-the-so-called--cluster--argument:-a-response) and demonstrated that it’s altogether false.

Finally, although it’s technically not a reason or argument for being a continuationist, I cannot ignore experience. The fact is I’ve seen all spiritual gifts in operation, tested and confirmed them, and experienced them firsthand on countless occasions. As stated, this is less a reason to become a continuationist and more a confirmation (although not an infallible one) of the validity of that decision. Experience, in isolation from the biblical text, proves little. But experience must be noted, especially if it illustrates or embodies what we see in God’s Word.

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**Why I Am a Cessationist**

JANUARY 22, 2014  |  [**THOMAS SCHREINER**](https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/profile/thomas-schreiner/)

I am not writing on this topic because I have the final answer on spiritual gifts, for the matter is difficult and Christians who love God and the Bible disagree. Readers should know that Sam Storms and I are friends. We love one another, even though we differ on a secondary or tertiary issue, while at the same time upholding the importance of truth. Over the years I’ve become convinced that some of the so-called charismatic gifts are no longer given and that they aren’t a regular feature of life in the church. I am thinking particularly of the the gifts of apostleship, prophecy, tongues, healing, and miracles (and perhaps discernment of spirits).

Why would anyone think that some of the gifts have been withdrawn? I will argue that such a reading fits best with Scripture and experience. Scripture takes priority over experience, for it is the final authority, but Scripture must also correlate with life, and our experiences should provoke us to re-examine afresh whether we’ve read the Bible rightly. None of us reads the Bible in a vacuum, and hence we must return to the Scriptures repeatedly to ensure we’ve read them faithfully.

**Foundation of the Apostles and Prophets**

Paul says the church is “built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets” ([Eph. 2:20](https://www.esv.org/Eph.%202%3A20/)). I conclude that all we need to know for salvation and sanctification has been given to us through the teaching of the apostles and prophets, and that this teaching is now found in the Scriptures. Now that God has spoken in the last days through his Son ([Heb. 1:2](https://www.esv.org/Heb.%201%3A2/)), we don’t need further words from him to explain what Jesus Christ has accomplished in his ministry, death, and resurrection. Instead, we are “to contend for the faith that was delivered to the saints once for all” through the apostles and prophets ([Jude 3](https://www.esv.org/Jude%203/)).

To put it another way, we don’t have apostles like Paul and Peter and John anymore. They gave us the authoritative teaching by which the church continues to live to this day, and that is the only teaching we will need until Jesus returns. We know that new apostles won’t appear since Paul specifically says he was the last apostle ([1 Cor. 15:8](https://www.esv.org/1%20Cor.%2015%3A8/)). And when James the brother of John died ([Acts 12:2](https://www.esv.org/Acts%2012%3A2/)), he wasn’t replaced. Apostles, in the technical sense, are restricted to those who have seen the risen Lord and have been commissioned by him, and no one since apostolic times fits such criteria. The apostles were uniquely appointed for the early days of the church to establish orthodox doctrine. There is no warrant, then, for saying there are still apostles today. Indeed, if anyone claims to be an apostle today we should be concerned, for such a claim opens the door to false teaching and to abuse of authority.

If the gift of apostleship has ended, then other gifts may have ceased as well, since the foundation has been laid by the apostles and prophets ([Eph. 2:20](https://www.esv.org/Eph.%202%3A20/)). I conclude from this point that the gift of prophecy has ended also, for the prophets identified here are the same sort mentioned elsewhere (cf. [1 Cor. 12:28](https://www.esv.org/1%20Cor.%2012%3A28/); [Eph. 3:5; 4:11](https://www.esv.org/Eph.%203%3A5%3B%204%3A11/)). The early churches didn’t have the complete canon of Scripture for some time, and hence an authoritative and infallible prophetic ministry was needed to lay the foundation for the church in those early days.

The most significant biblical argument against what I’m saying is the claim that New Testament (NT) prophecy differs from Old Testament (OT) prophecy, for some say OT prophecy is flawless but NT prophecy is mixed with error. But the idea that NT prophets could make mistakes isn’t persuasive for several reasons. 1.) The burden of proof is on those who say prophecy in the NT is of a different nature than prophecy in the OT. Prophets in the OT were only considered prophets of God if they were infallible ([Deut. 18:15-22](https://www.esv.org/Deut.%2018%3A15-22/)), and the same is almost certainly true in the NT. 2.) The admonition to judge prophecies instead of prophets ([1 Cor. 14:29-32](https://www.esv.org/1%20Cor.%2014%3A29-32/); [1 Thess. 5:19-20](https://www.esv.org/1%20Thess.%205%3A19-20/)) is often adduced to show that the gift is different in the NT. But this argument is not convincing, for the only way to judge prophets in both Testaments is by their prophecies. We only know prophets aren’t from God if their prophecies are false or if their words contradict scriptural teaching. 3.) We have no example of a NT prophet who erred. Agabus didn’t make a mistake in prophesying that Paul would be bound by the Jews and handed over to the Romans ([Acts 21:10-11](https://www.esv.org/Acts%2021%3A10-11/)). To say he erred demands more precision than prophecies warrant. Furthermore, after Paul was arrested he appealed to the words of Agabus, saying he was handed over to the Romans by the Jews ([Acts 28:17](https://www.esv.org/Acts%2028%3A17/)), so it’s clear he didn’t think Agabus made a mistake. Agabus spoke the words of the Holy Spirit ([Acts 11:28; 21:11](https://www.esv.org/Acts%2011%3A28%3B%2021%3A11/)), so we have no example in the NT of prophets whose prophecies were mixed with error.

Some object that my view of prophecy is off target since there were hundreds and thousands of prophecies in NT times that never made it into the canon. That objection doesn’t convince, however, for the same was true in the OT. Most of the prophecies of Elijah and Elisha were never written down or inscripturated. Or we can think of the 100 prophets spared by Obadiah ([1 Kings 18:4](https://www.esv.org/1%20Kings%2018%3A4/)). Apparently none of their prophecies was inscripurated. Nevertheless, the prophecies were all completely true and unmixed with error, for otherwise they wouldn’t have been prophets ([Deut. 18:15-22](https://www.esv.org/Deut.%2018%3A15-22/)). The same principle applies to the prophecies of NT prophets. Their words aren’t recorded for us, but if they were truly prophets then their words were infallible.

What some people today call “prophecies” are actually impressions from God. He can use impressions to guide and lead us, but they aren’t infallible and must always be tested by Scripture. We should also consult with wise counselors before acting on such impressions. I love my charismatic brothers and sisters, but what they call “prophecy” today isn’t actually the biblical gift of prophecy. God-given impressions aren’t the same thing as prophecies.

**What About Tongues?**

The gift of tongues is a more difficult issue. In Acts (2:1-4; 10:44-48; 19:1-7) this gift signifies that the age of fulfillment has arrived where God’s covenant promises are being realized. [First Corinthians 14:1-5](https://www.esv.org/First%20Corinthians%2014%3A1-5/) and [Acts 2:17-18](https://www.esv.org/Acts%202%3A17-18/) also suggest that interpreted (or understood) tongues are equivalent to prophecy. It seems, then, that prophecy and tongues are closely related. If prophecy has passed away, then tongues have likely ended as well. Further, it’s clear from Acts that the gift involves speaking in foreign languages ([Acts 2](https://www.esv.org/Acts%202/)), and Peter emphasizes in the case of Cornelius and his friends that the Gentiles received the same gift as the Jews ([Acts 11:16-17](https://www.esv.org/Acts%2011%3A16-17/)).

Nor is it persuasive to say the gift in [1 Corinthians 12-14](https://www.esv.org/1%20Corinthians%2012-14/) is of a different nature (i.e., ecstatic utterances). The word *tongues* (*glōssa*) denotes a linguistic code, a structured language, not random and free vocalization. When Paul says no one understands those speaking in tongues because they utter mysteries ([1 Cor. 14:2](https://www.esv.org/1%20Cor.%2014%3A2/)), he isn’t suggesting that the gift is different from what we find in Acts. Those hearing the tongues in Acts understood what was being said because they knew the languages the apostles were speaking. If no one knows the language, then the tongue speaker utters mysteries. Nor does [1 Corinthians 13:1](https://www.esv.org/1%20Corinthians%2013%3A1/) (tongues of angels) support the notion that the gift of tongues consists of ecstatic utterances. Paul engages in hyperbole in [1 Corinthians 13:1-3](https://www.esv.org/1%20Corinthians%2013%3A1-3/). He’s clearly exaggerating when referring to the gift of prophecy ([1 Cor. 13:2](https://www.esv.org/1%20Cor.%2013%3A2/)), for no one who prophesies knows “all mysteries and all knowledge.”

I believe what’s happening in charismatic circles today regarding tongues is similar to what we saw with prophecy. The gift is redefined to include free vocalization, and then people claim to have the gift described in Scripture. In doing so they redefine the gift to accommodate contemporary experience. So are contemporary tongues demonic, then? I don’t think so. I agree with J. I. Packer that the experience is more a form of psychological relaxation.

**Miracles and Healings**

What about miracles and healings? First, I believe God still heals and does miraculous things today, and we should pray for such. Scripture isn’t as clear on this matter, and thus these gifts could exist today. Still, the primary function of these gifts was to accredit the gospel message, confirming that Jesus was both Lord and Christ. I doubt the gift of miracles and healings exists today, for it isn’t evident that men and women in our churches have such gifts. Certainly God can and does heal at times, but where are the people with these gifts? Claims for miracles and healings must be verified, just as the people verified the blind man’s healing in [John 9](https://www.esv.org/John%209/). There is a kind of biblically warranted skepticism.

Now, could God in cutting-edge missionary situations grant miracles and signs and wonders to accredit the gospel as he did in apostolic times? Yes. But that’s not the same thing as having these gifts as a regular feature in the ongoing life of the church. If the signs and wonders of the apostles have returned, we should see the blind receiving their sight, the lame walking, and the dead being raised. God heals today (sometimes dramatically), but the healing of colds, the flu, TMJ, stomach, and back problems, and so forth aren’t in the same category as the healings found in the Scriptures. If people truly have the gift of healing and miracles today, they need to demonstrate such by performing the kinds of healings and miracles found in the Bible.

**Doesn’t 1 Corinthians 13:8-12 Contradict Your View?**

Let’s consider an objection to the notion that some of the gifts have ceased. Doesn’t [1 Corinthians 13:8-12](https://www.esv.org/1%20Corinthians%2013%3A8-12/) teach that the gifts last until Jesus comes again? Certainly this text teaches that the gifts could last until Jesus returns. There’s no definitive teaching in the Bible that they’ve ceased. We might even expect them to last until the second coming. But we see hints from [Ephesians 2:20](https://www.esv.org/Ephesians%202%3A20/) and other texts that the gifts played a foundational role. I conclude, then, that [1 Corinthians 13:8-12](https://www.esv.org/1%20Corinthians%2013%3A8-12/) permits but doesn’t require the gifts to continue until the second coming. And the gifts as they are practiced today don’t fit with the biblical description of these gifts.

For reasons like these the Reformers and most of the Protestant tradition until the 20th century believed the gifts had ceased. I conclude that both Scripture and experience verify their judgment on the matter.

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**The Uneasy Conscience of a Non-Charismatic Evangelical**

Dan Wallace  
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**Ed. Note:** This message is a slightly modified version of what was given at the Evangelical Theological Society's regional meeting in 1994, held at John Brown University in Arkansas.  It may be helpful for those reading Dr. Wallace's other essays on conflicting pneumatologies (i.e., different views of the Holy Spirit's ministry) to gain a balanced perspective.

**Introduction**

As is the case with past presidents of ETS-SW, I have had quite some time to think about this address.  In my case, the topic I had in mind two years ago has been shelved.  In the past eighteen months, I believe that the Lord has laid on my heart a new topic.  In a few moments, you will learn what the catalyst was that brought about this change.  As for the rest of the message, you will have to be the judge as to whether the impetus was from the Lord or a different source.

Three preliminary remarks are in order.  First, I need to define my target audience.  Some of you here are charismatics or Pentecostals.  I will not be speaking to you tonight.  But I think that you will agree with much that I have to say.  I invite you to listen in as I address my non-charismatic brothers and sisters.

Second, I speak from a non-charismatic or cessationist position.  That is to say, I believe that certain gifts of the Holy Spirit were employed in the earliest stage of Christianity to *authenticate* that God was doing something new.  These "sign gifts"--such as the gifts of healing, tongues, miracles--*ceased* with the death of the last apostle.  This is what I mean by "cessationism."  Some of you fellow cessationists might style yourselves as "soft" cessationists whereby you mean that *some* of the sign gifts continue, or that the sign gifts may crop up in locations where the gospel is introduced afresh,**[1](https://bible.org/article/uneasy-conscience-non-charismatic-evangelical" \l "_ftn1)** or that you are presently agnostic about these gifts, but are not a practicing charismatic.  For purposes of argument, I will take a hard line.  In this way, anything I affirm about the Holy Spirit's ministry today should not be perceived as being generated from a closet charismatic.  Further, it is not my purpose to defend cessationism.  That, I understand, will be taken up in the panel discussion tomorrow.  Rather, I wish to address some concerns that I, as a cessationist, have concerning the role of the Holy Spirit today among cessationists.

Third, based on my past performance at ETS meetings, you probably expect a heavily documented, fairly well researched, somewhat abstract, academic lecture.  This is not of that ilk.  There is a place for such lectures, but not here, not now, not with this topic.  Rather, this message will be personal and anecdotal.  I trust that, in spite of the paucity of footnotes**,** you will not dismiss this message as untrue.  It is a message borne of my experience with God.  This, of course, disqualifies it from publication in any theological journal!  But I hope and pray that it does not disqualify it from stimulating you intellectually--not, as I said, because I have investigated every nook and cranny of pneumatology.  But because it rings true.  Hopefully--and this is my real desire and prayer--your hearts will be convicted as much as your heads stimulated.

This address has two parts.  First is a topic rarely mentioned at ETS: a personal testimony.  Perhaps in our scholarly endeavor to avoid *ad hominem* arguments, we have come to disdain anything of a personal nature.  But our minds cannot be separated from our hearts.  What drives us to study a given topic often receives its impulse from highly personal struggles.  And at the risk of making myself vulnerable to you, of opening myself up to charges such as, "Wallace's views can be dismissed because we know whence they come," I wish to share with you, at some length, who I am and how God is working in my life.  Second, I have **eleven** theses to put on the table--theses that have to do with our deficiencies in how we relate to the Holy Spirit.  These theses are *only* at a seminal stage**[2](https://bible.org/article/uneasy-conscience-non-charismatic-evangelical" \l "_ftn2)**--indeed, I would like to *nail down 95* of them in due time!

**My Spiritual Journey**

I grew up in a conservative Baptist church in southern California. I was converted at age four when I attended Vacation Bible School in the summer of 1956.  My brother, at the ripe old age of five and a half, led me to Christ.  Ironically, he was not a believer at the time.  A dozen years later I was instrumental in bringing him to the Savior.

I grew up in the church.   My youth was characterized by timidity: I was a Clark Kent with *no* alter ego.  I was afraid of life, afraid to explore, afraid to question *out loud*.  In spite of this--or, perhaps because of this, I was a leader in the youth group.  But I had questions that would not go away--questions about an authentic Christian experience.  At age sixteen I was in the midst of a life-threatening crisis: should I or should I not ask Terri C. out for a date?  Because of the turmoil in my soul, I quickly agreed when a friend invited me to a charismatic revival at Melodyland in Anaheim, California.  The house was packed; several thousand were in attendance.  The speaker said some things that disturbed me intellectually.  When he gave an altar call, I was ready to go forward and give him a piece of my mind.  As I got up out of my seat, the Holy Spirit grabbed my heart and said, "No, this is not the reason you're going forward.  You need to get right with God."  Now, he did not speak audibly to me.  These words are not to be put in red letters.  But as I rose, before I took one step, I was overwhelmingly convicted of my own sin.  The Spirit of God was definitely in that place.

As I came forward, about four or five hundred other people streamed forth to the center stage.  With hundreds of people there, I was quite amazed when the speaker, microphone in hand, selected me.  "Why have you come forward, young man?" he queried.  "I came to rededicate my life to Christ," I answered.  It was a good thing that the Holy Spirit changed my heart before my lips got in gear!

That night, January 6, 1969, was the major turning point in my life.  I still celebrate it as my spiritual birthday (since the exact date of my conversion at age four was and still is a bit fuzzy).

That same night, before I left Melodyland, a man named David Berg invited me to visit his fellowship in Huntington Beach.  His group, known then as the Huntington Beach Light House, later became known as *The Children of God*; David Berg was later called David Moses or Moses David.

I joined the group and became a charismatic.  The group was vibrant in its worship, and courageous in its evangelism.  My faith was alive.  My prayer life was thriving.  And I gained courage.

I would pray for hours daily, praying that God would grant me the gift of tongues.  When one of the "apostles" (apostle Bob, I believe**[3](https://bible.org/article/uneasy-conscience-non-charismatic-evangelical" \l "_ftn3)**) at the Light House discovered that I had not spoken in tongues, he asked if I had been baptized in the Spirit.  When I answered in the negative, he laid his hands on me and did the job right there.  Observing that nothing had changed, he doubted my salvation.

So I quietly left the group.  In the coming months, I fellowshipped at Calvary Chapel, where the neo-charismatic movement finds its origins.  Finally, and quite naturally, I left the charismatic movement altogether.  But my zeal for God was not quenched.  I was a part of the Jesus movement as a non-charismatic.  I continued to pray, evangelize, and read my Bible.  In fact, there was a long stretch of time in which I read my New Testament, cover to cover, *every* week.  I saw God's hand in everything.  And the Lord granted me a measure of courage which was not and is not *naturally* mine.**[4](https://bible.org/article/uneasy-conscience-non-charismatic-evangelical" \l "_ftn4)**  Although I had left the charismatic movement, it took me a long time before I replaced my passion for Jesus Christ with a passion for the Bible.

Because of my interest in spiritual things, I decided to attend a Christian liberal arts college.  I attended Biola University, married a beautiful Irish lass**[5](https://bible.org/article/uneasy-conscience-non-charismatic-evangelical" \l "_ftn5)** right out of college, and came to Dallas for more theological training.

Through the years, after going to a Christian college and a cessationist seminary, I began to slip away from my early, vibrant contact with God.  My understanding of scripture was heightened, but my walk with God slowed down to a crawl.  I took a defensive and apologetic posture in my studies of scripture.  In the last several years, I've been questioning the adequacy of such a stance--recognizing, subconsciously at least, that it did not satisfy my deepest longings.

Joe Aldrich, the president of Multnomah Bible College once told me, "It takes the average seminary graduate five years to thaw out from the experience."  For most seminary graduates, I suspect, that thawing out may come through the natural course of events.  But it took several crises before the Lord started warming me up again.  The latest one was what happened to my son, Andy, just two years ago--when he was eight years old.

In December 1991, Andy was kicked in the stomach by a school bully.  He developed stomach pains which persisted for quite some time.  Two months later, through a providentially guided indiscretion, Andy left the bathroom door open when my wife walked by.  She saw something that horrified her: his urine was brown.  That same day, she took him to our family physician.  This began a series of doctors and specialists.  None of them had a clue as to what was wrong.  Finally, he was admitted to Children's Hospital on April 20, 1992, scheduled for a kidney biopsy.

Before the biopsy was to be performed, a sonogram was conducted.  We had anticipated a blood clot on the kidney, but the sonogram revealed that something more was present.  Perhaps it was a tumor.  *One* physician suggested exploratory surgery instead of a biopsy.  This sounded crazy to me!  Cut my "Beaker"**[6](https://bible.org/article/uneasy-conscience-non-charismatic-evangelical" \l "_ftn6)** open!  We agreed, grudgingly, to this procedure.

The surgery took place on Wednesday, April 22.  That's when the nightmare began.  One of the physicians prepped us ahead of time:

Mr. and Mrs. Wallace, I wouldn't be overly worried about this operation.  What the sonogram revealed may still be just a blood clot.  And if it's not a blood clot, then, most likely, it's a benign tumor.  And if it's not benign, then it is probably a Wilm's tumor.  This is a congenital kidney cancer found in children.  It's treatable and curable.  However, if it's not a Wilm's tumor, there is the very *slight* possibility that what your son has is *renal cell carcinoma*.  But that is such a rare cancer in children that the likelihood is quite remote.

As the hours during and after the surgery wore on, we found ourselves getting hit with wave after wave of dreaded news.  Andy, indeed, had renal cell carcinoma (RCC).  And it was not just the normal type--which was lethal enough.  Andy had the more potent strain of RCC.  Less than *ten* children ever diagnosed worldwide have lived beyond two years with this strain of RCC.  Apart from radical surgery, it's virtually untreatable and incurable, as far as medical science knows.

There was good news through all this, news of a providential character, news which gave me and still gives me hope that my son will live.  First, the bully who kicked Andy in the stomach probably saved his life.  Only in one third of the cases of RCC is there bloody urine.  The other symptoms are usually a *mild* stomach ache and an occasional low-grade fever.**[7](https://bible.org/article/uneasy-conscience-non-charismatic-evangelical" \l "_ftn7)**  That kick to the stomach probably triggered the bloody urine.  Second, the one physician who insisted on exploratory surgery instead of a biopsy also saved his life.  RCC is so potent a cancer that every case on record in which a biopsy was performed resulted in the death of the patient.  In the midst of wondering, of confusion, of crying out to God, I could still see his hand in all this.

Andy's kidney was removed and he went through various grueling tests in which his body was probed for any remnants of cancer.  For those of you familiar with cancer, I don't need to tell you about the torture of bone marrow scans.  Six days of testing produced no trace of cancer.

RCC in children is so rare that Andy's case was the first one reported in the United States in eight years.  Globally, he is the 161st child ever diagnosed with it.  There are no support groups!  Before Andy left the hospital a team of ten physicians could not decide whether to administer chemotherapy.  It would strictly be a preventive measure, but with RCC, prevention is everything.  If the cancer metastasizes again, he will die (as far as statistics reveal).  No child has yet survived a return of RCC.  The choice was ours whether or not to go with chemotherapy.

We decided to go with chemotherapy, because the risk of not doing it, wondering whether that might kill him, was too great to bear.  I cannot adequately describe what the next six months were like--for Andy, for me and his mother, for his three brothers.  But I can tell you that I was in an emotional wasteland.  I was angry with God and I found him to be quite distant.  Here was this precious little boy who was losing his hair, and losing weight.  At one point he weighed only *forty-five* pounds.  His twin brother at that time weighed eighty-five pounds.  Andy was so weak that we had to carry him everywhere.

Through this experience I found that the Bible was not adequate.  I needed God in a personal way--not as an object of my study, but as friend, guide, comforter.  I needed an existential experience of the Holy One.  Quite frankly, I found that the Bible was not the answer.  I found the scriptures to be helpful--even authoritatively helpful--as a guide.  But without *feeling God*, the Bible gave little solace.  In the midst of this "summer from hell," I began to examine what had become of my faith.  I found a longing to get closer to God, but found myself unable to do so through *my* normal means: exegesis, scripture reading, more exegesis.  I believe that I had depersonalized God so much that when I really needed him I didn't know how to relate.  I longed for him, but found many community-wide restrictions in my cessationist environment.  I found a suffocation of the Spirit in my evangelical tradition as well as in my own heart.

It was this experience of my son's cancer that brought me back to my senses, that brought me back to my roots.  And out of this experience I have been wrestling in the last eighteen months with practical issues of pneumatology.

**Eleven Theses**

I believe that in North America today, there are two brands of conservative Christianity, neither of which is wholly satisfactory.  There is charismatic Christianity--the free spirited, right brain, experiential roller coaster.  And then there is the evangelical rationalism--uptight, left brain, logical, talking head, argumentative.  Neither of these is adequate.  Don't get me wrong: I'm a fully committed cessationist.  I believe that the sign gifts ceased in the first century.  But I think that cessationists need to begin doing serious business with God.  We need a deep-rooted repentance--both individually and communally.

I want to offer you eleven suggestions, eleven challenges--eleven theses if you will--that we need to address.  I don't yet have 95 of them--and this isn't the Wittenberg Church.  And, as I said at the beginning, this list is in a seminal stage.  These theses are in a somewhat random order.

***(1) Although the sign gifts died in the first century, the Holy Spirit did not.***We all can affirm that theologically, but pragmatically we act as though he died too.  This is my fundamental thesis, and it's well worth exploring.  What can we, as cessationists, affirm that the Holy Spirit is doing today?  What did Jesus mean when he said, "My sheep hear my voice?"  What did Paul mean when he declared, "Those who are led by the Spirit are the sons of God"?  What did John mean when he wrote, "You have an anointing from the Holy One"?

***(2) Although charismatics have given a higher priority to experience than to relationship, rationalistic evangelicals have given a higher priority to knowledge than to relationship.*** Both of these miss the mark.  And Paul, in 1 Corinthians, condemns both.  Knowledge puffs up; and spiritual experience without love is worthless.

***(3) This emphasis on knowledge over relationship has produced in us a*** ***bibliolatry****.* Since the text is our task, we have made it our God.  It has become our idol.  Let me state this bluntly: *The Bible is not a member of the Trinity.*  One lady in my church facetiously told me, "I believe in the Trinity: the Father, Son, and Holy Bible."

One of the great legacies Karl Barth left behind was his strong Christocentric focus.  It is a shame that too many of us have reacted so strongly to Barth, for in our zeal to show his bibliological deficiencies we have become biblioters in the process.  Barth and Calvin share a lot in common: there is a warmth, a piety, a devotion, an awe in the presence of God that is lacking in too many theological tomes generated from our circles.

***(4) The net effect of such bibliolatry is a depersonalization of God.*** Eventually, we no longer relate to him.  He becomes the object of our investigation rather than the Lord to whom we are subject.  The vitality of our religion gets sucked out.  As God gets dissected and trisected (in the case of you trichotomists), our stance changes from "I trust in" to "I believe that."

***(5) Part of the motivation for this depersonalization of God is our increasing craving for control.*** What we despise most about charismatics is their loss of control, their emotionalism.  We fear that.  We take comfort in the fact that part of the fruit of the Spirit is "self-control."  But by this we mean "do all things in moderation"--including worshipping God.  But should we not have a reckless abandon in our devotion to him?  Should we not throw ourselves on him, knowing that apart from him we can do nothing?

Instead, as typical cessationists, we want to be in control at all times.  Even when it means that we shut God out.  It is this issue of control that kept my friend Sam a cessationist so long.  Now, as a member of the Vineyard movement, Sam is quite happy: he acknowledges that he never was in control in the first place.  In the midst of what I consider to be a heterodox shift on his part, there is this honest breakthrough with God.

***(6) God is still a God of healing and miracles.***As a cessationist, I can affirm the fact of miracles without affirming the miracle-worker.  God is still a God of healing even though his normal modus operandi is not through a faith-healer.  If I can be permitted an overgeneralization, the problem with charismatics is that they believe that God not only can heal, but that he must heal.  God thus becomes an instrument, wielded by the almighty Christian.  That is one reason why, historically, charismata has been a movement among Arminians. At the same time, the problem with non-charismatics is that although they claim that God can heal, they act as if he won't.  I don't really think they believe in God's ability--they don't really believe that God can heal.  Thus, the problem with charismatics is a denial of God's sovereignty; the problem with non-charismatics is a denial of God's ability or goodness or both.  And neither group is being completely honest with God.  Neither is submissively trusting him.

Let me take this a step further.  Is it possible for a Calvinist to say that an Arminian can be used of the Lord to bring someone salvation?  Yes, I think Calvinists would agree that such a thing is possible.  If so, is this not analogous to God using a "faith-healer" to heal someone?  In other words, can I, as a cessationist, affirm that sometimes God heals someone through the presence or stimulus of a faith-healer?  Perhaps the sick individual, or the faith-healer, was exercising great faith.  (After all, charismatics tend to believe in God's ability more than cessationists.)  In such instances, could we not say that rather than empowering the faith-healer, God was simply honoring the faith?

If this scenario is correct, then we would not expect every person touched by a faith-healer to be healed.  And that is exactly what we find: not everyone is healed.  At the same time, because the normal modus operandi of healing is through someone's faith, as a cessationist I can affirm both that there is often great faith in charismatic circles and that there is no such thing as a bona fide faith-healer today.  I can affirm miracles in their midst without affirming the miracle-worker.

***(7) Evangelical rationalism can lead to spiritual defection.*** I am referring to the suffocation of the Spirit in post-graduate theological training, as well as the seduction of academia.  Most of us can think of examples of gifted young students we have mentored who seemed to lose all of their Christian conviction in an academic setting.  For many of us, this recollection is too painful.  How many times have we sent Daniels into the lions' den, only to tell them by our actions that prayer won't do any good?

One particular instance is very difficult for me to think about.  One of my brightest master's students about thirteen years ago went on for doctoral work overseas.  We prepared him well in exegesis.  But we did not prepare him well in prayer.  A couple of years ago I caught up with him and discovered that he was only confused about his evangelical heritage.  He was even questioning the uniqueness of Jesus.  This student had suppressed part of the arsenal at his disposal: the witness of the Spirit, something non-believers can't touch.  To this day I wonder how much I contributed to this man's confusion and suppression of the Spirit's witness.

It is not the historical evidences *alone* that can lead one to embrace the resurrection as true.  The Spirit must work on our hearts, overcoming our natural reticence.  When our graduates go on for doctoral work, and forget that the Spirit brought them to Christ in the first place, and suppress his witness in their hearts, they are ripe for spiritual defection.  They need to be reminded--as do all of us who live in an academic setting--that exegesis and apologetics are not the sum of the Christian life.

I speak not only from the experience of my students.  In my own doctoral program, while seriously grappling with the evidence for the resurrection, I suddenly found myself in an existential crisis.  I was reading in biblical theology at the time, wrestling with those two great minds, Rudolf Bultmann and Karl Barth.  I was impressed with the fact that as strong as the historical evidence is for the resurrection, there is and always will be a measure of doubt.  Evidence alone cannot bridge the gap between us and God.  As much as I wanted the evidence to go all the way, in integrity of heart and mind, I couldn't make it do so.  At one point there was real despair in my heart.  I had gotten so sucked in to the cult of objectivism that I forgot who it was who brought me to faith in the first place.  Only when I grudgingly accepted the fact that *some* faith had to be involved--and that through the Spirit's agency--could I get past my despair.  The non-verifiable elements of evangelicalism had become an embarrassment to me, rather than an anchor.

***(8) The power brokers of rational evangelicalism, since the turn of the century, have been white, obsessive-compulsive males.*** Ever since the days of the Princetonians (Warfield, Hodge, Machen, et al.), American non-charismatic evangelicalism has been dominated by Scottish common sense, post-Enlightenment, left-brain, obsessive-compulsive, white males.  Perhaps this situation is suppressing a part of the image of God; perhaps it is suppressing a part of the witness of the Spirit.  And perhaps it is not in line with historic Christianity.**[8](https://bible.org/article/uneasy-conscience-non-charismatic-evangelical" \l "_ftn8)**  The implications of this such demographics are manifold.  Three of them are as follows.

The white evangelical community needs to listen to and *learn* from the black evangelical community.  I find it most fascinating that the experience of God in the black *non*-charismatic community is quite different from that in the white non-charismatic community.  In many ways, it resembles the white charismatic experience more than the white cessationist experience of God.  A full-orbed experience of God must take place in the context of community.  And that community must be heterogenous.  If, as has been often stated, the 11 o'clock hour on Sunday morning is the most segregated in America, then something is desperately wrong with the Church.

The Holy Spirit does not work just on the left brain.  He also works on the right brain: he sparks our imagination, causes us to rejoice, laugh, sing, and *create*.  Few Christians are engaged and fully committed to the arts today.  Where are the hymn writers?  Where are the novelists?  Painters?  Playwrights?  A very high-powered editor of a Christian magazine told me two weeks ago that he knows of only one exceptional Christian fiction writer.  What are our seminaries doing to encourage these right brainers?  What is the Church doing to encourage them?

By and large, women are more in tune with their right brain than men are.  We men have failed to listen to the women in our midst--and this failure is related to our not hearing the voice of the Spirit.  If the *Imago Dei* is both male and female, by squelching the valuable contribution of women, we distort that very image before a watching world.

**(9) The Holy Spirit's guidance is still needed in discerning the will of God.** The rationalism in our circles makes decision-making a purely cognitive exercise.  There is no place for prayer.  There is no room for the Spirit.  I believe there is a middle ground between expecting daily revelations on the one hand, and basing decisions solely on logic and common sense on the other.  Garry Friesen's Decision-Making and the Will of God went a long way to correct some silly notions about how we function in the mundane.  But I believe that Friesen went too far.  I may not receive revelations, but I do believe that the Spirit often guides me with inarticulate impulses.  Admittedly, this is primarily in the moral realm and Friesen was dealing basically with the amoral realm.  Yet, a basic recognition that the Spirit does guide me today in all realms makes me increasingly sensitive to his guidance in the moral realm.

***(10) In the midst of seeking out the power of the Spirit, we must not avoid the sufferings of Christ.****T*his is the message of Mark: the disciples could not have Christ in his glory without Christ in his suffering.  Too often when we decide that it's a good thing to get to know God again, we go about it on our own terms.  Again, I speak from personal experience.

Six weeks ago, one of my students died of cancer.  Another was about to die.  I began urging students at Dallas Seminary to pray for God's intervention.  The Lord did not answer our prayer in the way we had hoped.  Three weeks ago, Brendan Ryan was buried.  My own pain was increased when I saw his three small children paraded in front of the mourners at his memorial service.  I had only visited Brendan once in the hospital; I was determined not to let such happen again.

Two more of my students are on the verge of death.  I have called them and visited them in the past week.  And I learned about suffering and honesty with God.  I questioned God--and still do.  Out of my pain--pain for these students and their families, pain for my son, pain for myself--comes honesty and growth.  I have moments when I doubt God's goodness.  Yet I do not doubt that he has suffered for me far more than I will ever suffer for him.  And that is the only reason I let him hold my hand through this dark valley.  In seeking God's power, I discovered his person.  He is not just omnipotent; he is also the God of all comfort.  And taking us *through* suffering, not out of it, is one of the primary means that the Spirit uses today in bringing us to God.

***(11) Finally, a question: To what does the Spirit bear witness?***Certainly the resurrection of Christ.  How about the scriptures?  A particular interpretation perhaps?  Eschatological issues?  Exegetical issues?  Don't be too quick to answer.  Some of this needs rethinking . . .  In fact, my challenge to each of you is this: reexamine the New Testament teaching about the Holy Spirit.  Don't gloss over the passages, but wrestle with what they mean.  If the Spirit did not die in the first century, then what is he doing today?

**[1](https://bible.org/article/uneasy-conscience-non-charismatic-evangelical" \l "_ftnref1)**This is what I would call concentric cessationism, as opposed to linear cessationism.  That is, rather than taking a chronologically linear approach, this kind of cessationism affirms that as the gospel moves, like the rippling effect of a stone dropping into a pond, in a space-time expanding circle away from first century Jerusalem, the sign gifts will still exist on the cutting edge of that circle.  Thus, for example, in third world countries at the time when the gospel is first proclaimed, the sign gifts would be present.  This view, then, would allow for these gifts to exist on the frontiers of Christianity, but would be more skeptical of them in the 'worked over' areas.

**[2](https://bible.org/article/uneasy-conscience-non-charismatic-evangelical" \l "_ftnref2)**At present I am co-editing a book on this very topic, provisionally entitled, *Who's Afraid of the Holy Spirit?  Or, Pneumatic Christianity: A Third Alternative*.  This book will be written by cessationists for cessationists.  We have a very long lead time with the publisher, in part to get the qualified people to sign on, in part to give the two editors time to sort out and articulate what God is doing in the midst of their present crises.

As well, this entire paper is in a seminal stage of development.  I trust you will forgive me for not providing you with a fully manuscripted text.

**[3](https://bible.org/article/uneasy-conscience-non-charismatic-evangelical" \l "_ftnref3)**There were twelve apostles at the Light House.  We knew each one only by their first name because, as apostle Bob said, "the original apostles only had one name."

**[4](https://bible.org/article/uneasy-conscience-non-charismatic-evangelical" \l "_ftnref4)**So much so that as a high school student, during late 60's, I visited the University of California at Irvine to evangelize in a public forum.  The occasion was the capturing of UCI and "sit-in" by the SDS (a young socialist group).  The school shut down while it was under siege.  I sneaked in, hoping to address a group of hundreds of university students about a *greater* revolution than socialism.

**[5](https://bible.org/article/uneasy-conscience-non-charismatic-evangelical" \l "_ftnref5)**I must admit, she has that proverbial Irish temperament, too.  After almost twenty years of living with her, I wouldn't want it any other way.

**[6](https://bible.org/article/uneasy-conscience-non-charismatic-evangelical" \l "_ftnref6)**Andy's nick name.  Since he was about four years old, he has imitated the sounds of the beaker on the PBS program, Sesame Street.

**[7](https://bible.org/article/uneasy-conscience-non-charismatic-evangelical" \l "_ftnref7)**The first case reported in America (1934) was so mild, in fact, that the child died before the parents suspected anything worthy of a doctor's attention.

**[8](https://bible.org/article/uneasy-conscience-non-charismatic-evangelical" \l "_ftnref8)**Along these lines, Vern Poythress read a paper at ETS last November in which he affirmed the miraculous among cessationists.  Part of his argument was to note that cessationists in the 19th century sensed God's presence and saw his works in ways that are not nearly as frequent among cessationists today.

**The Continuation of the Charismata**

BY ANDREW WILSON

<https://themelios.thegospelcoalition.org/article/the-continuation-of-the-charismata/>

This article first defines the scope of the debate over whether or not Christians today should earnestly desire spiritual gifts, especially prophecy. The author then offers three key arguments for the charismatic position and concludes by raising and responding to the strongest argument for cessationism.

It is a huge privilege to open this discussion on spiritual gifts, with Tom Schreiner and other individuals from whom I have learned so much in so many areas.[1](https://themelios.thegospelcoalition.org/article/the-continuation-of-the-charismata/#_ftn1) “The first to present his case *seems* right, until the other comes and examines him” (Prov 18:17 ESV).

Because this exchange is based on two books, rather than one, and because Tom’s book and mine come to different conclusions on the continuation of the *charismata*, it would be easy for a discussion like this to become repetitive.[2](https://themelios.thegospelcoalition.org/article/the-continuation-of-the-charismata/#_ftn2) To try and avoid that, in this article I plan to do three things. First, I will try to define the scope of the debate as simply as possible, so we don’t end up talking past each other. Second, I will lay out the charismatic case in a positive way, with what seem to me the three key arguments for it. Third, I will summarise the strongest argument for cessationism, and then challenge it, before concluding. I will leave a discussion of the other cessationist arguments until we engage with Tom’s book later on.

**1. The Scope of the Debate**

To crystallise the debate in one sentence, I suggest this: *Are disciples today intended to earnestly desire spiritual gifts, especially prophecy?* I’m pretty sure that Tom Schreiner and Ligon Duncan would say no, and that Sam Storms and I would say yes. Prophecy, that is, is the most helpful focus for a concentrated discussion. We are not primarily debating the continuation of the ἀπόστολοι, since we would all agree that eyewitnesses of the resurrection have ceased (the sense of ἀπόστολος in Acts 1:21–26 and 1 Cor 9:1; 15:1–9), and that itinerant missionaries or messengers have not (the sense of ἀπόστολος in 2 Cor 8:23 and probably Rom 16:7). It is also noteworthy that in those passages where Paul urges believers to pursue the gifts, he does not include apostleship as one of them. And although we may disagree about the continuation of the gifts of languages, interpretation, healings, miracles, and discerning spirits—although maybe not so much, as we will see!—I think we would all agree that the key question concerns the continuation of prophecy. Should disciples ‘earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy’? Clarifying that might keep us from getting lost in the weeds.

**2. The Charismatic Case**

For the charismatic, the first reason to say yes is a *hermeneutical* one—namely, that Paul says so. This sounds like a facile remark, and certainly not worthy of such a sophisticated audience, but it is actually very important. Sometimes the exegetical debate over the pursuit of the gifts can look like a no-score-draw, with continuationists pointing out that the New Testament never says the gifts will cease, and cessationists responding that it never says they won’t, either. But this is to reason as if Paul’s instructions to pursue the gifts were not relevant, which they clearly are. ‘Earnestly desire the higher gifts’ (1 Cor 12:27). ‘Earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy’ (14:1). ‘Earnestly desire to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues’ (14:39). ‘Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith’ (Rom 12:6). ‘Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophecies, but test everything; hold fast what is good’ (1 Thess 5:21). Given the clarity and frequency of this apostolic instruction, and given that we would normally assume that New Testament imperatives apply to us unless it is clear from the context that they don’t, charismatics believe that the burden of proof rests with those who say Paul’s instructions don’t apply to us, rather than to those who say they do. (I tend to call this the Presumption Of Obedience, although I’m not wild about the acronym.)

Sometimes, of course, this burden of proof can be met. When we read the whole of Matthew’s Gospel, we recognise that “go nowhere among the Gentiles” (10:5) is not applicable to Christians living this side of the command to “go and make disciples of all nations” (28:19). Nor have there been any Christians in history who have made it their business to go to Troas and look for Paul’s coat; it is obvious from Paul’s letter that his request applied only to Timothy. But if an instruction appears frequently, to multiple different churches, at some length in one case, and there is no clear indication in the text that the instruction has since been superseded or relativised, we should assume it also applies to us, and require a significant burden of proof from those who say it does not. (We will look at the attempts to meet this burden of proof, or even to argue that the burden of proof lies elsewhere, in due course.) That is the hermeneutical argument for the charismatic gifts.

The second argument, to the surprise of some, is *historical*. That is, one of the best reasons to think the miraculous gifts continued beyond the deaths of the apostles is the fact that, according to many of the Church fathers, they did. In the context of contemporary debates this point is often lost, not least because the gift which has proved the most divisive in the last hundred years or so, namely the gift of languages, is the one over which the patristic evidence is least clear. But I am not aware of any writer before Chrysostom or Augustine making a cessationist argument about any of the gifts—and Augustine’s argument, famously, refers only to the gift of languages, and needs to be set alongside his extended treatment of miracles and healings in the *City of God*.

Justin Martyr claimed, ‘The prophetical gifts remain with us, even to the present time.’[3](https://themelios.thegospelcoalition.org/article/the-continuation-of-the-charismata/#_ftn3) Irenaeus said, ‘Those who are in truth his disciples’ performed miracles according to the gift given them, including driving out demons, seeing visions, uttering prophetic expressions, healing the sick, raising the dead, speaking in other languages, and declaring the mysteries of God.[4](https://themelios.thegospelcoalition.org/article/the-continuation-of-the-charismata/#_ftn4) (Eusebius uses this excerpt to demonstrate that ‘various gifts remained among those who were worthy even until that time.’[5](https://themelios.thegospelcoalition.org/article/the-continuation-of-the-charismata/#_ftn5)) Tertullian trash-talks Marcion, like Elijah on Mount Carmel, by daring his god to predict things to come, make manifest the secrets of the heart, interpret tongues or prophesy, before claiming that ‘all these signs are forthcoming from my side without any difficulty.’[6](https://themelios.thegospelcoalition.org/article/the-continuation-of-the-charismata/#_ftn6) Origen regarded the scope of the gifts as having diminished but certainly not disappeared: ‘there are still preserved among Christians traces of that Holy Spirit which appeared in the form of a dove. They expel evil spirits, and perform many cures, and foresee certain events, according to the will of the Logos.’[7](https://themelios.thegospelcoalition.org/article/the-continuation-of-the-charismata/#_ftn7) Basil the Great said, ‘The Spirit enlightens all, inspires prophets, gives wisdom to lawmakers, consecrates priests, empowers kings, perfects the just, exalts the prudent, is active in gifts of healing, gives life to the dead, frees those in bondage, turns foreigners into adopted sons.’[8](https://themelios.thegospelcoalition.org/article/the-continuation-of-the-charismata/#_ftn8) Cyril of Jerusalem explained, ‘He employs the tongue of one man for wisdom; the soul of another he enlightens by prophecy; to another he gives power to drive away devils.’[9](https://themelios.thegospelcoalition.org/article/the-continuation-of-the-charismata/" \l "_ftn9) And Augustine, as we know, lists an extraordinary range of healings from blindness, rectal fistula, breast cancer, gout, paralysis, hernia, demonization and even death.[10](https://themelios.thegospelcoalition.org/article/the-continuation-of-the-charismata/" \l "_ftn10)

From a purely historical perspective, then, the idea that the miraculous gifts suddenly stopped when the last apostle died is simply untenable. There are of course cessationists (like Tom) who grant this point, and see the cessation of prophecy and the other miraculous gifts as happening gradually across the first four centuries. But this concession is crucial, because it shows that there is no necessary conflict between foundational, infallible, apostolic teaching, and ongoing prophetic insight. That is the point that charismatics have been making for decades.

The third argument is *eschatological*. The gifts of the Spirit, and prophecy in particular, are seen by the apostles as characterising the entire era between Pentecost and the parousia, the coming of the Spirit and the return of Christ. So as long as we still live between the inauguration and the consummation of the kingdom—between D-day and VE-day, in Cullmann’s famous analogy—we should continue to expect, and pursue, all the spiritual gifts.[11](https://themelios.thegospelcoalition.org/article/the-continuation-of-the-charismata/" \l "_ftn11)

This expectation is clear on the day of Pentecost itself. At the start of the first sermon ever preached by a Christian, Peter explicitly connects the last days, the pouring out of the Spirit on all nations, and the gift of prophecy, with the latter a clear demonstration of the former. (As charismatics are fond of pointing out, Peter doesn’t say, ‘In the last days I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and they will prophesy—but after that I won’t, and they won’t.’) When Paul thanks God for the Corinthians, he reminds them that ‘the testimony about Christ was confirmed among you, so that you are not lacking in any *charismata*, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ’ (1 Cor 1:7–8). In other words, the *charismata* are theirs while they wait for Jesus to be revealed. Similar things are true of the famous ending to 1 Corinthians 13, verses 8–10: ‘As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away.’ Paul believes in the cessation of the gifts, but he believes it will happen ‘when the perfect comes’, and expresses the contrast in four ways: the partial versus the perfect, childhood versus maturity, dimness of sight versus clarity, and partial knowledge versus fullness. Despite occasional exegetical gymnastics to try and prove the contrary, this can only really refer to the return of Christ, as Tom (another spoiler alert) rightly points out in his book.[12](https://themelios.thegospelcoalition.org/article/the-continuation-of-the-charismata/" \l "_ftn12)

When we read Paul with this eschatological framework in mind—recognising that believers live in the ‘last days’, between Pentecost and Parousia, characterised both by the gift of the Spirit and the gifts of the Spirit until the return of Christ—we see it everywhere. We observe that Paul’s exhortation to ‘be filled with the Spirit’, characterised by (among other things) singing ‘spiritual songs’, is given as long as ‘the days are evil’. We notice that the exhortation to use spiritual gifts (including prophecy) in Romans applies to the period between Jesus’s resurrection and return: the time during which believers need not to be conformed to the pattern of this world, as their salvation gets ever nearer. We see that the command not to quench the Spirit or despise prophecy, in 1 Thessalonians, appears in the context of living godly lives as we wait for Jesus to return. Some of these texts are more explicit than others. But it seems clear that Paul anticipates the charismatic gifts, including prophecy and languages, remaining with the Church until the coming of Christ—at which point they will no longer be needed.

That, in a very, very small nutshell, is the charismatic argument for the continuation of the *charismata*. Eschatologically, we would expect them to continue; historically, they did; and hermeneutically, we would expect to eagerly desire them, especially prophecy, since Paul says so.

**3. The Strongest Cessationist Criticism**

The strongest criticism of this position, and the best way of attempting to meet the burden of proof I have mentioned, is the argument from the infallibility of New Testament prophecy, as expressed in writers like Richard Gaffin and Tom Schreiner. If New Testament prophecy is infallible and foundational, and associated with the infallible and foundational witness of the apostles, then claims to fallible prophecy today—‘I think the Lord is saying this, but I may be wrong, so my words need to be weighed and tested’, or whatever—cannot be sustained as biblical. So whatever we think of that phenomenon, and whatever else we call it (impressions, insights, intuitions, insanity!), it is not what the New Testament means by προφητεύω. Plenty of other cessationist arguments are made, of course, but as I said at the start, we will leave those for later.

The logical shape of the argument goes like this:

1. Prophesying in the Old Testament was infallible divine revelation. Aside from the numerous ‘thus says the Lord’ statements, the key texts here are Deuteronomy 13 and 18, especially 18:22: ‘When a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, if the word does not come to pass or come true, that is a word that the Lord has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously. You shall not be afraid of him.’
2. There is no indication of a change between Old and New Testaments on this point. Therefore, we should assume that prophesying in the New Testament is also infallible divine revelation.
3. Paul describes the church as “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets” (Eph 2:20), which indicates that New Testament prophecy is not just infallible but also foundational.
4. Therefore, the Pauline exhortations to pursue spiritual gifts, especially prophecy, should be considered as unique to the first century (or the first four centuries), and no longer binding on the church today.

If the first three steps are all true, then the fourth one follows. But there are good exegetical reasons to challenge all three of them.

(1) Is prophesying in the Old Testament always infallible divine revelation? Iain Duguid, in the *Festschrift* for Vern Poythress, demonstrates that in all sorts of instances where the word ‘prophet’ or ‘prophesying’ is used in the Hebrew Bible, ‘there is no suggestion of anyone listening to or being instructed by authoritative pronouncements’ (e.g. Gen 20:7; Num 11:25–29; 1 Sam 10:6; 19:20–23; 1 Kgs 18:4; 2 Kgs 2:3; 4:38; 6:1; 9:1; 17:13; 1 Chr 25:1–3; 29:29; 2 Chr 9:29; 12:15; 13:22).[13](https://themelios.thegospelcoalition.org/article/the-continuation-of-the-charismata/" \l "_ftn13) Rather, the person in view may be engaged in prayer, or ecstatic speech, or leading worship, or writing court history, or none of the above. In such cases, Duguid argues, ‘prophecy functions not to convey divinely inspired information but to identify divinely indwelt individuals.’ It is therefore possible—we might even say common—for Old Testament prophesying not to involve infallible divine revelation, but to mark out those in whom the Spirit of God is at work. It is this, rather than the demand for further infallible divine revelation, that is behind Moses’s famous challenge in Numbers 11:29: ‘Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the LORD’s people were prophets, that the LORD would put his Spirit on them!’

(2) That, of course, is exactly what the Lord does at Pentecost. And that is the sense in which there *is* a substantial change between Old and New Testaments when it comes to the gift of prophecy: not that prophecy suddenly becomes fallible, but that its scope is dramatically widened (‘I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy’, Acts 2:17), and its purpose explicitly connected with the new age of the Spirit, in which the Lord will put his Spirit on all believers, as Moses had asked all those years before. We can argue the toss about whether Agabus was mistaken in certain details in Acts 21:10–11, and there are plenty of interpreters on both sides. But the key point in Acts is that lots of prophesying does not look at all like Deuteronomy 18, in which we either get the new prophet like Moses, or an impostor who speaks in the name of other gods. The term is used far more broadly than that: it might refer to declaring the mighty works of God to others, extolling God, encouraging and strengthening the brothers, or simply speaking in ways that reveal the individual to be filled with the Spirit (2:11; 15:32; 19:6; 21:9). That same polyvalence is present in 1 Corinthians 12–14, as we will see.

(3) We also have to ask: Does Ephesians 2:20 show that all prophecy in the New Testament is infallible, divine, foundational revelation? Clearly, this is the role of the prophets to which Paul is referring in this text (and in 3:5), whether or not we agree with Grudem on the grammatical point (which Tom doesn’t, and nor do I).[14](https://themelios.thegospelcoalition.org/article/the-continuation-of-the-charismata/" \l "_ftn14) But is it the only purpose of prophecy, such that anything which does not qualify as ‘foundational’ does not qualify as ‘prophecy’? Richard Gaffin, interestingly, comes clean about which texts have interpretive primacy in his view: ‘As a general guideline for interpretation, the decisive, controlling significance of Eph 2:20 (in its context) needs to be appreciated. It and the other passages that bear on prophecy, like 1 Cor 14, are not of the same order of magnitude exegetically.… Eph 2:20 makes a generalisation that covers all the other New Testament statements on prophecy.’[15](https://themelios.thegospelcoalition.org/article/the-continuation-of-the-charismata/" \l "_ftn15) To which we should ask: really? One mention in Ephesians—in a subclause of a sentence that is primarily about the unity of the church—counts for more than three chapters on the gifts in 1 Corinthians? Why?

If we suspend judgment on that for a moment, and look at 1 Corinthians on its own terms, we get a far more varied perspective on the purpose of prophecy. It is given to encourage, console and edify other believers in the local church (14:3). It brings unbelievers under conviction (14:24), witnesses to the presence of the Holy Spirit in the assembly (14:25), and enables the congregation to learn and be encouraged (14:31). If we add 1 Timothy into the mix, prophecy also provides personal guidance for ministry (1:18), and is associated with appointment to eldership (4:14). Consequently, several of the major commentaries on 1 Corinthians now include Anthony Thiselton’s definition as standard:

Prophecy, as a gift of the Holy Spirit, combines pastoral insight into the needs of persons, communities, and situations with the ability to address these with a God-given utterance or longer discourse (whether unprompted or prepared with judgment, decision and rational reflection) leading to challenge or comfort, judgment, or consolation, but ultimately building up the addressees…. While the speaker believes that such utterances or discourses come from the Holy Spirit, mistakes can be made, and since believers, including ministers or prophets, remain humanly fallible, claims to prophecy must be weighed and tested.[16](https://themelios.thegospelcoalition.org/article/the-continuation-of-the-charismata/" \l "_ftn16)

None of this is to deny that Ephesians 2:20 and 3:5 are speaking of foundational divine revelation. It is simply to deny that those texts provide a Procrustean bed onto which every other use of the word should be forced to fit. The reason we sometimes talk about capital-A and small-a apostles, or capital-T and small-t teachers, or capital-E and small-e evangelists, is that we recognise such gifts come in different ways and for different purposes. We know there is a difference between the kinds of ἀπόστολοι in Acts 1 and 2 Corinthians 8. We assume there is a difference between the διδάσκαλοι that Hebrews 5:12 says we should all aspire to be, and the διδάσκαλοι that James 3:1 says we should *not* aspire to be. There may even be a difference between the sort of εὐαγγελιστής Philip was and the sort Timothy was told to be (Acts 21:8; 2 Tim 4:5). So yes, the προφῆται in Ephesians 2–3 were foundational for the entire subsequent church. Whether those in 1 Corinthians 12–14 were as well—and I have deliberately omitted the references in Romans and 1 Thessalonians, of which similar things are true—needs to be shown, not assumed.

**4. Conclusion**

Thus, I think there are good hermeneutical, historical and eschatological arguments for the charismatic position, and that the strongest argument against it ultimately falls. But I want to finish with a story from a fellow pastor of a London Baptist megachurch. Charles Spurgeon, as far as I know, never uses the word ‘prophecy’ to refer to this sort of phenomenon, although he does talk about revelation, God speaking, and the moving of the Spirit. But this gives a historical snapshot of the kind of thing I Paul may have been talking about, and perhaps also the various church fathers I quoted earlier. He writes:

While preaching in the hall, on one occasion, I deliberately pointed to a man in the midst of the crowd, and said, ‘There is a man sitting there, who is a shoemaker; he keeps his shop open on Sundays, it was open last Sabbath morning, he took ninepence, and there was fourpence profit out of it; his soul is sold to Satan for fourpence!’

The man explains:

I did take ninepence that day, and fourpence was just the profit; but how he should know that, I could not tell. Then it struck me that it was God who had spoken to my soul through him, so I shut up my shop the next Sunday. At first, I was afraid to go again to hear him, lest he should tell the people more about me; but afterwards I went, and the Lord met with me, and saved my soul.

Spurgeon again:

I could tell as many as a dozen similar cases in which I pointed at somebody in the hall without having the slightest knowledge of the person, or any idea that what I said was right, except that I believed I was moved by the Spirit to say it; and so striking has been my description, that the persons have gone away, and said to their friends, ‘Come, see a man that told me all things that ever I did.’[17](https://themelios.thegospelcoalition.org/article/the-continuation-of-the-charismata/" \l "_ftn17)

Earnestly desire spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy.

[[1]](https://themelios.thegospelcoalition.org/article/the-continuation-of-the-charismata/#_ftnref1) An earlier version of this article was delivered at the Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society (Denver, CO, 13 November 2018) in the Perspectives on the Spiritual Gifts session, moderated by Patrick Schreiner, with responses from Tom Schreiner and Ligon Duncan.

[[2]](https://themelios.thegospelcoalition.org/article/the-continuation-of-the-charismata/#_ftnref2) Thomas R. Schreiner, *Spiritual Gifts: What They Are and Why They Matter* (Nashville: B&H, 2018); Andrew Wilson, *Spirit and Sacrament: An Invitation to Eucharismatic Worship* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2019).

[[3]](https://themelios.thegospelcoalition.org/article/the-continuation-of-the-charismata/#_ftnref3) Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 82.

[[4]](https://themelios.thegospelcoalition.org/article/the-continuation-of-the-charismata/#_ftnref4) Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 2.32.4; 5.6.1.

[[5]](https://themelios.thegospelcoalition.org/article/the-continuation-of-the-charismata/#_ftnref5) Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 5.7.1–6; cf. also 5.17.4, quoting Apollinaris: ‘for the apostle thought it necessary that the prophetic gift should continue in all the Church until the final coming.’

[[6]](https://themelios.thegospelcoalition.org/article/the-continuation-of-the-charismata/#_ftnref6) Tertullian, *Against Marcion*, 5.8.

[[7]](https://themelios.thegospelcoalition.org/article/the-continuation-of-the-charismata/#_ftnref7) Origen, *Against Celsus* 1.2, 46, 67; cf. also 2:8; 3:3; 7.8; 8:58. Origen is sometimes quoted in support of cessationism, but it seems clear from *Against Celsus* that he regarded miraculous signs and gifts, including prophecy, healings, and the casting out of demons, to have diminished since the time of the apostles, but not to have ceased.

[[8]](https://themelios.thegospelcoalition.org/article/the-continuation-of-the-charismata/#_ftnref8) Basil, *Homily* 3, translated in Mark DelCogliano, *St Basil the Great: On Christian Doctrine and Practice* (Yonkers, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2013), 238.

[[9]](https://themelios.thegospelcoalition.org/article/the-continuation-of-the-charismata/" \l "_ftnref9) Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures* 16.12.

[[10]](https://themelios.thegospelcoalition.org/article/the-continuation-of-the-charismata/" \l "_ftnref10) Augustine, *City of God* 22.8.

[[11]](https://themelios.thegospelcoalition.org/article/the-continuation-of-the-charismata/" \l "_ftnref11) Oscar Cullmann, *Christ and Time: The Primitive Christian Conception of Time and History*, trans. Floyd V. Filson, rev. ed. (London: SCM, 1962).

[[12]](https://themelios.thegospelcoalition.org/article/the-continuation-of-the-charismata/" \l "_ftnref12) Schreiner, *Spiritual Gifts*, 147–53

[[13]](https://themelios.thegospelcoalition.org/article/the-continuation-of-the-charismata/" \l "_ftnref13) Iain M. Duguid, ‘What Kind of Prophecy Continues? Defining the Differences Between Continuationism and Cessationism’, in *Redeeming the Life of the Mind: Essays in Honor of Vern Poythress*, ed. John Frame, Wayne Grudem and John Hughes (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 112–28.

[[14]](https://themelios.thegospelcoalition.org/article/the-continuation-of-the-charismata/" \l "_ftnref14) Wayne Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today*, 2nd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2000), 329–46.

[[15]](https://themelios.thegospelcoalition.org/article/the-continuation-of-the-charismata/" \l "_ftnref15) Richard Gaffin, *Perspectives on Pentecost: New Testament Teaching on the Gifts of the Holy Spirit* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1979), 96.

[[16]](https://themelios.thegospelcoalition.org/article/the-continuation-of-the-charismata/" \l "_ftnref16) Anthony Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 965.

[[17]](https://themelios.thegospelcoalition.org/article/the-continuation-of-the-charismata/" \l "_ftnref17) Charles Spurgeon, *The Autobiography of Charles H. Spurgeon* (Cincinnati: Curts & Jennings, 1898–1900), 2:226–27. Spurgeon was steeped in Scripture, of course, so it is not surprising that there are echoes of a number of biblical texts in this paragraph, some of which explicitly refer to prophecy (John 4:29; 1 Cor 14:25; compare his remarks on being moved by the Spirit with Acts 13:2; 19:21; 20:22; 21:4).

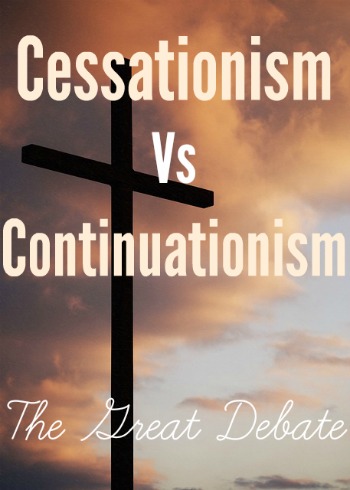
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Cessationism Vs Continuationism

William B. Hemsworth Jan 11, 2020  [Blog](https://biblereasons.com/category/blog/)[0 comments](https://biblereasons.com/cessationism-vs-continuationism/#commentform)

One of the big debates in theological circles today is that of continuationism and cessationism. Before an analysis can begin it is first necessary to describe what these two terms mean. Continuationism is the belief that some gift of the Holy Spirit, that are mentioned in Scripture, ceased with the death of the last apostle. Cessationism is the belief that certain gifts such as healing, prophecy, and tongues ceased with the death of the apostles.



This dispute has been widely debated for decades, and shows very little sign of a conclusion. One of the key disputes in this controversy is the interpretation of what these spiritual gifts mean.

The gift of prophecy is a perfect example of this. In the Old Testament, God spoke through prophets to warn, guide, and transmit divine revelation (i.e. Scripture).

Those who say that the gift of prophecy ceased with the death of the apostles see prophecy as revelation. To an extent that is true, but it is so much more than that. Prophecy can also mean edifying and [exhorting the body of believers to be a better witness for Christ](https://biblereasons.com/witnessing-to-others/).

One such theologian that believes in cessationism is Dr. Peter Enns. Dr. Enns is a professor of Biblical theology at Eastern University, and widely respected in theological circles. His work is beneficial to the body of Christ, and has helped me immensely in my theological studies.

He writes at length about why he believes cessationism to be the case in his great work *The Moody Handbook of Theology.*It is this work in which I will primarily be interacting.Though I understand the viewpoint of Dr. Enns in relation to the spiritual gifts I must disagree with his assertion that some gifts ceased with the death of the last Apostle. The gifts of tongues and discerning spirits are gifts I would tend to disagree with Dr. Enns on.

Regarding the gift of tongues [1 Corinthians 14:27-28](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Corinthians+14%3A27-28&version=ESV) states, “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 [1].”

Paul is writing to the church at Corinth, and is plainly telling them what to do if a congregation member started to speak in tongues. Though some apostles were still alive, Paul is writing this within the context of church discipline. This is ongoing instruction that he wants the church to follow long after he is gone. Someone must interpret the message, it must not be in addition to Scripture, but must substantiate it. I have been in churches where someone starts to speak in “tongues”, but no one interprets what is said to the congregation. This is counter to Scripture, as Scripture states that one must interpret for the good of all. If one does this it is for the glory of himself, and not for the glory of Christ.

In regards to discerning spirits Dr. Enns writes, “Those given the gift were given the supernatural ability to determine if the revelation was true or false[[1]](https://biblereasons.com/cessationism-vs-continuationism/#_ftn1).”

According to Dr. Enns, this gift died with the death of the last Apostle because the New Testament canon is now complete. In 1 John 4:1 the Apostle John writes, “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for [many false prophets have gone out into the world](https://biblereasons.com/false-teachers/).”

We are to constantly see if a new teaching is of God, and we do this by comparing it to Scripture. We must discern these things, and it is an ongoing process. It seems someone is always trying to add some new theology or manmade system. By discerning spirits, we can point out was is right and wrong about something. Scripture is the blueprint, but we must still discern if something is correct or heretical.

Dr. Enns also cites this verse in his reasons as to why the gift has ceased. However, Paul speaks of the gift in several of his writings. One such writing is 1 Thessalonians 5:21 which states, “But test everything; hold fast what is good.” It is spoken of in the present tense as something we should be doing on an ongoing basis.

I am of the opinion that the spiritual gifts have not ceased, and I am fully aware that some will disagree with me. The gifts do not convey extra-biblical revelation, but compliment them and assist the body of Christ in understanding existing revelation. Anything that claims to be a gift must not say anything contrary to Scripture. If it does it is from the enemy.

Are those that hold to cessationism not Christian? No. Are those that hold to continuationism not Christian? Not at all. If we claim Christ, then we are brothers and sisters. It is important to understand opinions that are contrary to our own.  We do not have to agree, and it is fine to disagree with me regarding the spiritual gifts. Though this debate is important, the Great commission and reaching souls for Christ is so much greater.

**WORKS CITED**

Enns, Paul. *The Moody Handbook of Theology*. Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2014.

[[1]](https://biblereasons.com/cessationism-vs-continuationism/#_ftnref1) Paul Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2014), 289.

