

# THE VALIDITY FOR THE CHURCH TODAY OF CHARISMATIC GIFTS WITHIN THE DISPENSATION OF GRACE

## CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION

The gifts of the Holy Spirit, of knowledge, wisdom, prophecy, healing, and tongues (and interpretation), are operative within the Christian community today. However, they have a specific Biblical framework in which they may be properly exercised for the good of the body of Christ.

Two crucial labels will repeatedly be used throughout the thesis. Since Christians often assign varying definitions to them, the reader must understand the author's definitions as used throughout this work. These are the terms "charismatic" and "cessationist." Simply stated, a charismatic is one (for this paper) who believes these spiritual gifts in the New Testament are active and proper for the Church today. The author is a charismatic. The reader is encouraged to stay focused on this narrow definition, and not add to it teachings or past experiences within various charismatic denominations to which he may have been exposed. Contrariwise, by "cessationist" the author is describing one who believes that these specific gifts of the Spirit are no longer active. In labeling one a cessationist, the author does not imply this Christian believes all spiritual gifts have ceased, as some use the term. Instead, the author limits its use to those

who believe in certain spiritual gifts for today, such as teaching, giving, or exhortation, but reject the so-called “sign gifts” listed above. In fact, it is the cessationist’s desire to separate the spiritual gifts of the New Testament into these two categories that provides the motivation and establishes the need for this work.

The need is twofold, in seeking to establish a proper middle ground within this controversial doctrine. The author declares the cessationist argument Biblically weak and unconvincing in making its case as to why certain gifts of the Spirit have ceased while others continue. This is due to four primary reasons. Many arguments are made more from anecdotal evidence than from a solidly reasoned Biblical discussion. The cessationist often uses the witness of Church history instead of Scripture to support his case.<sup>1</sup> The excesses of Pentecostals and television evangelists are displayed and dismissed as if doing so is satisfactory evidence alone. Dr. John Walvoord makes this exact argument. In speaking of the sign gifts, he writes:

Some of these are claimed for today by certain sects, whose neglect of the Scriptural instructions for use of these gifts is in itself a testimony to the spurious quality of their affected gifts.<sup>2</sup>

However, the erroneous teachings of some groups are not sufficient evidence alone to reject a doctrine in its entirety.

Along this line of thinking is the second reason. Certain incorrect doctrines of various teachers or denominations are presented as representative of all charismatic theology. While this is not equal to “strawman” arguments, nevertheless, one can remain charismatic without remotely believing some of these radical opinions. For example,

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<sup>1</sup> For clarity, throughout this work, the author will capitalize, Church, when speaking in general of Christendom, and will use lower case in speaking of a specific church fellowship.

<sup>2</sup> John F. Walvoord, *The Holy Spirit: A Comprehensive Study of the Person and Work of the Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1965), 168.

while it is perfectly proper and necessary to refute a teaching such as the one stating all believers must speak in tongues, it is a false conclusion to assume all charismatics believe this same teaching. Dr. Merrill Unger reflects this view in the first paragraph of his book, *The Baptism & Gifts of the Holy Spirit*.

One of the most noteworthy features of twentieth-century Christianity is the rise of a strong charismatic movement within the church. Appearing in various forms, this species has one common basic element. It highlights the baptism of the Spirit, which it construes as an experience of power subsequent to salvation and maintains the evidence of this experience is speaking in tongues.<sup>3</sup>

He then cites a solitary Pentecostal source for support. While it is true Unger might have cited hundreds of Pentecostals, it would not make his stereotypical statement accurate.

In contrast, Pastor Chuck Smith, founder of the Calvary Chapel movement, has written clearly in this regard, offering yet one simple example of how the cessationists are guilty of stereotyping in this matter.

I cannot deny the validity of the Spirit-filled lives of many of those dynamic leaders and laymen in the church today who have never enjoyed the experience of speaking in tongues, and I prefer their fellowship over many who promote the speaking in tongues as the only true evidence of the Spirit-filled life, but whose personal lives are marred by strife or pride and often even heresy.<sup>4</sup>

As will be shown, this author rejects the teaching that tongues are essential for a charismatic, and likewise rejects the view that the baptism of the Spirit is a work subsequent to salvation. Yet, Unger declares that to be a charismatic this is a “common basic element.”

Thirdly, when cessationists do offer Biblical support to refute the charismatic view, that which is cited typically results from selective verses, rather than thorough exegesis within context. These verses fail to provide adequate support for the cessationist

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<sup>3</sup> Merrill F. Unger, *The Baptism and Gifts of the Holy Spirit* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1974), 7.

<sup>4</sup> Chuck Smith, *Charisma Vs. Charismania* (Eugene: Harvest House Publishers, 1983), 110.

view, and will be analyzed in detail. A fourth and final concern is that the cessationists are not united in their Biblical arguments. While agreeing that certain gifts have ceased, the Biblical reasoning to support the position varies widely. As one cessationist points to a given passage with authority as providing significant textual support to the view, a second cessationist will readily agree with the charismatic that said passage is not properly being interpreted, yet substitute another verse instead.

A secondary purpose of this work is to counter errors within charismatic circles that provide a poor witness. These would include errors of doctrinal teaching, as well as errors of practice within church services. Therefore, in addition to refuting the cessationist viewpoint, the author will specifically define these gifts, while providing Biblical examples, as well as examples of their proper use today. Doing so will show that a charismatic theology does not contradict Scripture, and hopefully will guide those readers in their practice and discussion of the gifts with other Christians.

Since often these errors revolve around the doctrine of the baptism of the Spirit, the author will establish from Scripture that the baptism of the Spirit happens at the moment of salvation, as the believer is placed within the body of Christ. Therefore, it is not something for believers to seek as a secondary blessing. Readers of this work will find the author's view in this area to be similar to traditional Baptist theology.

It bears mentioning that this thesis should be viewed through the lens of traditional dispensationalism. The author essentially embraces a traditional dispensationalist theology, while duly acknowledging there are many controversies within dispensational theology that are outside the scope of this work.<sup>5</sup> The author accepts that the Bible teaches a pretribulation rapture of the Church with a premillennial

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<sup>5</sup> For the rest of the thesis, the author uses the term dispensationalism in the traditional sense.

Second Coming of Christ. The dispensation of grace began at Pentecost, as described in Acts, chapter two, continues into the present day, and will remain until the Rapture of the Church.

Likewise, the author is in agreement with Dr. Charles Ryrie's *sine qua non* of dispensationalism. This stresses a literal, historical, grammatical interpretation of Scripture, with the underlying purpose of God as bringing glory to Himself.<sup>6</sup> The cessationists cited will typically share this same dispensational viewpoint. The author will show how these cessationist dispensationalists are inconsistent. These men challenge or ignore certain arguments used against them by critics of dispensationalism, but then utilize these same arguments to support cessationism. This inconsistency will be highlighted in detail.

Since God has a purpose for all gifts, the local church that ignores the validity of some, while embracing others, is not operating with the full measure of God's spiritual power as it could (or should). Many believers who embrace these gifts are forced to seek fellowship at churches that over-emphasize the gifts, at the expense of sound doctrine. The author desires his reader, no matter which view he presently supports, to evaluate carefully and logically the Scriptural discussion that is to follow.

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<sup>6</sup> Charles C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), 39-41.

## CHAPTER TWO A FALSE PREMISE

There is one underlying, oft-repeated premise for the cessationist, to the point that Christians accept it as doctrinal truth without usually seeking a Biblical justification for the view. In fact, there seems little possibility that any Christian could arrive at the cessationist's conclusion by solely reading the Bible. This premise is that sign gifts were needed only until the New Testament was written, so God bestowed these gifts for a season until the canon's completion at the end of the first century. It is a teaching that must originate with the commentators, not the Scriptures. Only after acceptance of the teaching *a priori* is the Bible then consulted, with select verses chosen for validation.

### *This False Premise Illustrated*

Warren Wiersbe provides an illustration. While not exalting Wiersbe as a leading theologian, nevertheless he is typical of the popular Bible commentator of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, read by millions, and trusted as a conservative inerrantist when it comes to discussing the Word of God. In his commentary on First Corinthians, chapter twelve, he states:

In the early church, miracles were a part of the credentials of God's servants (Heb. 2:1-4). In fact, miracles, healings, and tongues all belong to what theologians call "the sign gifts" and belonged in a special way to the infancy of

the church. The Book of Acts, as well as church history, indicates that these miraculous gifts passed off the scene.<sup>7</sup>

Wiersbe does not explain further in his First Corinthians commentary how exactly Acts shows these gifts “passing off the scene.” This quote properly reflects the underlying premise of the cessationist: the sign gifts’ legitimacy belonged only to the early Church of the apostolic age.

As to what sort of timeframe is included when discussing the infant Church of the apostolic age, the most common marker is the completion of the final New Testament canonical book, Revelation. Ryrie makes this point in discussing the sign gift of prophecy by stating it “was a gift for the founding of the church, unnecessary after that period and after Revelation was written in the New Testament.”<sup>8</sup> Conservative scholars typically date Revelation around A.D. 96.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, the cessationist argues that certain spiritual gifts ended with the close of the first century, less than fourscore years into the present dispensation, while other spiritual gifts have had a lifespan of almost two full millennia, and will continue until this dispensation closes. The sign gifts are not present today, for instead the Church has a complete canon of Scripture.

However, this same canon’s existence is not sufficient to eliminate the need for all the spiritual gifts. Ryrie provides a fascinating perspective with this quote, penned only three pages before the citation on prophecy in the preceding paragraph.

If spiritual gifts were given to the early church only or are irrelevant to service today, then why do they appear in New Testament books written to the second generation of believers and to those who lived throughout the Roman Empire (Ephesians and 1 Peter)? Furthermore, since gifts are necessary for the

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<sup>7</sup> Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary: Volume 1* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1989), 608.

<sup>8</sup> Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology: A Popular Systematic Guide to Understanding Biblical Truth* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), 429.

<sup>9</sup> Irving L. Jensen, *Jensen’s Survey of the New Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1981), 493.

proper functioning of the body of Christ, how could they not be given today and yet have the church maintain that proper functioning?<sup>10</sup>

These same two questions posed by Ryrie could reasonably be asked of him concerning the need for the sign gifts, as could a third. Why can the Church function properly without some of the gifts, due to the New Testament's completion, but cannot without other gifts? Nevertheless, this is the foundation for the cessationist.

One of the most important issues in challenging the cessationist view is the way the book of Acts speaks to the means by which the Scriptures brought one to salvation. Ryrie and other cessationist authors speak of some gifts as unnecessary once the New Testament was completed. It is only logical to reverse this argument and assume the implication that these gifts were necessary, lacking the New Testament Scriptures.

However, in the early chapters of Acts, Peter uses multiple Old Testament verses for supporting his message that Jesus was God's Son, the Messiah, Who died and yet rose from the dead. The cessationist might say that these verses followed sign gifts, namely tongues in chapter two, and a healing that prefaced the messages given in chapters three and four. While true, is the argument then that without these signs, the Scriptures alone would not have been effective?

### *The Sufficiency of the Old Testament to Save*

Acts is quite clear that the Old Testament canon alone was sufficient to proclaim Jesus as Messiah and lead many to salvation, without any sign gifts. For example, Acts seventeen begins with Paul's ministry in Thessalonica.

Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. Then Paul, as his

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<sup>10</sup> Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, 426.



custom was, went in to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the scriptures, explaining and demonstrating that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, “This Jesus whom I preach to you is the Christ.” And some of them were persuaded; and a great multitude of the devout Greeks, and not a few of the leading women, joined Paul and Silas (Acts 17:1-4).<sup>11</sup>

There is no mention of any miracles during this part of Paul’s ministry. However, the persecution that followed sent Paul (and Silas) to Berea.

Concerning the Bereans, the Word of God declares:

These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so. Therefore many of them believed, and also not a few of the Greeks, prominent women as well as men (Acts 17:11-12).

Of special note is the conjunction, therefore (οὖν), for it connects the faith of these new believers with the study of the Scriptures. The record does not tell us Paul’s word was believed because of any signs, but rather because it agreed with the Scriptures. The Scriptures mentioned, as in the entire book of Acts, are of course the Old Testament.

One might suggest that these are unique circumstances since Paul was preaching to Jews in a synagogue in both of these cities. Jews naturally would be more open to the authority of their Scriptures, especially those faithful enough to gather for services in a synagogue. Of course, Peter was preaching to Jews and proselytes as well, and at the temple no less, when God chose to perform the aforementioned miracles before his sermons. Nevertheless, the suggestion loses its merit for the seventeenth chapter of Acts concludes with Paul preaching to Gentiles in Athens. Although this was not his greatest harvest (cf. Acts 17:32), there were some who believed, including Dionysius, Damris and others unnamed (cf. Acts 17:34). The Scriptures do not indicate any miracles used by the apostle.

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<sup>11</sup> The author uses *The New King James Version* for all Bible quotes.

Again, as Paul ventured to Corinth, the Bible declares his reasoning from the Scriptures that Jesus was Christ (cf. Acts 18:4-5). Crispus, his house, and many Corinthians hearing the Word were saved (cf. Acts 18:8), and for eighteen months Paul continued to teach the Word of God among the predominantly Gentile citizens of Corinth (cf. Acts 18:11). Acts is silent on any miracles taking place at this point in Paul's ministry.

In conclusion, the purpose of these brief spotlights on portions of Paul's second missionary journey is to show that the power of God's Word, entirely consisting of Old Testament Scriptures, when used by God's servant was sufficient in the apostolic age of the first century to lead multitudes to saving faith in Jesus Christ, whether Jew or Gentile. This fact is no less true today, though the Church has twenty-seven additional books in its canon. Faith comes by hearing the Word of God (cf. Rom. 10:17). Preaching Jesus Christ entirely from the Old Testament produces a powerful message for salvation today as well, and is especially crucial when witnessing to Jewish individuals. There is certainly no justification from the history of the early Church, as detailed in Acts, that Scripture alone was powerless to save sinners, and spiritual sign gifts were necessary in the first century due to some lack that only later the New Testament canon could fill. Nevertheless, God gave the infant Church these sign gifts. He used them, through the lives of these Christians, for an effective purpose, whenever and however He sovereignly chose.

### CHAPTER THREE THE PURPOSE OF THE SIGN GIFTS

As was shown, Acts teaches that the Old Testament Scriptures alone were sufficient to bring multitudes to salvation, apart from any sign gifts or other supernatural phenomena. However, it is certainly true that the spiritual gifts described in Acts served a purpose in authenticating the message that Jesus is the promised Messiah.

#### *New Testament Examples*

Peter uses the healing of the lame man at the temple to exalt the risen Jesus as the Prince of Life and Son of God before the crowds who wrongly wanted to give Peter himself the credit for the miracle (cf. Acts 3:11-16). His preaching resulted in an arrest by the priests and Sadducees, who challenged Peter (and John) as to the power or name in which they healed the lame man (cf. Acts 4:1-7). Peter then declares what has become a key evangelistic verse in the New Testament.

Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved (Acts 4:12).

The miracle of healing was used to lead to evangelism. Other examples in Acts could be cited (cf. Acts 5:12-14; 6:5-8; 8:5-8; 9:36-42). The miracles reinforced the message being preached, resulting in souls being saved and the growth of the infant Church.

It should be noted clearly that these miracles were mostly connected with evangelistic efforts. Acts gives little detail of the weekly activities of local New Testament churches. Instead the Holy Spirit, through Luke, chose to focus on significant starting points, as the gospel spread to different people and cities within the Roman Empire.

One may conceivably argue a greater need existed of God's more direct intervention in the day-to-day lives of the early believers, via the sign gifts, until the epistles were written to guide them. However, this is not a message plainly declared in Scripture. Greater detail will be given later to the role of the sign gifts in the local Church, both of today and the first century.

### *The Present Need*

For now, the simple question to the cessationist is, "why would this stop?" To elaborate, if sign gifts were effective in the infancy of the Church for evangelism, why would they not be effective today, particularly on the mission field? It was shown earlier that God was capable of using solely the Scripture to lead men to salvation, but sign gifts were often helpful in this regard to aid receptivity of the gospel message. It would seem that what was effective in the first century for reaching a pagan Roman citizen in Europe with the gospel of Christ, of Whom he was previously unaware, would be equally as effective in this century for reaching a pagan African, Hindu, or Buddhist, who likewise had never heard the name of Jesus Christ. God certainly values them as much as the first-century Gentile.

This is an especially significant challenge to the dispensationalist. God's attribute of immutability is unchallenged by conservative theology, but is understood by the dispensationalist in allowing for God to work differently in the various dispensations. However, on this subject, the cessationist argues for a significant change in God's working within the present dispensation of grace. Such a view must require Biblical support, but no passage can be cited which plainly declares this teaching, as will be shown in chapter six.

In conclusion, the spiritual gifts served a valuable purpose in aiding the evangelistic efforts of the early church in foreign lands. The need for evangelism is even greater today, with billions needing to hear the gospel for the first time. The cessationist declares the sign gifts were needed to aid evangelism in the first century. He must then answer why they would not be needed today, under similar situations.

## CHAPTER FOUR THE SIGN GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT

There is much disagreement concerning the exact nature and number of spiritual gifts. John MacArthur has written:

Bible scholars do not agree on the exact number and distinction of kinds of gifts. Because the scriptural lists are not identical, it seems clear that God did not intend to give His church either a rigid or a precise and exhaustive compilation, but rather general categories. One should be careful not to overdefine the gifts.<sup>12</sup>

There are two primary references for listing the spiritual gifts within the New Testament. These are found in Romans (cf. 12:6-8), and First Corinthians (cf. 12:8-10). The Greek word used in both instances is χάρισμα. Another list, found in Ephesians (cf. 4:11), is included with these gifts by some authors, like Walvoord.<sup>13</sup> Others, like MacArthur, choose to categorize the Ephesians passage differently, as the appointment of gifted men in the Church.<sup>14</sup>

### *Spiritual Gifts or Church Offices*

MacArthur, and others who share his perspective, see a distinction between the gifts cited in Romans and First Corinthians, and the list in Ephesians. The Ephesians

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<sup>12</sup> John F. MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: 1 Corinthians* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1984), 291.

<sup>13</sup> Walvoord, 168.

<sup>14</sup> MacArthur, 291,322.

passage does not use the same Greek word, χάρισμα. Instead it speaks to offices within the Church, with the purpose noted in the next verse, namely the equipping of the saints for the work of the ministry and building up of the body of Christ (cf. Eph. 4:12). The four offices listed, if one combines the pastor-teacher as a single office, all involve the public declaration of the Word of God. In addition, there would be confusion with the other two lists if one sees this passage as a separate listing. Both Romans and Corinthians speak of a gift of prophecy, whereas Ephesians speaks of the office of a prophet. Likewise Romans mentions the gift of teaching, where Ephesians speaks of a pastor-teacher office.

This is no small issue, for it strikes at the heart of much of the controversy today in this field of study. One can exercise a divine gift of prophecy, without having the authority of a prophet in the Biblical sense. A prophet spoke with the authority of God to the entire Church, or in the case of the prior dispensation, to the entire nation of Israel. However, a Christian can speak a word of prophecy to another individual or local group through the Spirit, and his declaration is not binding in any way upon the entire body of Christ. This is explained fully in the definitions, chapter seven.

Here is where the balance between two extremes manifests itself as proper doctrine. The canon of Scripture is closed. God does not, and will not, give any further special revelation to either the body of Christ or the nation of Israel in particular, or the world in general, other than what He has already given within the sixty-six books of the Protestant Bible.

### *No Modern Apostles or Prophets*

One's self-declaration of being a modern apostle or prophet to the Church must be rejected. Such an individual may be giving a message in clear contradiction to the teachings of Scripture, and thus should be shunned as a false teacher. Otherwise, if the message is consistent with Scripture, he is simply misinformed as to his proper office within the body. A better description might be teacher or evangelist, or maybe he is exercising the gift of exhortation as mentioned in Romans (cf. 12:8), accepted by cessationists as valid for today.

Unfortunately, some charismatics describe themselves as modern apostles or prophets. Often their teachings are in conflict with Scripture. These may declare one is not saved unless he speaks in tongues. Such incorrect doctrine, coupled with an improperly exalted view of his role as a modern apostle or prophet to the Church, makes for easy opposition from the cessationist. As a result, the cessationist argument often focuses on such extreme examples. The cessationist can offer quote after quote that clearly are indefensible from Biblical standards. By adding evidence from wild church services, he challenges the idea of certain gifts being used properly today. Unfortunately, the cessationist rarely offers the additional perspective from charismatics who believe the canon is closed as to revelation, and as to practice that all things should be done decently and in order (cf. I Cor. 14:40).

### *Spiritual Gifts Listed*

Paul lists nine gifts in First Corinthians. These are word of wisdom, word of knowledge, faith, healing, miracles, prophecy, discerning of spirits, tongues, and



interpretation of tongues (cf. I Cor. 12:8-10). In contrasting the lists of spiritual gifts from Romans twelve and First Corinthians twelve, it is interesting that the Romans gifts are mostly without controversy today. These would be the gifts of prophecy (though redefined as will be shown in the definitions), ministry (service), teaching, exhortation, giving, leading, and showing mercy (cf. Rom. 12:6-8). The cessationist has no difficulty discussing such gifts, as well as their importance to the proper functioning of the body of Christ today. Walvoord, in the introduction to a chapter titled ‘Permanent Spiritual Gifts,’ writes:

Certain gifts are clearly the possession of the church today as exhibited in their exercise in gifted men throughout the present dispensation. There is little doubt that some men today have (1) the gift of teaching, (2) the gift of helping or ministering, (3) the gift of administration or ruling, (4) the gift of evangelism, (5) the gift of being a pastor, (6) the gift of exhortation, (7) the gift of giving, (8) the gift of showing mercy, and (9) the gift of faith.<sup>15</sup>

Walvoord initially makes an appeal to modern experience as the validity for these gifts today. He declares these gifts “admitted by all as the possession of various gifted men throughout the present dispensation.”<sup>16</sup>

However, he then bases his argument against other gifts from selective evidence.

In a subsequent chapter titled ‘Temporary Spiritual Gifts,’ Walvoord makes the following declaration to support his viewpoint.

It is evident, however, that some of the most godly people of recent generations have been entirely without the spiritual gifts which are here classed as temporary. It is evident, also, that some who have claimed these temporary gifts in the present day have shown a gross indifference to the Bible as a whole, to Christian morality, and to the higher claims of a spiritual life. The history of these sects is most convincing in demonstrating that the undue seeking of spiritual gifts results only in excesses of the most unholy kind.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Walvoord, 168.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 168.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 174.

Then, in the very next paragraph he states, “there has been a constant parade of those who justify doctrine on the basis of varied experiences. The final test must always be what the Scriptures actually teach.”<sup>18</sup>

It is crucial that the reader see the problem in Walvoord’s logic within the quotes above. His premise involves the evidence of experience, and he has cited the good examples among the cessationist camp, while the poor witnesses for Christ are spotlighted among the charismatics. This reasoning method could argue the opposite point of view as well. Should not the Godly testimony of charismatics seeking to live holy lives and exalt the Scripture as sole authority be allowed as proof that the gifts are proper for today? There are many today within the body of Christ. Likewise, given the poor teaching, selfish attitudes, and miserly hoarding by many Christians, should such evidence be allowed as grounds to dismiss the gifts of teaching, helps, and giving? Of course, the Scriptures must be the authority to explain all experiences, good or bad, taking place in the name of Christ today.

The cessationist typically rejects the gifts listed in First Corinthians, commonly called the sign gifts. Because of the interesting grouping between Romans and First Corinthians, the cessationist is boldened in his position. Since Romans is the most thorough and crucial New Testament writing from a doctrinal perspective to this dispensation, he may argue from silence. Paul listed many spiritual gifts in Romans, yet did not include these sign gifts. Therefore, they must not be valid for today.

If one grants the epistle to the Romans as being chief among all Pauline writings, the first letter to the Corinthians is certainly high in any such ranking, given its length and diversity. The reality is that the letters serve two different, yet complementary purposes,

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 174.

and thus are both equally important in their own way. Romans is mostly a doctrinal discussion, with application not arriving until the start of chapter twelve. First Corinthians is more concerned with application and Church behavior, although crucial doctrine is included in chapters like fifteen. In fact, it is the key book to counter the excesses of the hyper-charismatics. Declaring large sections of this epistle as irrelevant to any church after the first century is an error, and would seem to violate the declaration of Second Timothy (cf. 3:16).

Biblical support for these sign gifts from Corinthians is offered later. However, the crucial point to note here is simply this. There is no hint of the cessationist doctrine within the context of the two passages where the gifts are listed. It seem unlikely any Christian in the twenty-first century, simply reading the Bible without additional commentaries or guides, would read the two passages and conclude that Paul was teaching the gifts in Romans are mostly still applicable for his life and church now, while the gifts in First Corinthians have not been applicable for over 1900 years. The Bible does not teach this idea in these passages.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### ARGUMENTS AGAINST SIGN GIFTS FROM CHURCH HISTORY

The cessationist's arguments against sign gifts as valid for the Church today involve two primary areas. These are the witness of tradition throughout Church history, and the witness of Scripture. Church history is placed prominently in the debate by the cessationist, as was seen in the Wiersbe quote earlier. It is common for a cessationist to devote as much space, or more, towards the Church history aspect, than what the Scriptures directly teach. MacArthur does this in refuting the gift of tongues, using a short paragraph for his points made from Scripture, and then devoting more than a page to the discussion from Church history.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, the refutation of the cessationist's argument from Church history is given priority.

#### *The Witness of Church History*

The problem in the cessationist's strong emphasis on the tradition of Church history, in forming his view concerning these spiritual gifts, is defined in two areas. The first deals with the general issue of using Church history to form and interpret Biblical doctrine. The second specifically deals with the dispensationalist's inconsistency in

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<sup>19</sup> MacArthur, 360-62.

choosing to use Church history in his argument. These two areas are discussed, in turn, with the general problem first.

In the book of Revelation, Jesus commanded the apostle John to write letters to seven churches (cf. Rev. 1:19). These letters form chapters two and three of the book. While a variety of interpretations have arisen concerning the significance of these chapters, these letters were initially written to seven existing churches in the area of Asia Minor. Whatever their symbolic meaning to present-day Christians, they were first directed towards the believers in those seven cities. A conservative date for Revelation's authorship is A.D. 96.<sup>20</sup>

These letters show that less than seventy years after the Church's inauguration at Pentecost, the churches were experiencing many problems. Jesus specifically offers the call to repent towards five of the seven churches. Only the churches in Smyrna and Philadelphia are spared a rebuke from the Lord. The churches in Ephesus, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, and Laodicea are all criticized in whole or in part. It only took a few decades, despite the powerful ministry of the Holy Spirit through the apostles during this time, for the Christians of the first century to stray in doctrine and practice.

Thus, it is an error to examine the practices and teachings taking place in these churches, and imply these were properly representative of Christ's plan for His people. This is the case for churches directly influenced by the teaching of the apostles, and through the nearly two thousand years of Church history, multiple errors of practice and doctrine have continued. The witness for Christ of the Church for much of this time period is not consistent with Biblical teachings. Over half of the Church age took place during the Middle Ages (c. A.D. 500 –A.D. 1500) when the Bible had negligible

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<sup>20</sup> Jensen, 493.

influence within the Church. Most Protestant cessationists have differences with some doctrine during those years of the Roman Catholic Church, and would challenge some teachings as not proper Church practice for today. MacArthur has stated, “For over 1800 years the gift of tongues, along with the other miracle gifts, was unknown in the life and doctrine of orthodox Christianity.”<sup>21</sup> However, orthodox Christianity, if seen in the context of Biblical priority, does not have eighteen centuries of history. MacArthur does not cite any authorities beyond Chrysostom, who died in A.D. 407.

With the rise of the Protestant Reformation in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the reformers did not look to the traditions of the Church, but sought a reformation based on *Sola Scriptura*, that in fact discounted these traditions. Dr. W. Robert Godfrey, President of Westminster Theological Seminary, defines *Sola Scriptura* as follows.

Let me begin with certain clarifications so as not to be misunderstood. I am not arguing that all truth is to be found in the Bible, or that the Bible is the only form in which the truth of God has come to His people. I am not arguing that every verse in the Bible is equally clear to every reader. Nor am I arguing that the church — both the people of God and the ministerial office — is not of great value and help in understanding the Scripture... The Protestant position, and my position, is that all things *necessary* for salvation and concerning faith and life are taught in the Bible clearly enough for the ordinary believer to find it there and understand.<sup>22</sup>

Godfrey’s comments reinforce the point that the teachings and customs of past Christians have some limited value, but the clear teaching of the Bible is the priority. The early Reformers, such as Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli, did not agree on all points of Biblical interpretation, and all taught something to which a dispensational cessationist would take issue.

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<sup>21</sup> MacArthur, 361.

<sup>22</sup> *The-Highway*. Internet Online. Available: [http://www.the-highway.com/Sola\\_Scriptura\\_Godfrey.html](http://www.the-highway.com/Sola_Scriptura_Godfrey.html) [17 February 2007].

### *Another Perspective on Church History*

When Church history is discussed, the last one hundred years are often dismissed concerning the sign gifts. Church history continues to take place today, and includes multitudes of charismatics, who also exalt the Bible as the Word of God. When evaluating what actions are Biblical, the past century, with the Bible in circulation and in the hands of most every Christian, deserves as much emphasis as those pre-Reformation years.

Church history also includes the first century of the apostolic age, when sign gifts were commonplace. A traditional dispensationalist does not sub-divide the dispensation of grace. The Church began at Pentecost, and continues until the Rapture. The Church continues in the present day. Traditional dispensationalists speak of a special apostolic age, but only within the topic of sign gifts, and do not otherwise modify their dispensational structure.

Another detail of Church history is just how little information exists from the past. MacArthur uses Clement's letter to Corinth (c. A.D. 95), and concludes that since he does not mention tongues in discussing problems within the church, therefore tongues had already ceased.<sup>23</sup> Arguments from silence among the church fathers are commonplace with cessationists. However, the knowledge of Church history is incomplete. Little is known of the activities upon the mission fields throughout these years. In addition, not all perspectives of history are cited by the cessationist.

John Wesley holds a prominent position in Church history. His comments on the topic of sign gifts, and their absence among the Church are relevant.

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<sup>23</sup> MacArthur, 361.

It does not appear that those extraordinary gifts of the Holy Spirit were common in the church for more than two or three centuries. We seldom hear of them after that fatal period when the Emperor Constantine called himself a Christian. Then he, from a vain imagination of promoting the Christian cause, heaped riches, power, and honor upon Christians in general, but in particular upon the Christian clergy. From that time, the gifts of the Holy Spirit almost totally ceased... The real cause of the loss was that the love of many, almost all the so-called Christians had grown cold. The Christians had no more of the Spirit of Christ than the other heathens... This was the real cause why the extraordinary gifts of the Holy Spirit were no longer to be found in the Christian church after that time. It was because the Christians turned heathen again, and had only a dead form left.<sup>24</sup>

Since the sign gifts are in fact *gifts*, bestowed by the Father when, and to whom, He chooses, Wesley's evaluation is of interest, given the spiritual condition of much of Christendom from Constantine to Luther. It is at least possible that God withdrew these gifts for a lengthy season, only to return them in preparation for His return.

Wesley continues by offering his evaluation of the teaching against such gifts in his day.

So, when this faith and holiness were nearly lost, dry, formal, orthodox men began even then to ridicule whatever gifts they did not have themselves. They belittled and discredited all the gifts of the Spirit as either madness or fraud. As a result, the miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit were soon withdrawn from the early church. Therefore, to say the miracles never occurred is to say that all who participated in them were either fools or scoundrels. They would be fools for believing miracles occurred if they had not. They would be scoundrels if they reported miracles had occurred if they knew they had not.<sup>25</sup>

Wesley describes a situation often seen today, some two hundred fifty years later.

Unfortunately, cessationists often view charismatic pastors as either fools or scoundrels.

However, the cessationist arguing from Church history is at least partially influenced by the men Wesley pictures.

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<sup>24</sup> John Wesley, *The Holy Spirit and Power* (Gainesville: Bridge-Logos, 2003), 110.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 110-11.



Wesley also has a different view of the Church fathers than MacArthur. The challenge in citing Church fathers for support is they often disagreed. So if one father is mentioned as an authority, a different father often would state the opposite point. In addition, since some of the Church fathers wrote volumes of material, one can sometimes use the same father to argue two sides of an issue.

For example, MacArthur mentioned Chrysostom as stating miraculous gifts had ceased.<sup>26</sup> He does not quote Chrysostom as to why. In his homily on First Corinthians chapter fourteen, Chrysostom states:

For in truth the Church was a heaven then, the Spirit governing all things...But now we retain only the symbols of those gifts...the present Church is like a woman who has fallen from her prosperous ways, and in many respects retains the symbols only of that ancient prosperity...And I say not this in respect of gifts: for it were nothing marvelous if it were this only: but in respect also of life and virtue.<sup>27</sup>

Chrysostom bemoans the absence of sign gifts as indicative of the lack of life and virtue in the Church, and not as an expected plan of God in light of the completed canon.

MacArthur declares Origen made no mention of tongues, calling him a “brilliant church scholar” in the process.<sup>28</sup> Wesley though quotes Origen as stating:

For the Christians cast out devils, perform many cures, foretell things to come. And many have been converted to Christianity by visions. I have seen many examples of this sort...Signs of the Holy Spirit were shown at the beginning of the teaching of Jesus, more were shown after His ascension, but afterwards fewer. However, even now there are still some remains of them with a few, whose souls are cleansed by the Word and who have a life conformable to it...Some, heal the sick. I myself have seen many so healed of loss of senses, madness, and innumerable other evils which neither men nor devils can cure. And this is done, not by magical arts, but by prayer and certain plain adjurations such as any common Christian may use, for generally common men do things of this kind.”<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> MacArthur, 361.

<sup>27</sup> Chrysostom, *Homily 36 on First Corinthians*.

<sup>28</sup> MacArthur, 361.

<sup>29</sup> Wesley, 112.

Irenaeus, writing in the second century, stated concerning the Church of his day:

In like manner we do also hear many brethren in the Church, who possess prophetic gifts, and who through the Spirit speak all kinds of languages, and bring to light for the general benefit the hidden things of men, and declare the mysteries of God...<sup>30</sup>

It is debatable if the fathers were truly silent on the issue. Wesley quotes Irenaeus, Justin Martyr, Cyprian and others in support of sign gifts after the apostolic age. Since this was within a letter to a critic, Wesley's lack of footnoting sources is expected. However, his use of direct quotations would argue for his familiarity with these texts.

Of importance is that the fathers did not write in support of the cessationist claim that sign gifts were not needed once the New Testament canon was completed. This is at the heart of an emotional challenge by Wesley to a critic of sign gifts.

St. Paul had observed long before. "Do all work miracles? Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues?" No, not even when those gifts were given in the most abundant manner. Then it is stated that no other church father had made the least claim to the gift of tongues. Perhaps this is true of those whose writings are in existence. At least, it is true for their writings which are now in existence. But what are those in comparison of those which are lost? And how many saints of the first three hundred years of the church left no written account at all? Or at least they left no account which has come into our hands. Who are those who wrote of speaking in tongues as a particular gift only for the times of the apostles? Show me six ante-Nicene fathers who support the objection, "There is not a single father who ventures to speak of it except as withdrawn from the church." Show me these and I will give up the whole point.<sup>31</sup>

To conclude, this section offers a different perspective on Church history, specifically the writings of the fathers. Cessationists often use silence, or the simple observations that certain gifts were not present, and from this limited commentary support a doctrine that the sign gifts only were meant to exist during the apostolic age. As

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<sup>30</sup> Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 5.6.1.

<sup>31</sup> Wesley, 118-19.

has been shown, the fathers' writings can be used in multiple ways. Thus, Unger is too general in stating:

The church in general has always maintained, on the basis of Scripture and the testimony of history, that the so-called miraculous sign gifts of healing and tongues, gradually disappeared from the church after the apostolic age when the New Testament was written down and circulated among the churches.<sup>32</sup>

Many cessationists today would differ with earlier Christian teachings on baptism, communion, and eschatology. A cessationist is inconsistent to point to such men as authorities on doctrine in the area of sign gifts, and then dismiss them in other areas. The most inconsistent of these cessationists are the dispensationalists, who speak of one dispensation for the Church, known as "grace." How they specifically demonstrate their inconsistency is the topic to follow.

### *Dispensational Inconsistency with Church History*

The dispensational cessationist, who would argue forcibly from Church history to support his cessationist viewpoint, faces a specific problem beyond the general issues of using Church history discussed earlier. The same argument by which such a one dismisses the validity of the sign gifts for today, is then ignored by the dispensationalist when comparing his doctrinal view with non-dispensationalists. The history of dispensational theology is cited to make one crucial point. The dispensationalist who dismisses criticism of his theology from opponents looking to Church tradition for support, is inconsistent in expecting his same argument from Church tradition against these sign gifts to be given credence by a dispensational charismatic. The dispensational charismatic is expected to ignore Church history claims supporting covenant theology,

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<sup>32</sup> Unger, 135-36.

amillennialism, and replacement theology, but to accept such claims when supporting cessationism.

Ryrie offers some points of defense for dispensationalism that present almost an identical argument for the charismatic debating the cessationist. Ryrie begins his chapter on 'The Origins of Dispensationalism' with these lines.

A typical statement about dispensationalism goes like this:  
“Dispensationalism was formulated by one of the nineteenth-century separatist movements, the Plymouth Brethren.” This is a prejudicial statement implying two charges: (1) since dispensationalism is recent, it is therefore unorthodox; (2) it was born out of a separatist movement and is therefore to be shunned. The implication in these charges is clear: If the poor misguided souls who believe in dispensationalism only knew its true origin they would turn from its teachings like the plague.<sup>33</sup>

Compare the above with MacArthur, writing on tongues.

Apparently no other tongues-speaking was practiced in Christianity until the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when it appeared in several Roman Catholic groups in Europe (Cevenols and Jansenists) and among the Shakers in New England. The nineteenth century Irvingites of London were marked by unbiblical claims of revelations and by “tongues-speak.” For over 1800 years the gift of tongues, along with the other miracle gifts, was unknown in the life and doctrine of orthodox Christianity. Then, around the turn of the twentieth century, tongues became a major emphasis within the holiness movement, a large section of which developed into modern Pentecostalism.<sup>34</sup>

MacArthur uses the same line of argument to which Ryrie objects, namely these sign gifts arose relatively recently in Church history, and their origin was within groups of questionable reputation.

Ryrie continues to answer dispensational critics.

In discussing the matter of the origins of dispensationalism, opponents of the teaching usually set up two straw men and then huff and puff until they are destroyed. The first straw man is to say that dispensationalists assert that the *system* was taught in post apostolic times. Informed dispensationalists do not claim that. They recognize that, as a system, dispensationalism was largely

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<sup>33</sup> Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, 61.

<sup>34</sup> MacArthur, 361.

formed by Darby, but that outlines of a dispensationalist approach to the Scriptures are found much earlier. They only maintain that certain features of what eventually developed into dispensationalism are found in the teachings of the early church.<sup>35</sup>

The argument is not that sign gifts were active throughout Church history. However, such gifts were found in the early Church of the New Testament. Cessationists like Ryrie, choose to argue for dispensational features in the early Church, even if not fully developed until the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century. They are inconsistent in not granting charismatics the same argument concerning the sign gifts.

Concerning the development of doctrine, Ryrie declares:

But dispensationalists do not claim that the system was developed in the first century; nor is it necessary that they be able to do so. Many other doctrines were not developed in the early centuries – including covenant theology, which originated in the seventeenth century. Doctrinal development is a perfectly normal process that has occurred in the course of church history...the fact that something was not taught until the nineteenth century does not make it wrong, unless, of course, it is unscriptural...After all, the ultimate question is not, Is dispensationalism – or any other teaching – historic? but, Is it scriptural? Most opponents of dispensationalism realize that this is the issue, but they still persist in using the historical argument with its fallacious implications.<sup>36</sup>

Ryrie's emphasis on Scripture over history is the same argument made by the charismatic.

The sign gifts have a Scriptural foundation.

The Reformers developed a theology, largely concerned with soteriology, which differed with centuries of Church tradition. A few centuries later, the early dispensationalists likewise developed a theology, largely concerned with ecclesiology and eschatology. At about the same time, charismatics began to develop (or rediscover) a theology, largely concerned with pneumatology. Why should the first two be easily accepted, and the third example shunned?

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<sup>35</sup> Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, 62.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

In concluding this chapter on Church history, it has been shown that such history does not establish the cessationist's case. Church history in general is one of continual doctrinal disagreement, and has been since John penned Revelation. Church history is not uniform or clear in its witness to this topic, and the last century is as legitimate a segment of Church history as the centuries under Rome. Finally, dispensationalists especially are accustomed to the challenges from Church tradition, and do not hesitate to counter such challenges with criticism. A closing comment from Ryrie could just as logically describe charismatics as dispensationalists.

The charge of newness was leveled long ago at the doctrine of the Reformers. Calvin answered it with characteristic straightforwardness, and his answer is one that could be used to defend dispensationalism equally well against the same charge: "First, by calling it 'new' they do great wrong to God, whose Sacred Word does not deserve to be accused of novelty.... That it has lain long unknown and buried is the fault of man's impiety. Now when it is restored to us by God's goodness, its claims to *antiquity* ought to be admitted at least by right of recovery."<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 62-63.

## CHAPTER SIX

### ARGUMENTS AGAINST SIGN GIFTS FROM SCRIPTURE

The simple reading of Scripture does not lead one to believe that some of the New Testament gifts would cease with the completion of the canon, while others would continue throughout all of Church history. Therefore, a discussion of the texts used by cessationists to support their viewpoint is necessary.

#### *First Corinthians 13:8-10*

This verse offers the most powerful argument for the cessationist, for it is the only passage in the entire New Testament that declares prophecies, tongues, and knowledge will one day end. The passage reads:

Love never fails. But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away (I Cor. 13:8-10).

At issue is the interpretation of what Paul termed as “that which is perfect.” Many cessationists make the claim for the “perfect” as being the completed canon of Scripture. Walvoord,<sup>38</sup> and Unger,<sup>39</sup> are two examples. However, this interpretation is not supported

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<sup>38</sup> Walvoord, 179,186.

<sup>39</sup> Unger, 140-41.

by the context of the entire chapter. MacArthur agrees, and writes concerning this passage:

Some Christians believe the perfect has already come in the completion of Scripture. But that idea would have been meaningless to the Corinthians. Nowhere in this letter does he mention or allude to such a scriptural completion...Still another reason **the perfect** cannot refer to the completion of Scripture is found in Paul's statement that we will see "face to face" (1 Cor. 13:12). Scripture gives a wonderful and reliable picture of God, but it does not allow us to see Him "face to face." Peter speaks of the many believers even of his own day who "have not seen Him" (1 Pet. 1:8). The Bible does not give a "face to face" vision of God. No Christian, before or after the completion of the New Testament, has known the Lord as he has "been fully known" (1 Cor. 13:12). We love One whom we have not seen.<sup>40</sup>

He then proceeds to explain the "perfect" is also not the Rapture, maturing Church, or Second Coming, but in fact is the Eternal State.<sup>41</sup> In doing so, he joins those commentators writing before the renewal of the sign gifts in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

John Calvin, in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, wrote concerning this passage:

Paul now shows that prophecy and all other gifts of that sort are destroyed, because they are bestowed upon us to help us in our weakness. But one day our imperfection will come to an end; therefore the use of those gifts will also stop at the same time...Paul might have put it this way: 'When we have reached the winning post, then the things that helped us on the course will be finished with.' But he uses the same way of expressing himself as before, in setting perfection in contrast with what is in part. He is saying: 'When perfection comes it will abolish everything that gives aid to our imperfections.' But when will that perfection come? It begins, indeed, at death, because then we will put off many weaknesses along with the body; but it will not be completely established until the day of judgement, as we shall soon learn. We conclude from that, that it is stupid of people to make the whole of this discussion apply to the intervening time.<sup>42</sup>

Matthew Henry (1662-1714), who authored an exhaustive early devotional commentary, saw the passage much as Calvin did.

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<sup>40</sup> MacArthur, 364-65.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 365.

<sup>42</sup> John Calvin, *The First Epistle of Paul The Apostle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1960), 280-81.



These gifts were fitted to the present imperfect state of the church...How much better it will be with the church hereafter (v.10). When the end is once attained, the means will of course be abolished. Then the church will be in a state of perfection, complete both in knowledge and holiness. God will be known then clearly...The things to be known will be open to our eyes; and our knowledge will be free from all obscurity and error. God is to be seen *face to face*; and we *are to know him* as *we are known by him*. O glorious change!<sup>43</sup>

Charles Hodge, writing three centuries later than Calvin, shares similar thoughts on these verses.

This is the reason why knowledge and prophecy are to cease. They are partial or imperfect, and therefore suited only to an imperfect state of existence. The revelations granted to the prophets imparted mere glimpses of the mysteries of God; when those mysteries stand disclosed in the full light of heaven, what need then of those glimpses?<sup>44</sup>

Nowhere in Hodge's commentary is a hint of reference to a completed canon. Albert Barnes, writing in 1872, likewise sees the "perfect" as heaven, "a state of absolute perfection...(where) all that we here possess that is obscure will be lost in the superior and perfect glory of that eternal world."<sup>45</sup>

The German scholar, Kling, offers a different perspective, but still provides no help to the cessationist looking for Christian support on this passage predating the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Kling defines the "perfect" as, "the consummation of the kingdom of God which is to take place at the appearance of Christ, and not the state of believers after death."<sup>46</sup> A perusal of the *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture* uncovers a variety of comments from multiple writers of the early Church, such as Basil, Chrysostom,

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<sup>43</sup> Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1961), 1820.

<sup>44</sup> Charles Hodge, *A Commentary on 1&2 Corinthians* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1974), 272.

<sup>45</sup> Albert Barnes, *Notes, Explanatory and Practical on the First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1872), 245.

<sup>46</sup> Christian Friedrich Kling, *Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1868), 271.

Ambrose, and Augustine. Nowhere is the suggestion that the verse refers to the completed canon.<sup>47</sup>

An interpretation of the perfect as the completed canon of Scripture is lacking prior to the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Indeed it is only today's cessationist who chooses such an interpretation. Some cessationists, like MacArthur, also declare that the passage cannot be taken in this manner.

Dispensationalist teachings are likewise foreign to the writers cited above. However, it is valid, and not inconsistent, to appeal to the doctrinal views of Church history in countering the interpretation of the perfect as the canon for the following reasons.

The witness of these earlier commentators supports the point that First Corinthians 13:8-10 was not a prediction by Paul that certain gifts would cease in the near future with the arrival of the completed canon. However, there are also several writers of the last century who see the passage as clearly speaking to the believer's future glorification. Henry Thiessen refers to the verse in connection with the "complete and final sanctification" of the believer.<sup>48</sup> Alan Redpath, discussing this verse, states Paul "can mean only when Jesus is come."<sup>49</sup> MacArthur already was cited as refuting the typical cessationist view of the passage. A Christian simply reading these three verses, in context with the entire Corinthian letter, would be quite unlikely to conclude the perfect was a completed canon, marking the end of some (but not all) of the gifts of the Spirit.

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<sup>47</sup> Gerald Bray, ed., *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament VII: 1-2 Corinthians* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 134-35.

<sup>48</sup> Henry C. Thiessen, *Lectures in Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1979), 292.

<sup>49</sup> Alan Redpath, *The Royal Route to Heaven: Studies in First Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Fleming H. Revell, 1993), 175.

The cessationist on the other hand is very dependent upon the witness of Church tradition, because the Biblical support is limited. The dispensational cessationist often uses Church history when it supports his doctrine, but not when that same history confronts him. The primary focus should be Scripture, and having shown that First Corinthians 13:8-10 does not strongly support a cessationist argument, the other Scriptural arguments used against the validity of sign gifts for the Church today are now examined.

*Hebrews 2:3-4*

Unger attributes this passage as establishing “the purpose of the miraculous sign gifts.”<sup>50</sup> However, Unger begins his quote as if verse three began the sentence. The sentence begins with verse two, and so Unger provides only a partial quote. The entire sentence reads as follows.

For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard *Him*, God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will (Heb. 2:2-4).

Nothing in this short passage supports a teaching that certain sign gifts would cease with a completed canon, still future at the time of the writing of Hebrews.

The author of Hebrews is writing to Jews. The book begins by stating God’s final revelation is through the Son (Jesus), greater than the angels (cf. Heb. 1). The “word spoken through angels” is the Mosaic Law (cf. Acts 7:53). Therefore, the contrast to this

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<sup>50</sup> Unger, 139.

Jewish audience is between the Law, leading to judgment, and the new message of the Son that leads to “so great a salvation.”

Unger declares, “He intimates it was to confirm the gospel and establish the new faith in a pagan world.”<sup>51</sup> While sign gifts do bear witness to the message of the gospel, nothing in this passage says that these gifts became unnecessary once the New Testament was completed. Apparent miracles are being documented today on the mission field, among those who are first hearing the gospel. Missionaries, such as those involved with The Jesus Film Project, a ministry of Campus Crusade for Christ, provide this testimony.<sup>52</sup> This passage does not directly support the claim that sign gifts would end before the first century.

#### *Second Corinthians 12:12*

This verse comes in the context of Paul’s attempt to justify his apostolic authority among the Corinthians, many of whom were challenging Paul’s position in the ministry there. The verse reads:

Truly the signs of an apostle were accomplished among you with all perseverance, in signs and wonders and mighty deeds (II Cor. 12:12).

This short verse is evidence with some cessationists that the sign gifts would end with the completed New Testament canon. MacArthur uses this verse five different times within his First Corinthian commentary, in the context that miracles authenticated legitimate apostles.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Paul Eshleman, *I Just Saw Jesus* (San Bernardino: Here’s Life Publishers, 1985), 105-15.

<sup>53</sup> MacArthur, 496.

Unger references this verse in saying, “Such miraculous sign-gifts were the special endowment of the apostles, as the God-ordained founders of Christianity.”<sup>54</sup> Walvoord says something similar: “Miracles were, accordingly, a display of divine power with a view of authenticating the apostolic or prophetic gift.”<sup>55</sup> Walvoord uses gift here in terms of the office of apostle concerning revelation.

The problem in taking this verse to such a conclusion is stated by Walvoord himself. Just three pages before the quote cited in the last paragraph, Walvoord writes, “The apostles in most instances had also the prophetic gift, and the gift of working miracles, though not all who had these gifts were apostles.”<sup>56</sup> Therefore, this verse does not effectively make the cessationist claim. If God had only given the sign gifts to the few apostles, then the cessationist could more strongly argue that those gifts by necessity must die-out with the lives of the apostles. The facts are that other Christians had these gifts who were not apostles, and therefore the cessationist cannot draw that conclusion.

An apostle, by definition, had to have been a witness to the resurrected Christ (cf. Acts 1:22; I Cor. 9:1; 15:5-8). The last apostle to see the resurrected Christ was Paul (cf. I Cor. 15:8). Paul first brought the gospel to Corinth on his second missionary journey (cf. Acts 18:1-11). If these gifts were meant to be unique with the apostles, why did God give to the Corinthians the sign gifts (cf. I Cor. 1:5-7)? Paul told them, “I wish you all spoke with tongues (I Cor. 14:5),” and provided instruction in this epistle concerning these gifts.

Thus, cessationists often reference an “apostolic age,” but that is not how they argue from this particular verse. The cessationist quotes above declare this verse teaches the miracles were for the apostles, yet non-apostles had these gifts as well. Other

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<sup>54</sup> Unger, 138.

<sup>55</sup> Walvoord, 179.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 176.

Christians had these gifts, and most did not receive them until God already had chosen all the apostles.

### *Other Scriptural Arguments*

Two final points are made here. First, Unger also mentions Romans 15:18-19 in his argument. It reads:

For I will not dare to speak of any of those things which Christ has not accomplished through me, in word and deed, to make the Gentiles obedient – in mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God, so that from Jerusalem and round about to Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ (Rom. 15:18-19).

This verse says Paul performed miracles, through the power of the Spirit. It is less supportive than the Second Corinthians 12:12 passage, for Paul does not even reference apostleship. He is speaking in the context of his missionary travels, and desire to someday visit Rome.

A final suggestion is offered by MacArthur, who declares:

It is reasonable to believe that tongues have ceased because their use is mentioned only in the earlier New Testament books. Most of the books, in fact, do not mention it. Paul mentions it only in this one letter, and James, Peter, John, and Jude make no mention of it at all. Nor does reference to it appear in the book of Acts after 19:6. It seems clear from the New Testament record itself that tongues not only ceased to be an issue but ceased to be practiced well before the end of the apostolic age. Nowhere in the epistles is it commanded or enjoined on believers as a responsibility or spiritual exercise.<sup>57</sup>

Tongues would not be commanded as a responsibility because it is a *gift*. It is also possible that this argument from silence is explained by noting that tongues might not have been practiced improperly, except in Corinth. Not all had the gift, and those who did might have been obedient to Paul's instruction to keep silent unless there was an

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<sup>57</sup> MacArthur, 361.

interpreter (cf. I Cor. 14:27-28). Just because the gift brings controversy today, does not necessarily mean it would among early churches.

MacArthur's line of reasoning is rejected when used by Biblical critics in other areas of doctrine, such as the virgin birth. Dr. Albert Mohler, President of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, has written:

What are we to do with the Virgin Birth? The doctrine was among the first to be questioned and then rejected after the rise of historical criticism and the undermining of biblical authority that inevitably followed. Critics claimed that since the doctrine is taught in "only" two of the four Gospels, it must be elective. The Apostle Paul, they argued, did not mention it in his sermons in Acts, so he must not have believed it. Besides, the liberal critics argued, the doctrine is just so supernatural.<sup>58</sup>

MacArthur's tactic in using the silence of other epistles is similar to a critic arguing against the virgin birth of Christ from the silence of Paul, Mark, and John. If God only needs to speak once on a subject, and all the epistles have their own theme and purpose for being written, then the fact that these sign gifts occur in only one epistle is not proof enough to support cessationist doctrine.

Of course, MacArthur is not declaring the Corinthian teaching to be inaccurate, but simply outdated. He is saying sign gifts, and the teaching for their proper usage, applied for the earliest years of the apostolic age only. This is different than denying a teaching outright, like the virgin birth, that appears in Scripture, only because it does not appear in more places of Scripture. However, if the teaching on sign gifts was already outdated by the time of the later New Testament books, it possibly follows that other teachings in this epistle should be dismissed. This could potentially lead to debates as to

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<sup>58</sup> *Albert Mohler* Internet online. Available:  
[http://www.albertmohler.com/commentary\\_read.php?cdate=2006-12-08](http://www.albertmohler.com/commentary_read.php?cdate=2006-12-08) [17 February 2007].

what epistolary teachings are still valid today, and what else is outdated, such as divorce, premarital sex, or homosexuality.

God explained these gifts in the Scripture. He gave instruction as to their operation within the Church in the Scripture. It is inconsistent for a conservative Christian to argue anything that God chose to include in the epistles for the grace dispensation as now outdated.

In summary, the cessationist lacks significant Biblical support of his view. Since Church history is also not a sufficient means of refuting the validity of sign gifts for today's Church, the final cessationist argument is to dismiss the sign gifts because of erroneous teachings and practices of certain charismatics. Thus, specific definitions of what these gifts entail, and their proper usage, must be examined.



## CHAPTER SEVEN DEFINITIONS

This chapter provides definitions of the spiritual gifts. Cessationists occasionally agree that God can (and sometimes does) work today in the ways described below. However, this issue is not simply over semantics. One is inconsistent to agree with the validity of these activities of the Holy Spirit within the body of Christ, while maintaining staunch opposition to the validity of these gifts.

An exegetical definition for each gift, with proper Biblical support, is illustrated with a relevant application for the local church today. In contrast, on occasion the cessationist's definitions seem lacking in Biblical support. Such definitions more likely result from the *a priori* perspective that sign gifts were needed before the canon, and therefore must have been used in some manner that could be replaced by the canon. These are highlighted.

### *A Word of Knowledge*

Paul mentions this gift in First Corinthians 12:8, as given through the Holy Spirit. The English translations typically translate with the definite article, but the article is absent in the Greek (λόγος γνώσεως). Thus, the gift is literally “a word of knowledge.”

Dr. Gordon Fee acknowledges this, though translating as if definite.<sup>59</sup> Dr. Daniel Wallace provides several examples in his grammar as to when an indefinite Greek noun can be translated as definite.<sup>60</sup> The English versions are universal in translating as definite, but it is lacking in the original.

The word translated, knowledge, γνῶσις, primarily means the comprehension or intellectual grasp of something.<sup>61</sup> Cessationists emphasize an aspect to this definition by arguing that knowledge “enabled a first-century believer to know and to instruct the assembly in truth now recorded in the New Testament.”<sup>62</sup> Such a definition allows for a dismissal of this gift once the canon is complete. Certainly, the truth that ultimately became Scripture was revealed to the writers, and it is likely they usually declared this truth before it was written (cf. II Thess. 2:5). However, this is too narrow a definition, and one not fully supported from Scripture. MacArthur, who limits his definition to “the capability of grasping the meaning of God’s revelation,” agrees this gift is still needed and valid for the Church today.<sup>63</sup>

A Biblical example of a word of knowledge is found in Acts five, where Peter discerns that Ananias, and later Sapphira, have kept some of the money from their land sale for themselves, while publicly declaring they were giving all of the proceeds to the church. Peter clearly gives the credit to the Holy Spirit in stating:

“Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back part of the price of the land for yourself? While it remained, was it not your own? And after it was sold, was it not in your control? Why have you

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<sup>59</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987), 592-93.

<sup>60</sup> Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996), 244-54.

<sup>61</sup> Frederick William Danker, ed., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature: Third Edition (BDAG)* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 203.

<sup>62</sup> Unger, 141.

<sup>63</sup> MacArthur, 298-99.

conceived this thing in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God” (Acts 5:3-5).

Therefore, the spiritual gift of “a word of knowledge” is the act of God whereby He gives a believer specific, factual content that otherwise he would not know at the time, for the benefit of the church. This definition does not exclude Biblical doctrine during the first century, but is not exclusive to doctrine either, as the Acts passage illustrates. Peter understood, through the Spirit, that Ananias was not giving the full amount of money that the sale brought him. This information did not come to Peter through personal observation, nor did others report it to him.

This gift did not give Peter omniscient powers. This is where the use of the definite article in English translations can be misleading, since *the* word of knowledge can imply a far greater scope than what the gift truly represents, which is namely a specific piece of information at a specific time for the benefit of the church. Despite his apostleship, Peter’s own admissions and actions show this gift did not equate to omniscience, even in the area of Bible doctrine (cf. II Pet. 3:15-16; Gal. 2:11-14).

Chuck Smith provides a modern example of this gift. In the account, his wife, Kay, felt sure that a prominent, married member of the congregation was having a sexual relationship with a secretary. Kay was appalled for having the thought, and initially tried to put it out of her mind, but it would not depart. She shared this with Smith who dismissed it with a mild rebuke for having “evil imaginations,” for this was a seemingly upstanding, devout brother. Nevertheless, several months later Smith received a tearful call from the man and his wife, unable to utter their need. Smith was able to tell them he knew what the problem was, specifically stating how the man was having an affair with his secretary the last six months. The gift of knowledge aided the pastor in his ability to

counsel them, and also shocked the couple to attention that God was working (and watching) the turmoil in their lives.<sup>64</sup> Of note, the gift did not come to the church leader, but to his wife, though it was Pastor Smith that ultimately ministered to the people due to the gift.

This author once had a discussion with the elder responsible for the hiring of the children's ministry helpers in a large church. The man explained the challenges of his job, since he rarely even recognized the people desiring to serve, due to the large size of the church. He declared his dependence upon God, Whom he sought in prayer before each interview. On rare occasions, he testified of God's Spirit warning him that the man seeking to volunteer was a pedophile. As a result, this brother would push a little deeper into discussion on background checks and references, urging a second interview. Without exception, these men never returned for that second interview.

Most cessationists will not deny the ability of God to speak to the heart of the believer today, concerning a bit of information that Christian would not otherwise know. However, the cessationist likely refuses to call these spiritual moments, gifts of a word of knowledge, for it contradicts their cessationist doctrine. Of course, this information must come from the Holy Spirit, as a gift, for the Christian is not in the position to demand such information from God on a regular basis. Yet, there is reluctance to label this a spiritual gift.

A completed New Testament canon does not make the need for a word of knowledge unnecessary today. The two modern examples do not speak to Biblical doctrine, and a reasonable charismatic will not listen to someone claiming a word of knowledge that directly contradicts Biblical revelation. Many modern examples could be

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<sup>64</sup> Chuck Smith, *Living Water* (Eugene: Harvest House Publishers, 1996), 113.

cited, where God's gifting of a specific bit of knowledge to the Christian was beneficial for the functioning of the local church. A proper understanding of the definition and usage of this gift results in the need to accept its validity for the church today.

### *A Word of Wisdom*

Paul also mentions this gift in First Corinthians 12:8, given through the Holy Spirit. Once again, the definite article is not present in the Greek text (λόγος σοφίας). The idea here is a proclamation of wisdom, or speaking wisely.<sup>65</sup> The word for wisdom, σοφία, is one that regularly speaks to man's wisdom, often in a negative manner. Paul uses the word throughout this epistle in that context (cf. I Cor. 1:17; 2:4,5,13; 3:19). Wisdom should not be thought of in too mystical a manner here. In addition, this word (λόγος) of wisdom is given to the believer by the Holy Spirit. The gift does not require an utterance on behalf of the believer, for it is the Holy Spirit instead speaking to the believer. The same is true for knowledge above, for God need not speak in an audible voice, but Spirit to spirit (cf. Rom. 8:16).

As with the gift of a word of knowledge, this gift is limited to a certain bit of wisdom for a specific situation. If knowledge is concerned with facts and information, wisdom is the wise action taken, or advice offered, as a result of the facts in evidence. Therefore, the gift of a word of wisdom is defined as the act of God whereby He gives a Christian the best solution to a problem for the benefit of the church. The believer may be wrestling alone with the issue, or be part of a group.

A Biblical example can be found in Acts fifteen, concerning the Jerusalem Council. There was much debate within the early Church as to the proper relationship of

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<sup>65</sup> BDAG, 599.

the new Gentile Christians with the Law of Moses (cf. Acts 15:7). While many offered opinion and testimony, it was James who ultimately rose to declare:

Therefore I judge that we should not trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God, but that we write to them to abstain from things polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from things strangled, and from blood (Acts 15:19-20).

This decision was met with agreement by the apostles, elders, and the whole church, who put the decree into writing and sent it throughout the Gentile churches. However, the decision was prefaced in writing with the words, “For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us” (Acts 15:28). Therefore, the Scriptures clearly show that the source of this wise decision was not simply James’ ingenuity, or a group consensus, but the Holy Spirit.

More than any of the other gifts, a word of wisdom should be the least controversial as to its modern application. No cessationist would likely suggest a church board or ministry endeavor begin an important meeting without first praying for God’s wisdom and guidance. Christians commonly petition God for His wisdom, in accordance with what James declared.

If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind (James 1:5-6).

God desires to give wisdom to His children today. God gives a Christian His wisdom to deal with a problem, through the Holy Spirit, yet some hesitate to equate this with the spiritual gift of a word of wisdom.

Ryrie includes this gift with knowledge, and dismisses them both as “early-church gifts.”<sup>66</sup> Walvoord ignores this gift in listing the New Testament spiritual gifts.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, 432.

<sup>67</sup> Walvoord, 168.

However, he speaks of a gift of wisdom within the Old Testament, and defines it as “the work of the Holy Spirit in giving wisdom for leadership and administration.”<sup>68</sup> That definition is quite similar to the one cited above. MacArthur again sees this gift in connection with applying the Scripture of truth to life situations, and declares its importance for today.<sup>69</sup> The different opinions within cessationist theology are thus seen. In listing these three prominent cessationists, one author includes this gift with those that have supposedly ceased, one does not include it, and one ignores it within the Church.

There may be difficulty in differentiating between God’s supernatural gift of wisdom through the Spirit, and man’s human ability to reason and decide on a course of action to solve a problem. However, this does not negate the validity of the gift for today, for the same is true of other spiritual gifts accepted as valid by the cessationist. For example, a man may exercise the supernatural gift of teaching, or simply be teaching according to his own human ability, even if exceptional. There is human generosity and also the spiritual gift of giving. Not all Christian decisions result from God’s gift of wisdom, but some certainly do. Therefore, this gift is relevant today.

Finally, this is another example to show that the completed New Testament is irrelevant to the discussion. The general principles for operating the local church are found in Scripture, but those alone are not sufficient when the church board meets to decide which of four assistant pastors to lay-off due to a financial need. This church needs the specific wisdom of God in making this important decision, and would be wise to pray for God to grant (gift) them this request for guidance.

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 74.

<sup>69</sup> MacArthur, 298.

## *Prophecy*

The gift, found in First Corinthians 12:10, is literally just the one word, prophecy (προφητεία). Nevertheless, a wide difference of opinion exists over the understanding of this word, in the context of spiritual gifts. Therefore, a more detailed study of the word is warranted.

According to Strong's, the word derives from prophet, προφήτης, literally a foreteller, a combination of the Greek verb, φημί, and the preposition, πρό.<sup>70</sup> The definition of the verb is to state something orally or in writing,<sup>71</sup> and is translated fifty-seven times as "say" and once as "affirm."<sup>72</sup> The preposition means "before," used in three different ways; as a marker of position in front of an object, as a marker of a point of time to another point of time, and as a marker of precedence in importance or rank.<sup>73</sup> A close examination of each of the forty-eight uses in Scripture shows the temporal usage clearly in thirty-four cases, with an additional seven more that would likely be classified temporally, as opposed to spatially (cf. Mark 1:2).<sup>74</sup> Noted Greek scholar, Dr. A.T. Robertson, finds only four instances of the spatial use.<sup>75</sup>

This examination should not be surprising to the average Christian who thinks of prophecy as something predictive of the future. A Biblical prophet was always someone who included future predictions in his declarations. The Mosaic Law sentenced a false

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<sup>70</sup> James Strong, *The New Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible: Greek Dictionary of the New Testament* (Nashville, Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1990), 62.

<sup>71</sup> BDAG, 1053.

<sup>72</sup> George V. Wigram, *The Englishman's Greek Concordance of the New Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1996), 785.

<sup>73</sup> BDAG, 864.

<sup>74</sup> Wigram, 653.

<sup>75</sup> A.T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1934), 621.



prophet to death, and when God anticipated the people's question as to how to recognize such a false prophet, He referred to the predictive nature of prophecy by saying:

When a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the thing does not happen or come to pass, that is the thing which the LORD has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously (Deut. 18:22).

Peter exalts prophecy above his own eyewitness testimony when exhorting his readers to follow the Word, explaining that man could not have spoken by himself, but God must have spoken through the man for prophecy to be accurate (cf. II Pet. 1:19-21). Indeed, apologetics typically focuses on fulfilled prophecy, predictions that came to pass, in proving both Jesus as Savior, and the Bible as God's Word.<sup>76</sup>

However, comments like MacArthur's are common today when seeking to define prophecy.

Prophecy simply means "to speak forth, to proclaim." It assumes the speaker is before an audience, and could mean "to speak publicly." The connotation of prediction was added sometime in the Middle Ages. Although many of the prophets made predictions, that was not their basic ministry and the idea is not involved in the original terms used to describe them and their work.<sup>77</sup>

The significance of Deuteronomy chapter eighteen involves a prediction of the coming Messiah, and the need to listen to Him, as the Jews had listened to Moses. The test would be fulfilled predictions of the future, and this test applied to all the prophets, since the false ones were to be killed. The prophets' mission in the Old Testament was typically to call the nation to repentance, or to announce judgment. Not all messages from the prophets were predictive in nature, but every one of them did make predictive comments. Such predictions were necessary to authenticate their proper role as spokesmen for God, given the demands of Deuteronomy 18:22. Jesus, of course, predicted both his death and

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<sup>76</sup> Henry M. Morris, *Many Infallible Proofs: Evidences for the Christian Faith* (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 1996), 189-90, 196-98.

<sup>77</sup> MacArthur, 303.

resurrection, authenticating the words He had spoken to the people (cf. Matt. 16:21).

Ryrie states, “technically a prophet was not only able to proclaim God’s message but he also was able to predict the future.”<sup>78</sup>

MacArthur defines prophecy as only “the Spirit-given and Spirit-empowered ability to proclaim the Word effectively.”<sup>79</sup> This interpretation, so similar to the gift of teaching, fits MacArthur’s decision not to include prophecy among the gifts that ceased in the first century. Other cessationists, like Unger,<sup>80</sup> and Walvoord,<sup>81</sup> include this as one of their temporary gifts. MacArthur explains why they would do so.

The primary argument for those who maintain it was a temporary sign gift – that it was a revelatory gift only, and therefore ceased when revelation ceased – is based on 1 Corinthians 13:8, where the gifts of prophecy, tongues, and knowledge all are referred to together as ceasing.<sup>82</sup>

Though MacArthur is a cessationist, he rejects the interpretation of the canon for the perfect in First Corinthians 13:10. Those like Unger and Walvoord who insist on using this text for cessationism, must then insist on this gift ceasing as well.

In defining prophecy differently than the common Biblical usage, which involves the predictive element, MacArthur can allow for its validity today in a non-charismatic sense. Romans twelve, and First Corinthians twelve, contain the two lists of spiritual gifts. Cessationists typically allow for the gifts found in Romans, such as teaching, leading, giving, while eliminating some or all of the ones from Corinthians. All of MacArthur’s temporary gifts come from Corinthians, none from Romans.<sup>83</sup> The problem is that prophecy, the same Greek word, προφητεία, occurs in both lists. Therefore, it is a

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<sup>78</sup> Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, 429.

<sup>79</sup> MacArthur, 303.

<sup>80</sup> Unger, 141.

<sup>81</sup> Walvoord, 177.

<sup>82</sup> MacArthur, 303.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 297.

serious challenge to adequately explain to another Christian why spiritual gifts like those found in Romans are important, but the ones in Corinthians are no longer needed, given that prophecy is in both lists.

The definition of prophecy as a spiritual gift is a message from God containing a predictive element. As with the two earlier gifts discussed, receiving a prophecy can be an isolated event. The Greek noun is singular. The predictive element is important to the definition for two reasons. The first is that it remains the most faithful to both the Greek word, and consistent Biblical usage. The second is that it differentiates this gift from the previous two mentioned, knowledge and wisdom, which also are messages from God. The Scriptures differentiate these gifts in Corinthians, so all definitions must have some distinction between them.

Two examples from Acts, both involving Agabus, demonstrate this gift within the current dispensation. The first reads:

And in these days prophets came from Jerusalem to Antioch. Then one of them, named Agabus, stood up and showed by the Spirit that there was going to be a great famine throughout all the world, which also happened in the days of Claudius Caesar. Then the disciples, each according to his ability, determined to send relief to the brethren dwelling in Judea. This they also did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul (Acts 11:27-30).

No less than six details are of note here. (1) The man is called a prophet, making his statement a prophecy. (2) This was a prediction of the future. (3) The prophecy came true. (4) The Holy Spirit is given the credit for making the prophecy through the human vessel, Agabus. (5) The prophecy moved the Christians to act in a way that was beneficial to some in the church. (6) The prophecy had nothing to do with any Biblical doctrine later included within the New Testament canon.

The second appearance of Agabus occurred in Caesarea, at the conclusion of Paul's third missionary journey.

And as we stayed many days, a certain prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. When he had come to us, he took Paul's belt, bound his *own* hands and feet, and said, "Thus says the Holy Spirit, 'So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man who owns this belt, and deliver *him* into the hands of the Gentiles.'"

Now when we heard these things, both we and those from that place pleaded with him not to go up to Jerusalem. Then Paul answered, "What do you mean by weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus."

So when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, "The will of the Lord be done" (Acts 21:10-14).

Once more, all six elements again appear. A man the Scripture calls a prophet gives a predictive message. He declares the prophecy is from the Holy Spirit, and the prophecy comes to pass, for Paul was literally bound in Jerusalem later in the chapter (cf. Acts 21:33). The prophecy moved the Christians hearing it to action, as they all, including Luke, tried to persuade Paul not to go to Jerusalem.

Finally, this prophecy also had no relevance to New Testament doctrine. Those who insist on making prophecy only involve the teaching of Scripture are refuted by these two examples. As with the other gifts, the completed canon would be irrelevant in the above two situations, if it already existed. If God, in the first century, cared enough about a pending famine to warn of it ahead of time, so that provisions for survival might be made, it is logical to assume He has the same concern for His people during the following 1900 years. Acts mentions others who prophesied, such as the four daughters of Philip (cf. Acts 21:9). Like Agabus, there is no mention of these women being instrumental in the contribution towards New Testament revelation.

Chuck Smith illustrates how God uses the gift of prophecy for a church today, with the following example. After seventeen years of fruitless ministry, he had just

resigned from his current pastorate to become pastor of the original Calvary Chapel.

Before arriving he was told they had decided to disband, rather than keep going, but since he had already resigned, he came anyway.

The day after I arrived we were in a prayer group, hands were laid on me, and a prophecy was given that seemed more dream than reality. The Lord said he was going to make me a shepherd of many flocks. At the time it seemed preposterous. Unknown to me, the church had also received a prophecy that God was going to bless the church so greatly that the little building it was meeting in would not be sufficient to hold all the people who were going to come. The church was to remodel its current building, then later move to a facility on the bluff overlooking the bay. Eventually the church would have a nationwide radio ministry, and would become known around the world. To a group of twelve people who were so discouraged they were ready to quit, the message sounded impossible.<sup>84</sup>

Since Smith did not know the details of the latter prophecy, the church became quite excited when he suggested how they should remodel the facility after his first Sunday service there.<sup>85</sup>

Only when they had outgrown their facility, another fulfillment, and Smith suggested they purchase elsewhere, was he then informed of the earlier prophecy. The members were certain the new building had to overlook the bay, and the property Smith wanted did not. Despite the protests of the members aware of the prophecy, he insisted they proceed anyway. Having sold the old building, their conditional use permit for the new spot was then denied by the city. Smith continues:

When we dejectedly returned to the planning department to retrieve our plans, a lady who worked there said, “You know, maybe you could move to our church. We’re going to be building a new facility and you could probably get our old one. It’s the Newport Harbor Lutheran Church on the bluff overlooking the bay.”

Even I could sense the Lord’s leading on this one!<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Smith, *Living Water*, 155.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 156.

Eventually, they began a radio ministry. Multiple new churches arose from the original Calvary Chapel, as Smith indeed became “a shepherd of many flocks.” Every detail of what were two different prophecies came to pass.

This example is quite specific in detail. Bible prophecies are always specific, and thus a true prophecy from God should not be as vague as a horoscope reading. Its fulfillment was complete, in all detail. Smith and the church did not fulfill it deliberately, nor could one argue its fulfillment happened due to a subliminal suggestion. It was directed to a local church, for a specific situation. Finally, it fits the explanation from Paul in First Corinthians 14:3 as to the purpose of prophecy, which is “to speak edification and exhortation and comfort to men.”

### *Gifts of Healings*

The title of this section reflects the text, for the Bible does not describe a general gift of healing, but rather states, “to another gifts of healings by the same Spirit” (I Cor. 12:9b). The Greek text for “gifts of healing” has both nouns in the plural, *χαρίσματα* *ἰαμάτων*. Fee recognizes that the same language recurs in verses twenty-eight and thirty of this chapter. His conclusion establishes a basis for the definition.

Probably this language reflects two things: (a) The use of *charisma* itself suggests that the “manifestation” is given not to the person who is healed, but to the person God uses for the healing of another; (b) the plural *charismata* probably suggests not a permanent “gift,” as it were, but that each occurrence is a “gift” in its own right.<sup>87</sup>

Arriving on a definition is crucial, for the cessationists have defined this gift far differently, thus enabling them to challenge the idea of its validity for today.

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<sup>87</sup> Fee, 594.

Unger declares, “a gift implies a settled and continued ability to do something again and again.”<sup>88</sup> However, such an implication goes beyond the simple definition of *χαρίσματα* as “that which is freely and graciously given.”<sup>89</sup> Unger’s view, shared by many cessationists, is more fitting for the secular usage of gift as a “notable capacity or talent.”<sup>90</sup> Those making such an implication within the definition allow for an argument that if one has the gift of healing, he should be able to exercise it at any moment, for any purpose. MacArthur’s sarcasm is indicative of what is often heard from the cessationist pulpits today.

Think of how thrilling and rewarding it would be to have the gift of healing! Think of what it would be like to go into a hospital among the sick and the dying and just go up and down the hall touching them, talking to them, and healing them! And wouldn’t it be wonderful to gather together groups of those who claim to have the gift of healing and fly them into the pockets of disease in the world where they could just go through the crowds healing everybody of cancers, yaws, blackfoot, and countless other ailments.<sup>91</sup>

Through such extreme rhetoric, he then concludes that since the Church does not do this, the idea of the gift for today is nonsense.

Bill Bright offers this definition on the subject of healing.

The gift of healing does not suggest that the recipient of the gift is given supernatural powers over the human body and over disease. Rather, it means that the individual is given the privilege of being the vessel through which God’s works of healing are directed.<sup>92</sup>

While Bright makes the exegetical mistake by defining a gift (singular), of healing (singular), rather than gifts of healings in the plural, his definition still fits the proper textual reading. The definition of gifts of healings is best seen as those acts of God,

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<sup>88</sup> Unger, 139.

<sup>89</sup> BDAG, 1081.

<sup>90</sup> *Webster’s Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary* (Springfield: Merriam-Webster, 1988), 517.

<sup>91</sup> John MacArthur, *The Charismatics: A Doctrinal Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978), 134.

<sup>92</sup> Bill Bright, *The Holy Spirit: The Key to Supernatural Living* (San Bernardino: Here’s Life Publishers, 1980), 211-12.

whereby He gives to a Christian the privilege to be a channel of ministry through which God provides a physical healing to another. Implicit in this definition is the realization that God does the healing, not the Christian; the one healed is not the recipient of the gift; and the believer is active in the presence of the healed individual, typically as the one praying for the healing. The use of the plural suggests God offers these gifts to certain individuals on more than an isolated occasion, likely because they are willing to be used by God in such a manner, when He should choose to do so in His sovereignty.

The test of such a definition is to see how it fits with Biblical revelation. The book of Acts describes many miraculous healings of physical ailments, through the ministry of the apostles. The cessationist argues that those who can heal today should be able to empty the hospitals. However, that was not the mission of the apostles. It is true that all were healed who even made contact with Peter's shadow (cf. Acts 5:15-16) or who touched Paul's handkerchiefs (cf. Acts 19:12). However, in both of these circumstances, the apostle in question did not actively seek these people to heal them. Peter made clear that his priority, as well as the other apostles, was the ministry of the word and prayer (cf. Acts 6:2-4). Since physical healings were never a priority for the apostles exercising this gift, it should not be the standard today.

The Lord Jesus Christ had a different purpose for physical healing than the apostles. When the Lord healed, it was to establish His credentials as the promised Messiah of Israel, in accordance with prophecy such as Isaiah 53:4 (cf. Matt. 8:16-17). No affliction was beyond the Lord's ability to cure, yet even Jesus Himself did not choose to heal every last individual in need within Israel. The proof of this statement is found in connection with the first apostolic healing of the dispensation of grace. Acts



three describes the healing of a man through the ministry of Peter and John. The man's description is as being, "lame from his mother's womb...laid daily at the gate of the temple" (Acts 3:2). Therefore, one may properly conclude that Jesus was aware of this man, crippled since birth, and saw him on His own visits to the temple. However, for God's own purposes and glory, Jesus chose not to heal him. The cessationist's elevation of healing as the priority for anyone who can do so was not seen in the life of Christ.

The Scriptures also point out various individuals that were with Paul, and yet were not healed by the apostle. Paul left Trophimus sick in Miletus (cf. II Tim. 4:20). Epaphroditus almost died, being sick with a lengthy illness (cf. Phil. 2:26-27). Paul instructed Timothy with medical advice, rather than to seek a supernatural healing, when it came to his ailments (cf. I Tim. 5:23). Paul himself discussed a "thorn in the flesh," commonly believed to be some sort of physical ailment, that God refused to remove (cf. II Cor. 12:7-10). The cessationist must explain these situations, while insisting on healing as a gift that is always operable for those, like the apostles, who had it.

MacArthur provides an explanation. His view involves noting that the above situations were later in the ministry of the apostle. He then concludes that the apostolic age had ended, and thus Paul's ability to heal had been removed from him.<sup>93</sup>

The cessationist typically connects the cessation of certain gifts by means of the completion of the canon. Epaphroditus' illness would have occurred before about half of the New Testament books were written.<sup>94</sup> Paul wrote Second Corinthians from Macedonia, during his third missionary journey, around A.D. 57.<sup>95</sup> This is the letter where the "thorn in the flesh" is mentioned, and MacArthur grants this to be a physical

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<sup>93</sup> MacArthur, *The Charismatics*, 83.

<sup>94</sup> Jensen, 20.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 282.

ailment, yet declares that since this was twenty-five years after the initial healings of the apostolic age, he was incapable to heal.<sup>96</sup>

MacArthur then seems to contradict himself by later mentioning Paul's ministry in Malta, where he was shipwrecked while in route to Rome as a prisoner.<sup>97</sup> Paul not only healed the father of Publius, but when word of the miracles spread, he healed everyone else on the island with diseases (cf. Acts 28:8-9). Of course, this all took place well after the writing of Second Corinthians. He first argues for an unlimited gift of healing, entrusted to the apostles, but then removed by God before nearly half of the New Testament was completed. He explains all cases of unhealed sickness among Paul's companions as taking place after said removal, but is countered by Scripture showing healing taking place up to the last chapter of Acts.

Therefore, one can conclude that God used the apostles to heal on many occasions, but they did not have unlimited power to heal. This fits the definition perfectly, for they did not have the gift of healing, but instead they received gifts of healings. These healings were for the glory of God, and the authentication of His Word, and both motives are certainly needed today.

Chuck Smith shares an example of a modern healing that took place one Sunday at Calvary Chapel.

Some kids wheeled their grandfather up to the front of the church. He was in a wheelchair, and they asked me to pray for him. I said "sure" and laid my hands on him and began to pray. I had just been reading in Acts 3 where Peter pulled the lame man to his feet, and it came to my mind to do the same. I lifted him up out of his wheelchair and said, "In the name of Jesus, walk!" And the man started walking! His grandkids were so excited they were almost doing cartwheels through the church. Then they told me that their grandpa had a cold, and they wanted me to pray for him to be healed of his cold!

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<sup>96</sup> MacArthur, *The Charismatics*, 83.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 148.

Where did that faith come from? I don't make a practice of pulling people out of wheelchairs; but at that instant, God gave me the faith to do that, and God gave me that gift of faith and healing at that moment. He does what He wants when He wants, and it is a blessing when He uses us and gives us the gifts that are needed.<sup>98</sup>

Smith also has shared with his congregation that a week later he again prayed for a man confined to a wheelchair. The prayer was rather simple, and he concluded with "God bless you" as they wheeled him away. An elder that had seen the prior miracle asked why Smith did not also pull this man to his feet with the command to walk. Smith simply explained, he did not feel God's leading to do so.

Since healings still occur, cessationists do believe God still can and occasionally will heal miraculously. Unger, having argued for the temporary nature of certain gifts to only the apostolic age, then writes:

This does not mean that God upon occasion may not, for His highest glory and to meet a human need, grant special faith to some or the power to perform miracles, including miracles of healing... These divine manifestations, however, are not to be regarded as gifts, but simply individual acts of God.<sup>99</sup>

Unger relies on semantics to explain the distinction he suggests, but this resembles a distinction without a difference. God grants the power to perform a miracle healing, but such granting is not a gift. Unger thus accommodates the reality of healings throughout this current dispensation, while maintaining his cessationist viewpoint.

MacArthur also recognizes healings taking place today.

Healings that are happening today can be explained biblically but not according to the Charismatic position. God does heal miraculously in answer to prayer to demonstrate His glory.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Chuck Smith, *The Word for Today Bible: New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005), 1510.

<sup>99</sup> Unger, 139.

<sup>100</sup> MacArthur, *The Charismatics*, 151.

Of note is the label, “the Charismatic position.” MacArthur describes a Charismatic position, but alternate views exist. His is not *the* (definite) Charismatic position.

It is an error to attribute certain false beliefs as indicative of what one must believe to be a charismatic. Christians, including charismatics, get sick. God does not choose to heal everyone, and one’s personal faith, or lack thereof, is not the sole blame for why one is not healed. Those who argue otherwise err. However, some Bible teachers accept miracle healings, while also challenging those through whom God chose to channel these gifts of healings. If cessationists would alter their views in this regard, there would seemingly be fewer Christians drawn to those teaching doctrinal error. Meanwhile, the influence of those teaching error would diminish within the body of Christ, as doctrinally solid churches taught God’s people on the subject of sickness in this fallen world, and healing in light of the sovereignty of God.

### *Tongues and Interpretation*

Of all the spiritual gifts, tongues is likely the most debated. The cessationist declares this gift ceased in the first century. However, certain implications result from such a view, in light of the exercise of tongues in the Church for the last century.

Some charismatic proponents allow for tongues to be utterances unknown to any human, earthly language. Fee makes this argument from the analogy of First Corinthians 14:10-12, and the brief reference to “tongues of angels” by Paul (I Cor. 13:1).<sup>101</sup> However, this seems to infer too much from the analogy. Paul is emphasizing the goal of edification in the church, by making the point of the need for interpretation whenever one

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<sup>101</sup> Fee, 598.

seeks to communicate, as noted in his question about the trumpet sounding for battle (cf. I Cor. 14:6-12). The reference to “tongues of angels” falls within the context of offering exaggeration, as seen with the references to understanding all mysteries, having all faith to move mountains, bestowing all his goods and giving his body to be burned. The exaggerations are used to emphasize the importance of love over any spiritual gifts, as love then becomes the topic of the chapter (cf. I Cor. 13:4-13).

Tongues in the passage is the word, γλῶσσα, in the Greek. It can literally refer to the physical organ for speech (cf. Mark 7:33). The word is commonly found in the papyri among magical documents, with the physical tongues of creatures like frogs being used as key ingredients in pagan rituals, as well as human tongues of the victims of ritual sacrifice.<sup>102</sup> Therefore, the term used among the pagans in connection to one in some sort of religious ecstasy is understandable.<sup>103</sup>

The Bible’s usage of the word in connection with the supernatural gift first occurs at Pentecost, at the birth of the dispensation of grace. The crowd in Jerusalem consisted of Jews from all over the world, gathered for the Feast of Weeks (Shavuot) as required by Mosaic Law. When hearing the apostles speak in tongues, in their amazement they first said:

Look, are not all these who speak Galileans? And how *is it that* we hear, each in our own language in which we were born (Acts 2:7-8)?

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<sup>102</sup> J.H. Moulton and G. Milligan, *Vocabulary of the Greek Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2004), 128.

<sup>103</sup> BDAG, 201.

The Greek word translated, language, is δῖάλεκτος, from where the word, dialect, derives in English.<sup>104</sup> Luke uses the word in connection with the Hebrew language elsewhere in Acts (cf. 21:40; 22:2; 26:14). It means language of a nation or region.<sup>105</sup>

The crowd then continued to exclaim:

Parthians and Medes and Elamites, those dwelling in Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya adjoining Cyrene, visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs—we hear them speaking in our own tongues the wonderful works of God (Acts 2:9-11).

Here the Greek word translated, tongues, is the word used of the gift in First Corinthians, γλῶσσα. Therefore, it is proper to equate the use of tongues, in its Biblical context, with the speaking of a human language. MacArthur offers seven reasons why tongues should equal languages.<sup>106</sup> He does so in the context of making a claim that, “ecstatic utterances are what normally pass for “tongues” in the Pentecostal/Charismatic movement.”<sup>107</sup> This assertion is debatable. It is possible that abuses through ecstatic utterances might have been taking place in Corinth, due to its pagan history. Likewise today, there is an emphasis on the gift in some churches, with tongues being given as the explanation for a variety of behavior, much of which is possibly human emotionalism and not the moving of the Spirit of God. However, MacArthur seems to stereotype all charismatics by equating tongues with such ecstatic utterances.

Charismatics often do view tongues as the speaking of a legitimate language.

Chuck Smith defines tongues simply as “speaking in a language that the speaker himself

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<sup>104</sup> Webster's, 349.

<sup>105</sup> BDAG, 232.

<sup>106</sup> MacArthur, *The Charismatics*, 159-60.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 162.

does not understand.”<sup>108</sup> While Smith is open to the idea of tongues including a heavenly, angelic language, his emphasis is that typically they are known languages.

A key verse to the discussion of tongues within the church service is found in Paul’s instruction to the Corinthians. Those critical of the practice often overlook key details, as will be shown.

I wish you all spoke with tongues, but even more that you prophesied; for he who prophesies *is* greater than he who speaks with tongues, unless indeed he interprets, that the church may receive edification (I Cor. 14:5).

Two points are of interest. The first is Paul’s desire that all the Corinthians spoke with tongues. This challenges those who argue that the Corinthians were not practicing a legitimate gift, but simply copying the pagan excesses they were familiar with before their salvation. This also counters those who argue the chief purpose of tongues was only as a sign for a few uniquely pivotal events in Acts.<sup>109</sup>

The second point often uncommented upon by cessationists concerns Paul’s declaration that prophesy is greater than tongues. Paul offers a qualifier not typically stressed by cessationists.<sup>110</sup> He uses the Greek particles, εἰ μὴ, commonly translated, “except,” or as above, “unless.” Prophesy is greater if there is no interpreter of the tongue message, but if there is an interpreter, then the situation changes. The goal is the edification of the church, and thus the purpose of the interpretation is to allow this edification, since now the people will understand what the tongue message means. This purpose for edification is clearly shown by the use of the ἵνα in introducing the purpose clause at the end of the verse.<sup>111</sup> Fee summarizes:

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<sup>108</sup> Smith, *Living Water*, 174.

<sup>109</sup> Walvoord, 183.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 185.

<sup>111</sup> Wallace, 472.

The problem is not speaking in tongues per se but speaking in tongues without interpretation-which from the context seems very likely what the Corinthians were doing. The interpretation of the tongue brings it within the framework of intelligibility, which in turn means that it too can edify the community. This does not imply that such a tongue is to be understood as directed toward the community, but that what the person has been speaking to God has now been made intelligible, so that others may benefit from the Spirit's utterance.<sup>112</sup>

The following example from the ministry experience of Chuck Smith will demonstrate the value that the gift of tongues can still have today. This will show the necessary relationship of the gift of interpretation, within the gathered assembly, and how tongues can still be used today as a sign for unbelievers, when such interpretation is present. Smith relates the story of a small gathering in the early years of Calvary Chapel, when to close the Scripture lesson there was a short time of worship where one of the ladies present prayed in an unknown tongue, namely French. He continues:

As she began to worship God, I could understand enough of her French to know that she was thanking God for her new life in Christ and the beautiful new song of love He had given her. I thought this was especially beautiful, as she used to be a nightclub singer prior to her conversion. At the conclusion of her worship in the Spirit, my wife began to give the interpretation to the group, and knowing that she does not know French, I was particularly blessed to hear how accurately the worship with the Spirit was being interpreted for the fellowship.

After the meeting one of the young men in the fellowship brought a Jewish girl from Palm Springs for counseling. When we sat down together, she said, "Before we get to my problems, explain to me what was happening here tonight. Why did the one lady speak to God in French, and the other lady translate to the group what she said?" I said, "Would you believe that neither of those ladies knows French?" I told her that I knew for a fact that neither knew French, since one of them was a close friend and the other was my wife. I then showed her in 1 Corinthians where it speaks of the gift of tongues and interpretation. She then told me that she had lived in France for six years, and that the French spoken was in the perfect accent of what she called the Aristocratic French. She also stated that the translation was perfect. She then said, "I must accept Jesus now, before we go any further."

It was my joy to see her find her Messiah and become a member of the body of Christ. There was a demonstration of the gift of tongues, followed by the

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<sup>112</sup> Fee, 659.



true interpretation, which was glorious praise and worship of God. The result was the edifying of the body and in this case the conversion of this Jewish girl.<sup>113</sup>

This example is somewhat special, for the primary usage of the gift is between oneself and God, in the privacy of one's personal prayer life. The Scripture is clear that when one prays in an unknown tongue, he is edifying himself (cf. I Cor. 14:4). This is likely why it is the least of the gifts (cf. I Cor. 12:28,30), for it is better to edify others in one's ministry. However, Paul made it his practice to speak in tongues often (cf. I Cor. 14:18), which should help answer the question as to its value in the devotional life of the Christian. It clearly is a gift that is under the control of the believer, and not to be confused with the confusion that takes place in many churches today (cf. I Cor. 14:30-33).

It is important to deal with the cessationist's understanding and teaching on just what exactly is taking place when tongues are spoken today. By refusing to accept a Biblically consistent exercise of this gift as the supernatural gift of the Spirit, taught in the Bible, how they then do explain such phenomena is now discussed. Their explanations might apply to a few Christians in a few circumstances. While there is some merit in each explanation, they are not sufficient to explain all supernatural examples of the gift, such as the one earlier illustrated.

Many of the explanations fall in the realm of the psychological. These include hypnosis, psychic catharsis, breakthrough of the unconscious, and escape from conflict.<sup>114</sup> These explanations, when detailed, might have value in explaining the behavior of those who utter unintelligible phrases, especially when such individuals are not Christians. However, they fail in explaining how a believer is capable of fluently speaking in a foreign language the praises of God. One theory is that of exalted memory.

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<sup>113</sup> Smith, *Charisma*, 118-19.

<sup>114</sup> Donald W. Burdick, *Tongues: To Speak or Not To Speak* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1969), 69-73.

The individual simply repeats language he was once exposed to, but never actively learned. Some psychological crisis triggers these long-stored memories, and the language comes forth.<sup>115</sup> Apparently, there are a few documented cases of such phenomena, but it certainly is no exhaustive explanation.

MacArthur suggests tongues may simply be a learned skill, describing this as “the most common explanation for the tongues that are occurring in the Charismatic movement today.”<sup>116</sup> The idea is twofold. First, one learns certain phrases and words by simply sitting in charismatic churches and listening to others. Then, one must practice speaking in his new “language” every day. MacArthur claims he has heard the sounds enough that he too could mimic the behavior.<sup>117</sup> He also remarks on many known cases where individuals finally realized they were not doing anything supernatural, and thus became quite disillusioned that their tongues was nothing more than learned behavior.<sup>118</sup>

However, this is not the legitimate gift of tongues. The reality is that many Christians today are able to fluently speak in another language, without any previous exposure to it. Churches like Calvary Chapel of Costa Mesa forbid the speaking of tongues in the regular worship services, for the emphasis is on the teaching of the Bible. Therefore, it would not be possible for the members of such a church to simply learn some phrases and repeat them afterwards. Something else, likely supernatural, is taking place.

This leads to the final explanation offered by cessationists. Tongues speaking is Satanic. This view comes when the cessationist eventually gets to the place of

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 74.

<sup>116</sup> MacArthur, *The Charismatics*, 176.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 177.

acknowledging that psychological and other rational explanations cannot adequately account for all the experiences of tongues in the Church today.

There are basically two choices when it comes to the supernatural, God or Satan. The charismatic, using the Bible as support, sees this supernatural activity equating to a gift of the Holy Spirit. The gift is described clearly in Scripture, with a significant portion of one epistle devoted to its proper practice and purpose for the Church. Much like Peter explaining tongues to the crowd at Pentecost, the charismatic explains the phenomena with, “this is what was spoken.” He then references the Bible as his authority. This is exactly what Chuck Smith did in answering the Jewish woman’s question as shown in the earlier example. The Scripture is not ignored for the sake of experience, but rather experience is judged according to the Scripture.

The cessationist has the same Bible, but has a cessationist belief-system. His evaluation of Christian experience is through this belief system. This system has already been shown Biblically deficient. Unlike healing mentioned earlier, there is no accommodation for tongues with a cessationist. If God is not the source, the only alternative is Satan.

Walvoord expresses this viewpoint.

There are good reasons to believe that most if not all the phenomena which are advanced as proof of modern speaking in tongues is either psychological or demonic activity. A most convincing argument is the history of the tongues movement with its excesses and its obvious evil characteristics.<sup>119</sup>

However, the cessationist must explain how the salvation of the Jewish woman cited earlier could be evil, or indicative of what Satan seeks to accomplish in this world?

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<sup>119</sup> Walvoord, 186.

There are ramifications for the conclusion that tongues is Satanic. Unless one is willing to grant that Satan can dwell within a Christian, the cessationist is accusing these charismatics of not being saved, and likely in need of an exorcism. Potentially millions of professing Christians, despite a firm belief in the gospel, are apparently not saved because of this one charismatic issue. Having already believed and received the pardon from Christ that only His death and resurrection provides, is there an addendum to the gospel of grace that also requires the renouncement of tongues in order to be saved? Since the legitimate work of tongues is praise to God, as seen through interpretation, it seems improper to argue that Satan is working in an individual to offer praises to God, and edification to other believers present.

The cessationist that points to Satanic activity towards his brothers in Christ must think through these ramifications. There seems no way to explain away all tongues, not to mention the gift of interpretation, without involving the supernatural. If the cessationist is wrong, he would be calling the work of the Holy Spirit, the work of Satan. If the cessationist is willing to accept at least some of the tongues activity today as legitimately the gift of the Holy Spirit, then the whole cessationist premise is found inadequate.

The concluding two quotes, first from Bill Bright and then Alan Redpath, provide a conclusion on this gift for both charismatic and cessationist alike. Bright writes:

Let me stress only two biblical principles: First, the gift of tongues must always be exercised in accordance with the biblical guidelines as mentioned in 1 Corinthians 14. Second, those who have this gift must exercise it in love and humility, and those who do not have this gift must accept with love those who claim to have it.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Bright, 213.

Bright seems to be asking charismatic and cessationist alike to relate to each other through Christ's love, humility, and acceptance. Redpath touches on both sides by concluding:

Don't demand that, in order for another person to be spiritual, he must heal, or he must speak in an unknown tongue...One of the most damaging things that is done today in the name of fundamentalism is to grieve the Holy Spirit and divide the body. For victory, the body must work together in harmony and fellowship and love, under the authority of the Holy Spirit...God forbid that any of us should do one thing, or say one thing, that would harm the Lord's body, the church, by ruining another's gift or destroying the fellowship.<sup>121</sup>

### *The Calvary Chapel Emphasis*

The experiences of Chuck Smith and Calvary Chapel are primarily used for modern illustrations. There are charismatic churches like Calvary Chapel that exalt the systematic teaching of Scripture above the sign gifts. Cessationists often make claims against the charismatic viewpoint by upholding the more extreme examples of excess within Pentecostalism. Calvary Chapel provides a different perspective, and thus is often ignored by cessationist authors, but warrants inclusion herein.

A prime example of this is seen in the writings of John MacArthur. His book, *The Charismatics*, is referenced earlier in this work. Although the book includes over 150 endnotes, and a bibliography of over 130 sources, he does not mention Calvary Chapel or Chuck Smith once. He does link charismatics with such heretical concepts as continual revelation, experience as priority over Scripture, and a variety of obviously erroneous teachings and quotes concerning specifics of these gifts. Since this book was written in 1978, during the height of what is known as the Calvary Chapel movement, his decision to exclude is noteworthy, especially given that both his church and Smith's church are

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<sup>121</sup> Redpath, 143.

located in Southern California. Smith's teachings do not fit with the abuses MacArthur spotlights in his book, yet MacArthur never acknowledges in this book that not all charismatics believe like the extremes he portrays.

Hank Hanegraaff did include Smith in the book he wrote that challenges the heretical teachings of the faith movement. He concludes this point with a quote from *Christianity in Crisis*.

Furthermore, it is tragic that a number of noncharismatics have attempted to use the Faith teachers to prove that the charismatic movement is in chaos. In fact, some have used the inane statements of the Faith teachers to label charismatics as having zeal without knowledge and enthusiasm without enlightenment-in short, being keen but clueless. This, of course, is clearly untrue.

Are we prepared to call a man like Dr. Gordon Fee, one of the foremost Bible scholars today, "keen but clueless"? Are we going to say that Dr. Walter Martin, founder of the Christian Research Institute and father of the modern-day countercult revolution, had zeal but not in accordance with knowledge? Do we really want to categorize Chuck Smith, pastor of Calvary Chapel of Costa Mesa, California, and founder of one of the largest and most effective Christian movements in modern-day history, as having enthusiasm without enlightenment?<sup>122</sup>

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### BIBLICAL SUPPORT FOR SIGN GIFTS

When it comes to the area of Biblical support of charismatic doctrine, the plain reading of Scripture, coupled with a consistent interpretation of God's Word, is sufficient.

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<sup>122</sup> Hank Hanegraaff, *Christianity in Crisis* (Eugene: Harvest House, 1997), 48.

One would not likely lead towards the cessationist viewpoint unless guided in that direction by the Biblical interpretations of others.

Nowhere does the Scripture indicate the use of the sign gifts of the Spirit were substitutes for New Testament Bible study for the early Church's growth. Paul exhorted Timothy in his first epistle:

Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you by prophecy with the laying on of the hands of the eldership. Meditate on these things; give yourself entirely to them, that your progress may be evident to all. Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you (I Tim. 4:14-16).

While this epistle was one of Paul's last, it was still written before several of the books that comprise the New Testament canon.<sup>123</sup> If Paul ever wanted to clearly teach the cessation of sign gifts, this would be one ideal place, especially since he mentions a sign gift in connection with Timothy's ordination. Instead, the emphasis for both Christian growth and salvation is doctrine. Paul uses the two words commonly translated, doctrine (διδασκαλία, διδαχή), a total of seventeen times in the pastoral epistles of First and Second Timothy, plus Titus. In his other ten epistles, they occur only eight more times.<sup>124</sup>

These Pastoral Epistles offer no support for the cessation of the sign gifts. Paul gave instruction on the emphasis of Scripture to these two leaders of what would be the next generation of Christians. Through these letters, the Holy Spirit has continued to teach Church leaders throughout history.

The basis for the charismatic view is not reliant upon various proof texts such as Hebrews 13:8 or Romans 11:29. Occasionally, a charismatic will use such verses to

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<sup>123</sup> Jensen, 20.

<sup>124</sup> Wigram, 150-51.

defend the doctrine, and in doing so is thus refuted by the cessationist.<sup>125</sup> Instead, a discussion of First Corinthians is sufficient, and now follows.

### *First Corinthians in Context*

Among the purposes in Paul's writing of this epistle is the identification of basic problems in the church, while offering solutions to those problems, which necessitates the elaboration of any doctrine involved.<sup>126</sup> Jensen outlines these problems as ones of division (cf. 1:10-4:21), depravities (cf. 5:1-6:20), personal problems (cf. 7:1-11:1), and worship service problems (cf. 11:2-15:58).<sup>127</sup> Therefore, the Christian should immediately see why such a letter would be included within the canon. The issues affecting the church at Corinth are also issues that have plagued the churches for centuries, and continue to do so.

The cessationist's sole attempt from this letter to support his view derives from First Corinthians 13:8-10. As was shown, their interpretation is out of context, and even challenged by other cessationists today. Consequently, there is nothing left within the body of this epistle that would lead towards cessationism. Therefore, the charismatic can let the teachings of Paul, within this letter, stand in their own right.

The New King James translators chose the word, "therefore," thirty times within this book.<sup>128</sup> While there are different Greek words used to express it, the significance of the observation concerns the style of Paul's writing within the letter. Paul concludes a specific section with the application appropriate in light of his teaching therein. Some

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<sup>125</sup> Unger, 136.

<sup>126</sup> Jensen, 269.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 280-81.

<sup>128</sup> *The New King James Version Concordance* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1992), 1232.



significant passages are as follows, chosen because all conclude paragraphs, both in the Greek, and the later-added chapters of the English translations.

Therefore let no one boast in men. For all things are yours: whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas, or the world or life or death, or things present or things to come – all are yours. And you *are* Christ's, and Christ *is* God's (3:21-23). – Conclusion of divisions within the church over personalities.

But those who are outside God judges. Therefore "*put away from yourselves the evil person*" (5:13b). – Conclusion of dealing with an unrepentant member involved in sexual sin.

For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's (6:20). – Conclusion of exhortation to sexual purity, since the Christian's body is the temple of the Holy Spirit.

Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble (8:13). – Conclusion of sensitivity towards a weaker brother's conscience.

Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as *one* who beats the air. But I discipline my body and bring *it* into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified (9:26-27). – Conclusion of Paul's humbling himself as a servant, despite his apostleship, for the goal and reward of the gospel.

Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. Give no offense, either to the Jews or to the Greeks or to the church of God, just as I also please all *men* in all *things*, not seeking my own profit, but the *profit* of many, that they may be saved. Imitate me, just as I also *imitate* Christ (10:31-11:1). – Conclusion of teaching on eating foods offered to idols.

Therefore, my brethren, when you come together to eat, wait for one another. But if anyone is hungry, let him eat at home, lest you come together for judgment. And the rest I will set in order when I come (11:33-34). – Conclusion of proper conduct at the Lord's Table.

Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord (15:58). – Conclusion of the Christian's resurrection hope due to the risen Christ.

The above references show that eight of the sixteen chapter divisions of the epistle conclude with Paul's use of the "therefore" idea. However, one more should be added to make the list complete.

Therefore, brethren, desire earnestly to prophesy, and do not forbid to speak with tongues. Let all things be done decently and in order (14:39-40). – Conclusion on order in church services, with emphasis on specific role of tongues and prophecy.

### *Rules of Interpretation*

For Biblical conservatives, there exists no rule of interpretation that would warrant accepting the first eight examples as practical advice for the Church both today and throughout history, but then dismiss the last citation as purely an outdated exhortation, only relevant to the first century church at Corinth around the year A.D. 55.<sup>129</sup> However, in anticipation of expected objections, three points are made.

First, the cessationist may try to argue context. However, this argument assumes one comes to the epistle with the *a priori* belief of cessationism. The epistles contain the teachings for the present dispensation of grace. If one dismisses such a large block of teaching, as found in First Corinthians concerning the sign gifts, one logically could freely choose to ignore other teachings in the letter, such as the teaching on divorce, or the solemnity of the Lord's Table. To be further consistent, under such a mindset, a Christian could eliminate teachings found in other epistles, such as the role of wives to husbands, or children to parents (cf. Col. 3:18,20).

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<sup>129</sup> Jensen, 269.

The second objection arises in the area of culture. Dr. Roy Zuck gives four guidelines in evaluating passages that might be influenced by culture.<sup>130</sup> Two involve commands in Scripture that pertain culturally to settings with little to no equivalency in modern America. In these circumstances, a principle should be transferable. An example from First Corinthians is to “greet one another with a holy kiss” (I Cor. 16:20b). Zuck explains the passage thusly:

Since that was the normal form of greeting in that day, and since that is not the normal form of greeting in our Western culture, it follows that this practice need not be carried over to today. Instead the principle behind it should be followed, namely, to express friendliness and love to others.<sup>131</sup>

Another example from First Corinthians that Zuck explains must be understood within a cultural context is the instruction on women’s hair coverings.<sup>132</sup> Both of these examples show the marked difference between truly cultural passages, and a significant theological section on spiritual gifts, such as found in this epistle. Zuck declares:

Some situations, commands, or principles are repeatable, continuous, or not revoked, and/or pertain to moral and theological subjects, and/or are repeated elsewhere in Scripture, and therefore are permanent and transferable to us.<sup>133</sup>

Such a definition would not allow the theological teaching on spiritual gifts in this epistle to be dismissed as only culturally relevant to the first-century Corinthians.

A final objection against the need for Christians to follow all the commands in the epistles is the last of Zuck’s four guidelines mentioned above. He writes:

Some situations, commands, or principles pertain to an individual’s specific nonrepeatable circumstances, and/or nonmoral or nontheological subjects, and/or have been revoked, and are therefore not transferable to today.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> Roy B. Zuck, *Basic Bible Interpretation: A Practical Guide to Discovering Biblical Truth* (Colorado Springs: Victor, 1991), 92-95.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., 93-94.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 94-95.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., 92.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 93.

Zuck's example here is Paul's command to Timothy to bring his cloak and scrolls (cf. II Tim. 4:13). Such commands do occur in Paul's epistles, for they are personal letters as well as doctrinal treatises. However, the commands on the spiritual gifts do not fit in this category either.

In conclusion, Paul commands the brethren to not forbid others to speak in tongues (cf. I Cor. 14:39). The cessationist breaks this command, yet does so without a hermeneutical principal for a base of support. He accepts the instructions found within the epistle, as relevant for the Church throughout history, but ignores this passage.

### *Commands in First Corinthians*

This is not the only command of consequence on the topic. Paul also wrote:

But earnestly desire the best gifts. And yet I show you a more excellent way (12:31).

Some may argue that the Greek verb, ζηλοῦτε, does not have to be translated in the imperative mood of command, for it is also the same form as the indicative mood of this verb, ζηλώω. Such a translation in the indicative would then be a simple observation: "You earnestly are desiring the best gifts." This perspective is opposed by lexicons such as Perschbacher,<sup>135</sup> Zodhiates,<sup>136</sup> and as found in Logos' Libronix Bible software. The translators for the King James, New King James, New American Standard, and New International Version all chose the imperative. Nevertheless, the Greek does indicate this verse alone cannot be construed dogmatically as an imperative of command.

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<sup>135</sup> Wesley J. Perschbacher, *The New Analytical Greek Lexicon* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1990), 188.

<sup>136</sup> Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study New Testament with Parallel Greek: King James Version* (Chattanooga: AMG Publishers, 1992), 571.

However, Paul repeats the word in the first verse of chapter fourteen. This verse reads, “Pursue love, and desire spiritual *gifts*, but especially that you may prophesy” (14:1). Here there is little doubt that the imperative is meant for the same word, ζηλοῦτε. The context supports it, and also supports an imperative understanding of the previous reference.

To put these together, Paul concludes the twelfth chapter with a command to earnestly desire the best gifts, but hints at a more excellent way. That excellent way is love, as detailed in the thirteenth chapter. Then, the very first word of chapter fourteen is the command to pursue (Διώκετε) this love, while also desiring spiritual gifts, as he leads into the discussion that prophesy is a greater gift to desire than tongues, due to the edification factor discussed in chapter six.

These two commands, coupled with the earlier reference of 14:39, show God’s desire, through His Word, to encourage the Church in the pursuit of these gifts. These commands are not isolated to solely a small church in Corinth around the middle of the first century. They have value in the Church today, just as the rest of this epistle has value for today.

### *The Best Gifts*

Some may then ask what these best gifts happen to be, that God would have His people desire. This question is akin to asking a carpenter what his best screwdriver happens to be. The size of the head, the length of the handle, and whether the job calls for a Philips or a flathead are all factors in his answer. Therefore, the answer ultimately is the best screwdriver depends on the job.

The same is true for spiritual gifts. Often lost in this debate is that Paul's primary purpose of chapter twelve is to declare the unity of the body of Christ, in the midst of wide diversity of spiritual gifts given to the members of that body. Nothing in Scripture is accidental, but the listing of the gifts seems almost incidental. One should view the context of chapter twelve as focusing on the need for all the gifts to be operative within the Church, and God's desire that there be no schism in the body. Paul declares this same theme in the Romans' listing of spiritual gifts.

For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we, *being* many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us...(Rom. 12:4-6a).

The best gifts depend on one's place in the body. God is sovereign in the placement of individual believers in the body, as to their duties in service to the Lord, but all are necessary for the effectual functioning of the body of Christ.

## CHAPTER NINE

## THE BAPTIZING WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

One teaching is so closely related to charismatic theology, and thus so criticized by cessationists, that its expounding is warranted here. This concerns the doctrine of the baptizing work of the Holy Spirit, sometimes called the baptism “in” or “with” the Spirit. For purposes here, no distinction will be made simply on the choice of preposition, though some writers do make an issue on this point.<sup>137</sup> This baptism is not a secondary experience after salvation. Such a view therefore is in agreement with the cessationists, and in opposition with most charismatics.

In proving this claim, another criticism of charismatics by cessationists shall be eliminated. To that end, the same cessationists that have been consistently opposed throughout this work (Unger, Walvoord, MacArthur) are now used in support. Charismatics need to redefine the experience they commonly call the baptism of the Spirit, and in so doing will eliminate much of the cessationist criticism they experience.

The ultimate desire is to make sure one’s belief system matches what the Bible actually teaches. The bulk of this work has argued that the cessationist is in error with Scripture. The charismatics’ beliefs must also equate to what the Bible teaches in context and fullness.

### *The Problem*

John MacArthur has written:

One of the cardinal doctrines held by Charismatics is the necessity for a “second work of grace,” commonly called the “baptism in the Holy Spirit.” Charismatic writers and teachers are all agreed that you need the baptism.<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Joy Unspeakable: Power and Renewal in the Holy Spirit* (Wheaton: Harold Shaw Publishers, 1984), 23,27.

<sup>138</sup> MacArthur, *The Charismatics*, 119.

MacArthur is too broad in asserting all charismatics are united in this belief. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that charismatic teachers in general do emphasize such a second work, and this work is commonly identified as the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

However, the baptism of the Holy Spirit as an act subsequent to salvation is not a necessary requirement for the charismatic view on gifts. One can believe all spiritual gifts are still operative today, in this present dispensation, without involving himself in the controversy over the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

The cessationist writers focus much of their challenge to charismatics on this subject. If those charismatics who believe the baptism to be a subsequent experience are in error with the Bible, the cessationist's appeal is that the charismatic must also be in theological error on the gifts. This is a logical fallacy. While it is understandable why the cessationist would correct this error, it does not reinforce other cessationist views. The two issues are separate.

### *Argument for a Baptism Subsequent to Salvation*

A case can be made for a subsequent baptism at some point following salvation. Bible teachers like Dr. R.A. Torrey and Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones have embraced this view. MacArthur himself has the highest of praise for Lloyd-Jones and his uncompromising stand for Scripture.<sup>139</sup> The main issue is to examine the transition from the gospels to Acts through a dispensational theology.

On the day of His ascension to heaven, Jesus told the apostles they would be “baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now” (Acts 1:5b). Therefore, they had

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<sup>139</sup> John MacArthur, *Pastoral Ministry: How to Shepherd Biblically* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005), 300.



not yet received this baptism. Torrey points out that Jesus had already pronounced these same apostles to be “clean” in John 13:10, and later repeated they were “already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you” (John 15:3). Torrey declares this as proof they were already regenerate men.<sup>140</sup> After Jesus’ resurrection, John tells us Jesus “breathed on them, and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit’” (John 20:22). At this point they believed the gospel, including His resurrection. It also seems logical that if Jesus “breathed” and commanded them to receive the Holy Spirit, that they indeed received the Holy Spirit. There is little justification for arguing Jesus was just giving a preview of Pentecost.

The issue is not whether the apostles were already saved. The key is to understand the uniqueness of the apostles as being part of a dispensational transition. The Church did not begin until Pentecost in Acts two. Therefore, when Jesus declared the apostles clean before His crucifixion, it would have been from the perspective of the prior dispensation. For example, if Peter had been killed on the night of the Lord’s betrayal, he would have joined John the Baptist and the rest of the Old Testament saints.

Jesus made it clear that the Helper, the Holy Spirit, would not come until Jesus had departed to the Father, when they would see Him no more (cf. John 16:7-11). This refers to the “Promise of the Father” mentioned by Jesus when promising the baptism of the Holy Spirit (cf. Acts 1:4-5). Thus, the reception of the Holy Spirit mentioned in John twenty should likewise be associated with the Spirit’s ministry in the Old Testament, and not the new ministry to take place at Pentecost. Much like David and others, the apostles

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<sup>140</sup> R.A. Torrey, *The Person and Work of the Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1910), 149.

were saved, and they had the Holy Spirit to aid them, but this should still be understood from an Old Testament perspective, specifically the dispensation of law.

Therefore, an argument simply from these passages, that the baptism of the Spirit is subsequent to a Christian's salvation, ignores the uniqueness of the apostles in their dispensational transition. Moses lived for eighty years before the institution of the dispensation of Mosaic Law, and he too experienced the transition from one dispensation to another. Adam, Noah, and Abraham were all saved individuals that also experienced dispensational transitions. Transitional characters are unique, and one must be careful building doctrine that would apply to all, based solely on their experiences. For the Bible to support a subsequent experience as the baptism of the Spirit, there must be evidence beyond the initial apostles, and after the birth of the Church in Acts two.

There are other instances in Acts, pointed to by those arguing for a post-salvation baptism. Two are dealt with here. The first concerns the ministry of Philip in Samaria in Acts eight. He made many converts in Samaria, and the Scripture then declares:

Now when the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them, who, when they had come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. For as yet He had fallen upon none of them. They had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:14-17).

Clearly, a mighty experience happened to these new Christians. As believers they already had the Holy Spirit dwelling within them (cf. Rom. 8:9). The reception of the Spirit described here, falling upon them, was something powerful and recognizable to others. However, nowhere does the text label this experience as the baptism of the Holy Spirit. The baptism that is referenced in these verses is water baptism after their belief in Christ

(cf. Acts 8:12), but otherwise the word baptism in connection with the Holy Spirit is lacking.

The second example concerns the salvation experience of Saul of Tarsus, known later as Paul. Paul was converted on the Damascus road (cf. Acts 9:3-9). However, the Lord later sent a disciple named Ananias to Paul for a specific purpose.

And Ananias went his way and entered the house; and laying his hands on him he said, “Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you came, has sent me that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” Immediately there fell from his eyes *something* like scales, and he received his sight at once; and he arose and was baptized (Acts 9:17-18).

This remarkable experience took place after his conversion, yet nowhere does the Bible describe what happened to Paul as the baptism of the Holy Spirit. The phrase that is used is the filling with the Holy Spirit. The reference here to his being baptized is again water baptism, and temporally occurs after the healing and filling with the Spirit, upon arising. Paul was healed and filled with the Holy Spirit instantaneously, and then he got up and went to be baptized in water. Neither of these two examples from Acts is described as the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

### *The Baptism of the Holy Spirit Defined*

A dispensational theology is crucial when discussing the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Walvoord explains why this is so:

The principal cause of disagreement is found in the common failure to apprehend the distinctive nature of the church. Many theologians regard the church as a universal group of saints of all ages, some extending even these boundaries to include in the conception all who outwardly belong to it, even if not saved. If this concept of the nature of the church is held, the baptism of the Holy Spirit has no relation to it...If, however, the church be defined as the saints of this age only, the work of the Holy Spirit in baptizing all true believers into the body of Christ takes on a new meaning. It becomes the distinguishing mark of the

saints of the present age, the secret of the peculiar intimacy and relationship of Christians to the Lord Jesus Christ. It is, therefore, essential to a proper doctrine of the baptism of the Holy Spirit that it be recognized as the distinguishing characteristic of the church, the body of Christ.<sup>141</sup>

Since there are relatively few passages in the New Testament that describe the baptism of the Holy Spirit, it is both possible and necessary to look at each one to understand a proper definition.

For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body-whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free-and have all been made to drink into one Spirit (I Cor. 12:13).

Here the baptizing work is done by the means of the Holy Spirit, and it is universal in scope. The work is the placing of the believers into the body of Christ. The context for this verse is significant for Paul is emphasizing the unity of the body, despite the diversity of gifts found among the members.

Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life (Rom. 6:3-4).

Unger notes three significant results of baptism derived from this passage. The context involves the previous chapter, where Paul contrasts the believer's relationship to Adam, versus his relationship to Christ. Therefore, the baptizing work of the Spirit both disconnects the believer's position in Adam, and identifies the believer as now in Christ.<sup>142</sup> The third observation is the baptism is the basis for the new holy walk of the believer.<sup>143</sup>

This passage is often equated with water baptism. Yet, Unger also explains:

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<sup>141</sup> Walvoord, 138.

<sup>142</sup> Merrill F. Unger, *The Baptizing Work of the Holy Spirit* (Wheaton: Van Kampen Press, 1953), 84-85.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 88.

This, however, does not mean that water baptism bears no relationship to Spirit baptism. On the contrary it is the symbol of the baptism of the Spirit, which effects union with the body of Christ and identification with Christ. In other words, water baptism is the symbol of the *cause* or *means* of union with Christ rather than the result of it or the portrayal of the process of salvation, and as such always underlies the spiritual reality.<sup>144</sup>

*There is* one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who *is* above all, and through all, and in you all (Eph. 4:4-6).

If one opposes Spirit baptism being the reference in this verse, the alternative would be water baptism. The implication would be that one must be baptized in water to be saved. All the other references are absolutes in the lives of a believer, thus precluding this as a reference to water baptism. The result then is recognition that all believers have experienced the Spirit baptism.

In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with *Him* through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead (Col. 2:11-12).

The reference to circumcision is to the spiritual reality that has happened to the believer because of his position in Christ, and not the ritual act of circumcision itself. Therefore, one logically should see the baptism here as also representative of the spiritual reality, and not the ritual act itself. All believers have been both circumcised in Him (Jesus), and buried in baptism with Him.

For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus (Gal. 3:26-28).

Spirit baptism is the reference here, for if water baptism was the focus, then Paul would be teaching that only those who have been baptized in water are sons of God. This is

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<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 87.

untenable. Once again, the universal scope of all believers is seen in this reference to Spirit baptism. The baptism is “into” Christ.

Having exhausted all of Paul’s doctrinal references to the baptism of the Spirit, the final references derive from the book of Acts. While there are multiple references to the ritual of water baptism in Acts, the baptism of the Holy Spirit only occurs twice.

The first of these has been discussed, and is found in chapter one, when Jesus promises the apostles will be baptized with the Holy Spirit in a few days (cf. Acts 1:5). This promise was fulfilled at Pentecost in chapter two. Though the term, baptism of the Spirit, is not found in that second chapter, the context indicates this event fulfilled what Jesus was predicting. This event marked the birth of the Church. The apostles so baptized were believers, but under an Old Testament perspective, until that moment.

The second and final mention is when Peter quotes Jesus, while explaining to the Jews why he had gone to visit Gentiles, namely Cornelius and his household.

“And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them, as upon us at the beginning. Then I remembered the word of the Lord, how He said, ‘John indeed baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’ If therefore God gave them the same gift as *He gave* us when we believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could withstand God?” (Acts 11:15-17).

Peter connects the powerful experience upon the Gentiles, as they began to speak with tongues and magnify God, as also the baptism of the Holy Spirit. This was a seminal moment, for it was the first instance of God opening the door of salvation to Gentiles, and Peter’s Jewish audience realized the significance (cf. Acts 11:18). However, it must be noted, that the baptism of the Spirit, associated with these Gentiles, was contemporaneous with their salvation, and not subsequent to it.

This exhausts the express teachings found in the New Testament concerning the baptism of the Holy Spirit. These passages do not teach that the baptism of the Holy Spirit is a secondary work of grace, after salvation, empowering the believer in a special way and providing various spiritual gifts. Unger provides the definition.

The baptism is the divine operation of God's Spirit which places the believer in Christ, in His mystical body, the church, and which makes him one with all other believers in Christ. The baptism makes them one in the life of the Son of God Himself, sharing His common salvation, hope, and destiny. Thus, this major Bible theme concerns intimately and vitally the believer's position and experience, his standing and state.<sup>145</sup>

The key idea within this definition is one of identification. Implicit in this definition is the fact that this baptism takes place at the moment of salvation, and is not repeatable.

### *Why the Confusion*

Some charismatics might take issue with the limited references to Acts discussed above. The term, baptism of the Holy Spirit, is often applied to passages where it does not belong. This is due to extrapolating too much from the Pentecost event at the birth of the Church, and the episode concerning Cornelius in chapter ten.

It is agreed that the experience of the apostles at Pentecost can be equated with the baptism of the Holy Spirit. In keeping with the earlier definition, this was the moment when the apostles were placed "in Christ." Because of their unique status as transitional characters between dispensations, they are the only Christians in Scripture who could be classified as saved before the baptism. Such salvation is understood as akin to the Old Testament saints, and not the new dimension of union with Christ that comes with the baptism they later experienced.

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<sup>145</sup> Unger, *The Baptism and Gifts*, 21.

A specific detail is mentioned in connection with this event, concerning the role of the Holy Spirit. The Bible says the apostles “were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance” (cf. Acts 2:4). The filling with the Spirit took place at the same time as the baptism of the Spirit. However, the two must not be the same event, for this filling of the apostles with the Holy Spirit is repeated in Acts, with no mention of the baptism. After praying to God for boldness, subsequent to the arrest of Peter and John in chapter four, the Scripture says:

And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness (Acts 4:31).

The Cornelius account is the second clear reference to the baptism of the Holy Spirit. As was shown, this does not harm the chosen definition, for this was the moment of conversion for Cornelius and his household. However, as with Pentecost, there is a crucial detail associated with this event, concerning the Holy Spirit.

The Bible says, “the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word” (Acts 10:44). The Greek word translated, upon, is ἐπὶ. Much is made of the use of this preposition, and confusion has resulted, for there are other instances in Acts where the Holy Spirit comes upon (ἐπὶ) believers.

Jesus uses the preposition in His prediction to the apostles in chapter one:

But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth (Acts 1:8).

Given that this was a prediction of what took place at Pentecost, it is proper to describe what happened to the apostles when they spoke in tongues as the Spirit coming upon



them. Therefore, in both instances where the baptism of the Holy Spirit is referenced, the teaching is that the Spirit came upon those receiving the baptism.

However, it is too much to then conclude that every event in Acts where the Spirit comes upon (ἐπι) someone is synonymous with the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Two other instances are often associated with the baptism of the Holy Spirit by charismatics, though the Bible does not make such a claim.

The first concerns the revival taking place in Samaria. The Scripture declares:

Now when the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them, who, when they had come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. For as yet He had fallen upon none of them. They had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:14-17).

It is not necessary to insist these were not already saved, and such a view is quite contrary to the chapter's earlier details. These had believed Philip's preaching, and were then baptized in water. To insist they were unsaved, one would have to explain away the declaration that they had "believed," and then assume Philip mistakenly arranged the water baptism of multitudes of unbelievers. One also would have to explain how they then became saved simply by the apostles laying on of hands, since no comment is made to the apostles preaching the gospel.

Since the Spirit indwells one at the moment of salvation, the reception of the Holy Spirit here must refer to the subsequent filling of the Spirit, as He came upon (ἐπι) them. This event is not referenced here as the baptism of the Spirit. The conclusion is the better terminology would be the filling of the Spirit. The ἐπι experience in Acts should connect to the filling, not the baptism.

The second instance involves those in Ephesus who had only known the baptism of John, and admitted not even hearing of the Holy Spirit (cf. Acts 19:1-3). The Bible continues:

Then Paul said, “John indeed baptized with a baptism of repentance, saying to the people that they should believe on Him who would come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus.”

When they heard *this*, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke with tongues and prophesied (Acts 19:4-6).

Here there seems little doubt that these were unbelievers until Paul explained Christ to them. As was with Cornelius, the Spirit came upon (ἐπὶ) them at the time of their salvation. Therefore, they were baptized into Christ at this moment, but also filled with the Spirit, as seen through the demonstration of their spiritual gifts.

In conclusion, it is best to equate the Spirit coming upon a believer, as the filling of the Holy Spirit, and not a secondary baptism of the Spirit. When a Christian today has a new, powerful, experience with the Holy Spirit, possibly involving the speaking in a foreign tongue, he should not think he just experienced the baptism of the Spirit as a secondary work of grace. As a Christian, he already had the baptism of the Spirit, and the better term for explaining what just took place is the filling of the Spirit.

### *The Filling of the Spirit*

R.A. Torrey has written:

A man may be regenerated by the Holy Spirit and still not be baptized with the Holy Spirit. In regeneration there is the impartation of life by the Spirit's power, and the one who receives it is saved; in baptism with the Holy Spirit, there is the impartation of power, and the one who receives it is fitted for service.<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> Torrey, 150.

The challenge to Torrey's claim has already been shown, but the significance of the quote is the idea of power, making one fit for service. Jesus did describe the baptism of the Spirit to come as power for the apostles, enabling them to be witnesses around the world. However, it has been shown what happened at Pentecost was the apostles being filled with the Spirit, when He came upon them (cf. Acts 1:8; 2:4).

Nowhere does the Scripture ever command a Christian to be baptized in the Holy Spirit. Nowhere, outside of the unique dispensational transition of Acts chapter one, are believers ever commanded to wait for the baptism of the Spirit. If Torrey was correct, and the baptism of the Spirit was needed to impart power for service for Christ, then surely the Bible would command it.

What the Bible does command believers is to be filled with the Spirit, and this verse must be studied in depth.

And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit (Eph. 5:18).

It is significant that Paul contrasted the filling with the Spirit to drunkenness in this verse, for one who is drunk is under the power of something external to the individual. The alcohol overtakes the person's natural abilities, but in a negative manner. When one is filled with the Spirit, he is under the Holy Spirit's power, in a positive manner, as God literally works through the individual for His purposes.

The Greek verb translated, be filled, is a present-tense imperative, and in the passive voice (πληροῦσθε).<sup>147</sup> The force of the present tense for this imperative is to command the action as an ongoing process.<sup>148</sup> As MacArthur states:

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<sup>147</sup> Perschbacher, 332.

<sup>148</sup> Wallace, 485.

Being filled with the Spirit is a daily challenge. You can be filled today, but tomorrow is another story. That is why the whole concept of a “second blessing” is inadequate. When the “second blessing” wears off, the Charismatic believer is left wrestling with the same basic problems faced by all Christians: while he is saved, he still exists in a human body that has a strong propensity towards sin.<sup>149</sup>

The Christian who experiences what he calls a second blessing is actually experiencing the filling of the Spirit, and thus it is logical for the exercise of a spiritual gift to be included with the experience.

The English translation, “with the Spirit,” can lead astray. The use of the preposition, ἐν, coupled with Spirit being in the dative case (πνεύματι), suggests means, not content. There is not one New Testament example where this verb for filling (πληρώω) is followed by ἐν and the dative, where content is warranted.<sup>150</sup> Therefore, if the Christian understands Paul to be speaking of agency, the Holy Spirit is the means of the filling. The result then is the power of the Holy Spirit, through the believer’s life.

In addition, the passive voice implies consent, or permission, on behalf of the believer.<sup>151</sup> There are some prerequisites on the part of the Christian, before he can be empowered with the filling of the Holy Spirit. Unger explains what he calls “the Bible prescription for power” by four recognitions. These are (1) knowledge of one’s position and possessions in Christ, (2) faith to act upon this knowledge, (3) yieldedness to God’s will and obedience to Scripture, (4) prevailing prayer.<sup>152</sup> A.W. Tozer provides four steps leading to being filled with the Holy Spirit. First, one must present his body to God (cf.

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<sup>149</sup> MacArthur, *The Charismatics*, 191.

<sup>150</sup> Wallace, 375.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid., 440-41.

<sup>152</sup> Unger, *The Baptism and Gifts*, 163-72.

Rom. 12:1-2). Second, one must ask to be filled. Third, one must be willing to obey the Scriptures in their entirety.<sup>153</sup> Finally, one must have faith, which Tozer explains thusly:

We receive Him by faith as we receive the Lord in salvation by faith. He comes as a gift of God to us in power. First He comes in some degree and measure when we are converted, otherwise we couldn't be converted. Without Him we couldn't be born again, because we are born of the Spirit. But I am talking about something different now, an advance over that. I am talking about His coming and possessing the full body and mind and life and heart, taking the whole personality over, gently, but directly and bluntly, and making it His, so that we may become a habitation of God through the Spirit.<sup>154</sup>

These quotes are not meant as simply a formula, but show the similarity in how many charismatics behave when seeking the baptism of the Spirit as a secondary blessing. They typically have confessed all known sin, and are earnestly asking God in prayer, by faith. God apparently may fill such a Christian, even though that sincere believer is using the wrong theological terminology.

The concern to the erroneous doctrine of a second blessing is twofold. First, the charismatic having this experience may not recognize the need for the perpetual filling for living a life of victory over sin, and service unto Christ. He may think he has arrived, thus leading to pride or possibly opening himself to even a greater fall. The second problem is that many Christians “tarry” for this experience, and if they do not receive the tongues gift, walk away in defeat, assuming something is wrong in their relationship with God. Every Christian is commanded to be filled, but not all will receive the spiritual gift of tongues or any other dramatic manifestation, for it was shown these gifts are distributed solely by the will of the Sovereign God. The present tense participles that follow this command (cf. Eph. 5:19-21) speak to the result of the filling, and do not

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<sup>153</sup> A.W. Tozer, *How to be Filled with The Holy Spirit* (Camp Hill, PA: Christian Publications, n.d.), 47.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

reference the gifts at all.<sup>155</sup> Instead, Paul mentions such results as singing, giving thanks, and submitting to one another.

### *Baptism Versus Filling in Greek*

In anticipation of objection to the distinction made, an analysis of the Greek words concerning baptism and filling is warranted. The words for baptism (βάπτισμα) and to baptize (βαπτίζω) derive from the word, βάπτω.<sup>156</sup> It has the specific meaning, to dip, and often was used in connection with dying a fabric.<sup>157</sup> The papyri evidence contains several supports for this usage.<sup>158</sup> It is from this root idea that the connotation of identification for the word baptism derives. If one dipped a white tunic in purple dye, he then had a purple tunic. The tunic experienced a “βάπτω,” and is then identified simply as a purple tunic.

The ritual of water baptism is meant as a symbol of identification with the Lord’s death and resurrection. The believer is lowered into the watery grave, and raised up again to walk in newness of life as a public follower of Jesus Christ. In other New Testament usages of the word, baptism, the issue of identification is present.<sup>159</sup>

Therefore, the baptism of the Holy Spirit should be seen as an identification, and such a view fits the argument described in detail above. Every believer experiences this baptism at the moment of salvation, as he is placed into the body of Christ, thus being

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<sup>155</sup> Wallace, 638-39.

<sup>156</sup> Strong, 18.

<sup>157</sup> BDAG, 165-66.

<sup>158</sup> Moulton, 103.

<sup>159</sup> Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament* (Chattanooga: AMG Publishers, 1992), 312-13.

identified as “in Christ.” Nowhere in this definition is there room for the idea of being empowered for service.

However, the Greek word translated as “filled,” does suggest such a definition. While this word, πληρόω, has a variety of nuances in meaning, its primary definition is simply to fill, whether of things or persons. When used with persons, as is the case here, it speaks to powers and qualities.<sup>160</sup> Therefore, it is quite appropriate to understand the filling with the Holy Spirit as the empowerment of the Holy Spirit for the Christian.

The Bible commands Christians to be filled with the Holy Spirit, but never commands the baptism of the Spirit. The filling is a necessity, if the Christian is to live a life that glorifies the Lord in word and deed. He needs the power of the Holy Spirit for the victorious Christian life. Related to living that life for Christ is the use of whatever spiritual gifts God has given him. Seeking the baptism is not commanded Christians, for they already received it at salvation when they believed the gospel, and became identified as being “in Christ.”

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<sup>160</sup> BDAG, 828.

## CHAPTER TEN

### CONCLUSION

There is little exegetical reason for the cessationist belief that some spiritual gifts ceased during the first century, while other spiritual gifts have remained both operative and necessary for the proper functioning of the Church these two millennia. The few Bible verses cited in support for such a view are taken to implications beyond what context and established hermeneutical principles allow. Contrariwise, the normal reading of Scripture alone, would likely not lead a Christian to the cessationist viewpoint, apart from being guided in that direction by the cessationist commentaries. The charismatic chooses for a book like First Corinthians to instruct the Church today in the epistle's entirety.

Lacking significant Biblical support, the cessationist emphasizes the tradition found within Church history. The inconsistency and problems of Protestant dispensationalists exalting history was shown, as often arguments from tradition are ignored when used against their dispensational doctrine, but embraced when used for cessationist teachings. Much of Church history is incompatible alongside the Scripture's teachings. This was true even in the first century, as Jesus Himself declared in the seven letters of the book of Revelation. Since the last century of Church history is as valid as any other, the cessationist appeals to history ignore God's work in these days. When trying to explain these workings today, he often dismisses them as fraudulent or even demonic.



However, the charismatic must properly define and then exercise the sign gifts discussed herein. The crucial distinction was made between the baptism of the Holy Spirit, occurring only once, at the moment of salvation, and the filling with the Spirit for power for service. Charismatics must revise their understanding of the baptism of the Spirit, for in so doing they will remove a chief objection to charismatic theology held by cessationists.

In conclusion, the author recognizes that theological differences exist within the body of Christ. Most would agree with the sentiment expressed by the ancient quote of debated origin: "In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; and in all things, charity." Unfortunately, too many who involve themselves with this debate have lacked both the liberty and charity that should be expected from those professing Christ.

As with political disagreements, there are those who think the other side is sincere, but wrong. Then there are those who think the other side is not just wrong, but evil. Charismatics who exalt the Scripture as sole authority for doctrine and experience believe the cessationists are simply wrong. However, the cessationist is still loved, and cessationist authors, such as the ones quoted herein, are still seen as tremendous blessings to the body of Christ. Indeed, a charismatic's library is likely filled with the other theologically sound works authored by such cessationists. At the most, the charismatic might see the cessationist as limiting God, and what He might want to more fully accomplish in the cessationist's life and church.

As was shown, the cessationist in turn often portrays the charismatic as evil, even demonic. He may equate all charismatics with the worst examples of behavior and teaching, thus establishing and propagating a stereotype against his brothers and sisters in

Christ. In light of this thesis, the author hopes his cessationist readers will evaluate not only their doctrine, but also their attitudes towards charismatics in general. Many conservative theological institutions and ministries insist on cessationist belief for eligibility to service. Should a mature Christian, holding to the inerrancy and authority of Scripture, be so discriminated due simply to this one issue?

The author hopes his charismatic readers in turn will always give the clear teachings of Scripture the authority they deserve, and not be lured unto fellowships and teachers who exalt charismatic experiences above the systematic study and teaching of the Bible. Recognize that not all activity taking place under the umbrella of charisma is in fact the movement of the Holy Spirit. Even when one does have a dramatic experience through one of the sign gifts, understand that these are not the foundations of the faith. At most, they are like a dessert after a meal. The meal (i.e. meat, bread, milk) is found in the Bible, God's inerrant, authoritative word.

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