

A Case for Cessationism (Tom Pennington)

Selected Scriptures

TM13-7

Strange Fire Conference

Well it is always a special privilege to be back here at Grace Church, it is our home church, it's the church from which we feel we were sent out and our hearts are here, John. Thank you for your faithfulness, and we all stand on your shoulders and appreciate so much your defense of the truth. It was here that I learned that if you're going to love the Lord, you have to hate all of those who would replace Him. And if you're going to love His truth, you have to hate error.

Well it is my joy, this morning, to look at a biblical case for cessationism. When one person heard I was speaking this morning on cessationism, she actually said, "You mean from the union?" Now things have gotten bad and I do live in Texas, but there has...there's been no talk of that yet.

This morning we are not going to deal with a political issue but with a biblical one, the question of cessationism. Clearly that label that we are stuck with was not created by someone who had any sense of style, it is from theologians because it is...it's a negative label. It pictures what we don't believe. It's like starting a football team in the Philippines and calling it the Manila Folders, it just has a negative... But the real problem the label cessationism is not that it is negative, but that it has easily caricatured as believing that the Spirit has essentially ceased His work. As a result of that, we are unfairly accused of putting the Spirit in a box, even of embracing an unbiblical, outdated, enlightenment world view. But those are caricatures, those are distortions. In fact, we believe that the Holy Spirit has not only continued His work, but He is displaying in and through us the power of the resurrected Christ. Nothing...nothing eternal happens in an individual believer or in a local church apart from the work of the Holy Spirit.

You and I can produce temporal effects, but we have no capacity or power to effect eternal reward, eternal events, eternal building and edification into the life of the church or an individual. It's a total misrepresentation of what we believe to say that we believe, as one man has, in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Scripture, as though the Scripture has replaced the position of the Spirit and the Trinity. It's wrong to refer to us as others have as Bible deists.

So what is it that cessationists believe the Spirit has ceased. Let's be very clear. We only believe He has ceased one function and that is He no longer gives believers today the miraculous spiritual gifts, gifts like speaking in tongues, prophecy and healing.

On the other hand, continuationists believe either that the miraculous gifts have continued unabated since Pentecost or other sects would say, no, they have waned through much of the church age but have now been restored. Although there are differences between the three branches of the

Charismatic Movement, the Pentecostals, the Charismatics and the third wave, they are all inherently continuationists and they often use the same arguments in their writings and in their speaking to defend their shared continuationism. The chief arguments that they put forward for the defense of their view, the ones that you will hear most commonly are these.

First of all, they'll say the New Testament nowhere directly states that the miraculous gifts will cease during the church age. But that argument cuts both ways because the New Testament doesn't directly say they will continue either. They counter with the second argument. There are a couple of New Testament passages that imply that the miraculous gifts will continue until Christ returns. Their favorite example of that is 1 Corinthians 13:10, "When the perfect comes, the partial will be done away." They argue that that means that only when Christ returns will the partial gifts of tongues and prophecy cease.

However, as you know, this is a very highly disputed passage and there are a number of possible interpretations. There are disagreements about how to interpret that passage on both sides of the issue. So they cannot legitimately support their theology and their practice from such a controversial passage. In fact, the truth is for most of church history, the very passage was used to defend cessationism.

Their third main argument for the continuation of the miraculous gifts is that the New Testament speaks only of the church age and therefore the gifts that began this age must continue throughout it. They say that we artificially divide the church age into the apostolic and the post-apostolic. But unless they believe that there are Apostles today at the same level as Peter and Paul, and most Charismatics do not, they also divide the church age and they relate at least apostleship solely to the apostolic era. They have become defacto cessationism...cessationists, I should say, at least in part.

But by far the most common argument that continuationists put forward for their view, and this is the one I'm sure you've heard, it is everywhere, and that is 500 million professing Christians who claim Charismatic experiences can't all be wrong. But let's think about that for a moment. Using that same argument, we should therefore accept all of the miracles of the Roman Catholic Church as well. After all, there are a billion of those, a billion who profess and advocate those miracles, and there's far more history to them. The point is millions, 500 million, a billion professing Christians can be wrong.

Now those are the most common arguments for continuationism. I want us to consider the biblical case for cessationism. First of all, we need to make sure we're talking about the same thing. We need to define it. Cessationism does not mean as our critics present it, that God no longer does anything miraculous. As a pastor, I get the joy of seeing the miraculous often because every time a spiritually dead sinner is brought to life, it is a miraculous work of divine grace. (Applause) The Apostle Paul says that the only way a blinded sinner can come to know the truth is if the God who said "Let there be light," says, "Let there be light in that heart." Every time someone is healed solely in answer to the prayers of God's people in total contradiction to what the medical community has said, it's a divine miracle, He has intervened.

So cessationism does not mean that God no longer does anything miraculous. Cessationism does not mean that the Spirit cannot if He were to choose give a miraculous ability to someone today. As God, He can do whatever He wants, whenever He wants. If He were to choose to do so, He could allow someone today to speak a language he never studied. It just wouldn't be the New Testament gift because it wouldn't be revelation from God as it was then.

So what do we mean by cessationism? We mean that the Spirit no longer sovereignly gives individual believers the miraculous spiritual gifts that are listed in the Scripture and that were present in the first century church. It is neither the Spirit's plan, nor His normal pattern to distribute miraculous spiritual gifts to Christians and churches today as He did in the times of the Apostles. Those gifts ceased as normative with the apostles.

But, of course, the crucial question is why. Why do we believe that those miraculous gifts of the Spirit ceased when the rest of the functions of the Spirit continue? Ask the average cessationist and he will turn you to 1 Corinthians 13, and I personally believe a case can be made there. But cessationism does not rise or fall on 1 Corinthians 13. In our time together this morning, I want to lay out for you seven biblical arguments for cessationism. Each of these arguments deserves its own message. Honestly, a couple of them deserve a series of messages. But we're going to cover all seven this morning. I know those from my church who are here will be shocked because when I started the Sermon on the Mount several years ago, there were bets among the high schoolers of what graduating class would be there when I finished..

So my goal this morning is not to fully develop these arguments, that's impossible. Nor is my goal to answer every possible objection, although they can be answered as well. My desire, this morning, is to give you a thirty-thousand foot fly over of the biblical case for cessationism and hopefully to encourage you to further study.

The first biblical argument for cessationism is the unique role of miracles. Many evangelicals, and I think most Charismatics, think that miracles litter almost every page of biblical history. In reality there were only three primary periods in which God worked miracles through uniquely gifted men. In other words, there were only three primary periods when God gave human beings miracle working power.

The first was that of Moses and Joshua. That period lasted from the Exodus to about 1445 B.C. through the career of Joshua that ended in about 1380 B.C. In other words, that first period of miracles lasted about 65 years.

The second window when miracles were common was during the ministries of Elijah and Elisha, putting again the biblical chronology together, they ministered from about 860 B.C. until 795 B.C. Again a period of only about 65 years.

The third time of miracles was with Christ and His Apostles. Obviously it began with His ministry and lasted at the very longest until the death of the Apostle John, or about 70 years.

Now throughout history, God has occasionally, biblical history, God occasionally intervened with direct miracles. But in thousands of years of human history, there were only about two hundred years in which God empowered men to work miracles. And even then miracles were not accomplished every day. Why was that? Because the primary purpose of miracles has always been to confirm the credentials of a divinely appointed messenger to establish the credibility of one who speaks for God, not one who teaches or explains the Word of God as I'm doing this morning, but one in whose mouth God has put His very words. This pattern began with the very first miracle worker, Moses.

I want you to turn with me to Exodus chapter 6...Exodus chapter 6 and we'll begin reading in verse

28. Moses here recounts and expands what happened at his call. Exodus 6:28, "Now it came about on the day when the Lord spoke to Moses in the land of Egypt, that the Lord spoke to Moses saying, "I am Yahweh, speak to Pharaoh, king of Egypt, all that I speak to you. But Moses said before the Lord, "Behold, I am unskilled in speech, how then will Pharaoh listen to me?"

"Then the Lord said to Moses, 'See, I will make you as God to Pharaoh and your brother, Aaron, shall be your prophet. You shall speak all that I command you, and your brother Aaron shall speak to Pharaoh.'"

You see what's going on here, God is saying, "Okay, you don't...you're not believing that I can empower you? I can accomplish through you what I intend? Then I'm going to give you Aaron, you're going to be like God to Aaron, he's going to be like your prophet. You put your words in his mouth, the words I put in your mouth and then he will speak to Pharaoh."

Now turn back to chapter 4 because he expands a little bit on this here as well. Exodus chapter 4, notice verse 15. "You are to speak to him, that is to Aaron, and put the words in his mouth." Remember, he's the prophet. You put the words in his mouth and I, even I, will be with your mouth and his mouth and I will teach you what you are to do. Moreover, he shall speak for you to the people and he will be as a mouth for you and you will be as God to him."

Now notice, in both of these passages that for Aaron to be Moses' prophet, he could not speak for himself, he had to speak only the words of Moses who was in the place of God to him. That is what it meant to be a prophet. God's own words put in your mouth. That's why when God commissioned Jeremiah in Jeremiah 1, He says, "I have put My words in your mouth."

But how were the people to know? How were the people to know if a man who claimed to be a prophet was in fact speaking God's own words? Moses, the very first prophet, faced this dilemma. And he brings this up with God at the beginning of chapter 4. "Moses said, 'What if they will not believe me or listen to what I say? For they may say the Lord hasn't appeared to you. How do we know that you're God's prophet? That those are God's words in your mouth?' And the Lord said to him, 'What is that in your hand?'"

You remember how the story unfolds, He says, "Throw it on the ground...that staff...and he threw it on the ground, it became a serpent, Moses fled from it. The Lord said to Moses, 'Stretch out your hand and grasped it by its tail,' so he stretched out his hand and caught it and it became a staff in his hand." And here's what God says. That they may believe that Yahweh, the God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob has appeared to you. This is why I'm giving you the capacity to work miracles."

He reiterates that with two other miracles in the verses that follow. And so, understand that God enabled Moses to perform miracles for one purpose only, and that was to validate Moses as God's prophet, and Moses' message as God's own words. Moses was universally accepted as God's prophet. And what he wrote became literally the word...or were the words of God and became to be accepted as the literal words of God.

Why was that? Because the power to work miracles validated his claims to speak for God. This continues to be the purpose of miracles throughout the Old Testament. Consider for example the Old

Testament prophets. Moses wrote that God would raise up men like himself to speak for God, other prophets. Turn to Deuteronomy chapter 18, Deuteronomy 18, verse 15, "The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like Me from among you, from your countrymen, you shall listen to him." Now obviously the great prophet was ultimately this prophecy fulfilled the Messiah, but it is equally clear that Moses was describing an institution of prophecy that was already active in his day, according to Numbers 11:29, and would continue. And so here in Deuteronomy, Moses laid down three criteria for discerning a true prophet from a false prophet.

If you'll notice in verses 21 and 22 of this chapter, he says that the true prophet's predictions just always come true. That's number one, criteria number one...the true prophet's predictions must always come true. That's how you know if he has in him the true words of God. In Deuteronomy 13 verses 1 to 5, God says that if he chose to authenticate a true prophet, He would do so by empowering him to work miracles, as He did with Moses. Also in Deuteronomy 13 He says that even if He works miracles, the third criteria that's to be used is that the prophet's message must always be in complete doctrinal agreement with previous revelation.

So Moses was a prophet, was given miracles to authenticate that he spoke God's own words. The prophets that were to come and follow him, the same was to be true of them. So in the Old Testament, only prophets, only those who spoke authoritatively and infallibly for God performed miracles because miracles were their credentials. The most famous miracle outside the Pentateuch comes in the ministry of Elijah and in 1 Kings 18:36 as he is calling down fire on that altar there at Mount Carmel, listen to what He says in his prayer. "Elijah the prophet came near...this is 1 Kings 18:36...and said, 'O Yahweh, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, today let it be known that You are God in Israel and that I am Your servant and I have done all these things at Your Word' God authenticate me."

When we come to the New Testament, we discover the same pattern unfolding. Our Lord, of course, was the ultimate fulfillment of the prophet that Moses had promised in Deuteronomy 18. He was the great prophet, the prophet with the greatest message and the greatest claims, and so it's not surprising then that he performed more miracles than any miracle worker in human history. But just as it was with Moses, and the Old Testament prophets, the primary purpose of Jesus' miracles was to confirm his credentials as God's final and ultimate messenger who spoke infallibly for God.

John the Apostle makes this point central in his gospel. In fact, turn with me to John's gospel and let me just show you a few examples. John chapter 5 verse 36, Jesus speaks, "But the testimony which I have is greater than the testimony of John for the works which the Father has given me to accomplish, the very works that I do testify about me that the Father has sent me." Look at what I do, look at the healing, look at the miracles, those are God's authentication of me as the ultimate and final messenger.

In chapter 6 and verse 14, "When the people saw this sign, that is the feeding of the five thousand which He had performed, what was it a sign to point to? This was their conclusion, this is truly the prophet who was to come into the world." In chapter 7 verse 31, "But many of the crowd believed in Him and they were saying, 'When the Messiah comes, He will not perform more signs than those which this man has, will He?'"

In chapter 10 verse 24, "The Jews then gather around Him and were saying to Him, 'How long will You keep us in suspense? If You're the Messiah, tell us plainly.' Jesus answered them, 'I told you

and you do not believe, the works that I do in My Father's name, these testify of Me, but you do not believe because you are not in My sheep.”

In verse 37 of that same chapter, “If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me. But if I do them, though you do not believe Me, believe the works so that you may know and understand that the Father is in Me and I in the Father.”

You see, Jesus' miracles were not primarily a tool for effective evangelism. In fact, miracles aren't, He said, even if one rose from the dead, if they won't hear Moses and the prophets, they will not believe. Jesus' miracles were not even primarily about alleviating human suffering, although of course we see in His miracles the great heart of compassion that He had.

The main reason the Spirit empowered Jesus to perform miracles was to confirm that He spoke the very words of God, that He was everything He claimed to be. On the day of Pentecost, a day of miracles, Peter reiterated that was the purpose of Jesus' miracles.

Look at Acts chapter 2...Acts chapter 2 verse 22, Jesus the Nazarene was a man attested to you by Go with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through him in your midst, just as you yourselves know. That was the reason for His miracles.

Jesus not only performed miracles Himself, but He also gave that same power to the Apostles and their miracles served exactly the same purpose. Turn over to Acts chapter 14, Acts chapter 14 and notice verse 3. “Therefore, Paul and Barnabas spent a long time there in Iconium speaking boldly with reliance upon the Lord who was testifying to the Word of His grace, granting that signs and wonders be done by their hands.”

Hebrews chapter 2 verses 3 and 4 make this same point. The writer of Hebrews says, “The message of salvation was confirmed to us by those who heard, that is by the Apostles, God also testifying with them both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will.”

The miraculous gifts that accompanied the Apostles were intended to confirm that they were God's genuine instruments of revelation, just as they had been with Moses, with the Old Testament prophets, Elijah and Elisha, and with Jesus Himself.

Now think about this for a moment. That is a very brief journey, far more could be shown and said about that issue. But since this pattern is consistent throughout the Scripture, it is reasonable to expect that with the death of the Apostles, with the end of God's revelation, with the death of those who spoke God's own words, the human capacity to work miracles would end as well...just as it had after Moses and Joshua for hundreds of years, and just as it had after Elijah and Elisha.

B.B. Warfield writes, “Miracles do not appear on the pages of Scripture vagrantly here and there and elsewhere and differently, without any assignable reason. They belong to revelation periods and appear only when God is speaking to His people through accredited messengers declaring His gracious purposes. Their abundant display in the apostolic church is the mark of the richness of the Apostolic age in Revelation. And when this Revelation period closed, the period of miracle working had passed by also as a mere matter of course.” Scripture leads us to expect the end of the

miraculous gifts because of the unique role that miracles have always played, as the validation of someone who spoke God's own words.

A second related argument to that is the end of the gift of Apostleship...the end of the gift of Apostleship. In two places in the New Testament, Paul refers to the Apostles as one of the gifts that Christ gave His church. The first, notice in 1 Corinthians chapter 12, in the middle of the section on spiritual gifts. First Corinthians chapter 12 and verse 28, "And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second, prophet, third, teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, various kinds of tongues." Paul is here demonstrating the diversity that the Spirit has created within the body, just as a physical body has a diversity of members, so the Spirit has uniquely gifted different parts of the body. Here he includes Apostles.

You see, although not all spiritual gifts are offices, all New Testament offices are gifts to Christ's church. Christ makes this very plain and in Ephesians chapter 4, in Ephesians chapter 4 as He lays out how the church is to function, verse 7 of Ephesians 4, "But to each one of us, grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore...it says...when He ascended on high, He led captive a host of captives, and He gave gifts to men."

Then down in verse 11 He tells us what those gifts are. "He gave some as Apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists and some as pastor/teachers." One of the gifts Christ gave His church was the apostles. But they were a temporary gift. Most Christians and most evangelical Charismatics agree there are no more Apostles like the Twelve, or like Paul. Why is that? Because an apostle, to be a true apostle, you had to meet three qualifications.

You had to be a witness of the resurrected Christ. In Acts chapter 1 as they're sorting through after the suicide of Judas, they're sorting through who's going to take his place. In chapter 1 verse 22 of Acts, beginning with the baptism of John until the day that he was taken up from us, one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection. You had to be a witness of the life of Christ, and of His resurrection.

Secondly, to be an Apostle, you had to be personally appointed by Christ. In Acts chapter 1 verse 2, the Apostles are referred to as those whom He had chosen. And even at the end of chapter 1 of Acts, when they're seeking to replace Judas, in their prayer they say to God, "Show which of those, or these two, You have chosen."

Thirdly, to be an Apostle in the true sense, you had to be able to work miracles. In Matthew chapter 10 verses 1 and 2, Jesus summoned His Twelve disciples and He gave them authority over unclean spirits to cast them out, to heal every kind of disease, every kind of sickness, not lower back pain.

Now these are the Twelve Apostles. You come to 2 Corinthians chapter 12:12, chapter 12 verse 12, it says, "The signs of a true Apostle were performed among you with all perseverance by signs and wonders and miracles." To be an Apostle, you had to be able to work miracles. Look at those three qualifications and you realize immediately that there is no one alive today who meets those three qualifications. So at least one New Testament gift, the gift of Apostleship has ceased. What that means is there is a significant difference in the work of the Spirit between the time of the Apostles and today because one of the most miraculous displays of the Spirit, the gift of Apostleship, disappeared with the Apostolic age.

It's also significant, I think, that the gift of Apostleship ceased without a crystal-clear New Testament statement that it would. That means it is neither impossible nor is it unlikely that other significant changes happened with the passing of the Apostles as well. You see, once you agree that there are no Apostles today at the same level as Peter and Paul, then you have admitted that there was a major change in the gifting of the Spirit between the Apostolic and the post-apostolic age. In fact, the one New Testament gift most frequently connected to miracles, the gift of Apostleship, ceased.

The third argument for cessationism is the foundational nature of the New Testament Apostles and prophets...the foundational nature of the New Testament Apostles and prophets. You see, the New Testament identifies the Apostles and prophets as the foundation on which the church was built.

Turn with me to Ephesians chapter 2, one of the great joys of my life was spending three years with my congregation working through the book of Ephesians and here in chapter 2, Paul lays a foundational understanding of the church, this one new man that has been created in which Jews and Gentiles are brought together, peace has been made with each of us individually with God and between all of the differences that distinguished us before, but now we're brought together in Christ. And at the end of this great chapter, he pictures the church with three great images. He says in verse 19 that we are like citizens in God's Kingdom. Also there in verse 19, he says, "You are of God's household, we're members of God's family."

And then he gives a third picture in verse 20, "Having been built on the foundation of the Apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole building being fitted together is growing into a holy temple in the Lord in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit." He says, "Not only are you citizens in God's Kingdom, not only are you members of God's family, but you are like individual stones placed carefully and meticulously by God into a structure and that structure is a temple in which our God will be worshiped."

But notice how he describes the structure in verse 20. The church having been built on the foundation of the Apostles and prophets. Now the reference to the Apostles is clear, and largely undisputed. But who were these prophets. Because of the far-reaching implications of this verse, some Charismatics have come up with novel interpretations of who these prophets are. Some Charismatics have argued that Paul meant that the church was built on the foundation of the Apostles and the Old Testament prophets. But in the context here, it's clear that Paul was referring to New Testament prophets. Notice just a few verses later in chapter 3 verse 5, he's talking about this *Mysterion*, this mystery that has been revealed to him of which he is a steward. And he says, "In other generations, it was not made known to the sons of men, Old Testament times as it has now been revealed to His holy Apostles and prophets." He's talking about New Testament prophets. Other Charismatics will take Ephesians 2:20 and they'll reword it like this, "Having been built on the foundation of the Apostles which are the prophets." In other words, the Apostles, it's one and the same group. There's a linguistic reason to reject that interpretation, but there's also a contextual reason.

Again, the context makes it clear that the Apostles and prophets are two separate groups. Turn over to chapter 4 verse 11, and he says, "He gave some as Apostles and some as prophets," two distinct groups. So then, let's put it together. In Ephesians chapter 2 verse 20, Paul teaches that the revelation that came through the Apostles and through the New Testament prophets is the foundation of the church. And the church is built on that foundation. You know the image. Steve

alluded to this as well. The image of the foundation of a building that has been finished. The foundation is finished. And now the superstructure is being erected on that already completed foundation. By the way, this is the same image Paul uses in 1 Corinthians 3 where he talks about the leaders of the Corinthian church are building, they're adding their work to centuries of building as God continues His work. We do that today, but the foundation was laid by the Apostles and the prophets, the revelation that came through them. Once the revelation God gave to the Apostles, and the New Testament prophets was complete, the foundation was finished. Their work was completed. Their role was done. That's clearly true of the Apostles, as we've already seen. They no longer exist. And now here in Ephesians 2, Paul says that the role of the prophets was also foundational and it is complete as well.

We should not expect any more Apostles. We should not expect any more prophets. We should not expect any more revelation. A fourth argument for cessationism is the nature of the miraculous gifts...the nature of the New Testament miraculous gifts.

If the Spirit were still gifting believers today with the miraculous gifts, they would be the same gifts that we find in the New Testament. However, the Charismatic gifts claim today bear almost no resemblance to their New Testament counterparts. Consider, for example, the gift of tongues. According to Luke in Acts 2, the New Testament gift was the capacity as manifest at Pentecost to speak in a known human language. Listen to Acts 2, verses 7 and 8, "They were amazed and astonished saying, 'Why are not all these who were speaking Galileans and how is it that we each hear them in our own language to which we were born?'" Our own dialect, these were known languages, the languages to which they were born.

You come to the second occurrence that's recorded in the book of Acts. In Acts 11:15 when Peter reports on the gift of tongues that was given to Cornelius and his household after his conversion, this is what Peter says in Acts 11:15. "As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them just as He did upon us at the beginning." It's the same thing. Peter says it's exactly what happened to us. So what happened in Cornelius' household is exactly what happened at Pentecost, and what happened at Pentecost is clear.

When Luke reports of a third episode of tongue speaking in Acts 19, there is absolutely nothing in the context there to indicate that it was any different than what had already happened in Acts 2 and Acts 10. And think about what Luke knew. Luke when he wrote the book of Acts, he knew what Paul had written six or seven years earlier in 1 Corinthians 14. He knew what was actually happening at Corinth, and yet Luke still defines speaking in tongues as we hear them in our own language, or our own dialect. No mention of anything ecstatic. That was the New Testament, gift, speaking in a known language or a known dialect. Compare that with today's tongues which are ecstatic speech. It's not the same thing.

Also, the New Testament gift of tongues, including 1 Corinthians 14, was a public gift meant for at one level the edification of others. There had to be someone to interpret. Today's tongues, on the other hand, are primarily a private prayer language.

So today's speaking in tongues has almost nothing in common with the New Testament gift except the word "tongue." Or consider the nature of the gift of prophecy. This too is different. The New Testament gift in today's manifestation are two different things. Contrary to Charismatic doctrine, nowhere does the New Testament distinguish the Old Testament prophets from the New Testament

prophets. Instead, the New Testament equates Old Testament prophecy with New Testament prophecy. There is no difference in the terms that re used...and let me just admonish you to do this, go through the book of Acts and notice every time the word “prophet” or “prophecy” appears, and you will see that the Old Testament prophets and the New Testament prophets, they are interspersed with not even a hint of difference between them. That means that just as the Old Testament prophets spoke direct infallible revelation from God, so did the New Testament prophets. Just like the Old Testament prophets, their words were to be evaluated against previous revelation, but once it was approved, as we saw in Acts 2, their prophecies were added to the teaching of the Apostles to form the foundation of the church. Ironically in Acts 21 verse 11, one of the favorite texts of Charismatics to defend the idea that New Testament prophecy is different from Old Testament prophecy, the prophet Agabus used exactly the Old Testament prophetic formula when he says, “This is what the Spirit says...” No difference.

So New Testament prophecy then is direct, infallible revelation. That is not what is called prophecy in the twenty-first century Charismatic Movement. The most capable defender of today’s Charismatic prophecies, Wayne Grudem, admits that prophecy as it is practiced in the Charismatic Movement should not be prefaced with “Thus says the Lord.” Instead, he suggests that prophecies in the Charismatic church today should begin with, quote: “I think this is what the Spirit might be saying.” That is not the New Testament gift of prophecy.

Consider another example, the gift of healing. In the New Testament when someone with the New Testament gift of healing used his gifts, the results were complete, immediate, permanent, undeniable, every kind of sickness, every kind of illness. The purported healings of today’s faith healers are the antithesis of those biblical miracles. They are incomplete. They are temporary, at best. And they are unverifiable.

So the displays that are today called the miraculous gifts are just not the same as the New Testament gifts. And it’s interesting, even many Charismatics agree with that. For example, on the issue of prophecy, Wayne Grudem wrote, “No responsible Charismatic believes that today’s prophecy is infallible and inerrant revelation from God.” Grudem went on to say, “There is almost uniform testimony from all sections of the Charismatic Movement that today’s prophecy is impure and will contain elements which are not to be obeyed or trusted.”

Now, we appreciate our brother but if that were the standard, if that happened in the Old Testament times, the prophet would be dead. Third Wave theologian Jack Deere admitted in his book *Surprised By the Power of the Holy Spirit*, that modern Charismatics do not claim to have apostolic quality gifts and miracle working abilities.

When Charismatics do claim that their miracles are on the same level as the New Testament gifts and there are those, such as the wild claims of limbs restored, or of resurrections, for example, they are almost always hearsay and if they’re not hearsay, they’ve not been verified. So the nature of the gifts practiced by today’s Charismatics is simply not the same as that of the New Testament gifts and that’s because they are not the New Testament gifts.

A fifth argument for cessationism is the testimony of church history. Now let’s start with New Testament church history. You see, the practice of the miraculous gifts declines even during the apostolic period. Pentecost and the events of Acts 2 happened within ten days of our Lord’s ascension, after ten days. The second mention of tongues in Acts 10:46 occurs sometime within the

next fourteen years before the death of James in 44 A.D. The third mention in Acts 19:6 occurs early in Paul's ministry at Ephesus. That's in the early fifties A.D.

First Corinthians, the only book outside of Acts that speaks about tongues was written in 55 to 56 A.D. Now if you align the New Testament letters based when they were written, 1 Corinthians was only the fourth inspired letter that Paul wrote, following Galatians and 1 and 2 Thessalonians. Paul would write nine other canonical letters after 1 Corinthians to six different churches. There is never a mention of the gift of tongues again.

In the pastoral epistles in 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus, the books written near the end of Paul's ministry as permanent directives for the post-apostolic ministry of the church, there is no mention of the miraculous gifts.

You see this come to its climax in the book of Hebrews. Turn with me to Hebrews chapter 1, verse 1, "God after He spoke long ago to the fathers and the prophets in many portions and in many ways, our Old Testament, in these last days," an expression the Jews had for the times of the Messiah, "in these last days He has spoken to us in His Son." God's last word is His Son and those whom He appointed. That's why when you come to chapter 2 verse 1, the writer of Hebrews says, "For this reason," because of who this message comes from, "we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard." And he goes on to argue that if the penalties for disobeying the first covenant ministered by angels was severe, how much more severe to disregard this new Covenant message by the Lord Himself? Far superior to angels.

Verse 3, "How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?" Now let me remind you that this book, the book of Hebrews was written almost certainly just before the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem in 70 A.D. That gives you a time frame. I want you to notice how the writer of Hebrews refers to the miraculous. He says it was first, that is the message of salvation, this final word from God, it was at first spoken through the Lord—there's generation number one, the Lord Himself. Then there's a second generation in this verse, "It was confirmed, that message was confirmed to us by those who heard." There the Apostles. The writer of Hebrews is putting himself in a third generation, us. And he says of the second generation, the Apostles, "God also testifying with them...not with us...both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will." Already before...just before 70 A.D., the writer of Hebrews is saying that was then, this is now. That was something the Lord and the Apostles did and we witnessed.

So in the chronological flow of the inspired New Testament history of the church, you find that even before the Scripture was complete, the miraculous gifts had already begun their decline. The miracles that were intended to confirm the apostles and their message had already begun to die out. That's the reality of the New Testament historical record.

When we leave New Testament history, we discover that the testimony of the church after the New Testament era, was exactly the same, in both what was taught and practiced. It was that the miraculous gifts ceased with the Apostles. Here are just a couple of examples from different periods of church history. Here's John Chrysostom, the great exegete in the 300's. This whole place, speaking about 1 Corinthians 12 and the gifts there, is very obscure but the obscurity is produced by our ignorance of the facts referred to and by their cessation being such as then used to occur but now no longer take place. Augustine, writing in the late 300's, early 400's, said, "In the earliest times, the Holy Spirit fell upon them that believed and they spoke with tongues which they had not learned

as the Spirit gave them utterance.” That thing was done for a sign and it passed away.

Fast forward to the Reformation, Martin Luther writes, “This visible outpouring of the Holy Spirit was necessary to the establishment of the early church as were also the miracles that accompanied the gift of the Holy Ghost. Once the church had been established and properly advertised by these miracles, the visible appearance of the Holy Ghost ceased.”

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

Jonathan Edwards writes, “Of the extraordinary gifts, they were given in order to the founding and establishing of the church in the world, but since the canon of the Scriptures has been completed, and the Christian church fully founded and established, these extraordinary gifts have ceased. Charles Haden Spurgeon says, “Those earlier miraculous gifts have departed from us. B.B. Warfield writes, “These gifts were distinctly the authentication of the Apostles. They were part of the credentials of the Apostles as the authoritative agents of God in founding the church. Their function thus confined them to distinctively the apostolic church and they necessarily passed away with it. The miraculous working which is but the sign of God’s revealing power cannot be expected to continue and in point of fact, does not continue after the revelation of which it is the accompaniment had been completed.”

Now that’s just a sampling. You can find others in the appendix of *Strange Fire* when you get it tomorrow and other resources as well. Although it is true that there were scattered reports of the miraculous throughout church history, those miraculous gifts, there is the consistent testimony of the churches key leaders at the miraculous and revelatory spiritual gifts ended with the apostolic age.

Frankly, this raises a huge problem for our continuationist friends. As Sinclair Ferguson expressed it in his excellent book on the Holy Spirit, continuationism provides no convincing theological explanation for the disappearance of certain gifts during most of church history. There’s no way to explain it.

The sixth argument for cessationism is the sufficiency of Scripture. Now Dr. Lawson plans to address this point, so let me just mention it briefly. The canon of Scripture closed with the writings of the Apostles and their authorized companions. The New Testament teaches that the result of God’s completed revelation is an all-sufficient Scripture in many places. Second Timothy chapter 3 verse 16, “All Scripture is inspired by God, it’s profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be adequate equipped for every good work.” There’s nothing left. The man of God needs no additional revelation from God, he has it all right here. (Applause) Jesus is not calling or equipping through a twenty-first century best seller, rather He is calling and teaching by His Spirit through a two to three-thousand year old best seller. The Spirit speaks only in and through the inspired Word.

In 1539, Luther commenting on Psalm 119 wrote this, “God wants to give you His Spirit only through the external Word.” Luther loved that expression, the external Word. God gave us a book, it’s not subjective, it’s outside of us, it’s in words and sentences and paragraphs that we can analyze and read and study. It’s external to us. We don’t have to wonder if that message in our mind is from God or not, we have a message from God. Luther also wrote, “Let the man who would hear God speak,

read holy Scripture.”

There is a seventh and final argument for cessationism, it's the New Testament rules laid down for the miraculous gifts. I want you to turn with me to 1 Corinthians... 1 Corinthians chapter 14... 1 Corinthians 14 where Paul lays out specific guidelines for how two of the miraculous biblical gifts were to be practiced in the church. First of all, in verses 27 and 28, speaking in tongues. Whenever the biblical New Testament gifts of tongues was to be practiced, there were specific rules that it had to follow. First of all, two or at the most three, were to speak in tongues in a given service. Look at verse 27, "If anyone speaks in a tongue, it should be by two or at the most three." Secondly, they were to speak one at a time. Verse 27 goes on to say, "And each in turn." There had to be order, there had to be structure because that's like God. Thirdly, there had to be someone to interpret. Verse 27 goes on to say, "And one must interpret, but if there's no interpreter, he must keep silent in the church and let him speak to himself and to God." No one was allowed to speak in tongues in the corporate worship of the church unless there was someone else who understood that language and could interpret what had been said.

Why is that? Because how would anyone know if he was telling the truth or not? In the mouth of two or three witnesses a manner is established. Fourthly, women were not allowed to speak in tongues in the corporate worship as he puts that all-encompassing command at the end...verse 34, "The women are to keep silent in the church for they're not permitted to speak but are to subject themselves just as the Law also says." That's how the gifts, the New Testament gifts of tongues was to be exercised. In verses 29 to 34 Paul goes on to regulate the practice of the gift of prophecy, the New Testament gift or prophecy.

Rule number one, two or at the most three were to prophesy at a church service. Notice verse 29,, "Let two or three prophets speak." Secondly, other prophets and the congregation were to evaluate those prophecies against previous revelation. Verse 29 says, "Let the others pass judgment." They were to speak one at a time, verse 30, "But if a revelation is made to another who is seated, the first one must be keep silent, for you can all prophesy one by one so that all may learn and all may be exhorted and the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets, for God is not God of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints." Fourthly, women are not allowed to prophesy in the corporate worship, verse 34 again.

Now I want you to look at those verses, I want you to think about those guidelines. Tragically most Charismatic practice today completely disregards those clear biblical commands. So not only are today's Charismatic gifts not the New Testament gifts, but the clear directives the Apostle laid down for the practice of the New Testament gifts are largely ignored. In most of the contemporary Charismatic practice, the Holy Spirit is not honored. Instead, He is routinely grieved and disobeyed. The result is not the work of the Spirit, but it is a work of the flesh, clear rebellion even if it were the New Testament gifts.

There are seven biblical arguments for cessationism. How should we respond to these arguments? Let me speak to you first if you're already a convinced cessationist. Don't overreact and downplay the crucial role of the Spirit in your life. John gave us a wonderful list this morning of what the Spirit does, what the Scriptures teach that the Spirit does in our lives. Don't allow the Holy Spirit's work to be hi-jacked by those who abuse His name. Secondly, hold to your confidence in the all-sufficient Word. We may soon be in a minority, but we stand in the historic position of the church and in the light of Scripture. Thirdly, know what you believe and why. Be able to defend the truth. Number four,

reject all forms of continuing revelation, including the favorite evangelical form, subjective impressions from God. Don't ever say "God told me." Don't ever talk about feeling something from God. God has given us, as Luther said, the external Word. He who would have God speak, hear God speak, let him read the Word. Don't give credence to the Charismatic Movement by our own version of mysticism and mystical talk as though God were revealing something to us today outside of His Word.

Finally, respond wisely to the different kinds of continuationists. There are different kinds. To the false teachers who along with their Charismatic practices deny the cardinal doctrines of the Christian faith, the biblical Jesus, the biblical gospel, do not be afraid to say with Jesus when you make a proselyte, you turn him into twice the child of hell that you are. Don't be afraid to use the language of Jude and 2 Peter. Don't be afraid to say with Paul that they teach another gospel and if they don't renounce that false gospel, let them be anathema, let them be damned.

To the Charismatics who have bought into the prosperity gospel and as John reminded us, that's the vast majority, confront them with the biblical gospel. Challenge even those who have only been marginally influenced by the prosperity gospel, to examine themselves to see if they're in the faith, or whether they have simply pursued bread from Jesus like those in the first century, their own physical needs being met.

When it comes to our Charismatic brothers, those who profess faith in the biblical Jesus and the true biblical gospel and there are some of those, graciously clarify the nature of the true biblical gifts as we've done this morning. Make the biblical argument for cessationism. Remind them of the biblical directives for how the spiritual gifts were to be exercised. Treat them as brothers but don't downplay the serious and significant differences, the sufficiency of Scripture is at stake.

If you're here or if you're listening and you're unconvinced, let me challenge you. Don't allow yourself for the sake of peace to simply refuse to come to a convinced position. Don't embrace the cautious but open stance out of a desire for peace or acceptance with your peers, or frankly just because it's cool right now. Be like the Bereans who searched the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so.

Listen to Martin Luther. "If I profess with the loudest voice and clearest exposition every portion of the truth of God except precisely that little point which the world and the devil are at that moment attacking, I am not confessing Christ, however boldly I may be professing Christ. Where the battle rages, there the loyalty of the soldier is proved and to be steady on all the battlefield besides is mere flight and disgrace if he flinches at that point." May God make us faithful to Him and His Word. Let's pray together.

Father, take these things and seal them to our hearts. We thank You, we bless You, O God, that You have given us Your Word, that You have given us the external Word on which we can build our lives, we can know that You have spoken and we are not subject to the winds of mysticism and feeling and impressions. Father, we bless You, help us to be faithful until You come. We pray in Jesus' name.

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