

**Now That's the Spirit**  
**Assessing and Addressing Evangelical Charismatics**  
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## **Introduction**

As we begin our look at evangelical charismatics, I would like to begin with a personal note of gratitude to several such men who have had a tremendous impact on my life. This would include men like Dr. John Piper, whose passion for the supremacy of God and the enjoyment of God has been infectious in my own heart; Dr. Wayne Grudem, whose *Systematic Theology* and other academic works have both instructed and inspired me; and C. J. Mahaney, whose humility and Christ-centeredness continues to convict me and to motivate me to greater godliness.

I am deeply indebted to these men, and I know that many of you are as well. So it certainly is not my goal this afternoon to show any disrespect to these men, or to those who hold similar views to them.

However, as I'm sure you are aware, their views regarding the miraculous gifts in the church today are different than those of Dr. MacArthur and Grace Community Church.

And that is the issue I would like to discuss today.

The purpose of this seminar, then, is threefold:

- To give an accurate representation of the continuationist position
- To give an adequate response to this position, as well as a defense of the cessationist position
- To give the reasoning behind Grace Church's association with certain conservative charismatic leaders

Because of time limits...

- This seminar will not be able to go into the detail or depth that some of these issues warrant. I will try to recommend helpful books and articles in cases where additional study clearly is needed.
- It should be noted that this seminar is not specifically concerned with whether or not miracles (in the general sense) still occur today. Many cessationists believe that they do. The question is, rather, are the miraculous *gifts* of the New Testament still in operation in the church today?

Samuel Dawson (of Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary), a cessationist, provides helpful definitions in this regard:

- Miracle—For our purposes, a miracle is a supernatural act, directly or indirectly, affected by God with or without the use of human agency, that results in supernatural phenomena.
- Miraculous gift—For our purposes, a miraculous gift is a gift given by God to an intermediary human agent who uses the gift through God’s power so that miraculous phenomena are effected, which are not capable of being duplicated by human agency alone. Miraculous gifts may include among others: healings, prophecy, tongues, interpretation of tongues. Thus, miraculous gifts must have a human agent whom God gifts to carry out an act that results in supernatural phenomena.

“I am not denying by all this that there are miracles in the world today in the broader sense of supernatural occurrences and extraordinary providences. I am only saying that there are no miracles in the stricter sense. There are no miracle-workers performing miraculous signs to attest the redemptive revelation they bring from God. Though God has never locked Himself out of His world and is still at liberty to do as He pleases, when He pleases, how He pleases, and where He pleases, He has made it clear that the progress of redemptive revelation attested by miraculous signs done by miracle-workers has been brought to conclusion in the revelation embodied in our New Testaments” (Waldron, *To Be Continued?*, 102).

1. Having recognized that there are numerous distinctions within each camp, this seminar will attempt to identify the primary arguments given by those who hold a continuationist position and then by those who hold a cessationist position.
2. It is recognized from the outset that our presuppositions play an important part in how we reach our conclusions. Nonetheless, in spite of this, we must finally appeal to the Word of God as the only and final arbiter in the debate.
3. I would also like to state at the outset how much I personally, along with our church corporately, love the Holy Spirit. His works of regenerating, indwelling, baptizing, sealing, assuring, illuminating, convicting, comforting, confirming, filling, and enabling are all indispensable aspects of His ministry. And for His work we praise Him as a coequal Member of the Trinity.

We also love “the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God,” which He Himself inspired for our instruction and edification. When we go to the Word of God for our instruction on this subject, we are going to the Spirit Himself, since He is the One who has inspired every word of this wonderful and all-sufficient revelation from God.

## **Definition of Terms**

- A. **Continuationists** believe that the miraculous gifts are still available and operational in the church today. Thus believers should pursue and practice these gifts. While there are

over 20,000 distinct continuationist groups in the world, continuationists fall into three main categories.

1. The First Wave: **Pentecostals** generally believe that Spirit-baptism is a post-conversion experience (or experiences) in which believers are empowered by the Spirit. This post-conversion experience is marked by speaking in tongues and is often viewed as an indication of the spiritual maturity of the believer.

Although its roots can be traced into the 1800s, the Pentecostal movement really began under Charles F. Parham when one of his students, Agnes Ozman, reportedly spoke in tongues on New Year's Day, 1901.

2. The Second Wave: **Charismatics** (those who historically were influenced by Pentecostalism but remained in their mainline denominations) vary in their views between Pentecostal and Third-Wave distinctives.

The charismatic renewal occurred as Pentecostalism began to have an impact on mainline Protestant and Roman Catholic churches. The renewal's benchmark organization was the Full Gospel Business Men's Fellowship, which was founded in 1951. The movement really commenced in Van Nuys in 1960 when Dennis Bennett of St. Mark's Episcopal Church embraced the charismatic gifts.

3. The Third Wave: **Third Wave** adherents, unlike Pentecostals, believe that Spirit-baptism occurs at the moment of salvation (1 Cor. 12:13). However, believers experience Spirit-filling for empowering/abiding throughout the Christian life. Often this includes the manifestation of miraculous gifts.

The Third Wave (also known as "The Signs and Wonders Movement") began in the 1980s and essentially refers to the influence of Pentecostalism within evangelicalism. Historically, the key figures in this movement would include Peter Wagner, John Wimber, and the Vineyard church.

- B. In contrast, **cessationists** teach that the miraculous gifts were unique to the early church and are, therefore, not available today. Thus, contemporary Christians should not pursue or attempt to practice them.

Cessationism has historically been the position of fundamentalists and evangelicals, groups that trace their roots to the Protestant Reformation.

- C. A third position, dubbed "**Open but Cautious**," allows for the possibility of miraculous gifts continuing throughout the entire church age but remains skeptical of contemporary charismatic practice.

## Getting to the Heart of the Argument

Although this issue is incredibly complex, I believe it can be ultimately reduced to two particular questions, the answers to which will determine one's position on this issue.

**QUESTION 1: Both sides agree that the New Testament indicates that the gifts will cease at some point. The question is, does the New Testament indicate *when*?**

- Continuationists say “at the return of Christ.”
- Cessationists say “shortly after the apostolic age.”

## **The Continuationist Argument**

### **A. Textual Arguments**

1. Joel 2; Acts 2—The fulfillment of Joel 2 began on the day of Pentecost and continues throughout the last days (Oss, *Are Miraculous Gifts for Today? Four Views*, 265–271).
2. 1 Cor. 1:7—Storms suggests that this passage indicates that Paul expected the gifts to remain until Christ's return
3. 1 Cor. 13:8–13—The “perfect” refers to the return of Christ. Thus the miraculous gifts should not be expected to cease before then.
4. Eph. 4:11–13—The full maturity of the church will not take place until Christ returns. Thus the gifts should be expected to remain until then.
5. Rom. 12; 1 Cor. 12; Eph. 4—It is inconsistent for cessationists to arbitrarily delineate between gifts that are miraculous (and therefore ceased) and gifts that are non-miraculous (and therefore continue) in the lists of gifts found in these passages.

### **B. Theological Arguments**

1. Ecclesiological: The primary purpose of such gifts is the edification of the church (which is still needed today). It was not their sole purpose to authenticate the apostles (cf. Storms, *Are Miraculous Gifts for Today? Four Views*, 190–95).
2. Pneumatological: The Holy Spirit is immutable; He would not inaugurate the church age and then disappear. What He initiated at Pentecost, He will continue until the end of the church age.
3. Bibliological: A completed canon of Scripture does not necessarily preclude the continued need for miraculous gifts (cf. Storms, *Four Views*, 200; Oss, *Four Views*, 279).

4. Practical: Continuationists reject the cessationist argument that it is an indication of weak faith or immaturity to seek for signs (cf. Storms, *Four Views*, 195–200).
5. Hermeneutical: The New Testament speaks much about the gifts but gives no evidence that they are no longer valid.

## The Cessationist Response

### A. Textual Arguments

1. Joel 2; Acts 2—This passage presents no problem to the dispensationalist who sees Pentecost as only a partial fulfillment of Acts 2. “The cosmic signs of Joel 2:30–31 [3:3–4] are significantly absent in Luke’s account of Pentecost. The sun was not darkened; the moon did not turn to blood. There is no blood, fire, or columns of smoke. Joel mentions nothing of speaking supernaturally generated foreign languages nor does Acts give evidence of supernatural dreams” (Irvin A. Busenitz, *Joel*, 193). If the continuationist is going to apply the prophecy and dreams of Joel 2 to the entire church age, he must explain why the cosmic signs of Joel 2/Acts 2 are not also a continuing part of the church age.

Moreover, the preposition “before” in the phrase “before the great and terrible day of the Lord” literally means “to/at the face of, in the presence of” and refers to priority in terms of status not necessarily priority in terms of time. Thus, it seems best to see the full fulfillment of Joel 2 as occurring at the end of the church age as that which comes immediately before (and is even the first part of) the final Day of the Lord (cf. Busenitz, *Joel*, 191).

This passage does not necessitate that prophecy and dreams would characterize the church age. “Only two points of contact are found: God’s Spirit was poured out, and those who called upon the name of the Lord were saved. But it is these two elements of Joel’s prophecy—the Spirit poured out and salvation for those who call on the Lord—that provide the connecting link to Pentecost. They lead logically to the central focus of Peter’s sermon. Consequently, it appears best to view Joel’s prophecy as fulfilled in a preliminary fashion at the time of Pentecost, with a complete fulfillment reserved for the time surrounding the second advent” (Busenitz, *Joel*, 194).

Moreover, cessationists reject the idea that the Old Testament promises a continuation of charismatic gifts throughout the new covenant age (cf. Gaffin, *Are Miraculous Gifts for Today? Four Views*, 290–91).

2. 1 Cor. 1:7—Although both gifts and the return of Christ are mentioned in this passage, they are not necessarily tied together or connected in the sense that the gifts necessarily last until the Parousia.
3. 1 Cor. 13:8–13—There are several cessationist interpretations of the “perfect” in this passage, including (a) the mature church (Robert Thomas, Donald McDougall), (b)

the completed canon (Bruce Compton, Larry Pettegrew, and others), and (c) the Parousia or the End of the Age (Samuel Waldron, Richard B. Gaffin Jr., John MacArthur).

Even if the “perfect” is associated with the Second Coming of Christ (or with the End of the Age), it does not ultimately prove that the miraculous gifts remain until then. Gaffin explains:

Many, however, judge that 1 Corinthians 13:8–13 clearly teaches that prophecy and tongues will not cease until the second coming of Christ. To them, this is a “gotcha” text that by itself settles the issue. But does this passage really imply their conclusion?

Look carefully at 1 Corinthians 13:8–13. Notice that its primary thrust is to compare the believer’s present and future knowledge. Present knowledge is partial and obscure (vss. 8–9), in contrast to the full, “face-to-face” knowledge that will be ours (vs. 12) with the arrival of “perfection” or perfect knowledge (vs. 10). This “perfection” almost certainly will arrive when Christ returns in power and glory. Does that mean that these gifts will not cease until the Second Coming?

That conclusion goes beyond the aim of this text. The accent of this text is on the *character* of our present knowledge—in particular, on its partial quality. The particular media of that knowledge are not the point. Paul clearly had a pastoral concern with the proper exercise of prophecy and tongues in the church at Corinth (chapters 12–14). Therefore, it’s understandable that he mentioned them in this context. He was not, however, addressing the issue of *when* they would cease. Rather, he was stressing the partial, opaque character of all our knowledge until Christ returns. This is true no matter by which revelatory means that knowledge comes (including, by implication, even inscripturation). This is also true no matter when those means may cease (Richard Gaffin in an online article: “What About Prophecy and Tongues Today,” originally published in *Modern Reformation*; [http://www.opc.org/new\\_horizons/NH02/01d.html](http://www.opc.org/new_horizons/NH02/01d.html)).

4. Ephesians 4:11–13—Gaffin continues by referencing Ephesians 4:

Ephesians 4:11–13 reinforces this interpretation. The exalted Christ “gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets...until we all reach unity in the faith...and become mature [*or* perfect], attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.” Almost certainly the “unity” and “fullness” of verse 13 is the same state of affairs as the “perfection” in 1 Corinthians 13:10. Ephesians 4:13 perhaps echoes 1 Corinthians 13:10 as well by its use of the word “perfect” or “mature.” This is the situation Christ brings by his return. Since that is so, if we read Ephesians 4 as noncessationists insist we should read 1 Corinthians 13, we are left with the unavoidable conclusion that there will be apostles, as well as prophecy

and tongues, until the second coming of Christ. Even many noncessationists, however, rightly reject this conclusion.

But how can they consistently do so? In terms of gifts, in relation to the ultimate goal in view, how is this passage any different than 1 Corinthians 13:8–13? Noncessationists who correctly recognize that there are no apostles in the sense of Ephesians 2:20 and 4:11 today can't have it both ways. If these passages teach that prophecy/prophets and tongues continue until the Second Coming, then they also teach that the apostles do as well. But a more sound understanding is simply to recognize that these passages do not even address the question of whether or not prophecy or tongues (or any other gift) will cease before the Second Coming. They leave it an open question, to be settled by other passages. (Gaffin, "What About Prophecy and Tongues Today").

Eph. 4:11–13—The fact that apostles are part of the gifted individuals included in this list is a critical blow to the continuationist argument. "He gave some as apostles...for the equipping...and the building...until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man."

- Major Premise: Paul says that there will be apostles in the church until believers attain to the unity of the faith

The "apostles" in 4:11 are the same as those in 2:20 and 3:5, whom O'Brien comments "were those specially commissioned and sent by the Lord Jesus Christ. This includes the Twelve and Paul himself with one or two others (1 Cor. 15:7; Gal. 1:19; 2:7–9; cf. Rom. 16:7; 1 Cor. 9:6). They provided the essential link with their master, and their role was a foundational one" (O'Brien, *Ephesians*, 214).

- Minor Premise: There are no longer apostles in the church
- Therefore, **either** the "unity of the faith" must refer to something that is already past (such as the completed canon or a mature church as some cessationists claim), since there were to be apostles in the church until that stage of the "mature man" was reached...**or** Paul has left the question open-ended (as other cessationists claim)

Harold Hoehner:

"Until we all attain." Normally [*mekri*—"until"] appears in the NT as a temporal adverb or improper preposition with the genitive meaning "up to the point of." It occurs three times as a conjunction (Mark 13:30; Gal 4:19; Eph 4:13) and always with an aorist subjective without [*an*] to indicate an indefinite future. Used with an aorist subjective, it means "*until*, of a punctiliary conceived future event preceded in time by the action of the main clause." This conjunction could depend on the immediately preceding prepositional phrase "for the building up of the body of Christ," but it is more probable that it relates back to [*edoken*], "he gave,"

in verse 11, denoting that he gave gifted individuals to the church and that will continue until the action of the following aorist subjunctive [*katantesomen*] “until we all attain” (Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 552).

5. Rom. 12; 1 Cor. 12; Eph. 4—It is not inconsistent for cessationists to delineate between gifts that are miraculous (and therefore ceased) and gifts that are non-miraculous (and therefore continue) if the text itself makes such a distinction (as Paul does by singling out the revelatory gifts in 1 Cor. 13). Moreover, all agree that at least the gift of apostleship has ceased, so continuationists are essentially guilty of the same arbitrariness, since they say apostleship has ceased but other gifts have not.

However, there are some cessationists (total cessationists) who contend that all the gifts, both miraculous and non-miraculous, have ceased.

6. Eph. 2:20—Paul makes it clear that the apostles and the prophets (contextually and grammatically he can only be speaking of New Testament prophets here, contra Grudem, cf. O’Brien and others) were for the foundation of the church. Now that the foundation stage has been laid, neither of the two groups is needed.

Ephesians 2:20 could not be more clear. The verse contains no difficult words, nor any difficult or unusual grammatical constructions. The grammatical construction of one article preceding two nouns joined by “and” is a familiar and well-known construction. Any alleged complexities in interpreting this verse arise not from the verse itself but from the presuppositions of the interpreter (Edgar, *Satisfied by the Promise of the Spirit*, 78–79).

SUMMARY: The “perfect” in 1 Cor. 13 could very well be the completed canon or the mature church (meaning the church after its foundational stages were laid). But even if the “perfect” in 1 Cor. 13 is determined to be the Parousia (or the End of the Age), this text (along with the parallel passage in Eph. 4:11–13) leaves the question of the timing of cessation open-ended. Ephesians 2:20 however makes it clear that both the apostles and the New Testament prophets were given to the church for its foundational stages. Since apostles are no longer in the church today (a point agreed on by most), it follows that the foundational stage is over. Thus, the revelatory gifts that accompanied apostles and prophets (such as the gift of prophecy) are no longer needed in the church.

## **B. Theological Arguments**

1. Ecclesiological: A completed canon of Scripture (the inscripturated knowledge of God) is all that is needed for life and godliness (2 Pet. 1:3) and for equipping the man of God for every good work (2 Tim. 3:17). While edification within the church was certainly part of the purpose of the miraculous gifts (1 Cor. 12:7), it was not the only purpose (cf. Heb. 2:4), nor does it mandate that the gifts themselves have continued.
2. Pneumatological: The immutability of the Holy Spirit is not harmed by cessationism. To say that God works in different ways at different times does not question His

immutability, since His character and essence is unchanged. The fact that the ministry of the Spirit before Pentecost was different than His ministry afterward does not detract from His immutability. Thus, neither does the concept of cessationism.

3. It is incorrect to limit the Spirit's "power" to charismatic gifts only. Even in the New Testament, a primary sense of the Spirit's power is His regenerating work (cf. Gaffin, *Four Views*, 295–97).

Both the Old and New Testaments, in referring to the New Covenant (church) age, emphasize spiritual power that works inwardly, not outward miracles (cf. Jer. 31:33; 32:38–40; Ezek. 36:26–27; Matt. 26:28; 2 Cor. 3:18; Heb. 8:8–12; 10:16–17). Continuationists thus put an undue emphasis on external miraculous phenomena (Saucy, *Are Miraculous Gifts for Today?* *Four Views*, 303).

4. Bibliological: Cessationists contend that it is difficult (if not impossible) for continuationists to be consistent in their claim that the canon is closed and yet at the same time that God is still giving true, error-free revelation to His people. (This will be addressed in more detail later in this lecture.)
  - a) If both Scripture and modern prophecy come as perfect revelation from the Spirit, then what is the essential difference? "Inspired speech is God's speech, his word, with his own, inalienably infallible authority... What sense can there be in trying to maintain both a closed canon and the occurrence of inspired speech today?" (cf. Gaffin, *Four Views*, 293)
  - b) Continuationists will argue that the notion of cessationism is not found in the New Testament (cf. Oss, *Four Views*, 278). Yet this could also be said of the cessation of the apostolate and of the close of the canon (two closely related topics). If continuationists allow for (and even embrace) the cessation of the apostolate and the close of the canon, why do they not allow for the cessation of the charismatic gifts? (cf. Gaffin, *Four Views*, pp. 292–93).
5. Historical
  - a) The fact that there are no "capital A" Apostles today indicates another important difference between the first-century church and the church today. At the very least, the gift of apostleship has ceased (cf. Gaffin, *Four Views*, 291–92). "The admission that the apostolate has ceased is a fatal crack in the foundation of Continuationism" (cf. Waldron, *To Be Continued?* 23).
  - b) An Apostle had to (1) be an eyewitness of the resurrected Christ (Acts 1:22; 10:39–41; 1 Cor. 9:1; 15:7–8); (2) be directly appointed by Jesus Christ (Mark 3:14; Luke 6:13; Acts 1:2, 24; 10:41; Gal. 1:1); and (3) have the ability to confirm his mission by miraculous signs (Matt. 10:1–2; Acts 1:5–8; 2:43; 4:33; 5:12; 8:14; 2 Cor. 12:12). Based on these three criteria (all three of which one must meet to

be an Apostle), there are no longer Apostles in the church today (cf. Waldron, *To Be Continued?*, 25–30).

- c) Cessationists and continuationists agree that there is prophecy in the church today (through the revealed Scripture). But we disagree on whether there are *living* prophets in the church today.
- d) According to continuationists, there also are no prophets today who prophesy with full canonical authority. Yet there were at least some New Testament prophets who did (e.g., Eph. 2:20; 3:5). This is another important distinction between the first-century church and following centuries. “These undeniable changes are sufficient to lay to rest the argument that all the Spirit’s activities in the eschatological age are continuous” (cf. Saucy, *Four Views*, 303).
- e) Church history is not the same as Old Testament or Apostolic New Testament history, because it is not part of redemptive history, but is rather the mystery age between two important redemptive events, Pentecost and the Second Coming.

Both cessationists and charismatics (such as Oss) would agree that redemptive history (meaning the unfolding of the central events in God’s plan of salvation) includes events such as the fall, the history of Israel, the incarnation, the cross, the resurrection, the ascension, the exaltation, Pentecost, the second coming, and the new creation. Church history, outside Pentecost and the apostles, is therefore distinct from redemptive history. It is part of the application of salvation (*ordo salutis*) rather than part of redemptive history (*historia salutis*). Thus, what took place during redemptive history cannot necessarily be assumed to continue outside of redemptive history (during a gap between Pentecost and the Parousia) (cf. Gaffin, *Four Views*, 285–89). [NOTE: *This seems to be a distinctly covenantal argument; it probably would be stated differently by dispensationalists.*]

- f) The vast majority of orthodox/reformed Christian leaders throughout history have been cessationists.
6. Hermeneutical: The New Testament indicates that certain gifts and roles (such as apostleship and prophecy) were for the foundation stage of the church (cf. Eph. 2:20). Thus, the New Testament does set a precedent for the cessation of at least some of the miraculous gifts. Moreover, as we have seen from the texts above, the New Testament does not conclusively assert that the miraculous gifts will continue throughout the entire church age. Not only is the completed canon a viable exegetical viewpoint, but it also is not essential to the cessationist position. At best, for the continuationist, the New Testament leaves the question of when the gifts will cease open-ended.
  7. Practical: Cessationists emphasize that Scripture must be our final authority over experience and not vice versa (cf. Gaffin, *Four Views*, 334–36). While

continuationists would agree in theory, cessationists question whether or not this is really what ends up happening in charismatic practice.

**QUESTION 2: Both sides agree that the New Testament indicates that the gifts were active during the apostolic age. The question is, does contemporary continuationist practice match *what* was happening in the New Testament?**

- Continuationists answer “yes!”
- Cessationists answer “no!”

Each side, according to the other, has wrongly defined the New Testament charismatic gifts. Thus, it is no wonder they hold the views they do—because they are looking for phenomena that fit their distinct understanding (cf. Storms, *Four Views*, 186).

For our purposes, we will look at the three primary gifts that receive attention in today’s debate: prophecy, tongues, and healing.

### **The Continuationist Position**

#### PROPHECY

- Prophecy is defined as “the human *report* of divine *revelation*. It is this that distinguishes prophecy from teaching. Teaching is always based on an inscripturated text; prophecy is always based on spontaneous revelation” (Storms, *Four Views*, 207).
- Yet “prophecy is occasionally fallible” because of the human agency involved. Every prophecy involves (1) divine revelation, (2) human reception and perception, (3) human interpretation, and (4) human application. It is in these human aspects where fallibility enters. Thus, “in terms of *revelation* alone, the New Testament prophetic gift does not differ from the Old Testament prophetic gift” (Storms, *Four Views*, 207).
- Biblical examples of human error in New Testament prophecy include the disciples at Tyre (Acts 21:4) and the prophet Agabus (Acts 21:11) (cf. Storms, *Four Views*, 208).
- It is because New Testament prophecy is potentially fallible that it must be carefully judged (1 Cor. 14:29; 1 Thess. 5:19–22) (cf. Storms, *Four Views*, 208). “These utterances are not equivalent to Scripture, but rather are judged by Scripture....Even during New Testament times, contemporary prophecy (in distinction to canonical prophecy) was not always vested with canonical authority” (Oss, *Four Views*, 279).
- Although New Testament prophecy does not carry with it intrinsic divine authority (as Old Testament prophecy), it is still edifying to the church, just as the gift of teaching does not carry intrinsic divine authority yet is edifying to the church (insofar as it is accurate) (cf. Storms, *Four Views*, 209).

- The accuracy of a prophecy varies in accordance with the measure of the gift and the faith of the one who is prophesying (Rom. 12:6) (cf. Storms, *Four Views*, 209). Romans 12:6 teaches that prophesy takes place “in proportion to [one’s] faith” meaning that the accuracy and frequency of prophecy can vary depending on how much faith one has been given (cf. Deere, *Surprised by the Power of the Spirit*, 65).
- Those who prophesy in the church are to do so under the ecclesiastical authority of the elders and in keeping with the guidelines set forth in 1 Corinthians 14 (cf. Storms, *Four Views*, 210–11).
- “Finally, one should avoid looking to or depending on the gift of prophecy for making routine daily decisions in life. God does not intend for the gift of prophecy to be used as the *usual* way we make decisions regarding his will” (Storms, *Four Views*, 211). Paul, for example, generally reckoned with situations, bearing in mind the specific circumstances, principles from Scripture, the needs of the moment, and so on to make decisions.
- Continuationists admit that people can rely too much on the subjective guidance of prophecy. “Usually this has been because they did not realize that prophecy in the Church age is *not* the word of God, and can frequently contain errors” (Grudem, *Kingdom and Power*, 84).
- “Unrestrained ‘personal prophecy’ did much to undermine the movement of the Holy Spirit which began at the turn of the century.... Christians are certainly given words for one another ‘in the Lord’...and such words can be most refreshing and helpful, but there must be a witness of the Spirit on the part of the person receiving the words, and extreme caution should be used in receiving any alleged directive or predictive prophecy. Never undertake any project simply because you were told to by presumed prophetic utterance or interpretation of tongues, or by a presumed word of wisdom, or knowledge” (Dennis and Rita Bennet as cited by Grudem, *Kingdom and Power*, 84).
- “There is almost uniform testimony from all sections of the charismatic movement that prophecy is imperfect and impure, and will contain elements which are not to be obeyed or trusted” (Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today*, 110).

SUMMARY: Thus, the gift of prophecy is defined as a non-authoritative, often incorrect, human report of true, error-free revelation from God. It is fundamentally different from Old Testament prophecy, which had to be one-hundred percent accurate (cf. Deut. 13:1–5; 18:15–22). It is not canonical and does not replace the all-sufficient Scripture, but rather gives specific information regarding the application of Scripture in daily living (cf. Grudem, *Kingdom and the Power*, 81).

## GIFTS OF HEALING

- “Gifts of healings” (as it is literally translated) suggests that Paul was speaking about different gifts or powers of healing, not one gift for all diseases at all times (cf. Storms, *Four Views*, 212).
- It is erroneous to assume that if a person could heal at one time, he could always heal. Paul, for example, did not heal Epaphroditus (Phil. 2:25–30), Timothy (1 Tim. 5:23), Trophimus (2 Tim. 4:20), and perhaps even himself (2 Cor. 12:7–10; Gal. 4:13). This suggests that the gift is under the control of the will of God and not the will of the healer (cf. Storms, *Four Views*, 212).
- Thus, gifts of healing “are occasional and subject to the purposes of God” (Storms, *Four Views*, 213).
- Gifts of healing may be tied to the gift of faith, since the faith is the confidence that God will act in a miraculous way. This is tied in with the “prayer of faith” in James 5. Gifts of healing thus include praying for the sick and laying hands on them, with the fervent expectation that God will heal them. This of course does not always mean that God will answer our prayer in the way we expect, since God may not always will to heal (cf. Storms, *Four Views*, 213–14).
- Since the apostles were the most gifted of all people in the church, and since spiritual gifts range in strength and intensity, we should not expect the average believer to heal with the same ability as the apostles (such as Peter and Paul) (Deere, *Surprised by the Power of the Spirit*, 64–68; cf. Grudem, *Kingdom and Power*, 99)

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

## THE GIFT OF TONGUES

- Speaking in tongues, first of all, is a form of prayer (1 Cor. 14:2, 14–15) (cf. Storms, *Four Views*, 215).
- The person speaking can start and stop at will (1 Cor. 14:15–19; 27–28; cf. 14:32) (cf. Storms, *Four Views*, 215).
- Speaking in tongues is edifying for the speaker, which is not a negative thing unless self-edification becomes an end in itself (1 Cor. 14:4–5a). Tongues are edifying even if the speaker does not understand what he is saying (Storms, *Four Views*, 215–16).
- The content of tongue-speech is praise. Its primary purpose is praise, not evangelism (note “the wonders of God” in Acts 2:11; 10:46; 19:17) (cf. Storms, *Four Views*, 217).

- Praying in tongues is a form of spiritual warfare (compare 1 Cor. 14:16 with Eph. 6:18 and Rom. 8:26–27) (cf. Storms, *Four Views*, 217).
- Praying in tongues was a staple part of Paul’s devotional life (1 Cor. 14:14–19, 28). The fact that tongues are to be interpreted in the church implies that Paul’s use of uninterpreted tongues was in his private devotions (cf. Storms, *Four Views*, 217).
- Devotional tongues is for all believers.
- Tongues were not a sign to unbelieving Israel, as cessationists suggest.

What, then, is the principle that Paul finds in Isaiah 28:11 that applies to Corinth (and to us)? It is this: When God speaks to people in a language they cannot understand, it is a form of punishment for unbelief. It signifies his anger. Incomprehensible speech will not guide, instruct, or lead to faith and repentance, but will only confuse and destroy. Thus, if outsiders or unbelievers come in and believers speak in a language they cannot understand, believers will simply drive them away. They are giving a “sign” to unbelievers that is entirely wrong because their hardness of heart has not reached the point where they deserve that severe sign of judgment (Storms, *Four Views*, 219).

The point then is that tongues were never intended as an evangelistic sign to the Jews. “So uninterpreted speaking in tongues should not be permitted in church, for in doing so believers run the risk of communicating a negative sign to others that will only drive them away” (Storms, *Four Views*, 220).

- While Acts 2 does explicitly say that speaking in tongues consists of foreign languages not previously known by the speaker, there is no reason that this text is necessarily the standard text on defining tongues. First Corinthians 12–14 seems to broaden tongues to include angelic and spiritual languages and not just human foreign languages. Thus 1 Cor. 12–14 provides the basis for our understanding of tongues, with Acts 2 providing one way in which the gift was manifested (specifically, on the Day of Pentecost) (cf. Storms, *Four Views*, 220–21; Oss, *Four Views*, 280).
- The gift of tongues has helped countless Christians deepen their prayer lives and their relationships with the Lord (cf. Storms, *Four Views*, 222).

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

## **The Cessationist Response**

## PROPHECY

- The Bible never explicitly or overtly distinguishes New Testament prophecy from Old Testament prophecy. “If New Testament prophecy in distinction from Old Testament prophecy was not infallible in its pronouncements, this would have constituted an absolutely fundamental contrast between the Old Testament institution and the New Testament institution. To suppose that a difference as important as this would be passed over without explicit comment is unthinkable” (Waldron, *To Be Continued?* 65).
- Continuationists “attempt to *imply* the fallibility of New Testament prophecy by showing that it was to be evaluated (1 Cor. 14:29; 1 Thess. 5:19 – 21) on the basis of Scripture. The problem is that Old Testament prophecy was also evaluated on the basis of Scripture (previous revelation). Deuteronomy 13:1–5 makes this patent. Clearly, this fact did not mean true, Old Testament prophecy was less than fallible” (Waldron, *To Be Continued?* 66).
- “Continuationists note that the prophets were subordinate to the Apostles of Christ. This is said in order to *imply* their fallibility. It is certainly true that the New Testament prophets were inferior in rank to the Apostles. This is suggested, for instance, by the consistent New Testament order in which apostles are mentioned first and prophets second (1 Cor. 12:29; Eph. 2:20; 3:5; 4:11). This subordinate position does not, however, imply their fallibility. As we have seen, the Old Testament prophets were distinctly inferior to Moses in the place they held in the nation of Israel (Num. 12:1–8). This, however, did not imply their fallibility” (cf. Waldron, *To Be Continued?* 66).
- “It may be argued that the New Testament prophets were of a different order than the Theocratic prophets designated by the phrase, ‘Samuel and all the prophets’ (Acts 3:24; 13:20; Heb. 11:32). But then so also were Abel, Enoch, Moses, and Jesus—all of whom the Bible describes as infallible prophets (Luke 11:51; Jude 1:14; Acts 3:20–23). Not just the Theocratic prophets, but all other true, biblical prophets were regarded as infallible in their pronouncements. Indeed, as we have seen, such infallibility was basic, indispensable, and necessary to being a true prophet (Deut. 18:15–22)” (Waldron, *To Be Continued?* 66).
- To say that Agabus erred in his prophecy is to apply undue woodenness to Agabus’s words. If such were applied to other parts of the Bible, such would uncover errors in many places where conservative Continuationists would not want to find them. Moreover, neither Luke nor Paul nor anyone else criticizes Agabus’s prophecy (cf. Waldron, *To Be Continued?* 67).
- “Continuationists argue that contemporary prophets receive a revelation or vision from God, but are not preserved from garbling the message when they utter it. Strictly speaking, this would mean they are seers and not prophets, a distinction nowhere made in the Bible. It would also mean they are false prophets (Deut. 18:15–22). Nowhere does the Bible make a provision for a well-meaning seer who garbles his message” (Waldron, *To Be Continued?* 67).

- “None of the attempts to find a distinction between Old and New Testament prophecy are viable. It is undeniable that the key distinction at which the defender of Continuationism is aiming is simply absent from the New Testament” (Waldron, *To Be Continued?* 68).
- On the positive side, the New Testament uses identical terminology (side-by-side) to refer to both Old and New Testament prophets and prophecy. Old Testament prophets are mentioned in Acts 2:16; 3:24, 25; 10:43; 13:27, 40; 15:15; 24:14; 26:22, 27; and 28:23. References to New Testament prophets and prophecy are interspersed without any distinction or comment (Acts 2:17–18; 7:37; 11:27, 28; 13:1; 15:32; 21:9–11) (cf. Waldron, *To Be Continued?* 68).
- Peter’s reference to Joel’s prophecy (in Acts 2:16–21) obliterates any distinction between Old Testament prophecy and New Testament prophecy since the Old Testament prophet Joel prophesied in the Old Testament that in the New Covenant “your sons and daughters shall prophesy” with young men seeing visions and old men having dreams (cf. Waldron, *To Be Continued?* 68).
- The book of Revelation, which is clearly New Testament prophecy, brings a curse on any who add to what it has revealed (Rev. 1:3; 22:7, 10, 18, 19).
- The New Testament explains that the New Covenant is better than the Old (Heb. 8:1–13; 2 Cor. 3:1–6). But this would be strange if the prophecy associated with the New Covenant is actually inferior to that of the Old.
- “There is not a single passage in the New Testament where the biblical terminology related to prophecy or prophesying refers to anything but the inspired reception and utterance of direct revelation. There is not one reference that differs from the Old Testament identification of the prophet as the spokesman and mouth of God” (Waldron, *To Be Continued?* 69).
- “Based on the description of the prophet in the New Testament no one can demonstrate that they are a prophet apart from the ability to predict the future. The predictions are not vague, general statements, but rather quite specific predictions that may be verified within reasonable time. They must also receive direct, immediate revelation” (Edgar, *Satisfied*, 84).
- Grammatically, the “prophets” of Ephesians 2:20 can only refer to New Testament prophets. Like the apostles, they were foundational to the establishment of the church. And, like the apostles, they are no longer on the scene (cf. Waldron, *To Be Continued?* 76).
- New Testament prophets were, as seen from above, both infallible and authoritative in their prophecies. Thus, were New Testament prophecy still available today, it too would have to be both infallible and authoritative.

- Romans 12:6 is better understood as “corresponding to the faith,” meaning that prophetic utterances must be tested by the truth of the faith (cf. 1 Thess. 5). Therefore, this verse could be saying ‘prophecy in accordance with the doctrine we believe.’ Such an instruction would fit well with other admonitions regarding prophecy. In addition, regarding the next several gifts listed in Romans 12, Paul instructs that they are to be exercised in the sphere of ministry corresponding to the respective gift. It is likely then that this is instruction to exercise prophecy in the sphere appropriate to prophecy: ‘the faith’ (Edgar, *Satisfied*, 111).
- “The New Testament offers no evidence anywhere of a qualitative difference in gifts given by the Spirit of God. This is as we might expect since God gives perfect gifts (James 1:16–17). All are described in the same way. We have no example of any qualitatively inferior or fallible gift or of any failure by any Christian who attempted to exercise a gift” (Edgar, *Satisfied*, 114).

SUMMARY: New Testament prophets are to be held to the same standard as Old Testament prophets since the NT writers make no attempt to distinguish between the two. Thus, the content of their prophecy (whether foretelling or forth-telling) must accurately convey the true, error-free revelation they are receiving from God. If their prophecy is shown to be incorrect, it is also shown to not be from God. Moreover, now that we have the completed “prophetic Word,” additional revelation from God is no longer needed for the present age.

## GIFTS OF HEALINGS

*The continuationist understanding of “gifts of healing” in 1 Cor. 12 fails for several reasons* (adapted from Mayhue, “Cessationism, ‘The Gifts of Healing,’ and Divine Healing,” TMSJ 14/2 [Fall 2003]: 271).

- The phrase “gifts of healings” (which only occurs in 1 Cor. 12) is so ambiguous in its contexts that no one can really know for sure what it means. Those who would base their entire theology of physical healing on that phrase alone are probably reading more into the text than is exegetically verifiable.
- The continuationist understanding does not explain the decline in quality and quantity of even the apostolic healings as the apostolic age drew to its close.
- The continuationist understanding does not explain why “gifts of healings” appears only in 1 Cor. 12 and not in any of the other lists of New Testament gifts.
- The continuationist understanding does not explain why the New Testament epistles do not give additional instruction regarding gifts of healing. (Note that cessationists do not see James 5 as connected to 1 Corinthians 12. James 5 discusses the prayer of the elders for a sinning [and subsequently sick] member of their church. The gift of healing is not found in that passage.)

- “Dr. Deere seems to contradict his own theory when he writes, ‘I believe that God is doing NT-quality miracles in the church today, and I believe He has done them throughout the history of the church.’ The only quality of miracles we know of from Acts are those done by the apostles. Yet Dr. Deere elsewhere theorized that the miracles of the church were substandard compared to those of the apostles. Both cannot be true” (Mayhue, *TMSJ*, 271).

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

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

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

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

**Conclusion:** When the summary of biblical evidence is considered, from both the OT and New Testament, the evidence does not support contemporary continuationist practice.

The gift of working miracles means that a specific individual can directly perform miracles. The gift of healing means that a specific individual can heal other people directly. The same applies to casting out demons if it is considered a gift. The individual has the ability to perform the miracle or healing. Instances where people are healed in answer to prayer are not instances of the exercising of spiritual gifts but are the direct work of God in response to prayer. If believers gather and pray for a sick person and that person is healed miraculously, this is not evidence that the gift of healing exists today. This demonstrates that God answers prayer.

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

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

**SUMMARY:** The New Testament gift (or gifts) of healing was of the same quality and kind as healings in the Old Testament, healings in the Gospels, and healings in the book of Acts. While cessationists appreciate answers to prayer in which God intervenes in healing a sick person, they maintain that this does not fit the biblical description of miraculous healing by a Spirit-endowed healer. Since the healings of contemporary charismatics do not fit the biblical description, they cannot be construed as being the same thing.

## TONGUES

- The gift of tongues is closely associated with evangelism. It authenticates the message of the evangelist (Mark 16:17, 20; Acts 2; 1 Cor. 14:20–22; cf. Heb. 2:2–3). According to Acts, the content of tongue-speech was “the mighty deeds of God.”
- The gift of tongues consisted of authentic foreign languages that the speaker had not previously learned (Mark 16:17; Acts 2:4, 8–11). According to Acts 10:47 and 11:17, the tongues of Acts 10 were the same as the tongues of Acts 2. By implication, the tongues of Acts 19 are also the same.

(This sets the precedent for seeing tongues as authentic foreign languages in 1 Corinthians 14—especially when one considers that Luke, who was Paul’s close associate, probably finished Acts after 1 Corinthians was written. In light of the Corinthian controversy, it is unlikely that Luke would have used identical terminology in Acts for something that he realized was intrinsically different from what was taking place in Corinth.)

- 1 Corinthians 12:8–11 and 27–31 make it unmistakably clear that not everyone is given the gift of tongues (cf. 14:26). Note that there is no contextual or grammatical warrant for seeing 1 Cor. 12 as one type of tongues [that only a few receive] and 1 Cor. 14 as a different type (that everyone is to receive). Paul’s statement in 14:5 (“Now I wish that you all spoke in tongues”) is almost identical to his earlier statement in 7:7 regarding singleness (“Yet I wish that all men were even as myself”). Thus, Paul’s wish does not indicate that which is possible and in fact makes it clear that not everyone in the Corinthian congregation actually did speak in tongues. Moreover, in the verse, Paul is actually emphasizing the priority of prophecy over tongues. He is promoting not tongues, in the context, but rather prophecy.

- The “tongues of angels” in 1 Corinthians 13:1 is probably hyperbolic in keeping with the context. Paul seems to be using hyperbole here (as his subsequent examples make clear)...It may even be a figure of speech meaning “to speak very eloquently.” Even if it is taken literally, there are two things to consider: (1) It is the exception and not the rule, as evidenced by the rest of the New Testament teaching on tongues and as evidenced by Paul’s hyperbolic list. (2) Every time angels spoke in the Bible, they spoke in a real language that people could understand (cf. Gen. 19; Exod. 33; Joshua 5; Judges 13) (cf. Geisler, *Signs and Wonders*, 166).
- Paul makes it clear that the gift of tongues was never intended to be the hallmark of the church or its most prestigious spiritual gift. Rather, the gift of prophecy is preferable because it does not require interpretation or translation in order to edify the church (1 Cor. 14:1–5)
- Paul defines what he means by “speaking to God and not to men” when he says that “no one understands” (v. 2). This would be true of a foreign language that someone spoke but no one else knew. They would not be edified because they would not understand what was being said.
- Geisler, *Signs and Wonders*, 167: “The fact that the tongues of which Paul spoke in 1 Corinthians could be ‘interpreted’ shows that it was a meaningful language. Otherwise it would not be an ‘interpretation’ but a creation of the meaning. So the gift of ‘interpretation’ (1 Corinthians 12:30; 14:5, 13) supports the fact that tongues were a real language that could be translated for the benefit of all by this special gift of interpretation.”
- The purpose of the gifts (within the church) is to edify the body (12:7; the whole point of “love” overrides the gifts in chapter 13; cf. 1 Pet. 4:10–11). The intended use of tongues, therefore, is when the gift is interpreted (translated) so that fellow believers are edified. Tongues (languages) that are not interpreted (translated) do not profit the body because the message cannot be understood (14:6–11). The intended use of the gifts is the edification of the church (v. 12). Tongues that are not interpreted do not edify the church (and therefore do not fulfill their intended purpose). (The private use of tongues is not ideal, since the ideal usage edifies others—c.f. 14:12–19)
- The context implies that Paul’s prayer in 14:14–15 is a public prayer, not a private prayer, since the entire discussion regards the use of the gift in the church, and since verse 16 mentions that the ungifted person (who does not understand the language being spoken) will not be able to affirm a public prayer that he does not understand.

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

- The madness of 14:23 seems to be similar to the supposed drunkenness of Acts 2:13. This, of course, would be a fitting response from those who heard others speaking in an authentic foreign language that they did not know.
- Paul defines what he means by “let him speak to himself and to God” in verse 28 with the preceding phrase, “he must keep silent in the church.” This again does not preclude authentic foreign languages as the essence of tongue-speech.
- The gift of tongues was to be used in an orderly manner in the church (14:27–28, 39–40).

**Note: There are no other passages that specifically teach about the gift of tongues. Some charismatics try to find tongues in Romans 8:26 and 2 Corinthians 5:13, but the context in those passages makes it clear that the gift of tongues is not in view.**

Viewing tongues as authentic foreign languages best fits the clearer passage (of Acts 2) and has the least number of problems in interpreting 1 Cor. 14.

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

Hasel, *Speaking in Tongues*, 55: “There is but one clear and definitive passage in the New Testament which unambiguously defines ‘speaking in tongues’ and that is Acts 2. If Acts 2 is allowed to stand as it reads, then ‘tongues’ are known, intelligible languages, spoken by those who received the gift of the Holy Spirit and understood by people who came from the various areas of the ancient world to Jerusalem.

We may raise a question of sound interpretation. Would it not be sound methodologically to go from the known definition and the clear passage in the New Testament to the less clear and more difficult passage in interpretation? Should an interpreter in this situation attempt to interpret the more difficult passage of 1 Cor 12–14 in light of the clearer passage of Acts 2? Is this not a sound approach?”

### **The Church Fathers (Regarding the Nature of Tongues)**

The following citations from the church fathers indicate that they understood the gift of tongues (as practiced by the New Testament church) in the same way cessationists do today.

**1. The gift of tongues was closely associated with evangelism. It authenticates the message of the evangelist (cf. Heb. 2:2–3)**

**Hippolytus (c. 170–c. 236):** “It is not therefore necessary that every one of the faithful should cast out demons, or raise the dead, or speak with tongues; but such a one only who is vouchsafed this gift, for some cause which may be advantage to the salvation of the unbelievers, who are often put to shame, not with the demonstration of the world, but by the power of the signs; that is, such as are worthy of salvation: for all the ungodly are not affected by wonders; and hereof God Himself is a witness, as when He says in the law: ‘With other tongues will I speak to this people, and with other lips, and yet will they by no means believe.’”

**John Chrysostom (c. 344–407):** “The Corinthians thought that speaking in tongues was a great gift because it was the one which the apostles received first, and with a great display. But this was no reason to think it was the greatest gift of all. The reason the apostles got it first was because it was a sign that they were to go everywhere, preaching the gospel.”

**Augustine (354–430):** “In the earliest times, ‘the Holy Ghost fell upon them that believed: and they spoke with tongues,’ which they had not learned, “as the Spirit gave them utterance.’ These were signs adapted to the time. For there behooved to be that betokening of the Holy Spirit in all tongues, to show that the Gospel of God was to run through all tongues over the whole earth.”

Others agree including Ambrosiaster (mid-fourth century), Hegemonius (before 350), Gregory of Nazianzen (c. 329–390), and Leo the Great (d. 461).

**2. The gift of tongues consisted of authentic foreign languages that the speaker had not previously learned (again, the gift is closely associated with evangelism). The content of tongues-speech was “the mighty deeds of God,” specifically with regard to the gospel.**

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

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

This is agreed on by Irenaeus (c. 140–c. 202), Hippolytus (c. 170–c. 236), Hegemonius (before 350), Ambrosiaster (mid-fourth century), Augustine (354–430), Leo the Great (d. 461), and implied by others (such as Tertullian [c. 160–c. 220] and Origen [c. 185–c. 254]).

The fathers equated the gift in Mark and Acts with the gift in 1 Corinthians 12–14. They did not see two types of the gift, one public and one private. They saw only one type of tongues—that as described in Acts 2.

**3. The gift of tongues is given to select individuals by the Holy Spirit. Not everyone is expected to speak in tongues.**

*Regarding the fact that only the Holy Spirit can give the gift of tongues:*

**Ambrosiaster (mid-fourth century):** “Paul is emphatic in asserting that the distribution of gifts is not to be attributed to human causes as if they were achievable by men. The varied gifts of the Holy Spirit and the grace of the Lord Jesus are the work of one and the same God.”

**Arnobius (late third, early fourth century):** “By His own Power, He not only performed those miraculous deeds...but He has permitted many others to attempt them and to perform them by the use of His name...He chose fisherman, artisans, peasants, and unskilled persons of a similar kind, so that they, being sent through various nations, would perform all those miracles without any fraud and without any material aids.”

Others agree, including Irenaeus (c. 140–c. 202), Origen (c. 185–c. 254), Novatian (d. c. 258), and Hilary (c. 291–371).

*Regarding the fact that not everyone is expected to speak in tongues:*

**Hippolytus (c. 170–c. 236):** “It is not necessary that every one of the faithful should cast out demons, raise the dead, or speak with tongues. But only such a one who has been graciously given this gift—for the purpose that it may be advantageous to the salvation of unbelievers.”

**Ambrose (c. 340–c. 397):** “Not all, says he, have the gift of healings, nor do all, says he, speak with tongues. For the whole of the divine gifts cannot exist in each several man.”

Others agree, including Clement of Alexandria (c. 150–c. 215), John Chrysostom (c. 344–407), Jerome (c. 345–420), Augustine (354–430), and Theodoret of Cyrus (c. 393–c. 466).

- 4. The gift of tongues was never intended to be the hallmark of the church or its most prestigious spiritual gift. Rather, the gift of prophecy is preferable because it does not require interpretation or translation in order to edify the church.**

**Ambrosiaster (mid-fourth century):** “The pursuit of prophecy is more acceptable [than the pursuit of tongues] because it is more useful.”

**John Chrysostom (c. 344–407):** “The Corinthians thought that speaking in tongues was a great gift because it was the one which the apostles received first, and with a great display. But this was no reason to think it was the greatest gift of all. The reason the apostles got it first was because it was a sign that they were to go everywhere, preaching the gospel.” (Chrysostom taught that tongues are only equal to prophecy if they can be interpreted.)

**John Chrysostom (c. 344–407):** “Paul does not forbid speaking in tongues, however much he may belittle the gift, but he insists that it be kept under control and used for the edification of the whole church.”

- 5. The purpose of the gifts (within the church) is to edify the body (cf. 1 Pet. 4:10–11). The ideal use of tongues, therefore, is when the gift is interpreted (translated) so that fellow believers are edified.**

***First Epistle of Clement Regarding Virginity (from third or fourth century):*** “With the gift, therefore, which thou hast received from our Lord, serve *thy* spiritual brethren. . . and declare the gift which thou hast received in the Church for the edification of the brethren in Christ (for good and excellent are those things which help the men of God), if so be that they are truly with thee.”

**Basil (c. 239–379):** “Since no one has the capacity to receive all spiritual gifts, but the grace of the Spirit is given proportionately to the faith of each, when one is living in community with others, the grace privately bestowed on each individual becomes the common possession of the others. . . . One who receives any of these gifts does not possess it for his own sake but rather for the sake of others.”

Others agree, including Irenaeus (c. 140–c. 202), Tertullian (c. 160–c. 220), Origen (c. 185–c. 254), Novatian (d. c. 258), Hilary (c. 291–371), Ambrosiaster (mid-fourth century), John Chrysostom (c. 344–407), Theodoret of Cyrus (c. 393–c. 466), and John Cassian (360–435).

- 6. The gift of tongues, if used in church, was to be used in an orderly manner.**

**Severian of Gabala (d. c. 408):** “The person who speaks in the Holy Spirit speaks when he chooses to do so and then can be silent, like the prophets. But those who are possessed by an unclean spirit speak even when they do not want to. They say things that they do not understand.”

**John Chrysostom (c. 344–407)**, commenting on 1 Cor. 14:40: “Again giving a blow to them who chose to behave themselves unseemly without cause, and to incur the imputation of madness; and who keep not their proper rank. For nothing doth so build up as good order, as peace, as love; even as their contraries tend to pull down.” (Schaff, 224).

## **A Biblical/Historical Understanding of Tongues**

Summary: The gift of tongues was a supernaturally endowed ability, given by the Holy Spirit to select Christians, enabling those believers to speak in previously unlearned human languages. The ideal use of the gift involved the translation of the message for the general edification of fellow believers or evangelism of unbelievers. This ability was not given to all Christians nor were they commanded to seek it. It was not considered the hallmark of the early church, nor is it ever highlighted as a normal part of the Christian experience.

Hasel, *The Gift of Tongues*: “The contemporary phenomenon of ‘speaking in tongues,’ which is practiced by millions of Christians around the world at present, is of recent origin in Christianity. Even though there have been attempts by the score to demonstrate that the phenomenon of glossolalia in modern times has roots going back for centuries in Christian practice, it remains certain that it is of recent origin.”

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

## **Conclusion**

Regarding the first question... *when* did the gifts cease? I personally believe that the evidence points toward the completed canon of Scripture. However, even if one were to interpret the “perfect” in 1 Cor. 13:12 as the Second Coming, it does not demand that the gifts continue until the Second Coming. Rather, it indicates that partial knowledge now (based on whatever source) will be one day be replaced by full knowledge. Thus, at best, it leaves the timing of the cessation of the miraculous gifts open-ended. Such a conclusion is further supported by Ephesians 4:11–13.

Other passages, such as Eph. 2:20, do not leave the question open-ended, however. Rather, Ephesians 2:20 makes it clear that both apostleship and New Testament prophecy was intended for the foundation stage of the church. Because we are no longer in the foundation-laying stage, such gifts are no longer necessary (as is evidenced by the absence of apostles in the church today).

This cessationist perspective is confirmed when we look at the second question: *what* were the New Testament gifts? The evidence indicates that the New Testament gift of prophecy was identical to Old Testament prophecy thus must be one-hundred percent accurate. The fallible Spirit-led suggestions of contemporary charismatic practice do not match this biblical understanding. The evidence indicates that biblical healings were immediate, complete, and undeniable? Thus, indirect healing through praying for the sick along with gradual periods of recovery do not match this biblical standard. And finally, the evidence indicates that tongues was the supernatural ability of select Christians to speak previously unlearned human foreign languages for the purpose of evangelizing the lost and edifying fellow believers within the church. Thus, a private prayer language consisting of non-rational spiritual languages (which everyone in the church should pursue) does not match this biblical standard.

Whether or not Scripture delineates the exact time when the gifts will cease (beyond the fact that they are intrinsic to the foundational stage of the church and therefore become unneeded after the foundation has been laid), the Bible is clear that what was taking place in the New Testament was something other than is currently taking place in continuationist circles.

A dilemma confronts noncessationists. If prophecy and tongues (as they function in the New Testament) continue today, then the noncessationist is faced with the quite practical and troublesome implication that Scripture alone is *not* a sufficient verbal revelation from God. At best, the canon is *relatively* closed. Alternatively, if—as most noncessationists insist—‘prophecy’ and ‘tongues’ today are not revelatory or are less than fully revelatory, then these contemporary phenomena are misnamed. They are something *other* than the gifts of prophecy and tongues that we find in the New Testament. Noncessationists are caught in a redemptive-historical anachronism. They are seeking within the *superstructure-building* phase of the church's history that which belonged to its *foundation-laying* phase. They are involved in the contradictory effort of trying to maintain that the New Testament canon is complete and closed and yet at the same time that the revelatory gifts for the open canon period—gifts for when the New Testament documents were still being written—continue.

But God's Word lifts us out of this dilemma. It shows us that by God's wise and gracious design, prophecy and tongues have completed their task and have ceased. What remains, supremely and solely sufficient and authoritative until Jesus comes, is ‘the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture’ (Westminster Confession of Faith, 1:10)” (Gaffin, “What About Prophecy and Tongues Today?” online article).

## **Final Question**

**So...why does Grace Church partner with conservative continuationist leaders, when our church has taken such a strong stance against charismatic teaching?**

To be sure, these are important doctrines, especially since they have such practical implications for ecclesiology and the daily Christian life.

However, for those who agree on the essentials of the gospel, there are times in which it is appropriate to overlook differences on second-level doctrines in order to stand united on first-level doctrines.

The Corinthians were obviously abusing the spiritual gifts that they had received. Yet Paul did not respond by separating from them over this issue. Rather, he sought to correct them in love.

Moreover, it seems ironic that a passage in which Paul is emphasizing love for fellow Christians would itself become a primary point of division among believers. As Richard Gaffin writes: “Consider this disconcerting situation: Especially in recent decades the work of the one Spirit, given to unify the church (e.g., 1 Cor. 12; Eph. 4:3), has become the occasion (notice I did not say, the source!) of disunity and even divisions in the church” (Gaffin, *Four Views*, 334).

While not compromising what we believe to be the clearest and most accurate interpretation of Scripture (namely, the cessationist position), the leadership of Grace Church has chosen to welcome certain conservative continuationist leaders because of their shared commitment to the biblical gospel. Though our church might not be able to participate in every ministry venue with these men, the leadership at Grace Church has chosen to partner with them in standing for the truth in a day when the gospel is under attack.

In a world that is becoming increasingly anti-Christian, it is important for us to link in some way around what is most important. So the bottom line is this: we want to link arms around the gospel with those who affirm the true gospel, even if there are some important doctrinal differences in other areas.

Dr. Albert Mohler has suggested three levels of fellowship and cooperation that might be helpful in this regard (cf. <http://www.crosswalk.com/news/weblogs/mohler/1263841.html>):

**Level 1:** Doctrines necessary in order to recognize someone as a true Christian.

These are beliefs that *must* be affirmed in order to be a Christian. This refers to the elements of the gospel, but it also includes the elements that are beyond “just believing in Jesus’ death on the cross.” They would include the bodily resurrection of the Lord, the significance of the atonement, justification by faith alone, the exclusivity of Christ, the inerrancy of Scripture, and other fundamentals of the faith.

We cannot cooperate *at all* if there is a question on these things.

**Level 2:** Doctrines important in how a church functions and is organized, or doctrines important for the formation and operation of a seminary.

These are doctrines that must be embraced, or we can’t serve in the same church together; they are doctrines that definitely must be confirmed in order to be on the staff of a church or seminary (because of the practical implications they have for ministry and Christian living).

This would include views on infant or adult baptism, ecclesiastical hierarchy, the charismatic gifts (in my opinion), and so on.

But these are not doctrines that would forbid us from possibly having someone come teach at the seminary or in our church (on an occasional basis). And these individuals would be mature enough and wise enough to not abuse the opportunity.

**Level 3:** Doctrines that we can disagree on and yet still function in the same local church together.

This might include views on eschatology or various interpretations of certain passages (such “the sons of God” in Genesis 6).

This is not to say that these issues are inconsequential...they are important, and we will take our stand and teach what we believe the Bible says. But they are not the final test for church membership, and in SOME cases, not the test of being on the staff of a church or the faculty of a seminary.

**Practically**, this means that we can cooperate (in certain venues) with C. J. Mahaney, Ligon Duncan, John Piper, R. C. Sproul, Wayne Grudem, and others because they all affirm level one—the highest level. **We can work “together for the Gospel.”**

Yet we would agree that we might not all be able to join one another’s churches or be on the faculty of one another’s seminaries.

Moreover, while we can cooperate with these men, we cannot partner with all Pentecostals, charismatics, or members of the Third Wave (or all Presbyterians or Baptists, for that matter). The reason for this is that some churches within these various movements exhibit a lack of commitment to the gospel and its attendant issues. **We must separate from those who do not uphold an accurate view of the gospel.**

Some will accuse us of sending a confusing message to those in our congregation. But we believe that if we teach our people to be doctrinally discerning, then they will not be confused.

Others will accuse us of compromising what we believe. After all, didn’t John MacArthur write *Charismatic Chaos*? Has he changed in his beliefs? No, not at all. We have not changed our position on the charismatic gifts, nor have we found the continuationist position to be exegetically tenable.

However, we believe that cooperating around the true gospel (rather than social issues or political issues) and still not compromising on some of our doctrinal distinctives sends a better message to the world as to what true Christianity is than pulling away from one another completely.

Thus, we stand together for the gospel with those who embrace it in its fullness as revealed in the all-sufficient Word of God.