

The Cessation of the Charismatic Gifts

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“Cessationism”: The question

The question is not...

- ✘ Is the Holy Spirit working today?
- ✘ Should we seek God’s felt presence?
- ✘ Have all miracles and gifts ceased?
- ✘ Does God not answer prayers for healing from sickness today?
- ✘ Should men limit God’s power?


“Cessationism”: The question



In the early church, after Jesus rose from the dead, there were particular people who received the spiritual gifts of speaking in tongues, prophesying and performing miraculous signs (and of apostleship). Did God intend this to be part of ongoing church life for us? Has he restored these gifts today?

“Cessationism”: The question

Or, put the other way round...

 Or, did those gifts “cease” during the age of the apostles? Why did the church believe this for nearly 2000 years.... and what difference does it make?

Aims of today's seminar:

- ✓ Explaining why the church believed this almost everywhere until recently.
- ✓ Helping us to rejoice that the Holy Spirit speaks directly with power and authority today, in the Scriptures.
- ✓ Removing misunderstandings and identifying the dangers.

“Cessationism”: The reality

- ✓ In reality, all agree that they ceased.
- ✓ The question is, did they much later return (briefly in the 19th century, in the early 20th and much more in the late 20th, perhaps with very isolated exceptions)?
- ✓ i.e. Is today a spiritual golden age, the restoration after cessation?

Outline of my argument:

- 1 Today's "gifts" clearly differ from those in the Bible.
- 2 The Bible's gifts are tied to the age and ministry of the apostles.
- 3 Having those gifts today would be against God's revealed purposes.
- 4 Answering objections.

1 Today's "gifts" are different

① The tongues are different.

“Tongue” (English) or glōssa (γλώσσα) (Greek) means either:

1) The thing in your mouth (“my tongue is red”).

2) A language (“my mother tongue is Swahili”).

Pentecostal “tongues” i.e. “languages”

Acts 2:4 – “other tongues”

Acts 2:6 – people from many places heard their own languages.

Acts 2:8 – “each in our own language”.

Acts 2:11 – they heard the gospel being explained in their own languages.

Pentecostal tongues=preaching Christ

After Pentecost: same thing

Acts 10:44-47 – “Just as we have”

Acts 11:15 – “Just as on us at the beginning”

1 Corinthians 12:10, 14:19, 27, 28: the gift of languages was of words that explained Christian doctrine, and could be interpreted with an interpreter present.

Verse by verse questions? Search “Charles Hodge 1 Corinthians commentary”.

Heavenly languages in 1 Cor 13?

“1 Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. 2 And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. 3 And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor..”

Paul uses hyperbole to teach about love; it is not a technical explanation of the gifts.

Do angels really speak completely different languages, without logical structure?

Today's "gifts" are different

② The prophets/prophecies are different

What is prophecy? "Prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit." (2 Peter 1:21).

 Not man's ideas  God speaking

God speaks, so you must obey!

Deuteronomy 18:18-22

- God's words in their mouths.
- Therefore, must all be strictly obeyed.
- Protection against false prophets needed.
- How to identify a false prophet? A thing he says doesn't happen.
- 1 John 4:1-3: or, they teach any doctrines that we know are wrong (not just that one!)
- Maximal consequences for false prophets

Consequences for false prophets

Old Covenant: removed from God's holy people: because church, land and state were joined, that was by death.

New Covenant (1 Corinthians 5): removed from God's holy people (excommunicated). Spiritually banished.

Have standards changed? (No)

- Revelation 22:18-19
- Acts 5:1-11 (significance of first record; compare Leviticus 10:1-3)
- Romans 13:11-14, Hebrews 10:28-31: Christ's coming *raises* the necessity of holiness. These are days of fulfilment.
- “Grace permits unholiness” = unthinkable heresy (Romans 6)

Jesus Christ, climax of revelation

- 1 Peter 1:3-12, 2 Peter 1:16-21, Hebrews 1:1-3, John 1:1-4, Revelation 19:10. Jesus himself. (Same as the gift of languages).
- Compare this with the usual focus and content of today's "prophecies".
- Micah 2:11, 3:5, Jeremiah 14:13-14: false prophets lie about earthly blessings.

2 **The gifts are tied to the apostles**
(This does not mean that only the apostles had the miraculous gifts).

- 2 Cor 12:12. Miraculous signs went with new revelation (like with Moses).
- Mark 16:20 – ‘confirming the word’
- 1 Cor 1:22 – wrong attitudes to signs

2 The gifts are tied to the apostles

- ② They laid the foundations once for all
 - The last days came (Heb 1:2, Acts 2:17)
 - Jews+Gentiles together! (Eph 2:11-22)
 - Foundations of the spiritual temple:
Eph 2:19; 1 Cor 3:9-11; Rom 15:17-21
 - Unique pioneering responsibility,
marked by signs: 1 Cor 14:18, 15:8,
Acts 1:23-26. To be “apostolic” today:
teach the Scriptures they wrote.

2 The gifts are tied to the apostles

③ The gifts pass during NT times

- 2 Peter 1-2: today we expect false teachers. No real “false prophets” without true prophets to imitate.
- 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus: detailed instructions for ordering the churches, after the apostles are gone. The lives and characters of pastors and deacons... only. See 2 Tim 2:2.
- Sign gifts: only found in the earliest books.
- Church history: everyone agrees they passed.

2 The gifts are tied to the apostles

④ Authentic apostles suffered like Jesus

- 2 Corinthians 10-12 – the differences between true and false apostles. Acts 9:16. Which are today's like?
- Galatians 6:17 – the authentic marks are marks of suffering, but false teachers seek followers (4:17).

3 God's plans for us are different

- God wishes us to prove ourselves faithful to teaching which is now written (2 Timothy 4:1-5)
- God wishes us to live by faith, not by sight (Romans 4:16, Hebrews 11, 2 Corinthians 5:7)
- A Christian life guided by today's prophets will be very different.

3 God's plans for us are different

- It is at Christ's return that we look to reign with him, not before (Luke 12:35-48; 1 Corinthians 4:8; Colossians 3:4; Romans 8:17)
- We are to judge false prophets by their fruits (Matthew 7:15-20) – are the fruits across the world of this “restoration” doctrine not clear?

4 Answering objections!

- Hindering the work of the Spirit?
He speaks in Scripture and does not contradict himself or confuse us. We live in today, not the apostolic age.
- Millions of Christians mistaken?
That's pretty normal (see the NT, and see church history!). What about the church's doctrine for nearly 2000 years?

4 Answering objections!

“No Bible passage says so directly!”

This is normal too (what single passage explains the Trinity?). Several commentators believe 1 Corinthians 13 is such a passage. That Paul could write manuals for church life with no mention makes it clear. Which passage promises a restoration 1900 years later?

4 Answering objections!

“New Testament prophecy is different!”

- To “test” in 1 Thess. 5:19-21 does not require that true prophets could give false prophecies.
- To “weigh” in 1 Cor 14:29 does not have to mean “possibly reject”. The best sermons are “weighed” to discern their impact on our lives.
- The prophecy of Agabus (Acts 21:10-11) was fulfilled within ordinary use of language.
- Major doctrines need large foundations, not isolated verses with dubious interpretations.

4 Answering objections!

“I know fine Christians with these gifts”

The real world is complicated. Many sincere and honest people make mistakes. Are they really the actual New Testament gifts (see section 1) ? There will always be things that puzzle us in this world, but we must stick to the revealed Scriptures. You're not being told to hate anyone!

4 Answering objections!

“Without the gifts, we have no power!”

What power are you speaking about?

“Jews seek for a sign, and Greeks for wisdom”. God wants his true power to be shown through his people’s weakness (1 Corinthians 1-2). The Bible tells us that our real need is to walk by faith and persevere in hardships (Hebrews 11).

4 Answering objections!

“Do we have to argue about this?”

Let us indeed disagree in a godly way. We must love both those who disagree and those who agree, but neither do we put aside the Scriptures. Jesus and his apostles warned about false prophets and teachers and things that harm our spiritual life, and we must too.

4 Answering objections!

“The Christian life is empty without these gifts!”

Are you a Christian? Christians have the Holy Spirit dwelling in them. They have a new nature. They pray to the heavenly Father. They fight against sin. They dwell in a new creation. They have fellowship with God. They await to see his face. If you are bored without miraculous outward signs, then you are either unsaved or terribly backsliden. Please read through John!