

Continuationism

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Within Christian doctrine, there are two main schools of thought in conjunction to the Gifts of the Holy Spirit as they relate to the modern church. These two schools of thought have names. One being Cessationism and the second being Continuationism.

*“**Cessationism** means 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.”¹*

Continuationism is a Christian theological belief that the gifts of the Holy Spirit have continued to the present age, specifically those sometimes called "sign gifts", such as tongues and prophecy. Continuationism is the opposite of cessationism.”²

This document seeks to bring to light the five most common approaches to cessationism and compare them to Scripture.

*“**16** All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, **17** so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. “*
2 Timothy 3:16–17 - (NIV)

It is my desire that each believer would find peace in the gifts that the Spirit has granted them. Not coveting another’s, nor being overcome by guilt and shame by a lack of gifts. Why do some believers pray for a gift, i.e. tongues, prophecy, knowledge, and do not receive it? I cannot answer that question, nor do I know anyone besides God who can. However, we can each have peace and joy knowing that Holy Spirit is the administrative head of the trinity. As such, the Person of the Holy Spirit grants to each of us, at His will exactly what we need, and when we need it.

Now, let’s take a look at the five most common beliefs in favor of cessationists.

¹ Pennington, Tom. [“A Case for Cessationism”](#). Grace to You. October 17, 2013.

² Scholarly Community Encyclopedia [“Continuationism”](#)

1. Apostles and Prophets No Longer Exist

Some cessationists believe that apostles and prophets existed only during the era of the first century to help establish the church and canonize Scripture. The gifts of the Holy Spirit were active in these leaders to help them “lay a foundation”. According to Ephesians 2:20, this foundation has been laid, and therefore the gifts of the Holy Spirit are no longer dispensed upon the believers. Cessationist Tom Schreiner, writes these words.

“The apostles were uniquely appointed for the early days of the church to establish orthodox doctrine. There is no warrant, then, for saying there are still apostles today. Indeed, if anyone claims to be an apostle today we should be concerned, for such a claim opens the door to false teaching and to abuse of authority. If the gift of apostleship has ended, then other gifts may have ceased as well, since the foundation has been laid by the apostles and prophets (Ephesians 2:20).”³

2. Miracles Authenticated Jesus Ministry

Another argument states, the role of miracles was to reveal that Jesus truly was the Messiah and to demonstrate the divine origin of apostolic ministry. (John 10:38; Hebrew 2:4) From this belief, some cessationist conclude that since the foundational role of the apostles has been laid, and the early church ministry completed, the need for these “authenticating gifts” no longer exists. Author Tim Challies writes:

“The primary purpose of Jesus’ miracles was to confirm his credentials as God’s final and ultimate messenger (John 5:36; 6:14; 7:31; 10:24-26, 37-38). Jesus’ miracles were not primarily a tool for effective evangelism or about alleviating human suffering. The main reason the Holy Spirit empowered Jesus to perform miracles was to confirm that he was everything he claimed to be and that he spoke the words of God (Acts 2:22). Jesus gave this same power to the apostles, and their miracles served exactly the same purpose (Acts 14:3; cf. Hebrews 2:3-4)”⁴

3. Absence of the Charismatic Gifts Throughout Church History

Another position argues that there is a lack of evidence for genuine charismatic expressions within the church dating between the first century and today. These cessationist believe that evidence for these gifts in Historical Church writings simply does not exist. They believe that the gifts operated through Jesus, and His disciples, but no historical church documents show evidence of these gifts in operation since that time. Therefore, the gifts of the Holy Spirit are not for today.

³ Schreiner, Tom. [“Why I Am A Cessationist”](#). The Gospel Coalition. January 22, 2014.

⁴ Challies, Tim. [“Strange Fire Conference: A Case for Cessationism”](#). Challies. October 17, 2013.

4. Closed Canon of Scripture

Most Evangelicals believe in a 66-book canon. These 66 books represent God's divine, Holy Spirit-inspired, inerrant, and authoritative Scripture. God's revelation to mankind. Most evangelicals also believe that all other forms of writing are subordinate to the Scriptures. Working from this premise, some cessationists believe that since we now have a canonized Scripture, the need for extra revelation, such as the gifts of the Spirit, such as prophecy and tongues, is no longer needed. Some go as far as to say that these other forms of revelation are dangerous, opening us up to other forms of revelation that are unbiblical. Dr. John MacArthur, one of the most vocal proponents of this form of thought, said in his 2010 article:

“Although charismatics deny that they are trying to add to Scripture, their views on prophetic utterance, gifts of prophecy, and revelation really do just that. As they add—however unwittingly—to God’s final revelation, they undermine the uniqueness and authority of the Bible. New revelation, dreams, and visions are considered as binding on the believer’s conscience as the book of Romans or the gospel of John.”⁵

One of the main arguments for this form of thought comes from Paul's writings in 1 Corinthians 13.

8 Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. **9** For we know in part and we prophesy in part, “
1 Corinthians 13:8–9 - (NIV)

Many have argued that the word “perfect” in this text is referring to the canonization of Scripture. Therefore, the canonization of Scripture brought forth a complete and total revelation of God to mankind, rendering all other forms of revelation, i.e. Prophecy and tongues void.

5. Lack of Gifts In Modern Time

Others argue that since so much of the church today do not experience the operation of gifts i.e. tongues and prophecy, that they must not be for today. The big question here is; why would a loving God allow some to experience this, but not others?

⁵ MacArthur, John. [*“Prophecy and the Closed Canon, Part 3”*](#). Grace to You. January 4, 2010

While these arguments are interesting, they all seem to fall short at some point. Over the next few moments, let's take a look at each of these five points from a different perspective, and see how these points line up with the Word of God. Let it be known, as I compare each thought to Scripture, I am doing so with these two truths in mind. First from the Old Testament prophet Malachi:

"6 *"I the LORD do not change. So you, the descendants of Jacob, are not destroyed. "*
Malachi 3:6 - (NIV)

And the second from the New Testament Apostle Paul.

"8 *Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. "*
Hebrews 13:8 - (NIV)

As we approach these thoughts keep in mind, God's word is absolute. His Word never changes. So it is imperative that we examine Scripture, within its context and cross-referenced.

An Examination of Cessationism Under Scripture

1. Apostles and Prophets No Longer exist.

Apostles and Prophets are part of the Five-Fold Ministry. They are what we call Office Gifts. Ephesians 4:11 lists all five; apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor, and teacher. If the apostle, and prophet have ceased to exist, why not evangelists, pastors, or teachers? This argument also states that according to Ephesians 2:20 that the foundation of doctrine has been laid and so these "apostles and prophets" are no longer needed. However, let's look at that passage more closely.

"20 *built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. "*
Ephesians 2:20 - (NIV)

There are not only two foundational stones, but rather three! Jesus Christ is the "chief cornerstone". According to this philosophy, Christ would have to be done away with as well. We are not throwing Jesus Christ away after laying the foundation of the right doctrine, and neither shall we throw away the apostles and prophets. Each new generation needs men and women filled with the Office Gift of apostles and prophets to help lay a strong foundation of the gospel for that generation to be built upon.

When reviewing these arguments, we must remove from our minds the prior things we have blindly been taught to believe and review the Scriptures with eyes wide

open. Take Scripture at its Word! Not once in Scripture does it mention that these gifts to the church, Office Gifts, or Spirit Gifts, ceased to exist. Believing such a thought is adding to, or deriving from Scripture, something that simply does not exist.

2. Miracles Authenticated Jesus

Certainly, they did – and they still do! However, are we to believe that the world we live in does not need signs and wonders? If this has ceased; why pray for the sick, the hurting, or for the addict? Further yet, Jesus' love did compel His miracles. How else can you read Matthew 14:14?

*“When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick. “
Matthew 14:14 - (NIV)*

Again, are we to take John 14:12 and say that these words are for the Apostles only and not for us?

*“Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. “
John 14:12 - (NIV)*

If we start reading the Word of God with this lens, what else are we going to cut out as irrelevant? This argument simply contradicts the loving nature of God and Jesus. It has no legs to stand on.

3. Absence of Charismatic Gifts Throughout Church History.

This argument does not even have Scripture to support its belief. Its entire thought is based upon human understanding and opinion. Doctrine is a set of beliefs taught and held by the church. If we begin writing doctrine, based upon things we think, and things that do not even contain Scripture, we risk a great deception.

4. Closed Cannon of Scripture

The main Scripture that supports this argument is 1 Corinthians 13:8,9.

But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away.

1 Corinthians 13:8b

But this scripture is not talking about the canonization of Scripture. This does not even contextually make sense. This argument comes from verse 10 of this passage.

“10 but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears. “

1 Corinthians 13:10 - (NIV)

The word perfect is the Greek word Teleios – it means “perfect mature or complete”. In this tense, it is referencing “mature development”. The only other time in the New Testament that we see this word used in this context is when Jesus has a conversation with the man, we call the Rich Young Ruler. Jesus said:

“21 Jesus answered, “If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.” “

Matthew 19:21 - (NIV)

Jesus said “If you want to be “teleios”...” and then references treasures in heaven; not the canonization of Scripture. In heaven, prophecy will cease, tongues will cease; if we are to say that this has already happened, are we to also say that knowledge has also ceased (v8)? No! Knowledge has not ceased, it perpetuates until the coming of Christ when we will “know fully – even as I am known” (1 Corinthians 13:12). Until that day, when we do not know how to pray, we are encouraged by Paul to pray in the Spirit.

“26 In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. “

Romans 8:26 - (NIV)

5. Lack of Gifts In Modern Time

Again, this argument contains no Scripture and so its validity is irrelevant. However, I will say that the argument of “why would God allow some to experience the gifts but not others apply to a great many events. Why did some men and women get close to Jesus and not others? Why did Paul heal the sick in Acts 20, or even seemingly an entire city in Acts 28? Yet in 2 Corinthians 12:7,8 Paul mentions this “thorn in the flesh” that he has prayed for God to remove, yet this “messenger of Satan” remained.

It is so important that we not build doctrine off our thoughts, feelings, or hurts. We must remain ruthlessly tied to God's Holy Word. Remember; Isaiah 55:8,9 says:

8 *“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the LORD. 9 “As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. “*
Isaiah 55:8–9 - (NIV)

If we read Scripture with eyes wide open, I believe we all will find that there is no Scriptural basis for cessationism. We can try and make God's Words fit our belief system. But allowing our beliefs to fit His Holy Word is much easier, and ultimately correct. John 14:16 says:

16 *And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever— “*
John 14:16 - (NIV)

Why do we work so hard to disprove what Scripture so clearly reveals as truth? What else can the word “forever” mean?

Conclusion

I hope that through this brief study, you have been encouraged to ask, seek, and pursue the gifts of the Holy Spirit. There is nothing that Holy Spirit offers that you cannot ask for.

30 *Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? 31 Now eagerly desire the greater gifts. And yet I will show you the most excellent way. “*
1 Corinthians 12:30–31 - (NIV)

What is that greater gift? Paul goes on to show us this in the very next chapter.

“If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. 2 If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. 3 If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.”
1 Corinthians 13:1–3 - (NIV)

Some of us may speak in tongues, some may not. Some of us may steward the gift of healing, others the gift of prophecy. Yet, some may have none of these. What really matters, according to Paul, is this. Do you have the gift of Love? We can argue cessationist vs continuationist all day. But if we lack love for each other, we still have nothing. In all, let us pursue love more than anything else.

Other Scripture To Reference:

"For I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground; I will pour out my Spirit on your offspring, and my blessing on your descendants. "

Isaiah 44:3 - (NIV)

*"And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. **29** Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days. **30** I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and billows of smoke. **31** The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD. **32** And everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved; for on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be deliverance, as the LORD has said, even among the survivors whom the LORD calls. "*

Joel 2:28–32 - (NIV)

"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, "

Matthew 28:19 - (NIV)

"And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever— "

John 14:16 - (NIV)

"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

Acts 1:8 - (NIV)

"In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. "

Acts 2:17 - (NIV)

"Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit, "

Ephesians 5:18 - (NIV)

