

Why I am Not Charismatic

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Part 1: Introduction

I used to walk through Christian book stores and choose my books based on whether or not the author was a charismatic. I would pick up a commentary and turn immediately to 1 Cor. 12 (the section on spiritual gifts). If the author believed that the spiritual gifts were for today, I would put it back on the shelf in disbelief that the store would carry such misleading material. If they did not believe that the gifts were for today---if the author was a "cessationist"---I would consider purchasing the book.

Such was the time when I believed that all those who believed that all charismatics were practicing a different Christianity, at best, or demon possessed, at worst.

I am not a charismatic, and I have my reasons, but I do not feel the same way today as I used to. Let me first define the terms and set up the field of play.

The word "charismatic" can be used in many ways. It is taken from the word "charisma." Webster's Dictionary defines it as "a personal magic of leadership arousing special popular loyalty or enthusiasm for a public figure (as a political leader)." Many would say that Barack Obama has charisma in such a way. Charisma is taken from the Greek *charisma* which means "gift." Its root, *charis*, means "grace."

In Christianity, "charismatic" refers to those who believe that certain "spiritual gifts" such as tongues, prophecy, and gifts of healings, are normative for the church. In the Scriptures, we are told that God gives certain gifts to everyone in the body of Christ. Representative gift lists are mentioned in 1 Cor. 12, Rom. 12, 1 Pet. 4, and Eph. 4. Some of these gifts seem to be natural extensions of the recipients personality (leadership, teaching, encouragement) while others distinguish themselves by their *extra*-ordinary nature. A charismatic is one who believes that God still gifts people in the church with the *extra*-ordinary or supernatural gifts and that these gifts are normative in the body of Christ for the extension of God's message, glory, and grace.

Charismatic is not a denomination, but a *trans*-denominational theological stance or tradition which can find representation in any denomination or tradition, including Evangelicalism. In fact, I think that the charismatic position (or some variation thereof) is the fastest growing tradition within Evangelicalism.

A cessationist (taken from "cease"), on the other hand, is one who believes that the *extra*-ordinary gifts ceased in the first century, either at the completion of the New Testament or at the death of the last Apostle. Cessationists believe that the supernatural gifts such as tongues, prophecy, and healings were "sign gifts" that were given for the establishment of the church and then passed away due to a fulfillment of their purpose. They served as a supernatural "sign" from God that the Gospel message being proclaimed was unique and authoritative. Since the Gospel message has been proclaimed and established in the New Testament, cessationists believe that

these type of gifts ceased due to an exhaustion of purpose. Therefore, with regards to the "gifts of the Spirit," there are "permanent gifts" and there are "temporary gifts."

What would a post be without a chart?

Temporary Gifts		Permanent Gifts	
Supernatural Sign		Speaking	Serving
Revelatory	Confirmatory		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apostleship • Prophecy • Discerning of spirits • Word of wisdom • Word of knowledge • Tongues • Interpretation of tongues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Healings • Miracles • Tongues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evangelism • Teaching • Pastor-teacher • Exhortation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Service • Showing Mercy • Giving • Administration • Helps

If you can see this (!), you will notice that certain "sign gifts" are revelatory while others are confirmatory. The revelatory gifts are those that reveal God's message in some way. They are prophetic *in nature*. Not everyone would agree which gifts belong in this category. Some would not place "word of wisdom" or "word of knowledge" here and one's placement of tongues will depend on how it is defined (prayer language? prophetic revelation in another language? Gospel proclamation in another language?). Either way, the category describes those gifts which involve a supernatural *revelation* from God. The "confirmatory gifts" are those which confirm or provide evidence for the revelatory gifts. In other words, someone cannot just claim to be speaking prophetically on behalf of God. Their message must be confirmed by some undeniable act of extraordinary power. Otherwise, *anyone* could claim to speak on behalf of God.

Of course the gift of healings have a benevolent purpose as the benefits of such gifts effect people in a wonderful way, but, according to most cessationists (and even some charismatics), the result that a person is healed is the secondary purpose. The primary purpose is the legitimize the message of the healer.

A very important points need to be made. (*If you don't get this, don't ever bother engaging in this conversation.*) Whether one is a charismatic or a cessationist, all Christians believe in God's supernatural intervention. Only a deist would claim that God has a "hand-off" approach to

history and our lives. It is not that the cessationist does not believe in healings or miracles, it is that they don't believe in the *gifts* of healing, miracles, etc. being given to a certain people. Both charismatics and cessationists (should) pray for God's supernatural intervention, can believe in stories of healings, and can expect God to direct their lives through some sort of divine guidance. In other words, just because someone prayed for healing and believes it happened, this does not make one a charismatic (properly speaking).

However, there does seem to be a higher level of *expectation* for divine intervention among charismatics than from cessationists. I am not saying whether this is good or bad. Expectation of the power of God can both motivate a Christian's life or be a cause for great disillusionment.

Part 2: In Defense of Charismatics

I briefly described what it means to be Charismatic in the theological sense of the word. In essence, it does not necessarily have to do with a belief in God's intervention in history or his willingness or power to perform modern day miracles, but, properly speaking, it has to do with a particular belief often called "continuationism." As apposed to "cessationism" the "continuationist" believes that the so-called supernatural sign gifts such as tongues, prophecy, and healings (among others) are still active gifts of the Spirit given to people today. The church, according to continuationists should seek, expect, and promote the use of such gifts. All Charismatics are continuationists and all continuationists, properly speaking, are charismatics (even if you must use a small "c").

Now I want to give a short defense of the Charismatic/continuationist position. Please understand these represent what I personally believe to be the strongest arguments, biblically, theologically, and practically, for the position, but this does not represent an exhaustive list of the arguments.

1. Acts chapter 2 seems to suggest that the gifts of the Spirit (particularly prophecy) would be normative for the church.

Notice especially 14-21 where Peter is explaining to the many Jews gathered to see why these people were speaking in tongues.

"Acts 2:14 But Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them, "Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give ear to my words. 15 For these men are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day. 16 But this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel: 17 "'And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; 18 even on my male servants and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy. 19 And I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke; 20 the sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the day of the Lord comes, the great and magnificent day. 21 And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.'"

Peter is obviously arguing that the events that they are witnessing are evidence of the "last days" prophesied by Joel. Peter believes that the powers being displayed are evidence that the "last days" had begun. Including in these last days events are great miracles. But most importantly, Peter believes that the pouring out of the Holy Spirit during these days results in *specific* events: "your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams." These last days events do not indicate a certain duration or cessation. In fact, it would seem that they will last until the "day of the Lord." Therefore, it would seem that Peter believes that the giving of such gifts is a perpetual norm of the last days.

2. The entire book of Acts seems to show that the supernatural gifts are common within the Church.

While I don't believe that this is as strong as the last (for it is very difficult to build too much theology from narrative), it would seem that the entire book of Acts---a book devoted to the birth and growth of the Church---illustrates that these type of gifts are normative for the life of the church.

3. All of Scripture supports the idea that it is God's nature to work in supernatural ways.

If one were to examine all of Scripture, it would seem that, generally speaking, with exceptions here and there, God speaks to his people in supernatural ways. Therefore, the supernatural gifts of the Spirit are evidence of a continuation of God's presence within the Church serving as a means of comfort, power, and extension (foreshadowing?) of the Kingdom.

As Jack Deere says,

"If you were to lock a brand-new Christian in a room with a Bible and tell him to study what Scripture has to say about healings and miracles, he would never come out of the room a cessationist" (Jack Deere, *Surprised by the Power of the Spirit* [Grand Rapids, Mi: Zondervan, 1997], 54).

4. The New Testament never explicitly states that the supernatural sign gifts would cease.

While this is an argument from silence, it is important to note that the New Testament does not explicitly say that any of the gifts would ever come to an end. In fact, it would seem that the assumption of many New Testament leaders, including Paul, that the "sign gifts" would continue until Christ comes. We have already noted Peter's testimony above, but also notice what Paul has to say in 1 Cor. 13:

"Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. 9 For we know in part and we prophesy in part, 10 but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away. 11 When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways. 12 For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known."

Ironically, many cessationists (including myself at one time), have used this passage to defend a belief in the cessation of the gifts. But, in reality, it speaks better for the continuationist's position.

Yes it does say that "tongues will cease" and that prophecy would "pass away," but notice when Paul believes in the cessation of such will commence: "When the perfect comes." The question becomes What is "the perfect." Some cessationists have argued that the "perfect" is the completion of the Scriptures---the perfect revelation. The idea is that once the Scriptures have been completed, there is no longer a need for gifts such as prophecy, tongues, or any other prophetic gift. Hence, there is no longer a need for confirmatory gifts such as healings and miracles since their purpose was to authenticate the message of the speaker.

But contextually it is highly unlikely that "the perfect" is the completion of the Scripture. The context suggests that "the perfect" is the second coming of Christ---the day of the Lord. If this is the case, this passage advocates at least some form of continuationism. Notice the parallelism:

"Love never ends. **As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away.**

For we know in part and we prophesy in part, 10 but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away.

When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. **When I became a man, I gave up childish ways.**

For now we see in a mirror dimly, **but then face to face.**

Now I know in part; **then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.**"

I have highlighted here using formatted text to illustrate how the text seems to function. Notice that the passing away of tongues and prophecy parallels seeing "face to face" and being "fully known." It would seem that the best understanding of being "fully known" and seeing "face to face" is not the completion of the New Testament, but the second coming of Christ, for when else will we see "face to face" in Paul's theology? Paul is looking to the eschaton (end times), believing that all gifts are temporary, but their cessation does not come until Christ comes.

5. Personal Experience

Finally, probably the most powerful testimony to the continuation of the so-called supernatural sign gifts is that of personal experience. If someone has seen or experienced such gifts in their lives, it is very difficult to argue against them. While experience should not be determinative, it would seem that with the lack of conclusive biblical evidence that such gifts have ceased, the believer has a legitimate argument that if they have experienced the gifts they, *de facto*, have not ceased.

I know that this is titled "Why I am Not Charismatic." I will soon get to this, but I want to do the best I can to give you a balanced understanding of the issue so that we can all work through this important (and often divisive) issue with great integrity.

Part 3: Prophecy and Healings

Having discussed some of the strengths of the continuationist/charismatic position, I would now like to explain why, at this point in my life, I am not a charismatic. I am going to put these in order, but I want to stress the tentativeness of my conclusion. In this, I am not necessarily offering what I believe to be *strong* arguments against continuationism, but only those arguments that are subjectively persuasive to me. I hope that these arguments genuinely express my position without the normal combative tone communicating "This is what I think everyone should be!"

1. I have never had a genuine charismatic experience.

Considering the relative weakness of any biblical defense against a strong cessationist position, I am very open, biblically and theologically, to continuationism. I used to have an emotional bias against all things charismatic, but I have not had such in years. In fact, I have come to respect and be intrigued with the position due to the scholarship and balance that I find in many contemporary charismatic leaders. However, I have never witnessed anything that I believe to be persuasive evidence that the supernatural sign gifts are normative or even active in the church today. This does not mean that I have not witnessed what I believe to be are miracles (I have seen one or two) or God's intervention and guidance, but I have never witnessed anything that would lead me to believe that someone has, as their gift to the body of Christ, any of the particular gifts---workers of miracles, healings, prophecy, or the like---that I mentioned in my first installment in this series.

Of course I have heard people give prophecies. During my undergraduate, a little over ten years ago, we had a "prophet" come to our school (it was a third wave school) and lay their hands on everyone during the chapel service giving them personal words of prophecy. But it was hard to tell the difference in this and a session of palm reading. The words were so general, a sort of "catch-all", that they could have been applied to anyone. "You have been through much pain lately . . . God knows." "You are confused about a decision you are up against . . . God says, 'go with your heart.'" "Be kind to her." Yes, people were listening with tears running down their face, but I could not adjust my skepticism and allow for such a breach of conscious. I though---and still think today---*anyone* can do this.

If a person is a prophet, they much show some type of undeniable sign. Would God really expect less for the surrendering of my mind? I would say and still will say to anyone who says that they are a prophet or have the gift of prophecy, "Why should I listen to you? What evidence do you bring that you are from the Lord?" Look at the examples of those who carried the Lord's message in the past. Look at Moses, Elijah, Peter, and Paul. The dead were raised, lame walked, and shadows healed. I have never witnessed anyone who spoke on behalf of the Lord---the definition of prophecy---and accompanied such with these type of miracles.

Why would God withhold such attesting signs? Don't say that people are just supposed to believe if they are of the faith. That is completely irresponsible and will lead to a path of destruction, filled with bitterness and disillusionment. When Moses said that the people will not believe him when he says that he comes with a message from the Lord, he was right. Not only this, but the people were right not to believe him. God did not rebuke such a statement saying "If the people have faith---true faith---they will *just* believe without any evidence at all. Notice the account (my comments are in brackets):

Exodus 4:1-9

"Then Moses said, "What if they will not believe me or listen to what I say? [A great and understandable question] For they may say, "The LORD has not appeared to you." [That is what I would say to anyone who speaks vainly (with empty proclamation) on behalf of the Lord] 2 The LORD said to him, "What is that in your hand?" [Notice the lack of rebuke from the Lord. God does not want use to blindly believe others when they say they speak on His behalf] And he said, "A staff." 3 Then He said, "Throw it on the ground." So he threw it on the ground, and it became a serpent; and Moses fled from it. 4 But the LORD said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand and grasp it by its tail"-- so he stretched out his hand and caught it, and it became a staff in his hand-- 5 "that they may believe that the LORD, the God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has appeared to you." [Can anyone perform such a miracle without having access to the divine?] 6 The LORD furthermore said to him, [God give yet another sign without solicitation] "Now put your hand into your bosom." So he put his hand into his bosom, and when he took it out, behold, his hand was leprous like snow. 7 Then He said, "Put your hand into your bosom again." So he put his hand into his bosom again, and when he took it out of his bosom, behold, it was restored like the rest of his flesh. [Now we have a healing miracle that was used, not for the benefit of Moses (for God had to give him the disease first) but as an attestation to the prophetic message of Moses. This would *further* serve to establish Moses' prophetic gift.] 8 "If they will not believe you or heed the witness of the first sign, they may believe the witness of the last sign. [Yet a third sign, unsolicited by Moses but provided by God due to the seriousness of Moses' bold prophetic proclamation and the protection of the minds' of the people] 9 "But if they will not believe even these two signs or heed what you say, then you shall take some water from the Nile and pour it on the dry ground; and the water which you take from the Nile will become blood on the dry ground."

Moral of this story: If someone claims to speak on behalf of God---if someone claims to have a prophetic gift---you have every right and obligation to demand an attesting sign. As well, if you think you are a prophet---if you sincerely believe that God has called you to such a ministry---you need to tell God that you cannot do so without such a sign. If one is not granted to you, then I would be highly suspicious that you are speaking of your own imagination. I would suggest that you adjust your theology to take God's word more seriously otherwise your supposed prophetic gift may be causing you to perpetually take the Lord's name in vain. No small matter.

Least you think I am being overly skeptical, listen to the rebuke of the prophets in Jeremiah's day:

Jeremiah 23:14-18

"Also among the prophets of Jerusalem I have seen a horrible thing: The committing of adultery and walking in falsehood; And they strengthen the hands of evildoers, So that no one has turned back from his wickedness. All of them have become to Me like Sodom, And her inhabitants like Gomorrah. 15 "Therefore thus says the LORD of hosts concerning the prophets, 'Behold, I am going to feed them wormwood And make them drink poisonous water, For from the prophets of Jerusalem Pollution has gone forth into all the land.'" 16 Thus says the LORD of hosts, "Do not listen to the words of the prophets who are prophesying to you. They are leading you into futility; They speak a vision of their own imagination, Not from the mouth of the LORD. 17 "They keep saying to those who despise Me, 'The LORD has said, "You will have peace "'; And as for everyone who walks in the stubbornness of his own heart, They say, 'Calamity will not come upon you.' 18 "But who has stood in the council of the LORD, That he should see and hear His word? Who has given heed to His word and listened?"

Prophets of today: Have you really stood in the council of the Lord? Live in fear of such a question.

I have never seen a modern day prophet whose words were backed up by anything substantial. I have never heard of one. All I have seen are multiple vain (empty) proclamations. I am sorry to come across so harsh in this matter, but its seriousness is far beyond comparison. Any misapplication, misunderstanding, or misassociation can destroy people's lives and their faith (from a human perspective). I have seen it too many times to number.

I am not saying that there are not those out there who are different---who really speak on behalf of the Lord and back it up. I am just saying that in my experience this has never happened. I am perfectly open to it, but I have never seen it. Therefore, I am a practical cessationist when it comes to prophecy.

The same can be said about the gift of healings. While I believe that God can and does heal people today, I have never, in my experience, come across someone with the *spiritual gift* of healing. I am beyond open to it. I call for it. I cry for it. I plead with God to send someone to my mother. But it does not happen. If a group of people pray and God heals someone, this is not evidence for continuationism. Evidence for continuationism would come if someone---some individual---has this gift. If you have this gift, please call me.

If you say, "Its not like that. God simply uses me *sometimes* to heal. I never know when he is going to and when he will deny such a request." I would say that we are simply talking past each other. In my estimation, you do not have the gift of healing. You, like everyone else, simply have the ability to pray for healing, leaving the answer in the hands of God.

Part 4: A Testimony

This is a sort excursus or interlude to my series that I think is a valuable part of the discussion. It comes from a friend named Greg (not his real name) who responded to this series. Please read carefully as I believe his testimony, while you may or may not agree with it, is representative of many disillusioned continuationists/charismatics. Greg was very passionate yet respectful in this post. I pray that you would show the same maturity in your responses.

"I've held back from posting my comments thus far. But Michael has provoked me to say something. I will try to focus on the current context of this post. At this point in the series, Michael is focused on healing and prophecy, so I will focus on prophecy for now.

My experience with the gift of prophecy, healing and tongues is 20 years in the making. Grew up around the gifts. Prophecy was a dime a dozen. It was everywhere.

Now, as I look back like a PI and investigate my experiences, I consider all the prophecies that are burned into my head. And, lo and behold, not one came true. Really? Yes, really. And its not like I didn't like prophecy, for many years I hoped against hope that it was really God speaking through these folks. But, if evidence means anything, these folks were not prophesying on behalf of God. They couldn't have been. Most of the prophecies were tethered to real events or something coming soon. Later on the prophecies became very generic and more praise than anything. I imagine the people could have just as well given the praise without the prophecy, since that was all that really happened.

So, what to make of this? I am convinced that prophecy is absolutely not the norm. I've got at least 100 people I can think of right now who gave prophecies that never happened. Some of these people were good brothers and sisters in the faith, some were suspect of even being born-again.

If there is any hard evidence that prophecy is normative, or even somewhat happening, I would say it ain't happening.

So, did some other church get it right? Just not the 10-15 different church's I attended growing up and into adulthood?

There is so much I struggled through to get to this point. Sometimes I wonder why God let me go through all this. Was it pointless? Was there any meaning? Could God use those people? Yes, and he probably did use them despite their ignorance. But then again, I believe God works through everything that happens, even our sin. But that is for another time.

Now, if you think I said this out of disgust or that I have some bias because someone wronged me, then you are mistaken. I held to the gift of prophecy as long as the Lord allowed me to. Then I was left with no other choice but to abandon this gift. I have seen so many people's lives poisoned with false hope, including mine, because we wanted to trust God. But God didn't come through. At least that is what I could have believed.

No, I knew God was good, but something was wrong. The people. They were wrong. I believe they were sincere, but they were still sincerely wrong. God help them. The gift of prophecy wrecked my life many times with false hopes and dreams. God can do whatever he wants, he is awesome. People unfortunately suck. And we have to be able to use our head and discern any and everything. Else, bad stuff will happen. As if it doesn't happen enough already. No need to try and complicate our lives with lies.

If you have the gift of prophecy and it is working for you and you have evidence to back it up, please contact me. I would love to be proven wrong. I am serious as a heart attack. I'd rather

prophecy be happening rather than not. But please, I can't tolerate false prophecies since they are dangerously toxic to our lives. By the way, God is still awesome and he is my closest friend and he has become a father to me. I trust him with all my soul and mind. He has proven to me that I can always trust him. But he has also allowed me to see our depravity and our tendency to fall into error.

I'm done. I went overboard, it think. I love everyone of brothers and sisters in Christ. Lord, sanctify us in truth, your word is truth."

Part 5: An Argument from History

I have thus far discussed what it means to be charismatic equating a charismatic with one who adheres to a continuationist view of the "supernatural sign gifts." In other words, a charismatic is one who believes that gifts such as prophecy (speaking on behalf of God), working of miracles, healing, tongues, and, if you so define them, word of wisdom and word of knowledge are normative for the church today and that we should expect people in the church to possess and practice them.

I have said that I don't believe that there is any *compelling* biblical evidence to say that the gifts have ceased in any dogmatic way. I have also said that one of the primary reasons why I am not charismatic is because I have never experienced such gifts in a way that would compel me to believe that these gifts, as they are expressed today, are legitimate. I am not saying that I *know* that there are not legitimate expressions of these gifts out there, I am just saying that I have not experienced such. I have to be responsible and discerning with my mind before God. Therefore, my life is experientially wanting in this area. I have every desire to believe that God is working through people in such a way, giving these gifts, but I am charismatically dry.

I now have to turn to the evidence of history. Our faith is nothing new. It is one which finds its roots in two thousand years of a legacy of saints that have gone before us. The expressions of our faith should find analogous representation in body of Christ, both living *and dead*. If those who have gone before us do not share our faith, then we have a responsibility to question the legitimacy of our beliefs.

From my studies, I do not find the practice of the supernatural sign gifts being in any way normative before the twentieth century. In other words, it does not seem that the historic church was charismatic in the way I have described above. In fact, I would describe them as *de facto* cessationists. What I mean by this is that they were cessationists out of necessity, not out of theological compulsion. They, like me, had simply not experienced the supernatural sign gifts. Again, this is not the same thing as saying that they had not experienced the miraculous or God's hand of intervention (beliefs that all Christians share), but that they did not believe that individuals possessed the supernatural sign gifts.

Notice what John Chrysostom (347-407), the great Antiochean exegete, says when he comes to 1 Cor. 12 about spiritual gifts.

“This whole place is very obscure . . . but the obscurity is produced by our ignorance of the facts referred to and by their cessation, being such as then used to occur, but now no longer take place.” (ECF 2.12.1.1.29.0)

Chrysostom is "ignorant" of the facts because of his *experience* of their "cessation." He is not living in the time of a charismatic controversy, he is just stating the way things were in his day, just a few centuries after the last Apostle died. He is a *de facto* cessationist. If the gifts were still being practiced in his day, the implication is that he would have been able to explain to his listeners what these gifts were. But since they had ceased, he does not know how to explain this passage.

The same can be said of the great St. Augustine (354-430). Notice what he says when it comes to the gift of tongues.

“In the earliest time 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 it was proper for the Holy Spirit to evidence Himself in all tongues, and to show that the Gospel of God had come to all tongues [languages] over the whole earth. The thing was done for an authentication and it passed away.” (*Ten Homilies on the first Epistle of John VI*, 10).

Augustine limits the practice of the *charismaton* (particularly tongues) to the "earliest time." Augustine believed that these were "signs adapted to the time." The adaptation has to do with the necessity of authenticating the Gospel message. While Augustine gives more of a theological explanation for their supposed passing, he still seems to be a *de facto* cessationist. If you were to ask Augustine "How do you know these gifts 'passed away,'" my guess is that he would simply say "Because they passed away. Because no one has them anymore!"

This early church *de facto* cessationism is not unlike the canon of Scripture. Why has the canon "closed"? Because God stopped inspiring writers to add to it. It is that simple. It is a *de facto* closing. Sure, some could provide a theological explanation as to why the canon closed (i.e. the fullness of time, the finality of Christ's revelation, the completion of soteriological history, etc.), but the fact is the reason why people believe that the canon had closed was because it had closed. No inspired verified prophet or apostle was adding to it.

This *de facto* cessationism continues through the middle ages and the Reformation. Outside of fringe groups and cults, cessationism was the orthodox position of the historic Christian church.

Again (and I have to repeat this because someone is going to misapply what I am saying), this is not to say that people believed that God was silent during this period or that he did not intervene or work in miraculous ways. This was the biggest and most glaring weakness in Jack Deere's *Surprised by the Power of the Spirit* when he deals with this historic argument. He equates evidence that the historic church believed in the miraculous with evidence that they were continuationists. You can't equate the two without misrepresenting what is at stake. The historic Christian church has believed in the miraculous, they have not believed in the continuation of the supernatural sign gifts, by and large.

Having said this, the historic argument must be tempered according to its relative strengths. What I mean by this is that just because the historic Christian church did not believe in the continuation of the supernatural sign gifts, this does not *prove* their cessation in our current day. Again, it is a *de facto* argument. It is very possible that God simply did not give these gifts during this time (or at least he gave them sparingly) and in our present day has poured out this power once again. This would be a *de facto* argument that the gifts have continued or been revived for God's purposes today. I am certainly open to this. I am a futurist with regard to most of the book of Revelation, therefore, I believe that there will be at least two people with the gift of prophecy in the future! Does that make me a continuationist? I guess to some degree it does.

In the end, the *de facto* cessationism of the historic Christian church is something that must be brought to the table of this discussion and something that we must be extremely considerate of.

Part 6: It's NOT About Miracles

Regrettably, I must pause and submit another excursus. While it might seem to some to be a frustrated reaction having to reiterate an important issue, I am actually glad to have to do so since the issue of this post is so central to my argument. (So scratch my initial "regrettably"!)

Just about every objection that I have seen so far has been something I have belabored with blood, sweat, and tears to say is *not* the issue. Many have objected to my arguments about why I am not charismatic, especially those arguments from church history, citing all the miracles that have taken place. Their argument is that if there are truly so many miracles throughout church history, the one who says that the supernatural sign gifts have ceased---the cessationist---are in error.

This is really misunderstanding both my argument and, I believe, the issue at stake. It is not about whether miracles take place! It is not about whether *you* believe in miracles. It is not about whether you have experienced a miracle or heard of someone who has! We all believe in miracles! Continuationists and cessationists do. Quoting the church fathers who say that there were miracles in their day is something both charismatics and non-charismatics can accept. It does not add to the discussion.

Again, let's be clear. According to how I am defining the issues (which I believe are correct) . . .

A continuationist/charismatic is one who believes that the so-called supernatural sign gifts such as tongues, prophecy, worker of miracles, etc. are normative for the church and that we should commonly expect people to be gifted with them.

A cessationist is one who believes that the supernatural sign gifts ceased after the death of the last Apostle or shortly thereafter due to an exhaustion in their purpose. Therefore, we should not expect such gifts in the church today.

My contention in the previous post was that the history of the Church has not been charismatic in the way defined above. If the modern charismatic movement is legitimate, I believe the charismatic must make the argument that it is a modern day phenomenon.

Folks, we all believe in miracles to varying degrees. If you don't then you have departed from the historic Christian worldview and slipped into some variation thereof (something of the deist sort).

Even most cessationists believe that God *could* gift anyone with the gift of tongues or prophecy at his will.

A charismatic, however, believes that these are *normative* and that we should *expect* them. Did you get those two important words? Normative. Expect.

If you say, "But I am a charismatic and I don't think we should expect the gifts and I don't think they are normative," then you are not really a charismatic. The expectation is key. The normative is essential.

Now, one more thing that I believe is important about miracles. I will concede that while both camps believe in miracles, charismatics have a much higher lever of expectation for such due to their theology of the gifts. Cessationists can often be heard saying "That is why they are called 'miracles'. If they happened all the time, they would be called 'regulars'!" With this I agree.

However, there may be times in history when miracles do happen much more regularly. God moves in time at his leisure and has complete freedom. We dare not attempt to bind his freedom with an artificial theological position of our own systematic comfort. I believe that there are times in history and places where miracles do seem to become regulars. *But*, generally speaking, they are extremely rare. Too much expectation can set us up for disillusionment. Most people don't get healed. *Everyone* stays dead. Christians' bills sometimes don't get paid.

Again, it is not about miracles. If you believe in miracles, you are not necessarily a charismatic.

Got it?

Part 7: Building a Theology of Sign Gifts

I have said that there is no compelling reason to say that the Bible teaches the so-called supernatural sign gifts have ceased. I have also said and demonstrated that the history of the church evidences a *de facto* cessation of the sign gifts. As well, I have said that, despite being open to the gifts, my personal experience is lacking with regard to any of these gifts, either through direct *or* indirect experience.

Because of this, I would say that the only responsible position for me to hold right now is that of a *de facto* cessationist. In sum, this is why I am not a charismatic.

Some have objected to my beliefs citing what they suppose to be an inconsistency. While admitting that the Bible does not present any compelling evidence that the supernatural sign gifts have ceased, I am *still* not a charismatic. Why is this? Isn't the Bible, not personal or ecclesiastical experience, my ultimate guide?

The answer is yes, the Bible is my ultimate guide. It is the final authority on all matters of faith and practice. If church history or "Michael history" says one thing and the Bible says another, then I (in theory) go with the Scriptures.

However...

While I did say that the Scriptures do not present any compelling evidence that the gifts have ceased, I don't believe that they present any compelling evidence that they have continued either. In fact, I would say that the Bible does not necessarily speak to the issue any more than it does the closing of the canon. Remember, the Bible does not present any compelling evidence that the canon is closed, yet I believe based on the same *de facto* arguments that Scripture is no longer being added to. I would argue that the Scriptures have been (for lack of a better word) "closed" due to an exhaustion of purpose. Interestingly, charismatics would make the same argument, believing that the while Scriptures never explicitly say that the canon is closed, they believe it has nonetheless. Why do we *all* believe that the canon of Scripture is closed even though the Bible itself does not say that it has closed? If we were theologically honest, our answer would be very simple: Because it, as a matter of fact, closed! It is a *de facto* argument. The canon of Scripture is closed because God has not sent a verified Apostle or prophet who added to it in the last 2000 years.

After we consider the *de facto* closing of the Scriptures ("canonical cessationism"), we *then* build a theology as to *why* the Scriptures have closed. This is a legitimate attempt to explain what is a matter of fact. It does not create the fact, it just explains it.

The same can be said with regard to supernatural sign gifts such as prophecy, tongues, and healings. Because they, *de facto*, seem to have ceased, we then attempt to offer an explanation. Here is a brief *post de facto* explanation as to why I believe the supernatural sign gifts might have ceased.

Exhaustion of purpose: The gifts were used for the establishing of the Gospel message in history. It seems reasonable for God to introduce himself uniquely every time he intends to provide further revelation of himself to mankind. In the history of redemption, the Christ advent and the Gospel message needed signs that accompanied it or belief would be unwarranted. Once the church was established and the historic verification of Christ accomplished, there was no longer any need to continue with such "sign" gifts.

Paul seems to indicate that this was the case as he implicitly argued that the reason for his ability to do extraordinary miracles was due to the Apostolic message he proclaimed. As others were claiming to be so-called "super apostles" (those who have an authoritative message from God), he argues that *true* Apostles will have these gifts to authentic their message.

"The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with all perseverance, by signs and wonders and miracles." (2 Cor. 12:12).

As well, there are certain events and happenings in redemptive history that don't need to be repeated. Notice what Paul says to the Ephesians:

"So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, 20 having been built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, 21 in whom the whole building, being fitted together is growing into a holy temple in the Lord; 22 in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit." (Ephesians 2:19 - 3:1)

The "foundation" is the key. If the foundation represents a part of the structure (i.e. the Church) that is not a repeated necessity, then so does that which comprises the foundation. Everyone would agree that the *work* of Christ is not repeated over and over. So also, it seems to be, that the work of the Apostles and the prophets, which established the work of Christ, does not repeat itself. It is forever a part of the foundation.

There also may be a *de facto* ceasing of the gifts even in New Testament times. Notice what the writer of Hebrews says:

"How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard, 4 God also bearing witness with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will" (Hebrews 2:3-4).

Notice that the message of salvation was first spoken by the Lord (subject #1---first generation). It was then *confirmed* by those who heard (subject #2---the Apostles and prophets---second generation). The "to us" is the key. The writer of Hebrews indicates that the Gospel was confirmed *to* them (subject #3---third generation), not *by* them. This seems to indicate once again that the supernatural gifts primarily served a confirmatory purpose, not simply a benevolent purpose. It also (and most importantly here) seems to suggest that these confirmatory gifts were already beginning to exhaust their purpose. The writer of Hebrews and his audience (the "us who heard"), it would seem, did not possess these gifts themselves, but relied upon the witness and testimony of those who did possess these gifts.

These are meant to offer biblical reasons why the gifts ceased, if indeed this is the case. Again, they are not *arguments for* cessationism, they simply present reasons why they might have ceased.

I am not a charismatic, but I am not a necessarily a cessationist either. I will speak to this next.

Part 8: I am a "*de facto* Cessationist"

Okay, so far in this series it should be *almost* clear where I stand on this issue. But I ended the last post by saying that I am neither a continuationist or cessationist. Let me clarify just what I am . . .

I define a Charismatic as one who thinks that the supernatural sign gifts such as tongues, prophecy, healings, etc. are *normative* for the church today. Therefore, believers should expect them. A cessationist is one who believes that these gifts ceased due to an *exhaustion in purpose* around the first century (some would say with the death of the last Apostle).

I don't think that one can make a solid case for the ceasing of the gifts from Scripture. However, I don't think that one can [make a solid case from Scripture for the closing of the canon](#). I believe that both of these issues are very similar. Could God add books to the Bible if it were his purpose? Of course. Could we cry "foul" and say "You cannot do that because our traditions and councils have said you cannot? No. We (Protestants) believe in the *de facto* closing of the canon. What does that mean? We believe in the closing of the canon because it, indeed, closed. It is a historical and experiential reality. God just quit adding books to the canon. Only after this does our theology step in and attempt to explain this by saying it closed because soteriological history was completed.

I believe the same about the gift of prophecy, tongues, and other supernatural sign gifts. I believe they have ceased because they ceased in church history (as I argued) and I, personally, have never experienced them. Therefore, I am a "*De Facto* Cessationist." Some may call it "Soft cessationist" and that is fine, but I like the term *de facto* since it describes the reasoning behind my position.

To those of you who are Charismatics out there:

I think that you have to understand my reasoning and the reasoning of those like me. It is not as if we are putting God in a box. We are just being responsible with our beliefs (which are precious to God) by attempting to explain the way we see things. I don't judge all claims with the same standard. I don't have a "guilt by association" default drive with this issue, tagging the back of the shirts of all Charismatics with a Benny Hinn label. I respect many who are Charismatic and think they are very bright and have something going on that persuades them to believe as they do. But I have been in the church all my life, traveled the world on missions trips, and partaken in many Charismatic services and never seen anything that would make me change my positions. Were I to see something that compels me to change, I would change.

With prophecy, for instance, if I were to see someone who claimed to be a prophet, speaking on behalf of God, and he, for example, raised someone from the dead, so long as he spoke in accordance with sound doctrine, I would most certainly listen (at least I hope I would). If someone claimed to have the gift of healing and came and healed my mother, I would believe and change my stance. If someone would have healed my sister before she died, again, things would be different. But the fact is that I have not ever witnessed such. I don't even have any good first hand testimony of such happenings. Sure, I believe that God heals, so coming to me with a story of healing is already in line with my theology. But what I lack---the essential component---is God gifting an individual with the particular gift of healing. Most healings and miracles I have seen come through prayer, not through a divine conduit with this particular gift.

Therefore, I remain a *de facto* Cessationist.

Two Important Points:

1. Am I Putting God in a "Box"?

I often hear it said that people like me put God in a box due to my unbelief. You need to be very careful with this line of thought. It could very well be that *you* are the one putting him in a box. Let me explain.

I remember studying the great prayer revivals in American history with John Hannah. While discussing these movements, we, the students, inquired about why God moved so much during this time in our history. His answer was rather odd. He said there was no reason he knew of. He went on to describe similar events where revival did not occur though the actions of men were the same. The moral of Hannah's lesson was that God moves when and where he will and we just don't know why. You cannot map Him. You cannot put him in a box one way *or the other*.

If God chooses to send a prophet or a man with the gift of healing, it is his own accord, purpose, and will which sanctions such. To have a "theology of expectation" not only sets many up for disillusionment, but can also be putting God in the box that you accuse others of. God's movements are mysterious. It could very well be that a revival breaks out. It could very well be that he decides to gift people with supernatural gifts. It is possible that he could send a prophet to your door. But this does not make it normative. It just says he did it. Praise God.

Remember the passage from the early life of Samuel where Samuel was hearing God's voice calling him but he did not know it was God? The preface to this narrative is very interesting: 1 Samuel 3:1: "Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the LORD before Eli. And word from the LORD was rare in those days, visions were infrequent." Why were visions infrequent? We have no idea. They just were. *De facto*.

2. Is God waiting on me to believe?

Also, you must remember that God's movements in his people's lives are not characteristically coy. When he is going to move in your life or mine, he is not waiting for us to believe in certain gifts or movements before we are qualified to receive such. He did not wait for Paul to be a believe before he hit him with a ton of bricks on the road to kill Christians. He blinded him and spoke. *De facto*, God was speaking. He did not wait for the Apostles to believe in tongues before they received them on the day of Pentecost. *De facto*, they were speaking in tongues.

If God wanted me to be a Charismatic, I would be one. He is not waiting for me to become one so that he can finally do his work.

The Spirit moves in mysterious ways. Outside of his general promises, it is very hard for us to hold his feet to the fire of the details. We wait, watch, pray, and follow his guidance. We can all put him in a box, but he won't stay there, believe me.

I am not Charismatic. I am not necessarily cessationist either. I am, right now, a *de facto* cessationist who lives with a high expectation that God is going to move in the way he will. I hope that I am always ready to follow.

Thus ends the series, *de facto*.