

Week #3

### **Do Biblical Spiritual Gifts Continue Today?**

Why do gifts that are created to bring unity cause such potential division?

What are healthy/biblical ways for Christians to handle their disagreements?

### **What is the New Testament gift of prophecy?**

#### What was an Prophet according to the Old Testament?

A prophet's primary function in the Old Testament (OT) was to serve as God's representative or ambassador by communicating God's word to his people. True prophets never spoke on their own authority or shared their personal opinions, but rather delivered the message God himself gave them. Several texts make this explicit.

OT Examples:

- The Lord said to Jeremiah, "I have put my words in your mouth" (Jer 1:9).
- And many of the OT prophetic books begin with the words, "The word of the LORD that came to . . ." (Hos. 1:2; Joel 1:1; Micah 1:1; Zeph. 1:1; cf. Jonah 1:1).
- Amos claimed, "This is what the LORD says" (Amos 1:3).

New Testament Support:

- 2 Peter 1:20–21: "No prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation of things. For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit."

The Gravity of being God's Mouthpieces:

Those who claimed to speak for God were held to a strict standard of judgment. Even should an alleged prophet perform a sign or wonder or accurately predict the future, if he says "Let us follow other gods . . . and let us worship them" (Deut. 13:2), he is to be rejected (Deut. 13:3).

Likewise, if the word he speaks "does not take place or come true, that is a message the LORD has not spoken" (Deut. 18:22; see also Jer. 14:14; 23:21, 32; 28:15; Ezek. 13:6). The punishment for speaking falsely in God's name was death (Deut. 18:20).

Transitions of a Sort:

3 Common views on prophecy in the NT/Church Era:

1. Always and only big P Prophets
2. The little p prophet
3. Prophecy is synonymous with teaching or preaching

3 truths that I believe are helpful and easy to agree on:

1. God leads people, even today, to say or do things which benefit the church.
2. Nothing that anyone says is from God will ever conflict with the clear teachings of scripture.
3. It is right to weigh what someone tells us with careful spiritual discernment and prayer.

**Are there unlisted spiritual gifts?**

The format of the lists we do have seem to have seemingly random overlap.

Scripture elsewhere implies certain spiritual gifts:

- Celibacy (1 Cor 7:6-7)
- Hospitality (1 Pet 4:9-11)
- Craftsmanship? (Exodus 31:1-6. 35:31-35)

1 Peter groups the spiritual gifts into 2, speaking gifts and serving gifts, making our list short but also potentially quite comprehensive.

Practically we can see people using other kinds of gifts.

What are some other possible spiritual gifts that you see God manifesting in believers with which they are able to build up the church?

### **Do all the listed gifts continue today?**

#### Cessationist Viewpoint

Cessationism is a viewpoint that the "super-natural" gifts or more miraculous gifts ceased with the apostles. This would include healing, miracles, tongues, prophecy, etc.

John MacArthur, a well-known cessationist, held a conference in 2013 called Strange Fire in which MacArthur and others worked to help people see and embrace their perspective that there is spiritual and theological danger in embracing and practicing these gifts in the modern day.

John MacArthur's three basic concerns regarding the continuationist perspective are that:

1. This has not been the historical practice of the church throughout history.
2. It undermines the sufficiency of the Bible to reveal God's will to us.
3. It harms our spiritual lives by making them dependent on the mystical and arbitrary practices of those who use such gifts.

Tomas Schriener writing on the Gospel Coalition makes a case that it seems evident that the gift or office of apostleship has ended and that leads him to believe that that gifts and others like it simply were no longer necessary after the writing and canonizing of the NT Scriptures.

"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 (Eph. 2:20). I conclude from this point that the gift of prophecy has ended also, for the prophets identified here are the same sort mentioned elsewhere (cf. 1 Cor. 12:28; Eph. 3:5; 4:11). The early churches didn't have the complete canon of Scripture for some time, and hence an authoritative and infallible prophetic ministry was needed to lay the foundation for the church in those early days."

I've also heard from other cessationists that they understand 1 Corinthians 13:8–13 to be speaking about a time when the perfect, the Bible will come and the gifts will cease.

Continuationist Viewpoint - Excerpts from Sam Storms

Uncompelling Reasons for Being a Cessationist

1. The first uncompelling reason for being a cessationist is an appeal to 1 Corinthians 13:8–12 on the assumption that the “perfect” is something other or less than the fullness of the eternal state ushered in at the second coming of Jesus Christ. **The “perfect” is that glorious state of final consummation when, as Paul says, we will see “face to face” and “know fully” (v. 12), as over against the limitations imposed by our life now where we see as “in a mirror dimly” and know only “in part” (v. 12).**
2. Another uncompelling or illegitimate reason for being a cessationist is the belief that signs and wonders, as well as certain spiritual gifts, served only to confirm or authenticate the original company of apostles, so that when the apostles passed away so also did the gifts. **The fact is, no biblical text (not even Hebrews 2:4) ever says that signs and wonders or spiritual gifts of a particular sort authenticated the apostles. Signs and wonders authenticated Jesus and the apostolic message about him.** If signs and wonders were designed exclusively to authenticate apostles, we have no explanation why nonapostolic believers (such as Philip and Stephen) were empowered to perform them.
3. A third uncompelling reason for being a cessationist is the belief that since we now have the completed canon of Scripture, we no longer need the operation of so-called miraculous gifts. However, the Bible itself quite simply never says this. In fact, as will become evident below, it says precisely the opposite. **It is the Bible itself that gives us warrant for believing that all spiritual gifts are designed by God for the church in the present age.**
4. A fourth uncompelling reason for being a cessationist is the belief that to embrace the validity of all spiritual gifts today requires that one embrace classical Pentecostalism and its belief in Spirit-baptism as separate from and subsequent to conversion, as well as their doctrine that speaking in tongues is the initial physical evidence of having experienced this Spirit-baptism. **One can be a continuationist, as I am, and affirm that Spirit-baptism happens for all believers at the moment of their faith and conversion to Christ and affirm that speaking in tongues is a gift for some, but not all, believers.**
5. Another uncompelling reason for being a cessationist is the idea that if one spiritual gift, such as apostleship, has ceased to be operative in the church that other, and perhaps all, miraculous gifts have ceased to be operative in the church. ...there is nothing inconsistent about acknowledging that one gift might have ceased while others continue. **If you can make an exegetical case for the cessation of apostleship, fine. But then you must proceed and make an equally persuasive exegetical case for the cessation of other gifts.**

6. A sixth unconvincing reason for being a cessationist is the fear that to acknowledge the validity today of revelatory gifts such as prophecy and word of knowledge would necessarily undermine the finality and sufficiency of Holy Scripture. But this argument is **based on the false assumption that revelatory gifts such as prophecy and word of knowledge provide us with infallible truths that are equal in authority to the biblical text itself**.
7. A seventh unconvincing reason for being a cessationist is the appeal to Ephesians 2:20 on the assumption that revelatory gifts such as prophecy were uniquely linked to the apostles and therefore designed to function only during the so-called foundational period in the early church. A closer look at Scripture indicates that there are **numerous instances where prophecy was not linked to the apostles and never functioned foundationally**. Ephesians 2:20 clearly does not have in view all prophetic ministry. Consider, for example, Acts 2 (where men and women, young and old, from all walks of life are expected to prophesy in the new covenant age); Acts 11 (the ministry of Agabus); Acts 21:9 (the four daughters of Philip who prophesied); Romans 12; as well as 1 Corinthians 12:7–10; 14:1, 26, 39 (in these two texts all believers are exhorted to earnestly desire to prophesy); and 1 Thessalonians 5:19–22. In summary, both the nature of the prophetic gift, as well as its widespread distribution among Christians, clearly indicates that there was far more to this gift than simply the apostles laying the foundation of the church.
8. Finally, a twelfth unconvincing reason for being a cessationist is fear of what embracing continuationism might entail for your life personally and the wellbeing of your church corporately. (In other words, **just because it's messy doesn't mean it is invalid**.)

#### Compelling Reasons for Being a Continuationist

1. This may sound strange, but the first compelling reason for being a continuationist is the twelve bad reasons for being a cessationist! In other words, no convincing biblical, theological, historical, or experiential argument that either in isolation or in conjunction with any other arguments gives reason to believe that what God did in the first century he will not do in the twenty-first.
2. A second compelling reason for being a continuationist is the consistent, indeed pervasive, and altogether positive presence throughout the NT of all spiritual gifts. Beginning with Pentecost and continuing throughout the book of Acts, whenever the Spirit is poured out on new believers, they experience the manifestation of his charismata. There is nothing to indicate this phenomenon was restricted to them and then. **Such signs appear to be both widespread and common in the NT church. Christians in Rome (Romans 12), Corinth (1 Corinthians 12–14), Samaria (Acts 8), Caesarea (Acts 10), Antioch (Acts 13), Ephesus**

**(Acts 19; 1 Timothy 1), Thessalonica (1 Thessalonians 5), and Galatia (Galatians 3) experienced the miraculous and revelatory gifts.**

3. A third compelling reason for being a continuationist is the extensive NT evidence of the operation of so-called miraculous gifts among Christians who are not apostles. In other words, numerous nonapostolic men and women, young and old, across the breadth of the Roman Empire consistently exercised these gifts of the Spirit (and Stephen and Philip ministered in the power of signs and wonders).  
**Others aside from the apostles who exercised miraculous gifts include (a) the seventy who were commissioned in Luke 10:9, 19–20; (b) at least 108 people among the 120 who were gathered in the upper room on the day of Pentecost; (c) Stephen (Acts 6–7); (d) Phillip (Acts 8); (e) Ananias (Acts 9); (f) church members in Antioch (Acts 13:1–3); (g) new converts in Ephesus (Acts 19:6); (h) women at Caesarea (Acts 21:8–9); (i) the unnamed brethren of Galatians 3:5; (j) believers in Rome (Romans 12:6–8); (k) believers in Corinth (1 Corinthians 12– 14, especially 12:7–10); and (l) Christians in Thessalonica (1 Thessalonians 5:19–20).**
4. A fourth compelling reason for being a continuationist is the explicit and oft- repeated purpose of the charismata: namely, the edification of the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:7; 14:3, 26). **Nothing that I read in the NT nor see in the condition of the church in any age, past or present, leads me to believe we have progressed beyond the need for edification** and therefore beyond the need for the contribution of the charismata.
5. The fifth compelling reason for being a continuationist is the fundamental continuity or spiritually organic relationship between the church in Acts and the church in subsequent centuries. No one denies that there was an era or period in the early church that we might call “apostolic.” We must acknowledge the significance of the personal physical presence of the apostles and their unique role in laying the foundation for the early church.  
But **nowhere does the NT ever suggest that certain spiritual gifts were uniquely and exclusively tied to them or that with their passing the gifts passed as well**. The universal church or body of Christ that was established and gifted through the ministry of the apostles is the same universal church and body of Christ that exists today.
6. Very much related to the fifth point, a sixth compelling reason for being a continuationist is because of what Luke recorded Peter saying in Acts 2 concerning the operation of so-called miraculous gifts as characteristic of the new covenant age of the church. As D. A. Carson has said, “The coming of the Spirit is not associated merely with the dawning of the new age but with its presence, not merely with Pentecost but with the entire period from Pentecost to the return of Jesus the Messiah.” Or again, **the gifts of prophecy and tongues (Acts 2) are not**

**portrayed as merely inaugurating the new covenant age but as characterizing it** (and let us not forget that the present church age = the latter days).

7. The seventh compelling reason for being a continuationist is because of what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 13:8–12. As noted above, here Paul asserts that **spiritual gifts will not “pass away” (vv. 8–10) until the coming of the “perfect.”** If the “perfect” is indeed the consummation of God’s redemptive purposes as expressed in the new heaven and new earth following Christ’s return, we can confidently expect him to continue to bless and empower his church with the gifts until that time.
8. The eighth compelling reason for being a continuationist is because of what Paul says in Ephesians 4:11–13. There he speaks of the bestowal of spiritual gifts (together with the office of apostle), and in particular the gifts of prophecy, evangelism, pastor, and teacher, as functioning in the building up of the church “until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (v. 13). **Since the latter most assuredly has not yet been attained by the church, we can confidently anticipate the presence and power of such gifts until that day arrives.**
9. A ninth compelling reason for being a continuationist is because the Holy Spirit in Christ is the Holy Spirit in Christians. **We are indwelt, anointed, filled, and empowered by the same Spirit as was Jesus.** His ministry is (with certain obvious limitations) the model for our ministry (cf. Acts 10:38).
10. A tenth reason to be a continuationist is the absence of any explicit or implicit notion that we should view spiritual gifts any differently than we do other NT practices and ministries that are portrayed as essential for the life and wellbeing of the church. When we read the NT, **it seems evident on the surface of things that church discipline is to be practiced in our assemblies today and that we are to celebrate the Lord’s Table and water baptism, and that the requirements for the office of elder as set forth in the pastoral epistles are still guidelines for how life in the church is to be pursued, just to mention a few. What good exegetical or theological reasons can be given why we should treat the presence and operation of spiritual gifts any differently?** None, so far as I can see.
11. An eleventh compelling reason for being a continuationist is the testimony throughout most of church history concerning the operation of the miraculous gifts of the Spirit. Contrary to what many cessationists have suggested, the gifts did not cease or disappear from early church life following the death of the last apostle.

12. Twelfth, and finally (although it is technically not a reason or argument for being a continuationist like the previous eleven), I cannot ignore personal experience. **The fact is that I've seen all spiritual gifts in operation, tested and confirmed them, and experienced them firsthand on countless occasions.**

Are we practical cessationists?