

CHURCH HISTORY: THE DOCTRINES THAT DEFINE US

INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES

- Have you ever wondered why our church believes in the various doctrines that we do? Have you thought about why another church, which seems to be a strong evangelical church, believes something completely different?
- Sometimes it is hard to take a position on doctrine when both beliefs seem to come from the same Bible.
- Is it possible for two churches, both desiring to honor God and walk with Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit, to land on opposite sides of vital doctrine for the church? Is there a place for fellowship with those who hold to completely opposite views than we do?
- The goal of this series is to examine various doctrinal convictions in the context of the church today, looking at how and why churches differ in these areas. Using God's word, we will seek to develop and strengthen convictions in key doctrinal areas, while thinking through how to interact with those who differ in their convictions.
- Here is schedule for the upcoming lessons:
 - July 21st: Introduction to the series.
 - July 28th: Why do we play all styles of worship music?
 - **August 4th: Why don't we believe all the gifts are for today?**
 - August 11th: Why don't we hold to covenant theology?
 - August 18th: Why do we have only men as pastors and elders?
 - August 25th: Why do we practice believers' baptism?

INTRODUCTION

- In this week's teaching, we are going to discuss the difference between those churches (and individual believers) who believe all the gifts are active for all believers today.
- The goal is to find out if we, as Cessationists, should have fellowship with those churches and/or should we have fellowship with those individuals.
- Also, we want to know how we can discuss this issue with people and still be able to have meaningful fellowship with them.
- **One key thing to always remember as we go through this class is that each of us are at different stages and phases of maturity and development in our walk with the Lord.**
- Nobody knows all things, and nobody certainly has a correct view of doctrine the moment they are born again. We are all going to be influenced by the people who were around us when we were first saved.
- This means that as we grow and mature in our Christian faith, it is up to us to search out the Scriptures so that we can know why we believe what we do.
- For the purpose of our study today, we are going to only consider those who hold to a continuation of the speaking and sign gifts. Namely those who believe in people who have the gifts of speaking in tongues, gifts of performing miracles, and healing are still in operation today.

WHAT IS A CONTINUATIONIST?

- A continuationist believes that the spiritual gifts have “continued” unabated since the Day of Pentecost and that today's church has access to all the spiritual gifts mentioned in the Bible.¹

WHAT IS A CESSATIONIST?²

- The contrasting viewpoint is called cessationism, which teaches that some of the gifts “ceased” and are no longer in operation today. The question in cessationism is not whether there are gifts still being given but which ones.

BRIEF EXCURSUS

- All those who are continuationists struggle with one issue, *there is no consistent or real evidence of the sign gifts from the 1st – 20th Century.*

¹ <https://www.gotquestions.org/continuationism.html>

² Ibid.

- This statement is not accepted by those who argue for the continuation of the sign gifts. There were sporadic, at best, times throughout 1900 years that men and women wrote about prophecy, tongues and miracles happening.
- The entire controversy exists because the miraculous gifts of the New Testament age did cease and did not occur for almost 1,900 years of church history and certainly have not continued in an unbroken line. Questions about their presence today as well as differing opinions, even among charismatics, regarding the nature of tongues, prophecy, and certain other gifts are due to the fact that they ceased. Chrysostom, a fourth-century theologian, testified that they had ceased so long before his time that no one was certain of their characteristics.³
 - I want you to really understand what Dr. Edgar is saying, there are so many differing opinions on how the gifts operate because there was a 1900-year gap in their operation.
 - John Chrysostom (349 AD – 407 AD) was a powerful preacher who was a cessationist. Even he did not know the last time these gifts were used.
- There are 4 writings that most continuationists point to in order to show some continuity throughout the history of the church.
 - Justin Martyr (approx. AD 100-165)
 - Irenaeus (approx. AD 120-202)
 - Novatian (approx. AD 210-280)
 - Gregory Neocaesarea (AD 213-270)
 - An example of the supposed evidence “...the miracles that he was said to perform. These were mostly miracles of healing, but we are also told that he could control the course of a river in flood, and that the apostles and the Virgin appeared to him and guided his work.”⁴
- While we do not solely base our theological beliefs on church history, there is overwhelming and compelling evidence that the church was not practicing any of the sign gifts for centuries.

THE AZUSA STREET REVIVAL⁵

- The Azusa Street Revival functioned as an important catalyst to the growth of American Pentecostalism. In January of 1906, an African American minister named William J. Seymour moved to Los Angeles and began holding cottage meetings with a small number of followers. After the first outbreak of speaking in

³ https://www.the-highway.com/cessation_Edgar.html

⁴ <https://prodigalthought.net/2013/03/15/did-certain-gifts-cease-after-the-first-apostles/>

⁵ https://www.thearda.com/timeline/events/event_211.asp

tongues in April 1906, the group began to grow and become racially integrated. Seymour moved his congregants to a dilapidated building on 312 Azusa Street, located in downtown Los Angeles.

- Scores of people began to "fall under the power" and to speak in tongues. Seymour's preaching of judgment and divine wrath seemed to have significance, for the great San Francisco earthquake hit on April 18, 1906. In the same month the volcano Vesuvius erupted. Many took these events as eschatological signs of the end and flocked to Seymour and his group of disciples.⁶
- Over the next few years, thousands of individuals traveled to Azusa Street to **experience** miraculous healings, tongues, and spontaneous worship. Religious services were held three times a day, and the attenders were racially diverse (at least initially).
- Over time, the revival started to dissipate. Seymour lost his influence and died in 1922. Although the building was condemned and destroyed in 1931, the revival remains a defining event for early Pentecostalism.
- **Azusa had its share of critics who were convinced the participants were lunatics.** Additional bad press occurred when spiritualists and mediums from the occult societies in Los Angeles began to attend and to participate in their own special way. **G. Campbell Morgan**, a highly respected evangelical preacher, called the Pentecostal movement "the last vomit of Satan," while **R. A. Torrey** claimed that it was "emphatically not of God, and [was] founded by a Sodomite." In his book, *Holiness, the False and the True*, **Harry Ironside** in 1912 denounced the movement as "disgusting . . . delusions and insanities" and accused their meetings as causing "a heavy toll of lunacy and infidelity."⁷

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

- Interestingly, one cannot point to one verse in the Bible that explicitly says that the gifts have ceased.

Speaking in tongues.

- When speaking of the cessation of tongues, 1 Corinthians 13:8-10 is commonly referenced.
- **1 Corinthians 13:8-10** "Love never fails; but if there are gifts of prophecy, they will be done away; if there are tongues, they will cease; if there is knowledge, it will be done away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part; but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away."
- Here Paul explicitly states that they will cease, but it will happen *when the perfect comes* (v. 10).

⁶ <https://www.samstorms.org/all-articles/post/history-of-the-pentecostal-charismatic-movements>

⁷ [Ibid](#)

- While there are many interpretations as to what the perfecting coming means, in **the immediate context** Paul is contrasting the partial that was already given (v. 10).
- **Some take this to mean the full revelation of Scripture.** That the Corinthian church had partial knowledge of the Bible, but the canon had not yet been complete.
- **Others think this is talking about Jesus Himself.** That when Jesus came, these gifts were done away with because they were no longer needed in the church.
- These both seem to be good answers, **but keeping with the context of what Paul is talking about**, it is hard to think that he was speaking of either of these things.
- The Corinthian church would not have been thinking about the completion of the canon. Furthermore, there is doubt that Paul was either.
 - With regards to Jesus, it seems that Paul is not referencing a person.
- **What is Paul saying?** Simply put, he is contrasting things that grow.
- In **verses 9-10** he talks about partial knowledge and prophecy and then the partial going away when the perfect comes.
- In **verse 11** there is growth from a child to an adult, no longer needing childing things.
- Finally, in **verse 12**, there is knowing in part to knowing in full.
- Paul has in mind something that grows from a juvenile stage to maturity.
- Since Paul is not talking about people, he must be talking about the church.
 - As the church grows into maturity, these gifts are no longer going to be needed and are going to fade away, or cease.
- There are men and women who do not believe this but hold that because there is not explicit reference to tongues ceasing, they must still be in operation.

Workers of Miracles

- Similar to the gift of tongues, there are no explicit verses which say *miracle workers all are done*.
- I think that it is important to point out two very important thoughts:
 - **Verifiable miracles seem to not be in abundance.**
 - “Many visitors come to experience a miracle, but while Bethel Church has extensively documented anecdotal claims of healing, they were unable to provide documentation of any medically verified miracles for *Shasta Scout*.”⁸

⁸ <https://shastascout.org/bethel-claims-miracles-what-proof-do-they-have/>

- “GMRI has not yet documented any medically verified miracles at Bethel during their three year partnership, but staff said they are investigating a number of specific healing claims from Bethel that seem likely to meet their criteria for verification and will comment further on specific cases after they are published.”⁹
- **Miracles take place every day!**
- They said the science on miracles so far supports the broad claim that miraculous medical healings can occur, as evidenced by [randomized controlled clinical trials](#) that have shown improvement in health outcomes following in-person prayer. While skeptics say documented improvements may be due the placebo effect, GMRI countered that they control for such effects in their research, and that the placebo effect “may account for some but not all of the observed effects of prayer for healing.”¹⁰
- **What are we really debating here...not that miracles happen...but that God has appointed people specifically to be miracle workers and they can call upon the power of God when they desire.**
- Something to keep in mind when watching miracle workers:
 - **2 Corinthians 11:13-14** “For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. No wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light.”
- Can God heal today? Absolutely! He can do as He pleases. Can God heal someone through your prayers? Absolutely! He can do as He pleases.

Modern Day Prophets and/or Prophecy

- **1 Corinthians 14:1** “Pursue love, yet desire earnestly spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy.”
- Cessationists believe that the so-called “revelatory” gifts of the Spirit mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12–14 (most pointedly, prophecy and tongues/interpretation, [1 Corinthians 12:10](#)) ceased sometime between the deaths of the apostles and the confirmation of the New Testament canon.¹¹
- The debate hinges on what Paul meant by “prophesy” in [1 Corinthians 14:1](#). Did Paul understand the new covenant spiritual gift of prophecy as Holy Spirit-inspired, authoritative, infallible, canon-equivalent revelation? Or did he understand it as Holy Spirit-prompted, subordinate revelation that could be partially or fallibly reported and therefore intended to be subject to God’s chosen apostolic and prophetic authoritative teaching contained in the Spirit-determined canonical writings of Scripture?¹²
- **We would agree that prophecy is no longer the infallible, authoritative, and canon-equivalent words that were written down in the Bible.**

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/what-do-cessationists-believe-about-prophecy>

¹² Ibid.

- What about what Spurgeon, Lloyd-Jones, and others have called an *impression* or an *unction*.
- Spurgeon, a cessationist, said, “There are occasionally impressions of the Holy Spirit which guide men where no other guidance could have answered the end. . . . I have been the subject of such impressions myself and have seen very singular results therefrom.”¹³
- Lloyd-Jones, “The Holy Spirit enables Christians by giving them what is called in the New Testament “unction”; He gives “anointing,” understanding, freedom, and clarity of speech, an authority. Many terms can be used with respect to this God-given ability to preach...This, then, is the dual action of the Spirit. He takes the preacher, the speaker, whether in a pulpit or in private, and gives this enabling. Then the Holy Spirit acts upon the ones who are listening and deals with their minds and hearts and wills. Both things happen at the same time.”¹⁴
- What we need to do is ask someone if they think they are adding to the authority of Scripture or if they are agreeing with what it says.
- While I do not think modern-day prophets are around today, there was a place for them throughout both the OT and NT time.
- The issue that faces most people is not *does God still lead His people...* the issue is *how does God still lead His people.*
- **Proverbs 16:9** “The mind of man plans his way, But the LORD directs his steps.”
 - How does the Lord direct our steps? When we read the Scriptures, how are those Scriptures being applied to the issues in our life?
 - While we are not led by our subjective experiences or feelings, how can we say the Lord was leading us to do something?

SHOULD WE HAVE FELLOWSHIP WITH CONTINUATIONISTS?

- While there are some in the continuationist camp which would connect the speaking of tongues with the baptism of the Spirit¹⁵, this certainly is not the prevailing view.
 - For those who hold to this view (they would be Pentecostal, not Charismatic), it would be hard to have any meaningful fellowship with them because *nowhere in the Bible does it say this must happen.*
 - Not only that, you have now brought disunity in the church...those with and without the Spirit.

¹³ <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/should-you-earnestly-desire-to-prophecy>

¹⁴ <https://www.patheos.com/blogs/adrianwarnock/2008/03/ask-doctor-what-do-you-mean-by-unction/>

¹⁵ <https://events.rhema.org/tongues-the-initial-evidence/#:~:text=From%20this%20we%20can%20conclude,the%20infilling%20of%20the%20Spirit.&text=The%20New%20Testament%20records%20several,baptized%20in%20the%20Holy%20Spirit.>

- Some cessationists, like MacArthur say, “*Put simply, charismatic theology has made no contribution to true biblical theology or interpretation; rather, it represents a deviant mutation of the truth. Like a deadly virus, it gains access into the church by maintaining a superficial connection to certain characteristics of biblical Christianity, but in the end it always corrupts and distorts sound teaching. The resulting degradation, like a doctrinal version of Frankenstein’s monster, is a hideous hybrid of heresy, ecstasy, and blasphemy awkwardly dressed in the tattered remnants of evangelical language. It calls itself “Christian,” but in reality it is a sham—a counterfeit form of spirituality that continually morphs as it spirals erratically from one error to the next. . .” MacArthur at Strange Fire conference.*
- I think this is a bit harsh...those are some pretty demeaning and vicious words.
- Wayne Grudem says, “Finally, it can be argued that those in the charismatic and Pentecostal camps and those in the cessationist camp (primarily Reformed and dispensational Christians) really need each other, and they would do well to appreciate each other more. *The former tends to have more practical experience in the use of spiritual gifts and in vitality in worship that cessationists could benefit from, if they were willing to learn.* On the other hand, Reformed and dispensational groups have traditionally *been very strong in understanding of Christian doctrine and in deep and accurate understanding of the teachings of Scripture.* Charismatic and Pentecostal groups could learn much from them if they would be willing to do so. But it certainly is not helpful to the church as a whole for both sides to think they can learn nothing from the other or that they can gain no benefit from fellowship with each other.”¹⁶
- As long as we are not talking about how we are saved or if someone is adding to the pages or authority of the Bible, we should not break off all fellowship with those who are continuationists.
- We should be very wary of those who have “heard from God” and what they “heard” does not align with what the Scriptures say.
- We should desire to show someone that by relying on their feelings, they are not necessarily following what God has prescribed for them. They should submit their feelings and desires to the Word of God.
- To be sure, we should also be cautious of those believers who think there are no emotions in our walk with the Lord. From David to Paul, these men and women wept, they were fearful, they were joyous, they were confused, and experienced any other human emotion.
- We just need to have our emotions and beliefs tethered to the text, not to our own thoughts and desires.

¹⁶ https://quotesthoughtsrandom.wordpress.com/2022/06/16/do-cessationists-and-continuationists-charismatics-and-pentecostals-need-each-other/#_ftn4